GENDER STEREOTYPING AND GENDERED DISCOURSES IN A HONG KONG PRIMARY ENGLISH TEXTBOOK SERIES

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the content and language of a currently published Hong Kong English language textbook series for grade one students to find out if gender stereotyping and gender bias still exist. The results of the study showed that males and females were almost equally represented and were portrayed in a similar range of activities. Females were also more visible in both illustrations and texts. The phenomena of females being underrepresented and male dominance occurred in the previous textbook studies do not exist in the examined textbook series, though males were still mentioned first when two nouns were paired for sex. Future studies that involve examining primary textbooks of different grade levels and interviewing the textbook authors are necessary so as to obtain a more confirmed conclusion that textbook authors nowadays are more aware of avoiding gender stereotyping and gender bias in the textbook contents and illustrations.

Key words: Gender Stereotyping; Gendered Discourse; Gender Bias; Primary Schools; English Language; Textbooks

RESUMEN ABSTRACTO

Este estudio analizó el contenido y el lenguaje de un libro de texto publicado en el idioma inglés en Hong Kong para estudiantes de primer grado para así averiguar si aún existe algún estereotipo o prejuicio de género.   El resultado del estudio muestra que los varones y las hembras están casi igualmente representados y se proyectan dentro de   límites similares de actividades.   Las hembras fueron más visibles tanto en las ilustraciones como en el texto. El fenómeno de que la mujer está sub representada y la dominancia del hombre que apareciera en estudios de libros de texto anteriores no existe en esta serie de textos aquí examinados, aún cuando los varones eran mencionados primero cuando se pareaban dos sujetos por sexo.   Futuros estudios que envuelvan el examinar libros de texto para diferentes

niveles y entrevistar a los autores del texto sería necesario para obtener una conclusión más confirmada de que los autores de textos están hoy en día más consientes de evitar estereotipos de género y discriminación en el contenido y las ilustraciones de sus libros de texto.

Palabras clave: *Estereotipo de género; discurso de género; discriminación por género; escuelas primarias; idioma inglés; libros de texto*

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Introduction

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), a statutory body in Hong Kong, was set up in 1996. One of its responsibilities is to implement the Sex Discrimination Ordinance to promote "equality" and "equal opportunities for all" (Equal Opportunities Commission, n.d.). Even though there is the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, people in Hong Kong still have a strong perception of a difference in gender stereotypes. According to a survey conducted by Equal Opportunities Commission, people perceive the eight personality traits (willing to take risks, having leadership abilities, possessing strong personality, defending own beliefs, independent, willing to improve, aggressive, and assertive) as the male stereotypes. For females, the respondents consider "fond of children, shy, sensitive to the needs of others, gentle, compassionate, affectionate, sympathetic, and understanding" as their stereotypical personality traits (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 13).

Law and Chan (2004) believe that people's internalized stereotypical differences are

formed by different socialization agents (e.g., schools) and processes. Cincotta also suggests that "(t)he child observes and learns about the society around him/her primarily through the medium of books" (1978, p. 26). Evans and Davies (2000), in investigating the portrayal of masculinity and femininity among male characters in the first, third and fifth grade reading textbooks, found that males were portrayed as significantly more aggressive, argumentative and competitive than females, while significantly less likely to be described as affectionate, emotionally expressive, passive or tender. However, in another study in which a set of picture books listed in The Horn Book for the years 1967, 1977 and 1987 were analyzed, Peterson and Lach (1990) found that the prevalence of gender stereotypes has decreased somewhat. Girls are as likely to have adventures as they are shown in a domestic setting, and boys and girls are equally likely to be the main character in both socially-oriented and family stories. Nonetheless, Peterson and Lach (1990) also point out that this major shift in the trends is not statistically significant. Gooden and Gooden (2001), in their examination of eighty-three Notable Books for Children from the period 1995-1999, suggest that while gender equity has greatly improved with an increase of females represented as the main character, gender stereotypes are still prevalent.

