

# **Gender Relations in Institutionalized Discourses**

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## **Introduction**

Gender relations are hierarchical relations of authority between women and men that tend to disadvantage women. These gender hierarchies are often accepted as normal and are subject to change over time. They can be seen in a variety of gendered practices, such as the division of labour and resources, and gendered ideologies such as ideas of suitable behaviour for women and men. But whether gender relations act to improve or to worsen other social inequalities, it depends on the context. Gender relations constitute and are constituted by different institutions, such as family, legal systems and academic organisations. They are a resource which redefine the rules, norms and practices which administrate social institutions. Since women have been eliminated from many institutional areas or their participation was restricted, they often have less negotiating power to influence changes which institutions operate (Reeves & Baden 2000).

The idea of universal values as seen in human rights and gender equality is supported by international bodies by means of instruments approved by numerous countries. In practical terms, guaranteeing human rights and gender equality means not only supervising bias and discrimination, but also quickly promoting human rights and ensuring that all representations of gender in institutionalized materials are equal. This paper then examines the portrayal of gender relations in institutionalized discourses such as dictionaries, textbooks and advertisements which determines the roles of men and women in the society.

## **Dictionaries**

The term dictionary can assign a tangible terminology; a more widely institutionalised cultural authority or a theoretical repository of linguistically coded entities obtainable in the range of individual speakers. All these meanings presume the conscious or unconscious creation of a set of definitive statements generally thought to be founded on the study or observation of linguistic and material entities in the real world. In turn, a dictionary definition places a word within a particular grammatical, cognitive, and substantial context, thus limiting dictating usage, conceptualisation, and perception. It is a fixed result of a set of interpretative practices that becomes the text that creates discourse. In this sense, a dictionary is any kind of academic or authoritative text on words that claims to be based on what it is. This statement is one way of accepting the process through which meaning, both sexist and non-sexist, is authorized (Treichler 1989).

Cameron (2006) pointed out that meaning is not fixed but always contextual; therefore mechanical substitution of sexist expressions with neutral options cannot guarantee exclusion of sexism in language. In that case, contestation of word meanings institutionalised in the dictionaries and presented as natural and true is more effective for changing the succeeding power dynamics between women and men observed in the language. In Russian dictionaries, pairs of words signifying 'female' and 'male' within the two editions of *Ozhegov Russian Language Dictionary* were analysed in order to examine the constructed meaning of gender. Within the national promotion for the language purity recently commenced by the government, dictionaries have been revised in order to reflect the authentic and pure Russian language. Iarmanova (2008) then compared the most recent revised 2007 edition of the dictionary with its previous 1992 edition. Analysis of the supporting assumptions in the revised entries showed drastic systematic changes in the meaning construction of gender. Separate sexist definitions and examples of 1992 edition have been systematically changed so that the new constructed meanings of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' as constituents of gender have become much more patriarchal in their nature. Thus, the Russian state has been using moral-panic centred around the trouble of alleged language corruption not only for achieving political influence through strengthening the Russian language but also as a part of traditional anti-feminist sexual politics of the language within the country itself. The analysis regarding the revision of ORLD is strongly interconnected in the power dynamic between sexes (Iarmanova 2008). And this analysis was believed to be an essential first step towards an organised feminist political activity for promoting change in the existing arrangement between women and men not just in Russia but to the other countries as well.

Cameron (2006) pointed out that meaning is not fixed but always contextual; therefore Textbooks worldwide are crucial means of mass media in the society. Teachers and pupils view textbooks as key instructional objects and sources of authority (Obura 1994). It remains as one of the resourceful agents of socialisation in the society. Gender images and roles are vital part of any culture, therefore the way in which female and male genders are portrayed in textbooks contribute to the type of images that learners develop of male and female in the society.

