

# **GENDER TEXTBOOK EVALUATION**

**By**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how New Interchange Intro (Student Book), written by Jack C. Richards, (Cambridge University Press, 2000) represents men and women. It comprises a series of three books from New Interchange Intro to New Interchange III. Most of English as a Second Language programs in Canada recommended the adoption of this series due to the special nature of their ESL programs. These language schools value the uniqueness and diversity of the students attending ESL classes and understand that people from diverse religious communities need to work and study in safe and respectful environments. In cities as dynamic and diverse as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, it is important that materials used in an ESL program be appropriate and sensitive to the multicultural population.

New Interchange Intro is a revised version of Interchange Intro (Cambridge University Press, 1990); it is intended for young adults and adults attending ESL/EFL classes. The author has developed activities that are derived from real-life situations and relevant to adult learners.

New Interchange Intro takes students from beginner to the high beginner level, and it is in compliance with the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB 1-4), a national standard which describes a learner's ability to use the English language to achieve various competencies. To conclude, New Interchange Intro is a useful tool in the ESL classroom because it depicts men and women fairly and respectfully.

### **1.1. Scope of the Paper**

This paper will discuss the following points:

1. Sexism in EFL/ESL textbooks;
2. An analysis of linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of New Interchange Intro and its treatment of sexism;
3. The method used to analyse the textbook, and;
4. Conclusions drawn from this research.

New Interchange Intro presents men and women in a balanced way, with each sex assigned positive role models and given equal space in society.

McDonough and Shaw (1993:74) when discussing learning materials, state "It is possible that the content of some materials will cause offence to some learners. The investigation by Littlejohn and Windeatt (1988) into teaching materials shows how textbooks may be "biased" in subtle, and in some cases not so subtle, ways in their representation of class, ethnic background and reference to smoking and drinking." New Interchange Intro topics are not controversial. On the contrary, the units and topics are innocuous and related to everyday activities and hobbies performed in most cultures such as playing soccer, reading, jogging.

The author of New Interchange Intro presents situations that can serve as a basis for cross-cultural comparison such as getting acquainted in a city (Unit 13), describing health problems and asking for/giving advice on how to take medications (Unit 12) and asking for/giving personal information about countries of origin (Unit 3) among others. “.... Topics have been selected for their interest to students of both genders in homogeneous and heterogeneous classes.” (New Interchange Intro Teacher’s Manual, page VI).

New Interchange Intro does not ascribe more importance to either sex; there is a numerical balance between males and females, which makes the presentation relevant to adult learners. For example, males are depicted performing non-traditional jobs, such as teachers while females are portrayed as pilots and security guards. As Schau and Scott (1984; Sadker & Klein, 1991) indicate, sex-fair materials broaden students’ attitudes about gender roles, and increase the motivation to learn.

It has been argued by some researchers such as Porreca (1984:709) and Nielsen et al (1977:182) that in the English language, male terms and characters less often than males; females appear in more derogatory roles than males, and male generic language is more frequently used.

To avoid this problem in our multicultural ESL classrooms, teachers need to direct their thoughts to reviewing and evaluating their teaching materials (Hartman and Judd, 1978:392) for sexual stereotypes in order to create an inclusive school environment where the needs of each individual can be met.

## **2. LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Treatment of Stereotypes in EFL/ESL Textbooks**

Learners’ perceptions and attitudes towards stereotypes have compelled teachers to examine not only sexism or gender in textbooks in general but also whether stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are portrayed in all EFL/ESL textbooks and materials. Gershuny (1977:143) states that stereotypes limit behaviour and understanding by constructing a static image of both sexes and also establishing a false impression of

male and female characters as an alternative to their socio-cultural origins. In addition, stereotypes are seen as socio-political hierarchies in which one sex is considered superior or dominant over the other inferior sex (e.g., Muslim men are more talkative and participate more in ESL/EFL classrooms than Muslim women.)

Most textbooks examined in the past were mostly written by men. As well, the male authors of dictionaries (Gershuny, 1977) chose to construct sentences that reflected gender stereotypes against women. Moreover, Hartman and Judd (1978, 384-385) conducted a survey of several textbooks and found that women suffered from low visibility. They counted the sex-linked proper names, titles or non-generic pronouns and reported in their findings that, in most cases, male references outnumbered the female ones. For example, in one of the books that Hartman and Judd examined, the ratio of male to female references was found to be 63% to 37%. They also demonstrated that women's stereotypical roles were related to housework and childcare. Women's household chores were exemplified by cooking, changing diapers, doing laundry. Men, on the other hand, were depicted fixing the car, changing electrical bulbs and/or mowing the lawn.