In schooling, textbooks can be one of the major sources that influence people's values and attitudes. Curriculum Development Council (2004) considers that students can develop positive values and attitudes with the use of quality textbooks. Their attitudes learnt from

growing from a culture will then be "reinforced and/or transformed with what is conveyed in textbooks" (Luk, 2004, p. 3). Cincotta (1978) suggests that sex-role stereotypes, as a kind of perception, are formed in the pupils' mind mainly through textbooks. Scott (1980) also believes that books may have considerable impact on children's attitudes, values, and behavior as they spend a great deal of time on reading at schools. Though teachers are advised to use a wide range of teaching resources to broaden students' learning experiences (Curriculum Development Council, 2004), textbooks are still the major teaching materials in most primary and secondary English classrooms in Hong Kong. Therefore, the present study was conducted to analyze gender stereotyping and gendered discourses in a Hong Kong primary English textbook series.

An English textbook, but not a textbook for other subjects, was chosen because English is one of the core and major subjects in Hong Kong schools and pupils have at least one English lesson (of about 35 minutes) every day. While gender representation in the local secondary English textbooks has already been investigated by Lee and Collins (2008), Hong Kong primary English textbooks still have not been studied. The present study aims to analyze gender representation in a primary English textbook series. Contrary to previous studies (e.g., Law & Chan, 2004; Lee & Collins, 2008), which often analyzed a series of textbooks for different grade levels published over a certain period of time, only one textbook series was examined in this study so that more in-depth and detailed content and linguistic

analyzes became possible. Before presenting the methodology adopted and the findings, some

previous studies would be reviewed.

Gender Representation in Textbooks

Previous studies investigating gender bias and gender stereotyping in textbooks are

numerous and involved different subject areas such as music (e.g., Regueiro, 2000), science

(e.g., Elgar, 2004), Chinese history and social studies (e.g., Luk, 2004). In foreign language

textbooks, early studies on sexism can be found starting from the 1970s. Stern (1976), for

example, conducted a review of the foreign language textbooks published in 1970-1974 and

found that in this period, women were usually excluded. In the rare cases where they were

included, they were only assigned with restricted roles as stewardesses, wives and

housewives.

Graci (1989), instead of analyzing textbooks, reviewed the textbook studies conducted

between 1975 and 1984 based on seven categories of analysis that are applicable to foreign

language textbooks: 1) number of male and female pronouns; 2) number of male and female

appearances in illustrations; 3) stereotyped male and female social roles; 4) number of

occupations for males and females; 5) number of males versus females identified with

occupations; 6) number of male and female names in titles; and 7) number of males and

females appearing throughout the text. These different categories were in fact the areas of

analysis in a substantial number of textbook studies.

In many of the textbook studies conducted (e.g., Cincotta, 1978), males and females were usually portrayed with typical male and female activities and having different interests. They were also represented with stereotypically different characters or personality traits and occupational roles. For example, in the exploration of the treatment of women in ESL materials, women are often assigned with stereotypically emotional reactions (Hartman & Judd, 1978). In terms of occupations, a higher proportion of female characters than males are found in household settings and portrayed as doing different kinds of housework in the primary Chinese language textbooks in Hong Kong. On the contrary, male characters are more likely to be portrayed in the workplace settings and are always in a senior position than females (Law & Chan, 2004).

Females are not only portrayed with having different occupational roles from males, but also in a fewer range of roles in society. Gupta and Lee (1989) found that the roles of women portrayed in Singaporean primary English textbooks are mostly in the nurturing professions such as teaching. The situation in Hong Kong textbooks is similar. Women still occupy such female positions as secretary, receptionist, typist, etc. in Hong Kong English textbooks over the past two decades (Lee & Collins, 2008).

Analyzing quantitatively and linguistically, as in many previous textbook studies, it could be discovered that women usually had lower visibility. In Porreca's (1984) study, the

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mean proportion of females to males in the ESL textbooks is 1:1.97. Gupta and Lee (1989)

also found that there were fewer female speakers than male speakers in their examined basal

reading series. By counting the total number of sex-linked nouns, male referents outnumbered

the females in many cases (Hartman & Judd, 1978). There are more male than female

references as indicated through pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, nouns,

titles and first names in the selected texts (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000).

