

Full Length Research Paper

Genders representation in focus: The case for a marketized EFL syllabus

Massoud Yaghoubi-Notash and *Roghayyeh Nariman-Jahan

University of Tabriz, Iran

Accepted 12 January, 2012

Gender as a pervasive variable offers great potential for research in ESL/EFL context and gender treatment and representation in syllabus as an institutional discourse intrigues researchers and practitioners. In the present study, conversations in *Interchange Series* (third Edition) were examined. Specifically the areas of focus were: a) the ratio of cross-gender as opposed to same-gender conversations, b) conversation initiation, c) either of the genders' turn length, and d) speech complexity of male and female characters in the conversations. The statistical analyses employed were Chi-square for a, and b, Mann-Whitney U-test for c, and Independent T-test for d, none of which turned out to be significant. Findings are discussed in the light of literature and implications are discussed.

Keywords: Gender representation, EFL Syllabus.

INTRODUCTION

A growing awareness of gender as a socially constructed entity seems to inform many of the recent concerns with gendered lines of research, theory and practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Yaghoubi-Notash, 2007). Such a process is held to be inextricably bound with language as an instrument of socialization. Therefore, language can be argued to play a fundamental role in the way gender is represented, negotiated, and (re)constructed in the context of society and culture (Hruska, 2004). This has given rise to a rich and growing body of scholarly work since the 1970s.

The earliest concern with language was sociolinguistically inspired and theoretically-driven in nature, inaugurated by Robin Lakoff's *deficit framework* (Lakoff, 1973), which in turn heralded a successive rise and fall of paradigms for the next two decades. These paradigms included dominance *framework* (Thorn and Henley, 1975; Spender, 1980), *difference framework* influenced by John Gumperz' concern with discourse variations (Gumperz, 1982a; 1982b), and *extended difference frameworks* (McEhinney, 1993; cited in Freed, 1995, p. 4). From the mid-1990s on, gender and lan-

guage has undergone vast changes crossing boundaries of sociolinguistics to include topics as culture, new conceptualizations of gender, feminism, socio-cultural context and contributions from other fields (See Freed, 1995). Now, more than ever before, gender and language studies are seen an autonomous field of interest entertaining a wide array of topics and issues. Gender representation in textbooks and educational materials as realizations of power discourse is indeed an intriguing arena for educationalists and EFL pedagogues.

Gender in Textbooks

Giacomini, Koker, and Rockwell (1986) investigated the representation of females and males in introductory human anatomy textbooks to discover whether the findings reflect the traditional discriminatory treatment of the sexes. They found out that in standard human anatomy illustrations, males are practically the only subjects depicted as a small minority (11%) in standard human anatomy illustrations. They also found nearly equal representation of females and males in reproductive chapters. In fact, women appear to be highlighted in the reproductive chapters and marginalized elsewhere.

*Corresponding Author E-mail: r_narimanJahan@yahoo.com

Thomson and Otsuji (2003) examined business Japanese textbooks. The analysis reveals that the textbooks present a stereotypical and exaggerated version of social practices of the Japanese business community, based on idealized native-Japanese norms. Female characters in the textbooks have less access to managerial positions, and fewer opportunities to participate in business, than in reality. The analysis also highlights the invisibility of non-Japanese female characters in the textbooks. Female students using the textbooks are not provided with role models or spaces to acculturate into. Tietz (2007) investigated representation of gender in introductory accounting textbooks. Findings from statistical tests of the quantitative research questions reveal that stereotypes of women and men are replicated and reinforced in the textbooks. Males outnumbered females in the textbooks. Women were shown more frequently in home settings than were men. Men were shown in a wider variety of occupational roles than were women. Three themes emerged from the qualitative analysis. First, men succeed, or have the potential to succeed, in the public sphere. Women were more likely to be portrayed as emotional and as having an emphasis on their physical appearance. The overall picture of women and men in the private sphere that emerges from the textbooks is that women are predominantly interested in, and responsible for, the private sphere and men are not as interested in, nor responsible for, the private sphere. Finally, closely connected to the first two themes is the concept that men's contributions to business and to society in general have been more valued than women's similar contributions.