A textbook, normally consisting of text and illustrations, provides accessibility to a given subject for a given age group in order to show the foundations for typical learning and a standard culture. Moreover, in their interpretation and presentation of knowledge, textbooks are a vehicle for norms, values and models of social behaviours through the representations that strengthen hopes of maintaining social unity and a harmonious relationship between human beings and institutions. Therefore, textbooks contribute to great socialisation (Brugeilles & Cromer 2009).

Various announcements and resolutions have been made and several conferences held aimed at promoting gender equity in the education system. For example, the 1979 Convention of Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) identified the need to eliminate gender stereotypes in education and particularly, the textbooks. The convention solved that any stereotyping concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education should be abolished, in particular by revisions of textbooks and school programs (UNO1979). Despite this resolution, gender stereotypes continue to persist in school textbooks. This is in spite of the fact that textbooks are essential tools in the teaching and learning process. Textbooks are basic carriers of the content that is conveyed to the pupils at various levels of learning and textbooks are accepted as the medium which play a very fundamental role in preparing the future actors in society by determining their attitudes and giving them a direction in life (Mbilinyi 1996). In this paper, textbooks in

Cameron (2006) pointed out that meaning is not fixed but always contextual; therefore different developing countries (Kenya, Syria, India, Romania, USA and Japan) were examined by carefully analysing the subject matter, authorship, content and

illustrations of the textbooks. Example sentences from the textbooks were also inspected and checked to observe if there are gender stereotyping and inequalities in gender roles.

The textbooks issued over the years for use in primary schools in Kenya have fallen short of including gender equity, thus achieving male dominance and women subordination. The school system is an important socialising agent hence textbooks are vital means of mass media to spread society's values and aspirations. Due to this gender issues in textbooks, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology through Kenya Institute of Education included gender responsiveness as one of the rising issues to be addressed by school curriculum through textbooks in all subjects (Kobia 2009).

The language that pupils gain during their schooling especially in English is learned from their teachers and textbooks. Language is one of the most and delicate ways of representing gender bias through writing. Gender bias in English language textbooks can be portrayed by use of naming, nouns, pronouns, generics and vocatives (Kabira and Masinjila 1997).

Naming or not naming a character in a story is one way of depicting gender bias language. This is because it shapes attitudes and beliefs towards the character in the text. For instance, in "Let's Learn English" textbook (Std 3 pages 20-21), a story is told of an officer from the children department but her name is not stated. The officer has been assigned to the role of taking care of children, which is an extension of conventional role that women have been assigned by the society. A survey of aspects of grammar in LLE series discloses that there is little gender biased language used against the female gender. However, in some cases, language portrays women in their conventional feminine roles that the society has assigned them over the years. Examples of sentences include:

1. My grandmother cooks her foods herself. (LLE Std 3, Page 62).
2. Jane should plait the doll's hair herself. (LLE Std 3, Page 62)
3. Today she arrived late than everyone else. (LLE Std 4, Page 199)

The above sentences capture the society's view and attitudes towards women of which the

illustrations of the textbooks. Example sentences from the textbooks were also inspected and authors are products of the society. Language, as far as male gender is concerned, is fair.

Boys are portrayed performing masculine tasks which promote positive personality traits like brave, inventive, intelligent, dutiful, informed, educated and curious. A few of sampled sentences below reveal this phenomenon.

1. The boys caught a rabbit the rescues. (LLE Std 3, Page 62)
2. His idea is an interesting one. (LLE Std 4, Page 25)
3. Mr. Momanyi drives the bus. (LLE Std 4, Page 34)

From the analysis of LLE textbooks content, the masculine pronouns outnumber the feminine. This can be attributed to overrepresentation of male characters in figures, photographs and proper nouns especially in the names of the male gender in the textbooks.

