

Perceptions of Gender Difference:

An analysis of an EFL textbook

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Choose an EFL textbook and discuss the ways in which it represents men and women.

Your discussion should focus upon linguistic representations, but it may also include consideration of non-linguistic features (e.g. visual representations of the sexes).

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1. Introduction

The way in which language is used and perceived is determined in part by gender. An author's views will be shaped by the society from which he or she derives. The prevalent power structures of that society are likely to be manifest in their choice of language.

The language used in foreign language learning materials is of crucial importance, because people do not learn languages by "communicating with an immediate social group" (Montgomery 2008: 73). It follows that, if the language used to convey the subject is stereotyped or sexist, the students will learn to speak in a similar fashion, which may not be congruent with their own societal norms.

The paper will examine an EFL textbook, *ESL Listening and Speaking*, to determine whether or not differences in gender roles are exaggerated or stereotyped. The textbook is a combination of *World Link Intro* and *World Link 1* (Stempleski et.al. 2007a). It was adapted from the other two textbooks to serve as a conversation book for mandatory first year university English classes in South Korea. The analysis will explore the images and frequency of gender portrayals as well as the language that has been employed.

2. Literature Review

Significant research has been conducted on EFL textbook treatment of gender roles. The following sections provide an updated overview. Research on sexism will be examined, together with studies on gender stereotypes.

2.1. Sexism in EFL Textbooks

Sexism is manifest in many ways in the English language. Ansary and Babaii (2003: 2) contend that "Sexism, though embarrassing and undesirable, is subliminal and mirrors the institutionalized, unfair, and inexcusable sex discrimination to the disadvantage of women in society." The fact that sexist language is often used subliminally makes it difficult to completely eradicate. Even when efforts are made to reduce or completely remove sexist traits, they can be found in areas that are difficult to recognize (Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland 2010: 482). This paper will concentrate on four areas, being female omissions; the issue of firstness; use of the masculine generic and occupations.

2.1.1. Omissions

Females have been the subject of discrimination in EFL materials by simply being excluded from characterisation in dialogues or images. This portrays the message that females, or their achievements, do not have enough value to be included in the text (Porreca 1984: 706).

Students are likely to note this lack of inclusion, which can reinforce sexist ideas that male students may nurture.

Research conducted in women's studies by Fujimura-Fanselow (cited in Norton and Pavlenko 2004: 511) found that unequal power sharing between the sexes had a negative effect on female students participating in class. This is likely because when one sex is excluded from dialogues, their opportunities to practice the language will also be reduced. This places the other sex in a more dominant position, giving them the opportunity to improve their language skills more rapidly.

2.1.2. Firstness

Adding to the injury caused by other issues, textbooks can be biased by giving one sex more opportunities in initiating conversations. Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland (2010: 473) argue that "If one sex *initiates* conversation more often than the other, the 'initiating sex' will end up having more active practice in the skill of initiating conversation" (emphasis is original authors'). Students studying foreign languages often lack the confidence to initiate conversations in the language they are studying. If one sex has less opportunity to practice initiating conversations in classroom settings, this will only serve to compound this problem, giving a clear advantage to the sex that initiates more often.

Firstness has also to do with male and female pairings of words. Generally, when two nouns are mentioned, the male will be placed first, for example brothers and sisters, or in the previous sentence, male and female. Hartman and Judd argue that this "reinforces the second-place status of women, and could, with only a little effort, be avoided by mixing the order" (1978: 390). The textbooks could be written with certain lexical chunks using the male word first, and others using the female. As long as they are used consistently throughout, there should be minimal impact on the students, while removing this subliminal sexist language.

2.1.3. Masculine Generic

Textbooks can be inadvertently sexist through the use of the masculine generic. This issue arises because English does not have an epicene third-person singular pronoun, which leads to pedagogical problems (Cochran 1996: 160). Often in these situations, *he* or *man* is used as a stopgap. This creates a problem, since as Holmes (2008: 320) points out, when these words are used generically, they are still associated with male images.