Chick and Altoona (2003) evaluated K-12 American history textbooks for gender balance. They found significantly more males than females were found at all levels in both content and illustrations. The main failings are not only in the presented language but also in the stereotyped portrayal of women as homemakers and mothers, the lack of representation of minorities, and the culturally insensitive presentation of Australia's indigenous people and their cultural heritage.

Gender and ethnicity represented in both Chinese and Malay language reading textbooks currently used in primary schools of Malaysia were examined by Liew (2007). Based on the findings, the study found that both Chinese and Malay reading textbooks did not present a balanced gender and ethnic portrayal of story characters. In fact, women and ethnic minorities in Malaysia continued to be depicted stereotypically in terms of age, character role, traits, occupation, setting, and activity. The results also showed that the narrative and pictorial contents of both Chinese and Malay reading textbooks were not ethnically representative of Malaysia. Law and Chan (2004) concentrated on the extent of gender stereotyping in Chinese textbooks' pictorial content, in terms of the proportion of male and female characters

represented, the settings in which they appear, their portrayal in domestic or non-domestic roles, and the kinds of occupational roles male and female characters were portrayed in. Findings indicate that gender stereotyping was common in the four areas.

Approaches to Gender Representation in EFL Textbooks

Studies of gender representation in textbooks can be divided into three categories: a) *text-driven studies*, b) *stereotype-driven studies*, and c) *criteria-driven studies*. Text-driven studies, e.g. Schultz (1974) involve the authors' efforts first to examine the textbooks, and only then to derive some list of criteria reflective of the textbooks examined. Stereo-driven studies, such as Smith, Greenlaw, and Scott (1987) are characterized by the authors' efforts first to establish a set of images associated with stereotypes or attitudes in the textbooks and then quantifying stereotypes in terms of frequency of occurrence. Criteria-driven studies, such as those by Wileke and Sanders (1978) are categorized by the fact that their authors established criteria for the examination of the data by means of a classification system before the textbooks themselves were examined.

Recent Studies of EFL Textbooks: Beyond the 2000

Studies conducted to examine the nature of gender representation and/or bias in the textbooks and materials demonstrate an expansion of scope which stands for an overlap in the three methods mentioned above. Methodologies in examining contents of textbooks or educational materials draw on multiple sources of investigation in their analysis of the textbooks. This can mean employing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Sano, Lida, and Hardy (2002) investigated the five series of English textbooks approved for use in Japanese junior high schools. Although there were no significant differences in the linguistic features of the overall texts, some textbooks contained gender-biased implicit messages. Ansary and Babaii (2003) investigated '*Right Path to English I and II*' (Birjandi and Soheili, 1999) that are locally designed to cater for and respond to the English language needs of Iranian students at secondary schools. Examination of the treatment of women in currently used ESL/EFL textbooks revealed that in every category of this study, women often appeared less visible than men. Evidence was also found that English was basically taught through the presentation of male-orientated topics. In addition, a much closer look at the data demonstrated that male firstness was prevalent, females were more visible in indoor passive activities, and were placed in traditional stereotypical roles. How-

ever, Dominguez (2003) found that there is a balance in *Interchange Intro*, generally of male and female representations throughout the book.

The study by Florence (2004) analyzed gender representation in English textbook dialogues in terms of language functions, speech amount and content, primarily focusing on married couple and parent roles. It generally shows that husband/father and wife/mother roles are portrayed in stereotypical ways. Husbands and fathers lead, give factual information, and make decisions, whereas wives and mothers are passive agents on most conversational occasions, but experts on cooking, housework, child rearing and instructing. The study by Sumalatha and Ramakrishnaiah (2004) focuses on the content analysis of secondary school social textbooks of Andhra Pradesh in India. The factors that they considered for the study are as follows: a) names, b) captions, c) illustrations, and d) remarks on women. They found great sex bias for all these factors.