However, the LLE series have tried to use gender sensitive language. Examples of gender responsive language include:

1. She can jump higher than all of us. (LLE Std 4, Page 11)
2. Lillian and Purity were discussing important matters. (LLE Std 8, page 21)
3. She is a bright girl. (LLE Std 3, Page 186)
4. My mother is very strict but loving. (LLE Std 4, Page 129)

On the other hand, in use of technology, the female gender is portrayed as falling behind. For example, in LLE Std 4, Page 74, a sentence reads: *She used a hoe to till her father's garden.*

This sentence depicts that women are not landowners. The land is owned by the male gender in all patriarchal societies. Also, using a hoe in 21st Century shows that female gender is falling behind as far as technological development is concerned. Ownership of property is also depicted as man's field. For example, this gender depicts men as the main owner of property: *This car belongs to my father.* (LLE Std 4, Page 120). More men are portrayed in management positions than women in the LLE textbooks. More men are also portrayed as politicians than women. For example, in the series one encounters sentences like:

- Our member of parliament was very impressed. He promised to take us to a trip. (LLE Std 4, page 111).

- My uncle is the provincial commissioner and I accompanied him to the stadium. (LLE Std 4, page 133).

Based on the findings on the gender relations in "Let's Learn English" textbook, there is gender imbalance in the portrayal of gender representations in favour of males at the expense of female gender. More male authors, editors, illustrators, photographers and designers contributed in the production of LLE series. This has led to the marginalisation and underrepresentation of female gender in the English textbooks. There are also more male characters than females portrayed in LLE series, through the use of illustrations. This can be attributed to the fact that no female artists or photographer participated in the production of the series. Furthermore, there are more females portrayed in reproductive roles than male.

Men are portrayed in productive activities, which enable gender stereotyping in the textbooks. On personality traits, it has been studied that more women are depicted in negative personality traits than men in LLE series. Positive personality traits connected with men outnumber women by a large edge. In general, women have been portrayed as fragile, passive, and dependent. On the other hand, men are depicted as courageous, adventurous and hardworking. The findings reveal that men are portrayed as leaders while women are followers as far as leadership and power relations are concerned. Very few women hold leadership positions as portrayed as administrators, politicians and holding professional jobs. In terms of possession of property like land, livestock and cars, men are depicted as owners of property of high value. Though a gender-bias language is not much featured,



it can be said that gender-bias language has not been totally eliminated in the LLE series (Kobia 2009).

In Syria, a total of 28 textbooks used in grades 8-12 were analysed and found to be male-bias in content and language; indeed, the author concluded that females were derogated and victimised. The books' annual distribution was over 500,000 students and the texts crossed all major subjects. Additional analyses found that male-centered language was used in particular like masculine nouns such as "mankind," and pronouns such as "he". Thus, male words served as all- general terms for both males and females. Another gender inequality were analysed at conventional sex roles. Males were portrayed as "masters" in their homes. They didn't seek advice from females even on such household-oriented topics as controlling children and household budgeting. Females were reprimanded for disagreeing with the males. Frequently, they were depicted as fixated on preserving the household to a high standard in order to make the husband happy (Alrabaa 1985).

In India, analysis about gender bias on History and Geography textbooks were done by Jon Ellis. His study was divided into two parts. Part 1 has 71 pictures of males (76%) vs. 22 of females (24%), and these findings are better evidence than many. And Part 2 shows far more tremendous gender bias than Part 1: it has 50 pictures of males (96%) vs. 2 of females (4%). Not a single woman is portrayed in the chapter about *Main Ways of Earning a Living* or in another illustration. Ellis claims that this is a false perception of reality since in West Bengal; many households have women as their heads, who hold titles in their own name. The author concludes that the gender bias

against women found in the text and pictures of these books makes them unacceptable for use (Ellis 2002).

