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Artículos

(DE)CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED IDENTITIES IN ELT MATERIALS: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL VIEW

(DE)CONSTRUCCIÓN DE IDENTIDADES DE GÉNERO EN MATERIALES ELT: UNA VISIÓN FUNCIONAL SISTÉMICA

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Abstract

With an ever-increasing abundance of English Language Teaching materials, there is always a need for research to unearth the possible gendered discourses in/around them. This investigation sought to uncover patterns a Systemic Functional Linguistic reading of Ministry-produced textbooks for the Iranian schools might yield vis-a-vis gender representation. To this end, all the clauses in the *Vision series*, containing references to males and females, were analyzed in terms of their Transitivity System elements. Subsequent to this phase, which rendered an imbalanced view of gendered identities, van Leeuwen's categories of Identification and Functionalization were applied to fine-tune the subjectivities arrived at. The study found men as transacting in more domains of life, as being more rational and vocal, and as being described more fully and attributed more lifelike qualities. As for van Leeuwen's resources, in addition to men being rendered in more occupations, they were displayed as being more innovative and technological.

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistics; ELT materials; van Leeuwen; the Vision Series; gender analysis.*

Resumen

Con una abundancia cada vez mayor de materiales para la enseñanza del idioma inglés, existe la necesidad de realizar investigaciones para descubrir los posibles discursos de género en ellos y alrededor de ellos. Esta investigación buscó descubrir patrones que una lectura lingüística sistémica funcional de libros de texto producidos por el Ministerio para las escuelas iraníes podría generar en relación con la representación de género. Para ello, se analizaron todas las cláusulas de la serie *Visión*, que contienen referencias a hombres y mujeres, en términos de sus elementos del Sistema de Transitividad. Posteriormente a esta fase, que generó una visión desequilibrada de las identidades de género, se aplicaron las categorías de Identificación y Funcionalización de van Leeuwen para afinar las subjetividades a las que se llegó. El estudio encontró que los hombres realizan transacciones en más ámbitos de la vida, son más racionales y vocales, y se les describe más completamente y se les atribuyen cualidades más realistas. En cuanto a los recursos de van Leeuwen, además de que los hombres se desempeñaban en más ocupaciones, se los mostraba como más innovadores y tecnológicos.

Palabras clave: *Lingüística Funcional Sistémica; materiales ELT; van Leeuwen; la Serie Visión; análisis de género.*

1. Introduction

The modern-day move towards gender equity in education has been on some governmental bodies' as well as some international organizations' agendas for quite some time now. This agentive action emanates from a call by "United Nations human rights programmes to bring about gender equality [...] not only in terms of gender parity (gender-balance in enrolment), but also in the quality of education on offer for girls and boys" (Mustapha & Mills, 2015, p. 9). The response to this call has taken many twists and turns and has for the most part brought about good results in the educational arena in many countries. Researchers have begun to investigate traces of gender (in)equity, especially in countries where set official worldviews are practiced and promoted in all spheres of social life. Some of these countries have allowed the most space for gender representational studies to be conducted.

Iran is an interesting case in point in this regard with plethora of research carried out into the content of curriculum at school and university levels (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Ebadi & Seidi, 2015; Foroutan, 2012, 2019; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Roohani & Zarei, 2013; Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010). The country is a theocracy with a population of approximately 83 million (Statistical Center of Iran, 2019) with deep-seated religious and cultural values noticeable and operative in almost every sphere of public and personal life. In this atmosphere the religious and political boil down almost to the same thing. Many domains of activities, including the nation's education, are tightly and centrally controlled by the government. It is the government which decides on the content of the curriculum to be taught (or not) (Atai & Mazlum, 2013), especially at the school level. It may seem safe to assume that a centralist handling of the country's affairs often leaves its stamp on the behavior of the citizens, more notably at an early tender age, through the workings of hidden curricula. With regard to the educational domain, for instance, textbooks are centrally and uniformly produced by the state and taught across the country. This is liable to have far-reaching (and sometimes unintended) effects on how children are socialized into the officially-promoted values of the Establishment.

Women comprise almost half of the population of contemporary Iran (Statistical Center of Iran, 2019). This portion of the overall population of the country has gained an unprecedented access to education subsequent to the 1979 Islamic Revolution leading to a rise in the educated population of women and their ever-increasing involvement in a range of societal roles and activities. This massification of education notwithstanding, women in some domains of public life in Iran do not still enjoy equal social rights. For

instance, in the year 2016, the ratio of Iranian female university teachers to the males has been reported to be 1:3 (Institute for Research & Planning in Higher Education, 2023).