Overuse of the masculine generic puts females at a disadvantage in recalling information. A study conducted on recognition and recall by Crawford and English (cited in Porecca 1984: 710) showed that females recalled less information when the masculine generic was used instead of the feminine version. Textbooks that repeatedly use the masculine generic are therefore disempowering female students.

An additional issue related to the use of the masculine generic is the use of masculine language in job titles such as policeman or chairman. Writers have attempted to get around this issue by creating feminine equivalents. Hartman and Judd argue that instead of relieving the problem, this merely exacerbates it (1978: 388). By creating titles that are feminine, without opposing masculine titles marks the female positions as something apart from the normal.

2.1.4. Occupations

In addition to being linguistically slighted, occupational sexism can appear in EFL textbooks. A study by Arnold-Gerrity found males were four times more likely to have paying jobs in textbooks, while females were generally cast as housewives (cited in Porecca 1984: 706). This stereotypical typecasting marginalises the reality of female roles in society. Since such a large part of learning a language is understanding the culture, it is important to portray females as they truly exist in that society.

2.2. Gender Differences

Apart from sexist undertones that can creep into language, much research has been conducted into the differences in the ways in which the sexes conduct conversations and express themselves. This section will examine the theoretical differences.

Female linguistic features have been broken down by Lakoff into ten characteristics. They are:

- a. Lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. *you know, sort of, well, you see.*
- b. Tag questions, e.g. *she's very nice, isn't she?*
- c. Rising intonation on declaratives, e.g. *it's really good?*
- d. 'Empty' adjectives, e.g. *divine, charming, cute.*
- e. Precise colour terms, e.g. *magenta, aquamarine.*
- f. Intensifiers such as *just* and *so*, e.g. *I like him so much.*
- g. 'Hypercorrect' grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms.
- h. 'Superpolite' forms, e.g. indirect requests, euphemisms.
- i. Avoidance of strong swear words, e.g. *fudge, my goodness.*
- j. Emphatic stress, e.g. *it was a BRILLIANT performance.*

(cited in Holmes 2008: 298)

This categorisation has been further grouped by Holmes into collections which either reduce or intensify the force of an utterance (ibid.). She contends that lexical hedges, tag questions, intonation, politeness and euphemisms weaken statements, while intensifiers and emphatic stress tend to strengthen them (2008: 323). Another feature that linguists note as a female strengthening device is the use of minimal response. For example, noises such as *mhmm* or *uh huh* signify agreement or acknowledging that the listener is following the speaker's ideas. Coates (cited in Montgomery 2008: 194) states that "Women make greater use of minimal responses to indicate support for the speaker". An additional characterisation of gender differences relates to the turn taking strategies employed in conversations. The following sections will examine these features.

2.2.1. Lexical Hedges

Lexical hedges constitute one of a number of devices used by both sexes to express uncertainty about subjects. This can be seen in the example; "Well... let's wait and see" (Stempleski et.al. 2007b: T134). Lakoff suggests that females use this feature more often than male counterparts. She argues that this is because they are "generally unassertive and/or tentative in expressing their views" (cited in Wardhaugh 2010: 340). Further research into this phenomenon has provided conflicting results. Some studies have supported the theory, but others such as Poos and Simpson found no correlation between gender and hedging frequencies (ibid.).

2.2.2. Tag Questions

Tag questions are commonly used to weaken statements. An example is; “This isn’t Bridget’s egg beater, is it?” (Holmes 2008: 303). As with lexical hedges, tag questions can display uncertainty about a statement.

Tag questions, unlike lexical hedges can act in other ways. They can act in a facilitative fashion, soften criticism, or even act in a confrontational way (Holmes 2008: 302), as in a police officer questioning a suspect, and stating; “you stole the car, didn’t you?” Lakoff’s original theories about female speech patterns did not differentiate between the types of tag questions used. Rather than making female speech patterns weaker, Holmes argues that women are “facilitative and supportive conversationalists, rather than unconfident, tentative talkers” (Holmes 2008: 303). It is misleading to say that female speech patterns are not as strong because of a use of tag questions in the absence of a qualitative analysis of the function of the tags.