In Romania, several textbooks reveal gender problems. Texts are generally gender neutral but their content is a more important promoter of gender stereotypes than their curriculum. Out of

106 textbooks analysed, the percentage of the pictures illustrating girls/women is 12.8%. While first

and second grade textbook pictures depict 24% girls/women, the percentage drops gradually to 10% by 12th grade. A fascinating exception involves book covers: 45% contain images of both sexes. The general percentages of the content are less intense than for the illustrations. Out of 4,318 human images, 64.8% are male while 33.2% are female. But when it comes to representation of trades and occupations, the pattern is much more extreme. Textbooks for third to twelfth grade contain only 2.2% of women working. Out of 5,620 images, 1,306 contain identifiable trades: 1,290 are performed by men vs. only 16 by women. Similarly, only 1% of men are placed in familial situations. Out of the 16,600 lines and 415 pages analysed in a primary level language and communication text, only 8 lines featured women in public life and 3 lines men in the home. In terms of authorship, women write about half the primary school texts (52% of 404 authors), and they comprise 43% of the 1,655 authors of high school texts. Moreover, there is no direct connection between the gender of the author and the level of gender justice promoted in the texts (Miroiu 2004).

As for English textbooks used in Japanese senior high schools, Nakai (2001) found abundant examples of male dominance, gender imbalance in social ranks and occupations, and stereotyped gender roles. The five government approved textbooks analysed in the study of Fumie Togano were *Crown English Writing New Edition* (Shimozaki et al., 2008), *Genius English Writing Revised* (Sano et al., 2008), *Revised Polestar Writing Course* (Minamide et al.,

2008), *New Edition Unicorn English Writing* (Ichikawa, Hestand, Shiokawa, Kobayashi, & Hagino, 2008), and *Voyager Writing Course New Edition* (Minamimura et al., 2008). These five were chosen from among 30 writing textbooks published in 2008 mainly because of their availability to the author and because they were a representative sample based on market share and recognition of writing textbooks presently in use. In all of the textbooks, the number of male authors was more than double that of female authors. In *Voyager*, all of the co-authors were male. Considerably, more male subjects were found, as if some authors used *he* out of routine when constructing the sample

sentences. For whatever motive, female subjects emerged far less frequently than male ones in the textbooks assessed. Fifty-five sentences contained the words *mother* or *mom*, and 68 sentences contained *father* or *dad*. Only one sentence (2%) depicted the mother working outside the home, while 18 sentences (26%) are related to the occupation of a father. The results of the study of Togano indicated gender imbalances such as women were less noticeable than men; housework and child care were mostly designated to mothers; working women rarely appeared; and men enjoyed much more variety of occupational roles than women. These findings show that the rules established by the government to support gender equality are not reflected in these government-approved textbooks. In addition, these textbooks failed to match up with current realities in Japanese society, where many women are already working outside their homes (Togano 2009).

Similar to the findings about the representations of gender relations in the textbooks in Kenya, Syria, India, Romania and Japan, there is also gender imbalance on the textbooks in the US. The textbooks do not show equality between men and women; instead they convey the message that men are more significant than women and that it is acceptable to portray women as objects. In other words, there is a risk that what learners hear and read in the classroom might affect their perception about gender relations when they use English outside of the classroom. If learners are exposed to a

huge number of names of famous men, and only to a few women they might conclude that either there are few famous women, or that they are not worth mentioning (Holmqvist & Gjorup 2006).

### **Gender Relations in Advertisements**

Advertising is a very influential means of social communication in modern society. It offers the most maintained and most concentrated set of images anywhere in the media system. It plays a major role in the construction, preservation, and representation of male bodies.

Almost all products are gendered in a practice of normative sexual dualism being emphasised and maintained within the linking cultural institutions of marketing