Holmqvist and Gjörup (2006) investigated the representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks. The results show that there is an imbalance in the number of female protagonists, an over-representation of male authors and that occupations for female characters are mainly stereotypical or non-existent. A current English language textbook used throughout Japan, 'Expressway A', was examined by Otlowski (2007) for (a) gender bias- the depiction of women in stereotypical roles, and (b) ethnic group portrayal- the visibility and depiction of ethnic groups in the text. The results showed that Expressway A, while better than many earlier EFL texts, still depicts women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society. The text also gives a very sanitized view of the ethnic make-up of the societies and, in one case, shows a large degree of cultural insensitivity.

Kobia (2009) examined the portrayal of gender images in primary school English textbooks using 'Let's Learn English' series published by Kenya Literature Bureau as a case study. The findings indicated under-representation of female gender in authorship, editorship, typesetting, photography and illustrating the LLE textbooks. The findings further revealed that male gender outnumber the female gender in usage of characters portrayed in illustrations, photographs, names and titles used to refer to the genders. Hamdan and Jalabneh (2009) conducted gender dominance in conversational topics, mainly, dialogues and comprehension passages in *Action Pack Series* which are offered to preparatory and elementary students in schools of Jordan. It is confirmed that EFL text studies prefer presenting males as the main acting characters in dialogues and reading passages.

With this background in mind, the present study focused on the conversations contained in *Interchange (IC)* series (Intro, 1, 2, and 3) (Richards et al., 2005) to examine the gender representation patterns. Specifically, the following aspects of the conversations were examined looking for

any hypothesized patterns in gender (under)representation:

1. the ratio of same-gender vs. opposite gender conversations
2. conversation initiation by males vs. by females
3. males' average turn length vs. females' average turn length, and
4. males' speech complexity vs. females' speech complexity

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Materials in the study were the conversations in the whole *Interchange* series (third edition), that is the four volumes of *Interchange Intro*, 1, 2, and 3 (Richards, Hull and Proctor, 2005). In a few cases, conversations continued on the tape. These audio parts were ignored due to the fact that it was time-consuming to transcribe all. Therefore the conversations that just appeared in print were subject to analysis in this study.

Procedures

For the purpose of the study, the following were counted in each and all of the four volumes of *IC Intro*, *IC 1*, *IC 2*, and *IC 3*.

- The ratio of the cross-gender and same-gender conversations
- The ratio of male-initiated and female-initiated conversations
- The mean turn length of the male and female speakers in each of the cross-gender conversations.
- The mean lexical complexity (Type-Token Ratio) of the male and the female speakers in each cross-gender conversation.

In counting the words, suprasegmentals such as *Uh*, *Ah*, *Oh*, etc. were ignored. Acronyms and abbreviations like *US*, *OK* were counted as a single word, but contracted forms such as *it's*, *don't* or *hasn't* were calculated as two different lexical items.

RESULTS

Calculations for all of the above values were made by both authors independently with a respectable level of inter-rater reliability, i.e. the Kappa coefficients of 1, 1, 0.89, and 0.82, respectively.