2.2.3. Politeness

Holmes signifies politeness as a way in which female speech patterns are weakened. This may be carried out through patterns of intonation. Females use intonation patterns associated with surprise or politeness more often than males (Brend cited in Wardhaugh 2010: 340). This occurs because “women are inclined to see relationships in terms of intimacy, connection and disclosure whereas men are inclined to see them in terms of hierarchy, status and independence” (Montgomery 2008: 194). This fundamental difference in worldviews affects the intonation of the interlocutors.

Polite forms are also used through indirect speech. In this way, interrogative or declarative structures are used in place of imperative forms (Holmes 2008: 273). Therefore instead of using the imperative “close the door”, an interrogative “could you close the door” or the declarative “I would like you to close the door” can be used to be more polite. While indirect speech can have the desired effect, it has been argued that it can also be viewed as coming from a position of weakness (Wardhaugh 2010: 344). This is because the interlocutor is using a politeness form when another might not. However, females tend to use indirect speech to foster feelings of connection rather than to reinforce status.

2.2.4. Minimal Response

Minimal responses are the sounds people make such as *mhmm* or *uh huh*. These are used as positive feedback for the speaker. Studies have shown that in mixed sex group conversations, females gave these responses over four times more frequently than their male counterparts (Holmes 2008: 309). This demonstrates that women are more active listeners than men. It also further reinforces the idea that women view relationships in terms of intimacy and cooperation instead of competition.

Women and men use minimal responses for different purposes. Often, when females use minimal responses, it means that they are listening. Males usually use them to mean that they agree with what is being said (Wardhaugh 2010: 347). Often when men do not agree, they will interrupt the speaker, rather than listening to the end of a train of thought. This leads to gender differences in taking turns in a conversation.

2.2.5. Turn Taking

Linguistic clues are typically followed in conversation to let the other party take their turn in the dialogue and to permit a smooth flow and transition. Two gender differences in such turn taking are worthy of examination, these being ‘interruptions’ and ‘asking questions’.

Interruptions can be characterised where a listener “penetrat[es] well within the grammatical boundaries of a current speaker’s utterance” (Montgomery 2008: 191). These penetrations increase in proportion to the asymmetry of the relationship (ibid.).

Studies indicate that in mixed gender conversations, men are much more likely to interrupt women. A study by Zimmerman and West, for example, found that 96% of the interruptions were made by males to females (cited in Montgomery 2008: 192). Partially as a result of these interruptions, females use the statement strengthening features of intensifiers and emphatic stress. They do this because “they think that otherwise they will not be heard or paid attention to” (Holmes 2008: 299). Holmes here is demonstrating the power inequality between the sexes in conversation.

The second issue with gender roles in turn taking is asking questions. A study by Fishman found that women asked two and a half times more questions than men, which means that the females are doing the “interactional shitwork” (cited in Montgomery 2008: 187). This again

lends support to Holmes' idea that females are supportive in conversations, compared to the combative nature of male conversations (2008: 303).

2.3. Images

Images play an important role in modern textbooks. Photographs and illustrations are used in texts. The latter play a more pertinent role in that “drawings come from the socially influenced imagination of the artist and seem to portray easily recognizable clichés” (Hartman and Judd 1978: 387). It follows that while textbook writers must take care to avoid sexism and stereotypes, the illustrators must also ensure that they are not portraying females in a diminished sense.

In order to analyse images selected for texts, Fairclough has compiled seven questions about the actors and activities in images:

1. What is the activity of the image?
2. Who is active (the “protagonist”) in the image?
3. Who is passive (the “receiver”) in the image?
4. Who has status in the image?
5. What does the body language communicate?
6. What does the clothing communicate?
7. Where are the eyes directed?

(cited in Giaschi 2000: 37)

These can be used to determine if gender bias is present in a given image. Body language and eye direction are especially important to determine a position of power of one character over another.