Nevertheless, compared with the earlier textbooks, the phenomenon of male dominance in the

recent Hong Kong secondary English textbooks has been improved significantly (Lee &

Collins, 2008).

In the language aspect, while many textbook writers attempted to avoid masculine

generic constructions by using *him or her*, *s/he*, and *his (her)* constructions instead, there are

gender differences in the use of adjectives. For example, the adjectives for females are usually

related to attractiveness whereas those within the categories of reputation (e.g., *famous*) and

intellect (e.g., *intelligent*) are more likely to be used to describe males (Porreca, 1984).

The textbook studies reviewed above mainly concern the content itself. However,

some studies investigated textbooks in the discourse level. Poulou (1997) examined

mixed-sex dialogues in two textbooks for teaching Greek as a foreign language to adults. It

was found that, in both books, when the participants had a more personal relationship (i.e. a

non-expert role), women tended to ask for information and make requests whereas men

tended to give more information and utter different types of directives. Equal Opportunities Commission (2000), on the other hand, found different results in that women are more likely than men to give information while men seek more information than women in conversation. Men also tend to take on a more "pro-active conversational role" than women (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2000, p. 12). They elicit interactions more likely than women but women tend to respond to elicitations more than men.

Whilst the results of content analyzes conducted in many previous studies tend to have bias towards females, with the females being portrayed as more disadvantageous than males, Jones et al. (1997) show an encouraging level of gender fairness in their analysis of the discourse roles in dialogues of two textbooks for teaching English as a foreign language and suggest that the occupational and social roles should be looked at to see if gender balance has been achieved or not. In those more recently published textbooks such as the Social Studies textbooks published in 2003, Luk (2004) also found that males and females have similar contribution in different kinds of social, economic, cultural and recreational activities, and both parents portrayed in the textbooks have jobs outside the home and share domestic work inside the home.

One possible reason that can explain the discrepancy of results obtained from the previous studies is that the textbooks examined were published at different periods of time. A more current study that investigated Hong Kong textbooks was conducted by Lee and Collins

(2008). Nevertheless, it examined only the secondary English textbooks. From the review of previous studies and the best knowledge of the researcher, it seems that there are no textbook studies that specifically analyze the Hong Kong primary English language textbooks. It is hoped that this study can contribute to the field of gender in education to explore if gender bias still exists in the recently published textbooks, with the Equal Opportunities Commission and Sex Discrimination Ordinance being set up and implemented in Hong Kong for more than a decade. To achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions were answered:

Frequency of occurrence:

1.	Are male and female characters represented equally often in the illustrations and texts?

Content:

2.	Are there any gender differences in the domestic and occupational roles portrayed?

3.	Are there any gender differences in the range of activities portrayed?

Lexical choice:

4.	Are there any differences in the adjectives/descriptions used for male and female

	characters?

Syntactic feature:

5.	What is the frequency of male/female firstness within single phrases?

Communication patterns:

6.	How many utterances are initiated by male speakers and how many by female speakers?

7.   What are the functions of the single-sex and mixed-sex dialogues initiated by the male

and female speakers?

Methods

The Textbooks Analyzed

The present study involved a descriptive content and linguistic analysis of a Hong

Kong Primary One (i.e., grade one) English language textbook series. The Primary One (but

not the other grade levels) textbooks were analyzed because Primary One is the first year of

primary schooling and the pupils' values and attitudes may be easily influenced at this stage.