communication and market segmentation. As a means of consumption, advertising plays a strong role in promulgating dualistic gender roles and prescribing sexual identities. Most ad campaigns raise gender identity by drawing their imagery chiefly from the stereotyped depiction of masculinity and femininity. In this way, masculinity and femininity interact evenly with the logic of the market-advertising representations and consumption practices which offer a meaningful system of difference and has established strong limits to the possibilities of male and female consumers. Within this system, symbolic masculine activities such as shaving the face, driving fast cars, having a hearty appetite, smoking cigarettes, and drinking liquor are put next to feminine visions of applying makeup, driving a minivan, eating “light,” doing the laundry, and decorating houses (Schroeder & Zwick 2004). Erving Goffman in his book *Gender Advertisements* (1979) believes that advertisements are in fact very strange creations, particularly on the portrayals of gender relations. He showed people that in advertising, the best way to realize the male/female relation is to compare it to the parent/ child relation in which men take on the roles of parents while women act as children. In advertising, women are treated mostly as children. Goffman supports his argument by pointing to a number of aspects of gender relations in advertising. For example, in examining the portrayal of hands, he finds that women's hands usually are shown just caressing an object, or just barely touching it, as if they were not in full control of it, whereas men's hands are shown toughly grabbing and manipulating objects. Goffman is concerned with what social portrayals say about the relative social positions of men and women. A recumbent position leaves people in a deprived position to defend themselves and thus puts them at the leniency of others. This position is of course a traditionalised expression of sexual availability. Goffman's sample of ads shows that woman is evenly shown drifting away mentally while under the physical defense of a male, as if his strength and vigilance were enough. Women are also shown in the finger-to-mouth pose, directly

suggestive of children's behaviour. Furthermore, when men and women are shown in physical contact, consistently the woman is snuggling into the man in the same way that children beg for protection and comfort from their mothers. Advertisements share a conception of masculinity connected to consumer lifestyles. The images may reassure men by placing them in masculine situations while ingeniously reminding them that this masculinity is fragile and temporary which are in need of stable stoking by consumer choice. Men have long been persuaded by advertising representations to take charge as consumers to construct perfect masculine identities (Schroeder & Zwick 2004). Thus, these images show how men can be represented as consumers, how the male body functions to represent consumer goals and in what ways ads express masculine desire via the male body. When advertisements connect male bodies with consumer goods, they call upon a representational scheme that serves as a stabilizing yet culturally and historically bounded object-code (McCracken 1988). This however is not merely a simple reflection of reality—ads are neither false nor are they true. As representations, they are essentially a generalisation from what they perceived. Indeed, all communication is a generalisation at some level. For too long, the debate on gender has been

focused on the extent to which advertising images are true or false. Ad images are neither false nor true reflections of social reality because they are in fact a part of social reality. As such, advertisements are part of an entire context within which people attempt to understand and identify their own gender relations. They are part of the development by which people learn about the context of gender in the society.

The interactions of identity, consumption, and representation correspond to one of the crucial imperatives of modern consumer culture. As global markets expand and built with global advertising campaigns, representations of identity promote an enormous collection of products to a growing range of consumers. Cultural conceptions of gender identity, sexual fulfillment, and their part in the promised good life of consumer choice will come under

intense pressure. Understanding the role that masculinity and femininity plays in consumption, visual history, and representation indicates a step toward understanding how the market structures advertising campaigns.

### **Conclusion**

Dictionaries, textbooks, advertisements and other reading materials are very important agents which play a very crucial role in determining the perceptions of people regarding female and male gender in the society. Gender relations and equality are the rising issues that have attracted major debates in different forums including the education system and marketing strategies. The findings regarding the display of gender relations on the institutionalised discourses are very similar. Masculinity is very superior and dominating compare to the concept of femininity. The overrepresentation of male character in textbooks, dictionaries and advertisements develop awareness especially gender roles in the society. Any gender imbalance in these discourses may lead to misunderstandings about how society reflects gender representations.

Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland suggest that authors either attempt to make the occupational roles of men and women in textbooks reflect those of society, or create positive role models in the textbooks and advertisements by describing women who are employed in a broader range of professions and even assuring that there are similar numbers of men and women in the professions being described on the institutionalised discourses. Though there are gender imbalances in the discourses discussed in the paper, it cannot be denied that the authors attempt to have gender equality in their discussions and though it may not be successful, it can be a stepping stone of correct representation of gender in institutionalised discourses.

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