The educational arena, as already alluded to, has been analyzed for how it could contribute to instances of gendered socialization. Because of their prevalence and dominance in most educational settings of various sorts, textbooks might socialize, especially young learners, to absorb set conceptions of how their gender is expected to behave in the society. This is in the main due to the fact that these young learners are right through their formative years and that their “conception of their own gender identity is in the process of forming and evolving” (Hassel & Clasen, 2017, p. 2). For this reason, textbooks should be scrutinized closely for their content lest they construct a negative or stereotypical image of especially such groups as women in the society.

Gender Studies has currently garnered a vast amount of attention from researchers working locally and internationally. One particular direction adopted in Gender Studies is the analysis of textbooks to see the amount of gender-(un)fair content. In education, this area seems to have been by far the most exploited of all by investigators and practitioners.

Current perspectives in the humanities see gender(ed) identities not as monolithically set subjectivities, or simply as a way of being, but dynamically as a way of becoming. (Menard-Warwick, 2009). Systematic probe into the issue of the interface of gender identities and textbooks is of paramount significance to various stakeholders in educational arena since via the use of language “gender is constructed, legitimized and contested” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 7). Identities are constantly (re)produced due to human performativity in/through language (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). In keeping with this, unless textbooks are meticulously looked into for any likely skewed view of gender types, they are liable to make especially young learners socialize into adopting set gender subjectivities as reflected in books with gender-unfair content.

Along similar lines, a large number of studies have already been carried out in the Asian context exploring the roles assigned to both men and women in textbooks, and the extent to which they might have differed in their represented gendered roles. This plethora of investigations in Asia is most likely due to factors such as an abundance of religious and political ideologies assigning sometimes opposite roles and responsibilities to gender types, poor conditions of the education sphere, and some lingering deep-rooted gendered beliefs, as well as the existence of centrally-produced textbooks reflecting the dominant administrative values. Agha, Kazim Syed, and Mirani (2018), for instance, have conducted a pictorial and textual analysis of the images of textbooks (class 1-5) in Sindh in Pakistan in search of noteworthy patterns aiming to expose gendered identity

types. Their findings showed that the images highlighted the public-private dichotomy prevailing in and characteristic of a patriarchal society. Within the same (Pakistani) context, Ullah and Skelton (2013) carried out a qualitative content analysis of 24 textbooks (Urdu, English, and Social Studies) in classes 1-8, and found that, for all decade-long efforts, the textbooks were still laden with stereotypical images of women. In the KSA context, Sulaimani (2017) performed a quantitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the content of an international English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook and concluded that women were mis/underrepresented in the said English textbook in terms of three domains of gender relations, subject positions, and contents.

Beside other investigations in the Central and Southern Asia (Asadullah, Islam, & Wahhaj, 2018; Mohammed Ismael Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2022; Orfan, 2021), the Far East and South-East Asian educational context has also witnessed a surge of interest in attempts by researchers to dig deep into the likely color-blindness of curriculum developers and textbook writers in rendering the image of women (Ariyanto, 2018; Gupta & Yin, 1990; Lee, 2014, 2018). The studies point, one way or another, to the existence of an (un)intended gender partiality, and agentively seek to promote more gender-neutral content in the textbooks used in Asian countries' schools and other educational institutions. Studies of gender in Africa also show almost the same gender-imbalance trend (Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Cobano-Delgado & Llorent-Bedmar, 2019).

The Iranian context, as previously mentioned, is no short of studies tapping into the (non)existence of gender-related issues. The investigations conducted in Iran show much diversity in the range of theoretical and methodological resources they have employed to approach gender-specific issues (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Baghdadi & Rezaei, 2015; Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Ebadi & Seidi, 2015; Foroutan, 2012; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2016). Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat (2010), for example, adopted a multimodal discourse analytic lens to examine how genders were represented in three international and local ELT textbooks. Their results pointed to an imbalance between how men and women were displayed and the kind of activities they engaged in at the level of image. Their results found the pictures portrayed men as being more powerful and competent, as well as acting as breadwinners. Women, conversely, were shown to be less competent in the data analyzed. Other investigators have applied other procedures to the analysis of data. Fard Javani and Tahriri (2018), for instance, have adopted a Faircloughian CDA approach to detecting sexist attitudes in the *Prospect Series* (the ministry-produced English textbooks taught at the Iranian junior secondary schools).