3. The Textbook

The textbook to be analysed is *ESL Listening and Speaking*. The book is divided into 12 units, each being further subdivided into two sub-units. Each unit deals with a specific theme, for instance, the topic for Unit 10 is food, which is subdivided into “food and eating habits” and “food around the world” (ibid.) The planned university curriculum is for units 1-6 to be taught in the first semester, and units 7-12 to be taught in the second. This analysis examines the scripted conversations and listening activities to determine if sexism or stereotypical usage of linguistic behaviours is evident. All images will be examined according to Fairclough's image analysis.

3.1. Sexism

The first section to be examined is sexism. It is difficult to imagine that textbook writers would go out of their way to use sexist language. However, as the available literature has shown, sexism is ingrained in the English language, largely because it has “been literally man-made and... is still primarily under male control” (Wardhaugh 2010: 353). This section will look to see if any of those traits have translated into the textbook.

The issue of omission is purely quantitative in nature. In the text, gender representations were very similar. There were a total of 55 male and 50 female interlocutors in the printed and listening dialogues (see appendix 1). This shows that the authors have taken into account the ideas expressed by Norton and Pavlenko (2004: 506) that female voices must be included, or else their needs will not be met.

The issue of firstness in the textbook is slightly more polarised towards male speakers. There are 51 dialogues in the textbook. Three of the conversations are male only, one is female only, and the remaining 47 are mixed gender conversations. Of the mixed gender conversations, males initiated the conversations in 57% of the cases (see figure 1). While males do have a slight advantage over female speakers in dialogues, it does not appear to be skewed so far towards males as to make female students feel disadvantaged in the classroom.

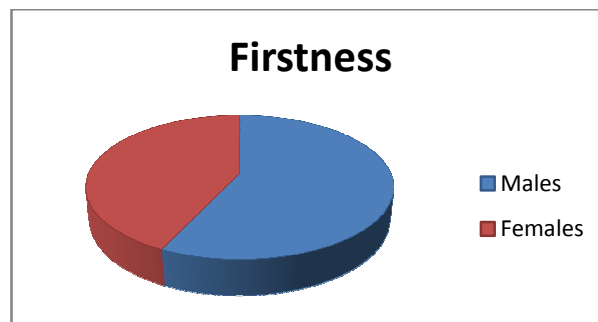


Figure 1: ratio of firstness in mixed gender conversations

Regarding the use of masculine generic, the textbook did not exhibit use of *he* or *she* that did not refer to a single person of that gender. The only issue with this topic was the naming of job titles. The textbook refers to “businessman” (2007a: 12) and “businesswoman” (2007a: 112) to refer to gendered occupational roles, but then makes the switch to “businessperson” (2007a: 121) when referring to a generic position. Two other terms that cause problems are

“waitress” (2007a: 112) and “actress” (2007a: 96). As Hartman and Judd state, “attempts to label the female version of the position only serves to underline the assumption that a women [sic] in one of these roles is a deviation from the norm” (1978: 388). Using non gender specific forms such as *actor* or *server* allows for elimination of the language that denotes females as different.

The final sexist issue that this paper will deal with is stereotypical gender occupational roles. All of the occupations listed in dialogues and images where the occupation was explicit have been listed in Appendix 2. The textbook had several issues with occupations. The first quantitative issue is that there are 32 discrete occupations for males, but only 21 for females (see figure 2). The second is that there are 69 male characters with occupations, compared to only 52 females. There is a clear bias against females with jobs.

Occupations		
	Male	Female
Discrete Jobs	32	21
Total People	69	52

Figure 2: Quantitative data for gender occupations

From a qualitative standpoint, there appears to be no bias either way. There are some male characters with stereotypical female occupations such as hairdresser or dancer. Female characters are given educated well paid occupations such as doctor, webmaster and filmmaker. Male and female characters share 13 occupations, such as doctor and student.

3.2. Gender Differences

This section will examine the textbook for the five differences in gender speech that were previously introduced. The first variance is lexical hedges. There was very little difference between the sexes in the use of hedging devices. Females in dialogues used hedges ten times, while their male counterparts used them eight times. This demonstrates that the textbook has not portrayed its female characters in a more uncertain light than male characters.