This chosen series of textbooks includes *New Magic 1A* and *New Magic 1B*, which was

authored by JoAnn Dionne (a female author) and published by Oxford University Press

(China) Ltd. in 2008 "to support schools in following the 2004 English Language Curriculum

Guide for Primary 1-6" (Oxford University Press, 2008), and was selected from the *List of*

Recommended Primary School Textbooks in English Subject: English Language published by

the Education Bureau (2009). According to the Education Bureau (2007), all the textbooks

listed in this Recommendation List have been examined by the appropriate Reviewing Panels

of the Bureau's Textbook Committee and are recommended for use in schools. They have

been considered as "acceptable in terms of coverage, content, sequence, exercises, language,

illustration and format". Within the list, there is another series of textbooks which was

published in 2009 and is the most currently published one. However, this series was not selected for analysis because it seems that *New Magic* is more commonly used in Hong Kong primary schools. The whole series of *New Magic* textbooks for Primary One students (including *New Magic 1A* and *New Magic 1B*) was analyzed as it is used in the two terms of Primary One. Excluding the content page and the blank pages in the Main Task at the end, there are 62 pages in both the two books. The 'Picture dictionary', 'Self-assessment', 'Suggested reading list', and 'More words to use' (in *New Magic 1B* only) sections were excluded because of their limited content and only non-human characters can be found. The remaining parts for analysis include all the different units, 'The alphabet' (in *New Magic 1A* only), 'Classroom English', and the 'Main task' sections, and all the written texts and illustrations were analyzed.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the selected textbooks but no statistical analysis was made on the data. The coding categories to be used for data analysis are as follows:

1. Male and female characters in illustrations: The male and female characters were checked once, no matter how many times they appear in the illustrations. Then the total number of male and female characters was counted. The sex of some illustrated characters could not

be identified easily. For this case, the researcher determined the sex based on their names given.

2. Male and female mentions: These include both male and female names and male and female references represented with personal pronouns, e.g., *he*, *she*, etc. The male and female mentions found in every instance of the texts were counted.

3. Male and female domestic (e.g., father, mother, brother, sister, etc.) and occupational roles (e.g., student, teacher, model)

4. Male and female activities: These include the activities at school (e.g. drawing, reading) and other activities (e.g., skipping, driving).

5. Nouns and adjectives used with male and female characters

6. Order of mention of males and females within a single phrase (e.g., *He/She* vs. *She/He*)

7. Utterances initiated by male and female speakers: The number of times male and female speakers initiated mixed-sex dialogues was counted. Like Poulou (1997), the term 'utterances', which refers to a turn of speech, preceded and followed by other utterances, defined by Gupta and Lee (1989) was adopted.

8. Functions of the mixed-sex dialogues: Based on the context and the theme of the units, the functions of the mixed-sex dialogues initiated by the male and female speakers were identified.

In order to ensure accurate analysis of the data, the whole textbook series was

analyzed thoroughly by the researcher for two times. Discrepancies of the findings were resolved by reviewing the items again. Then a research assistant was employed to analyze the two textbooks again (using the same coding categories and procedures adopted by the researcher) to cross-check the data. The research assistant generally agreed with the results obtained by the researcher, over 97% of the time.

<p style="text-align:center">Results and Discussions</p>

Male and Female Characters in Illustrations and Texts

In the analyzed series of Primary One English textbooks, it can be found that male and female characters are represented almost equally often in illustrations. The total number of occurrences of males and females in the illustrations in the whole series is 176 and 179 respectively (see Table 1 for the total number and frequency of male and female characters appeared in illustrations in the whole series). The ratio of males to females in illustrations is 1:1.017. This aspect differs from Huang's (2009) study in which there is gender imbalance in the junior high school English textbooks in Taiwan which is in favour of males. The slightly higher ratio of occurrences of female to male characters in the illustrations may probably be explained by the fact that female teachers appeared in many different units of *New Magic 1A*.