The present study has sought to scrutinize the Ministry of Education (MoEd) developed EFL textbooks for the Iranian secondary schools, that is the *Vision*

Series, and has done so in light of new analytical tools. In this study, Halliday's Transitivity System as well as van Leeuwen's Functionalization and Identification resources have been deployed in an attempt to lay bare the amount and nature, if any, of asymmetrical portrayal of genders in the locally produced ELT materials. The joint use of the two aforementioned frameworks is warranted by the fact that both have been extensively applied to critical reading of texts of various modes (Matthiessen, 2012) that mediate the social reality around certain human and institutional entities. It should be noted, at this point, that significant studies applying selected tools of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), in particular, the Transitivity System, are almost nonexistent. This issue is liable to add a layer of originality to the present research. The investigation has advanced the following overarching research question: What does an application of select SFL analytical tools reveal about gender(ed) identity types in the *Vision Series*?

2. Method

The analytic unit in SFL is clause. As stated previously, clauses simultaneously fulfill three (meta-)functions: the ideational (i.e., how entities in a clause interact in/with the world), the interpersonal (i.e., how identities and relations are created or enacted through language), and, finally, textual (i.e., how the message is built up in the course of a text). In this study, the data consists of all the clauses in the MoE-produced English textbooks for the Iranian senior secondary schools known as the *Vision Series*. The focus of the research has been on the first metafunction to see how the textbook data represent the male and female entities as they operate in/through the world and to identify how their experiences of the world might have possibly been reflected.

The data includes three student books and three supplementary workbooks. Unlike *Vision One*, taught at the 10th grade of senior secondary schools, which comprises four units, *Vision 2* and *Vision 3*, taught in the 11th and 12th grades respectively, contain three units. All the textbooks are based on a skills-integration pedagogy and their content almost closely reflects official policy recommendations as crystallized in the National Curriculum document.

In this investigation, initially all the clauses used in the *Vision Series* (the six textbooks) involving female and male characters were identified, isolated, and tabulated for analytical purposes. To maximize greater intra-coder reliability, the same phase of data analysis was repeated with a time interval of three months so that any ambiguities regarding the coding of the categories be cleared out.

The theoretical approach adopted in this study, and driving analysis of the data at large, is that of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The approach, introduced and developed by Halliday and further fine-tuned by his disciples (Christie, 1994, 1999; Martin, 1992; White, 2012), sees language as containing ‘meaning-potential’ enabling text-producers to achieve strategic purposes in their social life through the various choices it equips them with. In the theory, any set of related choices within clauses is referred to as *systems*. Hence the label *systemic* in the name of the linguistic movement. The choices additionally make it possible for language users to be able to function in the society. Hence the attribute *functional*.

In SFL, the clause as the major constituent part of a text simultaneously fulfills three roles (technically dubbed as *metafunctions*): textual metafunction, or a view of clause as message, interpersonal metafunction, or a view of clause as exchange, and ideational metafunction, or a view of clause as representing experience

The clause as experience represents the entities – whether it be humans, groups, institutions, etc. – and the kind of (re)actions, behaviors, and/or emotion they engage in. This metafunction is realized through the Transitivity System. The Transitivity System has been deployed on a large scale by investigators undertaking Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of texts of various types because the model allows for digging deep into how hegemonic discourses might have had or continue to have a normalizing effect on the behavior patterns of certain (marginalized) individuals and groups at society. In other words, how the elite powerful discourses help legitimize certain types of identities and render others as irrational and unwarranted in/through the use of language.

The system contains three elements at the level of clause: processes, participants, and circumstantials. Whereas processes are realized via verb phrases, participants are realized through noun phrases, and circumstantials (the optional category) by means of prepositional or adverbial phrases. In terms of processes and participants, entities might be displayed as acting agentively in the world they occupy or, conversely, be rendered at the receiving end of activities. The use of circumstantials might help with realizing the amount of leeway given to the same subjectivities. Processes fall into four major and two minor categories as illustrated below, respectively:

Material processes, rendering agents as doing some action, or representing an event simply playing out:

The schoolboy was run over by the van.

Goal (the entity receiving or being influenced by an action) + material process + actor (the entity making something happen)

Mental processes, representing the inner world of people:

That guy really thinks he's bee's knees!

Senser + mental processes + phenomenon (what is thought, felt, wanted, etc.)

Relational processes, identify or characterize entities:

She is full of herself.

Carrier + relational process + attribute

Verbal processes, renders entities as involved in saying something:

My grandma used to tell nice stories.

Sayer + verbal process + verbiage

Behavioral processes:

The teacher laughed.

Behavior + behavioral process

Existential processes:

There is a bird caught in that room.

Existential process + existent

The analytic framework, as already pointed to, has been extensively used by the practitioners of CDA in an attempt at representing the cline of (in)action and the roles and functions attributed to people and groups in their social life. The present study has thus availed itself of such a theoretical and analytic model to see how gender types have been rendered in/through the ELT materials practiced in Iranian senior secondary schools.

3. Findings

Analysis of textbook series' data pointed to a notable asymmetrical representation of male and female characters. Males were represented as engaged more in dealing with and experiencing within their surrounding environments, in talking and being talked to/about, and in displaying more emotions, senses, and willingness to go about doing things. They were additionally given more human and lifelike attributes of various kinds vis-à-vis women.

In regard to the gender roles in material processes, that is how they functioned in/upon their surroundings, the following results as displayed in Table 1 were found:

Table 1. Frequency of Males/Females in the Elements of Material Processes

Elements of Material Processes	Gender	Number	Percentage
Actors	Male	436	64%
	Female	245	36%
	Total	681	100%
Circumstantials	Male	224	61%
	Female	142	39%
	Total	366	100%

As can be seen in Table 1, in senior secondary school English textbooks, males are represented in the role of actor approximately twice more than that of females. In other words, they make things happen in the world they act in almost twice more than women do. In addition, they are also displayed as involved in circumstantials roughly twice more than females, that is, they are rendered as maneuvering more actively in the domains they inhabit. The net result presents a picture of a world unfolding more around men than women, or one with males in the limelight:

- (1) Reza and I [Behzad] [actor] are going [material process] to Darband [circumstantial of location] for climbing and walking [circumstantial of cause] this Thursday [circumstantial of location]. We really like to see you. Will you [Sina] [actor] come [material process] with us [circumstantial of accompaniment]. (Vision 2 Student Book, p. 53)

Male characters are additionally portrayed as expressing their emotions, wants and needs, as well as thoughts more readily compared to women. Table 2 has yielded the results of analysis of data as far as mental processes and their elements is concerned in the textbook series' data:

Table 2. Frequency of Males/Females in the Elements of Mental Processes

Elements of Mental Processes	Gender	Number	Percentage
Sensors	Male	113	59%
	Female	78	41%
	Total	191	100%

Phenomenon	Male	49	71%
	Female	20	29%
	Total	69	100%
Circumstantial	Male	13	62%
	Female	8	38%
	Total	21	100%

Still, as can be seen from the table above, the textbooks mainly depict a society in which men have more leeway and opportunities to vocalize their perceptions and sensations. The following clauses from the books may help illustrate the findings arrived at:

- (2) I [Diago] [senser] heard [mental process] Iran is a great and beautiful country [phenomenon], but I [senser] don't know [mental process] much [phenomenon] about it [circumstantial of matter]. (Vision 1 Student Book, p. 102)

Table 3 has provided the number of occurrences of each sub-type of mental processes in the data analyzed. Two notable patterns gleaned from the table are that men have been shown to be more of a thinking type (cognitive sub-type), and to communicate their wants and wishes (desiderative sub-type) roughly three times more than women:

Table 3. Types of Mental Processes as Experienced by Males and Females

Gender	Types of Mental Processes	Number
Male	Cognitive	40
	Emotive	27
	Perceptive	15
	Desiderative	25
	Total	107
Female	Cognitive	19
	Emotive	22
	Perceptive	12
	Desiderative	9
	Total	62

The following instances from the data are illustrative of the patterns found regarding the kind of mental processes men and women are shown to be involved in:

- (3) Hamed wants [mental process/desiderative subtype] to learn a language. (Vision 2 Student Book, p. 102)
- (4) I [Diago] am planning [mental process/desiderative subtype] for my summer vacation. (Vision 1 Student Book, p. 102)

One striking pattern arrived at in the analysis of the data is that wants and wishes (i.e. desiderative mental processes) of male characters figure almost three times more than those of females. They are additionally shown as being more reflective, emotive, and involved in the perception of the world (of the textbooks).

The next finding relates to the observation in the data that men are depicted as more vocal and verbally interactional – at either end of the communication process – and are even talked about more often compared to women. Table 4 gives a summary of the findings:

Table 4. Frequency of Males/Females in the Elements of Verbal Processes

Elements of Verbal Processes	Gender	Number	Percentage
Sayers	Male	240	60%
	Female	159	40%
	Total	399	100%
Receivers/Verbiages Involving genders	Male	243	67%
	Female	118	33%
	Total	361	100%

The above pattern arrived at in the data can mostly be spotted in dialogs throughout the series. Here, it turns out men have more ‘say’ in issues of various sorts.

Finally, as far as relational processes in the textbooks is concerned, men occur twice more than women in the type of clauses aiming to describe or characterize human entities. This observation helps place males in more positions and activities in the social domain as well as rendering them as more life-like:

- (5) Dr. Gharib was [relational process] also a generous man. He spared no pains to cure sick children. He was [relational process] very friendly and helpful to poor families. (Vision 3 Student Book, pp. 20 & 21)
- (6) Alice is [relational process] interested in playing tennis. (Vision 2 Student Book, p. 77)

Table 5 has summed up the genders' description and categorization in the ELT textbook series taught in Iranian secondary schools. It also shows that their description and/or categorization has been accompanied by more contextual elements as realized by the SFL category of circumstantials:

Table 5. Frequency of Males/Females in Relational Processes

Relational Processes	Gender	Number	Percentage
Describing and characterizing	Male	167	69%
	Female	74	31%
	Total	241	100%
Circumstantials	Male	36	73.5%
	Female	13	26.5%
	Total	49	100%

Further analysis of the material processes in which men and women were shown to be engaged in pointed to an asymmetrical rendition of them regarding the types of activities they performed. Subtle bias was found in the domains of activities attributed to both males and females. Men were displayed as being more innovative and technological, more academic, more athletic and fun-loving, more professional, and helpful. This finding comes as a surprise as women are already an active part of the Iranian society with them engaged in numerous fields of study and endeavor once monopolized almost exclusively by men (Koolae, 2014). The only domain women were displayed as having the upper hand was the domestic domain of the household jobs and activities. Notwithstanding such gender-specific and stereotypical attributions, the investigation yielded a somewhat unexpected result as far as males were concerned. They were shown more in the shopper role than women were. Table 6 shows unequal treatment of both gender types. It is worth noting, at this stage, that some domains of activity reflected in the data were too negligible to be included in the table:

Table 6. Domains of Activity of Males/Females as Represented by Material Processes

Domains of activity	Males	Females	Total
School/study/research	86 (60.1%)	57 (39.9%)	143
Entertainment/sports	74 (68.5%)	34 (31.5%)	108

Work/attempt	34 (73.9%)	12 (26.1%)	46
Building/making	22 (81.5%)	5 (18.5%)	27
Shopping	16 (66.7%)	8 (33.3%)	24
Service to the community/Being helpful	15 (68.2%)	7 (31.8%)	22
Household Jobs	7 (31.8%)	15 (68.2%)	22

The following excerpts from the textbook series help typify the findings arrived at in the course of the investigation:

- (7) Hassan worked as a translator when he was studying English at university.
(Vision 1 Workbook, p. 46)
- (8) Baird invented the first television in 1924. (Vision 3 Workbook, p. 64)

Also, the study found that the textbooks under scrutiny had presumably recognized and applied themselves more on the contributions made and services done to the community by men than those by girls and women. This observation was further attested to and reinforced by the application of van Leeuwen's (2008) representational tools, in particular, his sociosemantic categories of functionalization, that is "when social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, [...], an occupation or role" (p. 42), and identification, that is "when social actors are defined [...] in terms of what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are".

Analysis of functionalization made it clear that men, especially Iranian ones in the data, had been depicted in more occupations and social activities compared to women. From among the three categories of identification, that is classification (e.g., Muslim), relational identification (e.g., aunt), and physical identification (e.g., tall), the last category proved to have occurred more frequently and saliently in the data. Additionally, analysis of the identification category yielded more descriptions of the physical appearance of males than females. This appeared to have the effect of backgrounding women as faceless and somewhat inconsequential characters. Table 7, preceded by some examples from the data, is apt to help illuminate such male superiority reflected in the world of the textbooks unraveled:

- (9) Alexander Fleming was a great researcher [an instance of functionalization]. He was doing research in his laboratory in winter 1928. (Vision 1 Student Book, p. 82)
- (10) Mr. Sanders is a doctor [an instance of functionalization] who lives in a city. (Vision 3 Student Book, p. 59)
- (11) A young [an instance of physical identification] man came to me and asked what I wanted. (Vision 2 Student Book, p. 47)