Same-gender vs. opposite-gender conversations: The frequency of the conversations between a male and a female as opposed to those between two males and between two females were calculated. In *IC Intro*, 1, 2, and 3, the female-to-female conversations accounted for 5, 1, 2, and 0 of the conversations in each of the books, respectively. Regarding male-to-male conversations,

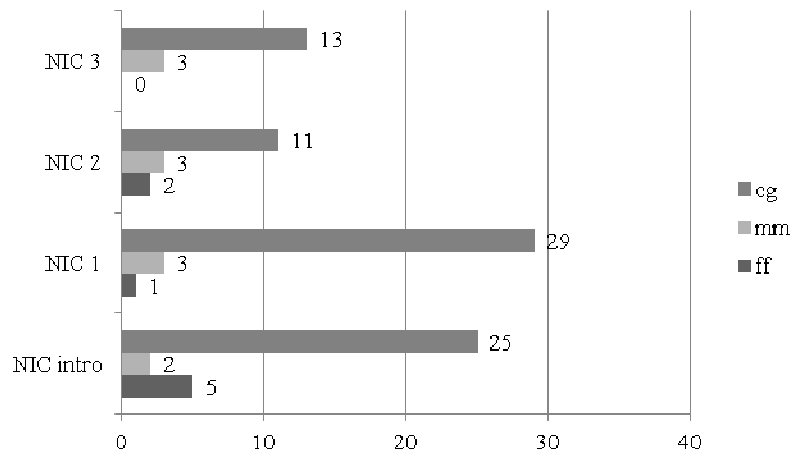


Figure 1. Distribution of female-to-female, male-to-male and cross-gender conversations in IC Intro, IC 1, IC 2, and IC 3. IC = Interchange, ff = female-to-female, mm = male-to-male, cg = cross-gender

Table 1. Frequency Results of Gender Distribution of Conversations in IC Series

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
0	1	1.3	-0.3
1	1	1.3	-0.3
2	2	1.3	0.7
3	3	1.3	1.7
5	1	1.3	-0.3
11	1	1.3	-0.3
13	1	1.3	-0.3
25	1	1.3	-0.3
29	1	1.3	-0.3
Total	12		

Table 2. Chi-square Results for Gender Distribution of Conversations in IC Series

	frequency
Chi-square	3.00
Degree of freedom	8
Significance	0.93

there were 2 in IC intro, 3 in IC 1, 3 in IC 2, and 3 in IC 3. Cross-gender conversations comprised 25 of conversations in IC Intro, 29 in IC 1, 11 in IC 2, and 13 in IC 3 (See Figure 1 above).

Chi-square analysis of the results returned no significant proportion of the gender makeup of the conversation pairs (Tables 1 and 2)

Male-initiated vs. female-initiated conversations: Here, the conversations started by the females and those

started by the males were compared in frequency. The results appear below in Figure 2. Chi-square results did not reveal any significant differences in conversation initiation patterns in terms of gender or the book (See Tables 3 and 4).

Males' average turn length vs. females' average turn length: Mean length of utterances produced by females and males in each of the cross-gender conversations were compared. To ascertain the right statistical proce-

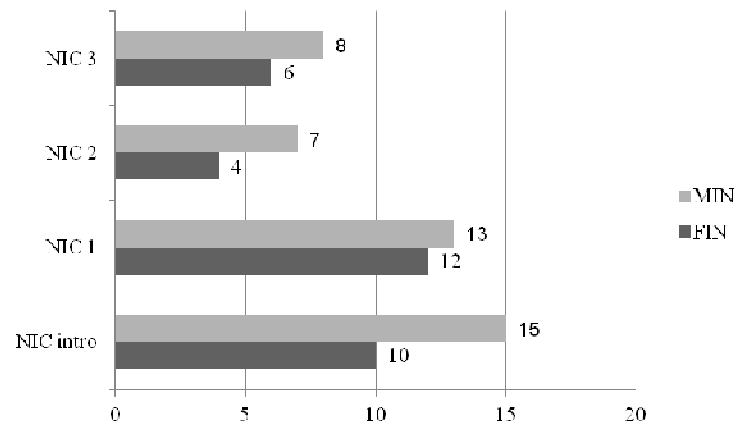


Figure 2. Distribution of female-initiated and male-initiated conversations in each of the IC books.