Hence, it appears that many EFL/ESL textbooks for young and mature learners researched by Hartman and Judd (1978) and Gilbert and Rowe (1989) showed gender stereotypes in which women were generally given subordinate status because of their gender alone, and were treated linguistically as inferior without regard to their actual power or social status. Consequently, EFL/ESL textbooks can be one of the great influences in contributing to cultural prejudices and personal biases that learners can, unfortunately, absorb in their learning.

New Interchange Intro does not match those findings. For example, Unit 8 (pg. 46-51) discusses jobs and occupations. Men are depicted in such jobs as teachers, a role usually occupied by women, while women are shown as a judge and a doctor. Thus, the roles of men and women appear to be interchangeable, but they do not present an anti-sexism agenda, which may be offensive to learners.

## 2.2 Treatment of Sexism in ESL/EFL Textbooks

Holmes defines *sexism* as follows “... the ways in which language conveys negative attitudes to women” (Holmes, 1996:336). There are mechanical procedures, which may be used to evaluate sexism in EFL/ESL textbooks based on their linguistic and non-linguistic components. For example, some researchers stress the need for compiling checklists to evaluate language (work or discourse) and/or the ways in which pictures work as well (Florent et. al, 1994; Vivier et al. 1994:206; Bymes (1994-166). Most of the research has been conducted to evaluate word items; nouns, pronouns and titles used in the text by male and female figures.

Porreca’s study (1984) demonstrates that an important number of **omissions** were noted “The high concentration of masculine generics creates a very distinct masculine “presence”... The average ration of females to males, including masculine generic constructions, is 1:2.06.... ” For example, there were more male pronouns: *he*, *she*, *friend* had a male connotation.

Another aspect to be considered is **firstness**. Porreca (1984) defined this term as “Given two nouns paired for sex, such as male/female, the masculine word always came first, with the exception of the pair ladies/gentlemen” (1984:706). The third aspect that Porreca (1994) identified in his study was **occupational roles** for males and females, “To what extent do textbooks contain a wide variety of occupations for men and a limited range of occupational roles for females. Arnold Gerrity (1978) found that men were portrayed in four times as many paying occupations as women....” (Porreca, 1984:706)

## 2.3 Treatment of Images in EFL/ESL Textbooks

Researchers such as Fairclough (1989) and Berger (1972) evaluated the gender positioning of images in textbooks. These authors use the word **positioning** as defines by Glaschi “in a quite literal way: individuals or groups of individuals are positioned by discourse as “inherently inferior,” “in control, “ “weak,” “strong,” and so forth.” (2000:33). On the one hand, Berger pays attention to the positioning of women as

objects to be owned and men as objects of jealousy, while Fairclough evaluates several aspects of contemporary culture through media and discourse.

In the last two decades, publishers have included more photographs, graphs and captions in textbooks, and are paying more attention to the visual presentation of the EFL/ESL textbooks in addition to their grammatical or textual content (Glaschi, 2000). Moreover, images are not only used to support written text but to express meaning on their own as well.

For example, Glasche (2000:36) states:

**“The analysis of images addresses the use of poststructuralist analytical techniques in deconstructing universal truths. The image per se would seem to be the perfect instrument for an enlightenment dogma, difficult to disintegrate, difficult to challenge on a rational basis; we are forced when analysing an image, to discuss *feelings* and *impressions* rather than point and counterpoint, and this latent quality is the image’s communicative strength.”**

In conducting his analysis of textbook images, Glasche follows Fairclough’s (1989) technique. This method includes three steps: (a) description: a series of ten questions related to the discourse; (b) interpretation: another set of seven questions related to interrogate the images (**Critical Image Analysis**); and (c) explanation; the examination and interpretation of the images is always subject to the person who performs the analysis. Consequently, critical image analysis is a useful tool to analyse gender positioning in EFL/ESL books that, if not done, might continue in a hidden or subconscious form.