Table 7. Instances of Functionalization/Physical Identification

Representational category	Males	Females	Total
Functionalization	31 (86.1%)	5 (13.9%)	36
Physical identification	15 (83.3%)	3 (16.7%)	18

4. Discussion

In the face of fierce competition from various manifestations of modern-day digital revolution, textbooks “remain the most important educational medium in schools worldwide” (Fuchs & Bock, 2018, p. 1). One could dig deep into and gain sufficient insight of the visible heart of any ELT curriculum (Sheldon, 1988) simply by looking into the type and nature of content delivered in a given textbook or textbook series. It is true that they have been and are being scrutinized closely on a regular basis for their relevance of content and suitability to learners’ needs from a wide variety of perspectives; all the same, they continue to persist and perish in a world of unprecedented rapid changes and transformations given the arrival of a wide range of foolhardy rivals in the form of new learning materials.

ELT materials in general and textbooks in particular have been critically approached and closely evaluated from a wide variety of standpoints by scholars and practitioners of the field alike. One area in which these cultural products have been or are being exposed to critical reception is the way they might seek to construct and channel reality in given ways.

In the current study, the same identity-construction function assigned to textbooks by the above authors (Fuchs & Bock, 2018) was found in the data analyzed. It was in effect revealed that textbooks might (un)consciously render a stark dichotomization of gender types. Analysis of how genders are rendered throughout the *Vision Series* reflected the norms of a can-do society, although one with apparently patriarchal values and orientations. The world depicted was one characterized by a social order in which men

and women are separated along quite different occupational and positional faultlines. The same findings have been reported by other researchers looking into English school textbooks for any likely asymmetrical portrayal of women and men (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Foroutan, 2019; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020).

The investigation conducted has employed, in the main, the Hallidayan idea of ‘clause-as-representation’ in an attempt to unpack the ideologically-driven rendition of gender types in the English school textbooks taught and read across the country. The select transitivity tools indicated a world peopled by men who are more active and vocal than women, and who are given more life-like properties. Women have been mostly portrayed as faceless social actors contributing to the society they inhabit in a rather limited way vis-à-vis males. A few national or international studies adopting other CDA analytic frameworks to analysis of textbook data have likewise arrived at similar findings (for example, Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat [2010] to see how a critical Faircloughian stance has been taken towards the issue of gender representation in ELT materials).

With the subliminal effect and subtle workings of male-chauvinistic ideologies in some societies, it seems urgent that educators develop more sensitivity towards likely gender-biased educational content in textbooks. This is clearly warranted as children are socializing agents absorbing and internalizing the content presented to them. If the differential treatment of men and women in school textbooks is not properly seen to by educators, it is likely that the workings of the hidden curriculum make learners see the social reality in set ways – ways maintaining and perpetuating gender imbalance. This is of particular import to educational researchers, policy-makers, materials developers, and teachers. As gender studies seem to have come of age and a plethora of research has been conducted in countries as Iran, researchers could become involved in conducting synthetic studies of those investigations carried out so as to come up with, *inter alia*, a checklist of linguistic forms and constructions which might have yielded a gender-biased image of women. It also behooves top educational decision-makers to design policies addressing the issue of coverage of gender-specific content. This could be done in the form of running workshops and other programs for compilers and authors of the local textbooks. Similarly, given the ubiquity of textbooks especially in centralist education systems such as that of Iran, the content of the materials should be exposed to critical examination at regular intervals.

Teachers furthermore need to be sufficiently sensitized to the way gender bias is apt to function in textbooks so as to be able to react properly when unwanted content has found its way into teaching materials. One way through which they could respond to the issue of gender-biased content is by adapting materials (McDonough, Shaw, &

Masuhara, 2013). For instance, ELT teachers could employ the adapting principle of ‘rewriting’ by changing a text from the aforementioned textbooks in which men are in (more) agentive roles to one in which women are rendered as being more active. In the final analysis, it is down to them to devise delicate and genuine ways of ameliorating the impartiality reflected by/in the textbooks adopted by them. In this way, practitioners are likely to develop or hone on their ‘textual power’ (Perfecto & Paterno, 2018), that is the ability to interrogate the implicit values, assumptions, and norms embedded within the cultural artefacts deployed in the classroom, most notably the textbooks.

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