The second gender difference to be discussed is the use of tag questions. The textbook uses only very scripted dialogues, which lack some of the nuances of authentic speech patterns. As a result, there were no tag questions used in any of the dialogues.

The issue of politeness shows a clear difference in the textbook. In dialogues, female characters used indirect speech in four instances, and used direct modes of speech in three (see figure 3). As stated previously, it is considered more polite to use the declarative or interrogative form in place of the imperative when making a request because the interrogative implies dominance over the listener. Comparatively, male characters used indirect speech only once and direct speech nine times. This data is consistent with Wardhaugh's position that women use politeness to maintain relationship status, whereas men typically do not use polite forms, because they view speech as a way of achieving outcomes (2010: 343). The male interlocutors used direct speech to achieve outcomes, while the females couched their language in more polite forms.

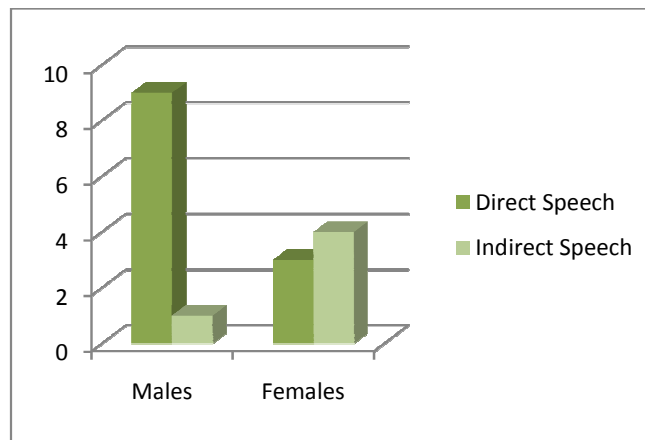


Figure 3: Direct and indirect speech

Only two characters, one of each sex made use of minimal response. Although Wardhaugh (2010: 347) contends that males usually use sounds like *mhmm* to portray agreement, both interlocutors used it to signal that they were listening. However, this sample size is too small to draw any firm conclusions from it.

The final issue examined in gender speech differences is turn taking practices. As noted earlier, turn taking structures “illustrate the real lines of social and sexual power” (Cochran 1996: 160). The textbook did not use situations where people were interrupted. Neither did it involve female characters being conversation facilitators. In all of the mixed gender dialogues, both genders assisted the conversation by asking questions. The main reason for this is that the dialogues have been scripted to give all of the speakers chances to speak. This has removed some of the authenticity, and thus sexism, from speech patterns.

3.3. Images

The textbook featured a large number of photographs and illustrations. A large number of the images portray people. Figure 4 shows the number of male and female characters that appear in the images. From a quantitative standpoint, both genders are represented nearly identically.

Images		
	Male	Female
Photograph	126	112
Illustration	82	81

Figure 4: Gender portrayals in images

A large number of images show portraits of people, or those engaged in activities together. Where people are interacting, only two images are used where one person is not looking at the other. In both cases the female character is looking away when a male character is looking at her. This places the male in a more powerful position. In the images where the couple is looking at each other, there are three pictures where the female is looking up at the male. In all three images, the female is seated looking up at the male character. The height difference and the body language that it necessitates place the males in the dominant position. It is worth noting that all of the images with males in dominant roles are illustrations rather than photographs. This supports Hartman and Judd's earlier stated claim that illustrations come from the socially biased viewpoint of the artist (1978: 387).

4. Discussion

Overall, the textbook *ESL Listening and Speaking* did not use sexist or stereotypical views of women. Virtually all of the conversations featured both genders, and the images were not significantly biased towards either sex in the quantitative analysis. The only issue with the images is that more care could have been taken to ensure that the illustrations did not portray social bias.

Female job roles are not effectively addressed in that females need to be represented with jobs in equal proportion to their male counterparts. As a result, there is a bias against females. As a counterpoint, the textbook did not portray any female characters as housewives. This is a distinct difference from the study performed by Hartman and Judd (1978).