FIN = female-initiated

MIN = male-initiated

Table 3. Frequency Results of Conversation Initiation in IC Series

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
4	1	1	0
6	1	1	0
7	1	1	0
8	1	1	0
10	1	1	0
12	1	1	0
13	1	1	0
15	1	1	0
Total	8		

Table 4. Chi-square Results for Conversation Initiation in IC Series

	frequency
Chi-square	0.00
Degree of freedom	7
Significance	1

ture, the means were analyzed for normality of distribution. Using

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (See Table 5), normality of distribution, which is an assumption of T-test, could not be established for the values. Therefore a non-parametric counterpart of the T-test, i.e., Mann-Whitney U-test was employed, the results from which did not support any significance at $p < 0.05$ (Table 6).

Males' speech complexity vs. females' speech complexity: Complexity of speech contained in the cross-gender conversations were compared for males vs. for

females. Having established normality of distribution as a requirement of the t-test, the data were plugged in independent t-test. Results returned no significant differences in the lexical density of males as opposed to that of females in the conversations (See Table 7)

CONCLUSIONS

The statistical analysis of the data demonstrated that:

a) the number of cross-gender conversations do not

Table 5. Kolmogrov-Smirnov Test Results (Normality of Distribution)

		Mean turn length
N		154
Normal Parameters	Mean	9.6116
	Std. Deviation	3.75707
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.122
	Positive	.122
	Negative	-.082
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.519
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.020

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U-test Results Comparing Means

	Mean turn length
Mann-Whitney U	2643.000
Wilcoxon W	5646.000
Z	-1.162
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.245*

a. Grouping Variable: GENDER

* not significant

Table 7. Independent T-test Results Comparing Means of Lexical Density

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Lexical Density	Equal variances assumed	-.737	152	.463	-1.04857

exceed that of the same-gender conversations. In other words, conversations contained in the New Interchange Series do not lean to cross-gender or same-gender ones.

b) in the cross-gender conversations, no significantly higher frequency of conversation initiation could be found, which means that neither males nor females are depicted as the dominant conversation starters.

c) on average, males and females did not produce significantly higher or lower number of words in each conversation turn. To put it differently, results indicated that males do not speak more than females in each turn, and the same holds true for females as opposed to males.

d) lexical density of males' speech is not of significantly different from that of females in the conversations. This means that males and females were not shown to speak much differently regarding complexity.

To summarize, conversations represent a balanced gender representations in the New Interchange regarding the ratio of conversations, conversation initiation, number of words per turn, and complexity of speech across male and female participants in the conversations.

The study at an abstract level rests on the premise most congruent with *difference framework* while not losing sight of power and aspects of gender representation as a discursively motivated linguistic actualization. The approach in this study is more in line with criteria-driven studies with a slight leaning towards text as the focal point of the investigation.

The results from the study did not prove any imbalance in gender representation. This is supported by Sano et al. (2002) and more explicitly by Dominguez (2003). However, such a finding is refuted by Thomson and Otsuji (2003); Tietz (2007); Chick and Altoona (2003); Liew (2007) and Law and Chan (2004) as studies

in the context of education at large. More specifically, they are incompatible with Ansary and Babaii (2003); Florence (2004); Sumalatha and Ramakrishnaiah (2004); Holmqvist and Gjörup (2006); Otlowski (2007); Kobia (2009) and Hamdan and Jalabneh (2009).

It can also be argued that a typically marketized syllabus incorporates texts as a token of foreign language discursive practice. In this way, the syllabus can claim to negotiate a message of gender equality within the discourse of classroom.

On the other hand, equalized status for each of the genders in the syllabus can shape classroom interaction in a way that teachers' and students' talk around the text can be influenced.

It must, however, be remembered that balanced gender presence in quantitative terms cannot necessarily mean a content free from gender bias. Quantitative studies can shed further light on the aspects of gender treatment. Also, further research can focus on reading, vocabulary and grammar for presence, representation or marginalization of genders.

Further studies can cast light on different gendered aspects of books and materials contributing to an awareness-raising about gender in the ESL/EFL classrooms.