## **2.4 Objectives of the Paper**

The studies reviewed above aimed to evaluate sexism in EFL/ESL textbooks, first at the level of word items; then as males and females portrayed in stereotypical jobs or occupations and finally, an analysis of images within the textbook. Moreover, we can

claim that sexism is hidden or imperceptible on the face of the language and is consequently, vital to analyse. Pauwels, (1998:230) discusses this issue as follows:

**“Although the attention of the language planner is usually focused on describing and eliminating linguistic sexism at the word level; an attempt should be made to examine the issue at sentence and discourse level or at least to draw the language user’ attention to the fact that eliminating sexism is not a matter of replacing sexist terms with non-sexist ones.”**

Therefore, the examination of New Interchange Intro will focus on the following points:

- a. The numerical weighting of male and female characters in text and in illustrations;
- b. First place occurrence of males and females in conversations; and
- c. How males and females are depicted in occupational roles in both text and illustrations.

### **3. THE TEXTBOOK EXAMINATION**

In New Interchange Intro there is a balance, generally of male and female representations throughout the book (male: 233 and female: 174). For example, Unit 1 has five pictures of people introducing themselves or conversing. Two of the pictures show three women and two men, while two other pictures show two men speaking to one woman. They are wearing casual attire and they are depicted as being of European background. They do not show any particular race and/or dress code. The setting is quite neutral –the hallway of an international language school– ESL/EFL learners can identify themselves with the pictures because most of the time they are either wearing similar clothes and they frequently stand in the school hallway talking to their classmates.

Conversations task-based activities in the textbook feature learners from different backgrounds. On the one hand, it could be argued that New Interchange Intro does not show any Muslim representation (text or pictures) such as Muslim women wearing the headscarf or **hijab**. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that Muslims are not always visible and the traditional notion of how Muslims are represented might be based on stereotypes of the reader. The material addressing this particular ethnic group has yet to be developed by the author.

The Interchange series, as most North American textbooks, mirrors the fact that the learning of English is not limited to any one country, religion or culture. Thus, most of the listening exercises have been recorded by people with different accents.

### **3.1 Bias in New Interchange Intro**

New Interchange Intro does not appear to have hidden bias. The textbook does not appear to address any specific views or ideas. On page IV, New Interchange Intro-Teacher's Manual, the author states, "English is the major language of international communication and is not limited to any one country, region or culture." He adds that in the listening exercises "A variety of native speakers voices and accents, as well as some non-native speakers of English, are used."

H. D. Brown (1994:240) asserts, "In English, another twist on the language and gender issue has lately focused us on "sexist" language: language that either causes unnecessary attention to gender or is demeaning to one gender – almost always women in today's only male dominated world. Writers are cautioned to refrain from using what we call the generic *he* and instead to pluralize or to use *he* or *she*. What used to be stewardesses, chairman and policeman are now more commonly referred to as flight attendants, chairs, and police officers."

Hidden bias occurs when a gender male or female is not included in the textbook or when males are named more than females in the textbook and vice versa (e.g., a ratio of 70% - 30%). Such bias can be detected after reviewing the whole textbook. Sometimes random sampling of the textbook does not reveal that a gender is rarely or not included either in it. A common example of hidden bias occurs in history books where authors did not portray the roles of women and visible minorities.

Unit 1-Exercise 1 (page 2) in New Interchange Intro introduces greetings from around the world. It shows how men and women greet each other in different parts of the world. This type of activity is suitable to the learners in Canadian adult ESL classrooms

because the students come from different countries and backgrounds and they can identify themselves with the pictures and their explanations.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

##### **4.1. Analysis of Word Level**

New Interchange Intro was analysed by counting the words in a straightforward way (male and female), as well as by paying attention to the illustrations that accompany each conversation or passage in the textbook (because of space limitations only four units are being discuss in this paper).

The following units were analysed: (a) Unit 1 – Introducing greetings and talking about countries of origin; (b) Unit 4 – Describing clothing and weather; (c) Unit 8 – Asking for and giving information about jobs and occupations, and (d) Unit 14 – Describing past events.

##### **4.1.1. Male and Female Characters**

Characters mean those men and women given proper names in the textbook and in the illustrations accompanying the dialogues or reading passages. Each character has been given a single count. For instance, names that are mentioned more than once in each unit are counted as one. Therefore, first names, last names, and full names of males and females with a title such as Ms., Miss., Mrs., and Mr. are counted as total occurrences in each unit.

	Male	Female
Unit 1 -	21	22
Unit 4 -	8	8
Unit 8 -	2	3
Unit 14 -	6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>

These figures indicate the number of occurrences of character roles, and the percentage (5%) shows the relation between male/female characters named in the above-mentioned units. In the illustrations, the total figures for male-female are 79:66 (a percentage of 16% male to female). Consequently, male characters appeared more often than female in the illustrations; while in the text the difference is minimal, there was one more male occurrence than female.

#### **4.1.2. Occupational Roles**

Mentions of occupational roles for male and female are as follows:

Male: receptionist pilot musician police officer lawyer cook (3) waiter  
salesperson security guard air traffic controller teacher

Female: doctor (2) nurse flight attendant judge waiter cashier  
security guard (2) teacher

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Total jobs: male = 13 female = 11

The difference between male and female occupations is also minimal in the text. In illustrations, male occupations were mentioned 32 times against 24 jobs depicted by females.

It should be pointed out that the author was aware of mentioning non-traditional occupations for both the female or male characters (e.g., female – doctor; security guard, judge; male – receptionist, teacher and cook.) By doing this, the author is avoiding stereotyping, which occurs when genders are assigned to their traditional roles, for example, when men are portrayed as doctors or engineers, and women are depicted as nurses, teachers and housewives.

#### **4.1.3. Amount of Talk**

To analyse the order in which the dominant speaker(s) utterance(s) occurred in conversations, the times in which exchanges were made were counted. Turn-taking in conversation is defined by Sinclair and Coulthard (1995:2) and J.C. Richards (1993:130) as what a speaker says, who says what before the other, and who asks for or gives information.

In eight conversations, the four units were analysed. Three conversations were begun by a female speaker talking to a male character, two were started by a male speaker interacting with female, and three dialogues took place with two female characters. All conversations took place in informal settings, and the recordings are well acted with a variety of native English speakers as well as non-native speakers. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the author did not show any sign of linguistic or hidden bias (**invisibility**).

#### **4.1.4. Male and Female in Illustrations**

The image chosen for analysis are taken from the units mentioned above. Because of space limitations, the selection of illustrations was based on this author's own perception. Interactions between male and female, as well as occupational roles and everyday activities with which ESL learners can identify themselves very easily were analysed. However, it is almost impossible to definitively detect this form of bias due to the personal subjectivity involved in image recognition and visual processing.

The New Interchange Series, and New Interchange Intro in particular demonstrates that there is an increase in images in textbooks and this is a growing trend among the best-known publishers of ESL/EFL Textbooks. For example, the very popular Side by Side Series (S.J. Molinsky and B. Bliss, 1989), and the American Streamline Series (B. Hartley and P. Viney, 1983) utilized illustrations and captions which are very childish from an adult point of view. (See Appendix A)

Image 1 (Unit 1, pg. 6) (Appendix B) presents a photograph linked to a grammar exercise where one female and two males exchange utterances in a conversation. Both

men and woman are standing and smiling. The woman is standing on the left side of the picture looking to the right of the camera. One man is in the middle of the composition and the other is on the right. Looking at the woman. There is eye contact among the three characters. The scene occurs in a school hallway. Therefore the setting is familiar and relevant to learners from different cultures and backgrounds.

Image 2 (Unit 4, pg. 21) (Appendix C) depicts two women in a laundry room, linked to a conversation describing clothes. They are dressed casually, jeans and T-shirts, which are typically worn by learners in a school environment. The female on the left is keeping eye contact with the female character on the right, who is taking her clothes out of the dryer. She looks a bit worried because her socks are ruined. Her head (female character on the right) is inclined.

The analysis of eye contact and head position usually involve a more subjective interpretation of the illustrations or images because they can be perceived as innocuous images and at the same time they emphasize gender positions. For example, women depicted by keeping eye contact express confidence in themselves and they do not show signs of submissiveness.

Image 3 (Unit 8, pg. 51) (Appendix D) is a collage of pictures linked to a listening exercise in which four women are talking about their occupations. Each woman is looking straight at the camera. The first female representation is of a female character of fair skin, and brunette who is singing and wearing a formal dress. The second female, of African background, is a chef at a restaurant and she is decorating a cake. The third female, a blonde security guard, wearing her uniform and talking on a walkie-talkie. The fourth female character is a pilot. The women are all on their late 20's or early 30's and they look very confident in their jobs. Finally, two of these women are performing male dominated jobs (security guard and pilot; until recently, chefs jobs were mostly male, too).