Regarding the issue of direct and indirect speech, the text needs to “provide comparable speaking opportunities, and in addition *inform* students of empirically established gender differences” (emphasis is original authors’) (Jones, Kitetu & Sunderland 2010: 483). This will lead the students to a better understanding of the workings of the language. The possibility is also there to create interesting lesson plans around the topic. As Hartman and Judd noted, “Language learning can sometimes be a very tiresome business, for all our efforts. Built in controversy can both stimulate learning... and rouse interest in a comparison with the student’s own language conventions” (1978: 391).

5. Conclusion

It is clear that there is a variance by gender in common English language usage. This can lead to sex bias, even in EFL teaching materials. Whereas the materials examined had minimal sex bias, the goal must be to attempt gender neutrality.

It is crucial that everyone involved in the education process be acutely aware of the factors which lead to such bias. The singular benefit of this will be to enhance teaching materials and practices, which will lead to an enriched and more efficient student learning experience.

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Appendix 1

Character Firstness in Dialogues (Units 1-4)			
Unit	Male Characters	Female Characters	Initiating Character
1A	Danny	Mariana	Female
1B	Josh, Uncle Tim	Emily	Male
2A	Jim	Katy	Male
	Marc	Angie	Female
	Pablo	Carolyn	Male
	Tony	Vickie	Female
2B	Man	Woman	Male
	Man	Woman	Male
	Man	Woman	Male
	Man	Woman	Female
3A	Kyle	Juliet	Female
	Man	Woman	Male
	Man	Woman	Female
	Man	Woman	Male
3B	Jim, Bobby, Simon		*Male
	Man	Woman	Male
	Man	Woman	Male
	Man	Woman	Female
		Connie, Gina	*Female
4A	Ted, Mike		*Male
4B	Dad	Ashley	Male

Character Firstness in Dialogues (Units 5-8)			
Unit	Male Characters	Female Characters	Initiating Character
5A	Mick	Paula	Female
	Zach, Juan		*Male
5B	Interviewer	Yeliz	Male
6A	Officer Hill	Mrs. Wilkins	Male
	Jon	Chloe	Female
6B	Brian	Lisa	Male
7A	Peter	Molly	Female
	Tyler	Ayumi	Female
7B	Man	Woman	Female
8A	Jay	Marta	Female
	Silvio	Pam	Female
8B	Interviewer	Lauren	Male

* Single gender dialogue

Character Firstness in Dialogues (Units 9-12)			
Unit	Male Characters	Female Characters	Initiating Character
9A	Man	Woman	Female
	Hyun	Carmen	Female
9B	Bill	Rosa	Male
	Bill	Rosa	Male
10A	Lance	Woman	Female
	Man	Cami	Male
	Mark	Sally, Waitress	Male
	Jason	Marnie	Male
10B	Matt	Dioni	Male
	Matt	Pilar	Female
	Matt	Pilar	Female
11A	Man	Sachiko	Male
	Rick	Clare	Male
	B.J.	Amy	Male
	Adriano	Jessie	Male
11B	Nick	Kelly	Male
12A	Ramon	Lisa	Male
	Brad	Lisa	Female

Appendix 2

Employment by Sex	
Male	Female
Student x16	Student x14
Café (job unspecified) x2	Café (job unspecified)
Lost & Found Centre (job unspecified)	Lost & Found Centre (job unspecified)
*Businessman x9	*Businesswoman x7
Doctor	Doctor x2
Television Presenter	Television Presenter
Writer x2	Writer x2
Actor x8	*Actress x5
Chef	Chef
Receptionist	Receptionist x2
Nurse	Nurse
Artist	Artist
Teacher x4	Teacher
Baggage Porter	Singer x3
Graphic Artist	Filmmaker
Hairdresser	Hotel Front Desk Clerk
Soccer Player x2	Painter
Police Officer	Cashier
Police Captain	Dentist
Robber	*Waitress x4
Gymnast	Webmaster
Taxi Driver	
Inventor	
Magician	
Sailor	
Inventor	
Race-car Driver	
Dancer	
Fashion Designer	
Store Clerk	
Translator x2	
Musician	

* Vocabulary used has not been changed from the original text