Table 1   The number and frequency of male/female characters represented in illustrations

	Male characters	**Female characters**
New Magic 1A	116 (50.2%)	115 (49.8%)

New Magic 1B	60 (48.4%)	64 (51.6%)

Apart from counting the number of males and females represented in the illustrations, the total number of mentions in the texts was also counted. The number of male and female mentions can be identified with the total number of male and female nouns and possessive nouns (e.g. *father*, *mother*, *Holly's*), names (e.g., *Harry*, *Holly*), surnames with titles (e.g. *Miss Tickle*), and pronouns, including subject pronouns (*He*, *She*), object pronouns (*him*, *her*) and possessive pronouns (*his*, *her*). Adding all the mentions of males and females in *New Magic 1A* and *New Magic 1B*, the total number is 202 and 224 respectively (see Table 2 for the total number and frequency of male and female mentions in the two textbooks). The ratio of males to females in the two books is 1:1.109. However, while there are slightly more male mentions in *New Magic 1A*, *New Magic 1B* has more female than male mentions.

Table 2   The number and frequency of male/female mentions represented in texts

	Male mentions	**Female mentions**
New Magic 1A	101 (50.5%)	99 (49.5%)
New Magic 1B	101 (44.7%)	125 (55.3%)

Similar to the results of Lee and Collins's (2008) study which analyzed Hong Kong secondary English textbooks, this study shows that the phenomena of female invisibility and

male dominance occurred in the earlier textbooks published from the 70's to the early 21st

century do not exist in the examined textbook series.

Domestic and Occupational Roles of Male and Female Characters

The roles of male and female characters portrayed in the illustrations and texts of the

examined series of textbooks are similar. Males are usually fathers in the domestic role

whereas being a mother is the major domestic role for females. Other portrayed domestic

roles for males include brother and grandfather, and females are portrayed as sister,

grandmother, or daughter. Other than the domestic roles, male and female characters are

portrayed as students in many occurrences (71 and 58 times respectively). They are also

represented as models in five and three instances respectively.

One interesting phenomenon is that while female teachers appeared for twenty-four

times in both illustrations and texts, no male teachers could be found in the examined

textbook series. Bağlı and Esen (2003, cited in Esen, 2007) believe that it will serve as a

factor that reinforces sexism. Whilst teaching is still portrayed as a female-identified

occupation, as in Gupta and Lee's (1989) study, this phenomenon partly reflects the reality in

Hong Kong. In 2008/2009 school year, there are 46,385 female teachers but 22,551 male

teachers. In primary schools, there are even more female teachers than male teachers.

According to the figures from the Census and Statistics Department (2009), 77.8% (i.e.,

17,509) of the primary school teachers in Hong Kong are female while only 22.2% of them

(i.e. 4,982) are male. The phenomenon of only females being portrayed as teachers shows the

problem mentioned by Kimmel and Messner (1995) that males are underrepresented at the

lower levels of education, since the gender ratio of primary school teachers in Hong Kong is

reported as 3.5 females to 1 male. Table 3 shows all the domestic and occupational roles

portrayed in the analyzed textbook series.

Table 3   Domestic and occupational roles of male and female characters

Domestic & Occupational roles	Males (Number of occurrences)	Domestic & Occupational roles	Females (Number of occurrences)
Father	16	Mother	13
Brother	7	Sister	7
Grandfather	1	Grandmother	4
		Daughter	1
Model	5	Model	3
Student	71	Student	58
		Teacher	24
		Reporter (school magazine)	1

Range of Activities of Male and Female Characters

        The male and female characters in the examined textbook series are portrayed in a

similar range of activities (both indoor and outdoor), though females engage in slightly more

different kinds of activities. Table 4 shows the different types of activities of the male/female

characters portrayed in the textbooks. Interestingly, males are portrayed as cooking, which

was traditionally considered as a stereotyped female domestic activity, in two illustrations.

This finding is similar to Esen's (2007) study in which there is an illustration where the

mother is cleaning the windows, while the father is ironing in the analyzed Turkish Life

Studies textbook. It may imply that the textbook writer has tried to portray the males and

females similarly to avoid gender bias that occurred in earlier textbooks. For the undesirable

behaviour such as fighting with others and throwing rubbish, it is still done by male characters

but not females.

Table 4   Range of activities performed by male and female characters

Activities	Males (Number of occurrences)	Activities	Females (Number of occurrences)
Activities at school			
Drawing	3	Drawing	1
Cleaning blackboard	1	Giving instructions (e.g. *Close the door*)	7
Opening windows	1	Giving orders (e.g. *Keep quiet*)	6
Throwing rubbish	1	Reading	2

Fighting	1	Turning off lights	1
Reading	1	Talking to a student	1
		Tidying books	1
		Teaching	1

<u>Other activities</u>

Swimming	2	Swimming	1
Skipping	2	Skipping	1
Cook	2	Shopping	1
Count	1	Having a barbecue	1
Singing	1	Driving	2
Eating	1	Dancing	2
Making salad	1	Making salad	2
Playing ball	1	Playing ball	1
		Singing	5

Lexical and Physical Representations of Male and Female Characters

In the examined series of Primary One textbooks, the key vocabulary items are mostly nouns, with only a few adjectives used to describe the characters. Male and female characters are usually portrayed with stereotyped images. In terms of appearance and clothing, males usually have short hair and wear shirts/T-shirts and trousers, while many female characters wear dresses and have long hair. For the size of body, a girl is described as "short and thin" whereas a boy is "tall and fat", as portrayed in *New Magic 1B*. This finding is in line with Esen's (2007) study. According to Bağlı and Esen (2003, cited in Esen, 2007), it will

symbolize the stereotypes of both sexes.

Frequency of Male/Female Firstness within Single Phrases

Lee and Collins (2008) discovered a strong tendency for men to be mentioned first in single phrases in Hong Kong English textbooks, given that two nouns are paired for sex. This phenomenon can also be found in many instances of the examined primary English textbook series in this study. In the whole series of textbooks, there are 37 instances of male firstness but only 3 instances of female firstness (see Table 5 for details). The ratio of female to male firstness is 1:12.3. While only a few examples of female firstness (e.g., *Witchy and Didi*) can be found, males tend to be mentioned first when two nouns are paired for sex. These examples of male firstness occur in nouns (e.g. *Harry and Holly*), possessive nouns (e.g., *Harry and Holly's first day at school*, *Harry and Holly's birthday*, etc.), subject and object pronouns (e.g., *He is* or *She is*, *him/her*, etc.), and short phrases or sentences (e.g. *Birthday boy(s) and/or girl(s)*, *Write 'He' for a boy and 'She' for a girl*, etc.). Hartman and Judd (1978, p. 390) believe that this ordering of placing the male first "reinforces the second-place status of women" and suggest mixing the order.

Table 5   Number and frequency of instances of male/female firstness within single phrases

	Male firstness	Female firstness

New Magic 1A	27 (96.4%)	1 (3.6%)
New Magic 1B	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.7%)

Number of the Utterances and Functions of the Single-Sex/Mixed-Sex Dialogues Initiated by Male and Female Characters

The total number of utterances initiated by male and female speakers is counted to determine their speaking opportunities, with an assumption that the more chances to speak, the more visible the character is. As mentioned earlier, Gupta and Lee's (1989) definition of a unit of an utterance was adopted when counting the number of utterances. To simplify the counting, those utterances uttered by more than one person at the same time were excluded from analysis. The utterances were also not considered if their speakers were unknown or not clearly shown. The speaker of an utterance was determined by the direction the speech bubble was pointed to, and the structure of a direct speech (e.g., *'It is a lion! Help!' says the man.*). Contrary to Jones et al.'s (1997) study, the quantitative analysis of the utterances shows that there are more utterances initiated by female characters than males in the examined series of textbooks. There are only 41 utterances initiated by male speakers, while the total number of utterances initiated by female speakers is 68 (see Table 6 for the number and frequency of utterances initiated by male and female speakers in the textbook series). The ratio of the utterances initiated by the male and female speakers is 1:1.66. This means the female characters are more visible than the male characters in this examined textbook series.

Table 6   The number of male/female utterances

	Male utterances	**Female utterances**
New Magic 1A	30 (39%)	47 (61%)
New Magic 1B	11 (34.4%)	21 (65.6%)

The utterances initiated by the male and female speakers were then analyzed

qualitatively to identify their discourse functions. They were analyzed in two major situations,

either in single-sex dialogues, or in mixed-sex dialogues. In the whole examined textbook

series, not only there are more female utterances, but also more turns involve female speakers

only (16 turns), compared with the turns with male speakers only (8 turns) in the single-sex

dialogues, as can be seen in Table 7. However, in the mixed-sex dialogues, the number of

turns initiated by males and females is similar, with 7 turns initiated by males and 8 turns

initiated by female characters (see Table 8 for details).

Table 7   Number of turns in single-sex dialogues

	Male-only dialogues	**Female-only dialogues**
New Magic 1A	6	12
New Magic 1B	2	4

Table 8   Number of turns initiated by males or females in mixed-sex dialogues

	No. of turns initiated by males	**No. of turns initiated by females**
New Magic 1A	5	7

New Magic 1B	2	1

Males and females are also represented in a similar way, without any bias towards either sex in terms of their status. This aspect can be discovered from the functions of the utterances initiated by either male or female speakers in single-sex and mixed-sex dialogues (see Table 9 and Table 10).

Table 9   Functions of the turns initiated by male or female speakers in the single-sex dialogues

Functions of the turns	No. of instances among male speakers	No. of instances among female speakers
Asking for information & giving information	3	3
Requesting & reacting to the request	1	--
Questioning & answering	--	2
Greeting & reacting to the greeting	--	1
Asking for permission & accepting	--	2

Table 10   Functions of the utterances initiated by males or females in the mixed-sex dialogues

Functions of the utterances	No. of utterances initiated by males	No. of utterances initiated by females
Asking for information	4	4
Requesting	--	2
Expressing gratitude	--	2

Greeting	1	--
Asking for permission	2	--

In the examined textbook series, it can be found that asking for information is the most common function in both the single-sex and mixed-sex dialogues. In the single-sex dialogues, a male speaker asks for information and another male speaker gives information, or vice versa between two female speakers. For example, "*Hello! I am Harry. What is your name?*" "*My name is Tim.*", "*Is it a drawing board?*" "*Yes, it is.*", etc. The function of asking for permission, followed by agreeing (e.g., "*May I go to the toilet, please?*" "*Yes, sure.*") can be found in two instances of the single-sex dialogues between two female speakers. Here, the two speakers are of different status, with one as a teacher and another one as a student. Other functions of the turns initiated by the male/female speakers in the single-sex dialogues are summarized in Table 9.

In the mixed-sex dialogues, there is the same number of male and female utterances that function as asking for information (4 utterances). When the male speaker asks information (e.g. "*What colour is his cap?*", "*How many apples are there?*", etc.), the female speaker responds by giving information (e.g., "*It is green.*", "*There are seventeen apples.*"). The female characters' asking for information (e.g., "*What is your name?*", "*What is it?*") is also followed by males' giving information (e.g., "*My name is Joe.*", "*It is a toy plane.*").

Apart from the asking for and giving information function, in the mixed-sex dialogues,

a male speaker's greeting is followed by a female's react to his greeting, as can be seen in the

example in *New Magic 1A* "*Hello, Emma. How are you?*" "*I am fine, thank you.*" (Dionne,

2008, p. 12). The male speaker's asking for permission can also be found and is followed by

the female's agreeing, as in the dialogues "*Excuse me. Can I borrow your book, please?*"

"*Here you are.*" in *New Magic 1B* (Dionne, 2008, p. 58). Then, in the female initiated

mixed-sex dialogues, two utterances function as requesting, followed by the male speakers'

reacts to the requests. One example of this type of dialogue in *New Magic 1A* is "*Can you

spell your name, please?*" "*J-o-e.*" (Dionne, 2008, p. 5). And, two examples of

female-initiated dialogues that express gratitude can be found and are followed by the male

speakers' reply to the thanks (e.g. "*Thank you very much.*" "*You are welcome.*") (Dionne,

2008, p. 58).

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research and Teaching

This paper aims to examine if gender stereotyping and gender bias still exist in

currently published Hong Kong primary English textbooks. To achieve the research aim, a

recently published Hong Kong English textbook series for Primary One students was

analyzed quantitatively and linguistically. The results of this study show that males and

females are almost equally represented. Also, the male and female characters are portrayed in

a similar range of activities, though undesirable behaviour is still done by males but not

females. In occupations, teaching is still portrayed as typical for females. However, it does not mirror the reality of Hong Kong, as nearly one-thirds of the teachers in Hong Kong are males. The phenomenon of male dominance occurred in earlier textbooks does not exist in this examined textbook series. Female invisibility, which was a phenomenon of the textbooks published in the early 1970s, cannot be found in the examined textbooks either. Females are even more visible, with more female characters appeared in illustrations and more utterances uttered by females. In terms of the discourse functions of the utterances, whilst male speakers' asking for information is followed by female speakers' giving information in mixed-sex dialogues, the opposite also occurs. This represents a similar, even not equal, status of males and females. However, in many instances, males are still mentioned first, followed by female mention, within a single phrase when two nouns are paired for sex.

It is not certain if the fairly equal gender representation in this analyzed textbook series is related to a higher level of awareness and concern of "equality" and "equal opportunities for all" (Equal Opportunities Commission, n.d.), unless the textbook author was interviewed, which could be conducted in future research. Generalization from its results should be done with caution because only one single textbook series published by one publisher was analysed and it raises the question of whether the textbook series examined is representative of those available for use within the same age range and across different grade levels, since the results obtained could simply be due to chance. Future studies should involve

examining the primary English textbooks from different grade levels because this examined Primary One textbook series is only restricted to certain themes and contexts such as my family and friends at home and in the classroom. In fact, as Rifkin (1998, p. 231) mentions, "quantifiable data on gender equity may be an unreliable indicator". In other words, it implies that we cannot simply draw a firm conclusion that recently published textbooks have shown improvement in gender equity merely based on quantitative analysis. The topics and themes of the textbook units should also need to be considered. As in Rifkin's (1998) case study of Russian textbooks, the quantitative analysis showed that the textbooks published more recently tend to be more equitable in their gender representation than those published before 1996. However, in a closer qualitative examination of the textbooks, it could be found that far more images of males than females were dedicated to the topic of sports.

One major limitation of this study is that only the total number of male/female utterances and the number of turns initiated by male/female speakers are counted. Research studies conducted in the future should also count the total number of dialogue words spoken by male and female characters, like Jones et al.'s (1997) study, because this can reflect the speaking opportunities of the male and female characters more accurately.

While gender bias portrayed in the lexical items or dialogues in foreign language textbooks may have significant impact on students' values, attitudes, and belief systems, the role of a teacher in mediating the gender representation portrayed in the textbook texts

(Sunderland et al., 2001), that is, using Sunderland et al.'s (1997, p. 8) term, the teacher's "talk around the text" is even more important. They suggest that it is "[t]he mediation of gender in textbook texts by teachers … in the form of their treatment of those texts, is likely to be one factor in shaping the learner's response" (Sunderland et al., 1997, p. 25-26).

Sunderland et al. (2001, p. 277) suggest that teachers may mediate the textbook texts with either of these two ways: "endorsement" and "subversion". The gendered texts that maintain the traditional gender roles are endorsed by the teacher through explicit positive comment, dealing with the texts uncritically, or simply teaching the texts. On the other hand, the traditional gender roles portrayed in gendered discourse can be undermined by simply omitting the texts or ignoring those parts. For grade one English teachers, it may not be necessary to teach or discuss with their students about the issues of sexism. Nonetheless, the role-play of textbook dialogues, for example, asking a male student to practice the dialogues of a teacher, can be an effective way to minimise the impact of gendered discourse. Despite the prevalence of traditional gender stereotyping, if a teacher is committed to challenge the sexist ideology, the impacts on students' values and attitudes can be minimised (Abraham, 1989).

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