Image 4 (Unit 14, pg. 87) (Appendix E) is a photograph related to a grammar exercise where a man is waiting for his girlfriend to telephone him. He is reading a book and looks worried. His face is inclined towards the book; he appears to be concentrating on the reading and is a bit anxious. The man is wearing casual clothes. He might be sitting in his living room. This picture is especially relevant for analysis because the role of the male is passive, and he is performing a role mostly exemplified by women who are waiting for the male figure to call and ask them out!

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the examples analysed in Section 4, the author of this text, Jack C. Richards does not appear to present any sexist bias throughout the book.

### **5.1 Male and Female Characters**

The findings show that there is a balance between male and female representations in the text and in the illustrations. There are special allocations of male and female main characters. In addition, first place occurrences among male/female characters are divided equally in the conversations analysed. The author of this text is careful to keep female character in mind.

### **5.2 Occupational Roles**

Occupations in text and illustrations have been assigned to men and women in non-traditional roles, for example a male receptionist and a female security guard in Unit 8. Stereotypical jobs of housewives or babysitters were not included.

In short, examples of sexism in occupational roles were not discovered in this text. Thus, contradicting the findings of Hartman and Judd (1978) who stated occupational stereotypes continue to grow in ESL/EFL Textbooks.

### **5.3 Amount of Male/Female Talk**

Based on analysis, the recordings of each dialog in the units demonstrate that female and male characters have been allotted the same amount of time. These findings negate the stereotype that women talk more than men (Wareing, 1999:75).

As a result, the author of New Interchange Intro has allocated to men and women the same status in their conversations. In addition, J.C. Richards (2000) has given equal importance to female-female, male-female, and female-male interactions in dialogues.

#### **5.4 Male and Female in Illustrations**

After analysing the images (refer to 4.1.4. Section) men and women have been portrayed equally. New Interchange Intro does not emphasize the world of business, travel or entertainment performed by wealthy people; the emphasis of this textbook is on settlement (e.g., finding places in a city, renting an apartment, describing habits and routines, finding a doctor and/or general interest topics such as describing cities and talking about past events in anyone's life.) Moreover, the topics are interesting to any background or ethnic group.

Further, in Unit 8, describing occupations, the illustrations depicting leading roles are distributed evenly among female and male characters. Men and women have exchanged active and passive roles; there is no dominance of one sex over the other.

The position of the women's heads in the illustrations shows confidence and happiness. Attitudes indicating submission (Morris, 1977) widely depicted in commercial ESL/EFL textbooks, were not demonstrated.

Contemporary fashion is shown. In the illustrations dedicated to fashion, men and women are represented either wearing casual or professional dress or wearing uniforms. No disturbing images of males and females that might offend learners of different backgrounds have been included, such as people wearing minimal bathing suits or being naked. Thus, the author has been prudent not to depict women as interested mainly in

fashion and/or as objects or models, as was described by Berger (1972) in most ESL/EFL textbooks.

In most of the illustrations, men and women show positive eye contacts towards each other. In most cases, men and women are smiling, and if a gesture is added to the picture, there is no indication of intimacy or submission from the contact. For example, Image 1 (Unit 1, pg. 5 – Appendix F) where the female character is looking at the other two male characters, anger or tension could not be identified. On the contrary, this image shows a group of friends or classmates talking amicably. On the other hand, Image 3 (Unit 8, pg. 51 – Appendix C) shows women alone gazing directly into the camera. These photographs show women working and being part of the workforce instead of being stereotyped as stay-at-home mothers.

The illustrations used in New Interchange Intro make obvious that the author has been very careful to avoid stereotypes. The overall analysis shows that New Interchange Intro does not present gender stereotypes in which women are generally given subordinate status because of their gender.

## **6. SUMMARY**

A book as New Interchange Intro is a valuable resource either for the experienced or newly appointed teachers. It is intended for the multicultural and multiracial environment of any ESL/EFL class in Canada and/or worldwide. This textbook, used at the beginning level is a stepping stone in a process of meeting learners' settlement and integration needs. Further, New Interchange Intro is a sex-fair ESL/EFL textbook that helps students increase their motivation towards learning (Sadler & Klein, 1991). As such, the author has done an admirable job in avoiding linguistic and visual bias.

To conclude, it would be interesting to continue further research on the subject by involving institutions, publishers, authors and educators in analysing gender bias and at the same time, by organising in-service workshops for ESL/EFL professionals on how to detect gender bias in textbooks, newspapers, and/or magazines.

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