REFERENCES

- Ansary H, Babaii E (2003). Subliminal sexism in current ESL/EFL textbooks. *Asian J.* 5: 200- 214.
- Birjandi P, Soheili A (1999). Right path to English I and II. Iran, Tehran: Ministry of Education, Center for the Publication of University Textbooks. Chick K A, Altoona P S (2006). Gender balance in K-12 American history textbooks. *Social Studies Research and Practice.* 1: 284- 290.
- Dominguez LM (2003). Gender textbook evaluation. Unpublished MA thesis, Department of English University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.
- Eckert P, McConnell-Ginet S (2003). *Language and gender.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Florence AMY (2004). Gender in textbook dialogues: Textual analyses and classroom practices. Unpublished MA thesis, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Freed AF (1995). Language and gender. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics:* 15: 3-22.
- Giacomini M, Koker RP, Rockwell PAF (1986). Gender bias in human anatomy textbook illustrations. *Psychology of Women Quarterly.* 10: 413- 420.
- Gumperz J (Ed.) (1982a). *Discourse strategies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gumperz J (Ed.) (1982b). *Language and social identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamdan S, Jalabneh H (2009). Topics in EFL textbooks and the question of gender dominance: A case study from public schools of Jordan. *The Int. J. Language Society and Culture.* 28: 52- 56.
- Holmqvist P, Gjörup L (2006). The representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks. Retrieved November 10, 2009 from <http://dspace.mah.se:8080/bistream/2043/34261/representation%20of%20of%20gender.pdf>
- Hruska BL (2004). Constructing gender in an English dominant kindergarten: Implications for second language learners. *TESOL Quarterly.* 38: 450-485.
- Kobia JM (2009). Femininity and masculinity in English primary school textbooks in Kenya. *The Int. J. Language Society and Culture.* 28: 57- 71.
- Lackoff R (1973). Language and women's place. *Language in Society.* 2: 45-80.
- Law KWK, Chan AHN (2004). Gender role stereotyping in Hong Kong's primary school Chinese language subject textbooks. *AJWS.* 10:49-69.
- Liew Peck-Chong (2007). An analysis of gender and ethnic representations in Chinese and Malay primary school reading textbooks: Grades 2-6. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Tennessee State University, Tennessee, US.
- Otlowski M (2003). Ethnic diversity and gender bias in EFL textbooks. *Asian EFL Journal.* 5: 1-15.
- Richards JC, Hull J, Proctor S (2005). *Interchange, Third Edition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sano F, Lidia M, Hardy T (2002). Gender representations in Japanese EFL textbooks. Pac 3 at JALT 2001 conference proceedings. Retrieved November 10, 2009 from <http://jalt-publication.org/archive/proceedings/2001/899.pdf>
- Spender D (1980). *Man made language.* London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul.
- Sumalatha K, Ramakrishnaiah D (2004). Sex bias in secondary school social studies textbooks: A case study in India. *Am. J. Appl. Sci.* 1: 62- 63.
- Smith NJ, Greenlaw J, Scott CJ (1987). Making the literate environment equitable. *The Reading Teacher.* 40: 400- 407.
- Schultz S (1974). Sexism in Russian grammars. *Russian Literature Triquarterly.* 9: 571- 574.
- Thomson CK, Otsuji E (2003). Evaluation of business Japanese textbooks: Issues of gender. *Japanese Studies.* 23: 185- 203.
- Thorne B, Henley N (Eds.) (1975). *Language and sex: Difference and dominance.* Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Tietz WM (2007). The representation of gender in introductory accounting textbooks. Unpublished PhD thesis, Kent State University, College of Education, Health, and Human Services/Department of Teaching, Leadership and Curriculum Studies.
- Yaghoubi-Notash M (2007). Variability in L2: Exploring gender influence in task-prompted oral performance. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran.