The investigation of manifestation of sexism in EFL/ESL textbook: A Case Study

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*Abstract :*Sexism is discrimination based on a person' sex or gender .It is an attitude which might be originated from traditional stereotypes of gender roles .It reflects the view that a person of one sex is intrinsically superior to a person of the other .Focusing on the concept of the sexism ,the present study aims to investigate the status of sexism in Top Notch textbook series as newly developed ESL/EFL series adopted by many EFL teachers in private language institutes .To fulfill the aims of the study, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were performed to examine the sexist attitudes in these textbooks. In quantitative analysis, sex visibility in both texts and illustrations were studied. Then, a qualitative inquiry was made into, sex-linked job possibilities, sex-based activity types, stereotyped sex roles and first ness and masculine generic conception. The results of the study indicated that Top Notch textbook series were largely free of sexism attitudes in their contents and can be adopted by language teachers. It seems that since the first study of sexism in ESL/EFL materials in the 70's, we have witnessed some progress in changing the view of the material developers in this regard.

Key words: Course content, Sexism, Stereotyping, Top Notch

Introduction

It has been shown that students can learn some concepts which are not written and are implicit. Some of these implicit ideas may lead students to behave in special ways in society. They learn quickly that they have to conform to the rules of the school if they want to receive approval (Anderson, 2001).

With growing interest to learn English for communication, emerging of the centers for learning language and increasing number of students from diverse culture, curriculum problems emerged. Syllabus designers and teachers faced with inappropriateness of national curricula to cover every aspect of international experiences .One of the significant issues in sociolinguistics related to the relationship between sex and how it is illustrated .The study of the language and gender began in 1975 by the publication of the three books which influenced the sociolinguistic works : Male / Female Language (M.R.Key) , Language and Women's Place (R. Lakoff), and Difference and Dominance (Thorne & Henley).Sexist practices are those that contribute to demeaning or ignoring women (or men) or to stereotyping either sex ; sexism is often not a matter of intention but of effect. (LSA bulletin, 1996, p. 68).

It seems that stereotyping is viewed as one of the most important types of trends which targeted a particular sex. Sexist attitudes in textbooks increase sexism in society. McDonough and Shaw (1993, p. 74) state "it is possible that the content of some materials will cause offence to some learners". Recently there was a growing trend in using gender-neutral language in cpmmunication.One of the desirable goals for EFL students is to construct grammatically correct sentences and to pronounce words correctly and gain communicative competence as well .

Review of the related literature

Hartman & Judd (1978, pp.384-385) investigated several TESOL textbooks. It has been revealed that men are more visible than women .The investigation of sex-linked proper names, titles, or non-generic pronouns showed that male references outnumbered the female ones. Besides, they showed that women's stereotypical roles were related to the housework and chores.

Hellinger (1980) studied 131 passages from three ELT textbooks .She reported that in most of the cases men are speaker and they were represented in a high range of occupational roles, she revealed that "presence of intellectual or other achievements of women are ignored, downgraded or described as exceptional."(p. 250).Porreca (1984)conducted a research in which he investigated over fifteen most frequent ESL textbooks .She concluded that "there is evidence that sexism continues to flourish in ESL textbooks"(p. 718).Besides, he pointed that "although females comprise slightly over half the population of the United States, they are represented
Only half as often as males in both texts and illustrations."(p. 719).

In the 90's, in the same vain, Peterson and Kroner (1992, p. 29) stated that "representation of

Work theory and behavior of males significantly exceeds the representation of female; and females are frequently portrayed in negative and gender-biased ways". Carrol and kowitz (1994) explored sexism in EFL/ESL texts .Their findings showed that "male pronouns are more common than female pronouns, ranging from 2.55 – 3.85 to 1".Besides, they revealed that from overall adjectives under the study,18 and 9 were referred to men and women respectively ,while 6 manipulated adjectives described both of them .Accordingly , Poulou (1997)examined the roles of men and women at discourse level. It manifested the negative effects of sexist differences between men and women on the pedagogical value and goals of textbook dialogs.

In Iran's context, Davoodi (1999) analyzed Iranian high school EFL books and revealed that "of the total pictures of male [sic.] and females represented , 59.48% are male[sic.], 26.72% are female [sic.]." This, according to him, is "an indication of strong prejudice against women."

In this regard , Babaii and Ansari (2001,p.8) studied TV advertisement "they (women) are present but to qualify and strengthen the traditional patriarchal morality in which women are expected just to cook, wash the dishes, and do the housework."

Otlowski (2003) investigated ethnic diversity and gender bias in EFL textbooks   . The   study examined two criteria : gender bias ethnic group portrayal .The findings of the study about conversations   and   illustrations   showed that " still depict women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society" (p. 50).In another study , Ansari and Babaii (2001,p.8) studied TV advertisement "they (women) are present but to   qualify and strengthen the traditional patriarchal morality in which women are expected just to cook, wash the dishes,   and do the housework." With keeping this point in mind that the materials in teaching English may convey biased attitudes .In light of these studies the present study aims to investigate how sex is manifested in EFL /ESL textbooks.

Methodology

Materials

As newly developed EFL /ESL textbooks, Top Notch series were chosen to serve as the corpus of present study. The textbooks have five levels: one fundamental level, levels 1, 2 and 3, and two summit levels which are widely used in different language schools in Iran.

Data Collection & Analysis Procedures

In this study two types of analysis were carried out .First, quantitative content analysis was performed with reference to male/female visibility in conversations ,reading passages &illustrations, male/female topic presentation in conversation and reading passages .Then , a qualitative inquiry was made into ,sex-linked job possibilities ,sex-based activity types stereotyped sex roles and first ness and masculine generic conception .

Variety of different representation of sexism were examined in the analysis .First, the number of occurrence of male/female in conversation ,reading passages and illustrations were counted and tailed .In the next step ,the types of jobs for females and males were identified . Besides, the types of depicted activities in   which females and males often participated   were   recorded.

In the last step, in an attempt to document whether masculine generic constructions are truly intended to be generic (including both sexes) or they are merely male referenced, the association between all adjectives and their referents were determined.

Results and discussion

The number of male and female characters in the texts and illustrations of the textbook are presented in table 1. The raw numbers show the number of occurrences and the numbers in parentheses show the percentages of male and female characters in both texts and illustrations.

Textbooks	Text			Illustration		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Fundamental A	245 (56%)	212 (44%)	457	297 (47%)	323 53%	620
Fundamental B	268 (53%)	232 (46%)	500	242 (51%)	226 (49%)	468
Level 1	412 (51%)	391 (49%)	803	250 (53%)	236 (47%)	486
Level 2	355 (46%)	401 (54%)	756	246 (46 %|)	292 (54%)	538
Level 3	298 (55%)	238 (45%)	536	202 (52%)	184 (48%)	386
Summit 1	245 (53%)	213 (47%)	458	91 (46%)	106 (54%)	197
Summit 2	198 (46%)	225 (54%)	423	127 (55%)	103 (45%)	230

Table .1.Sex visibility in texts and illustrations

According to the table 1 .all of the level of the textbooks are approximately at a reasonable and equal balanced level of presenting male and female characters in their texts. The results indicate that the textbooks do not show sexism towards women in manifesting female and male characters in texts. Regarding to the illustrations, textbooks seems to be in a satisfactory and acceptable level of manifestation of female and male in characters in their illustrations.

Regarding to the females and males occupational roles and professional setting, the analysis of the data is based on the frequency of occurrences of females and males occupational roles in illustrations and texts of the textbook series. The numbers mentioned in parentheses show the percentages**.**
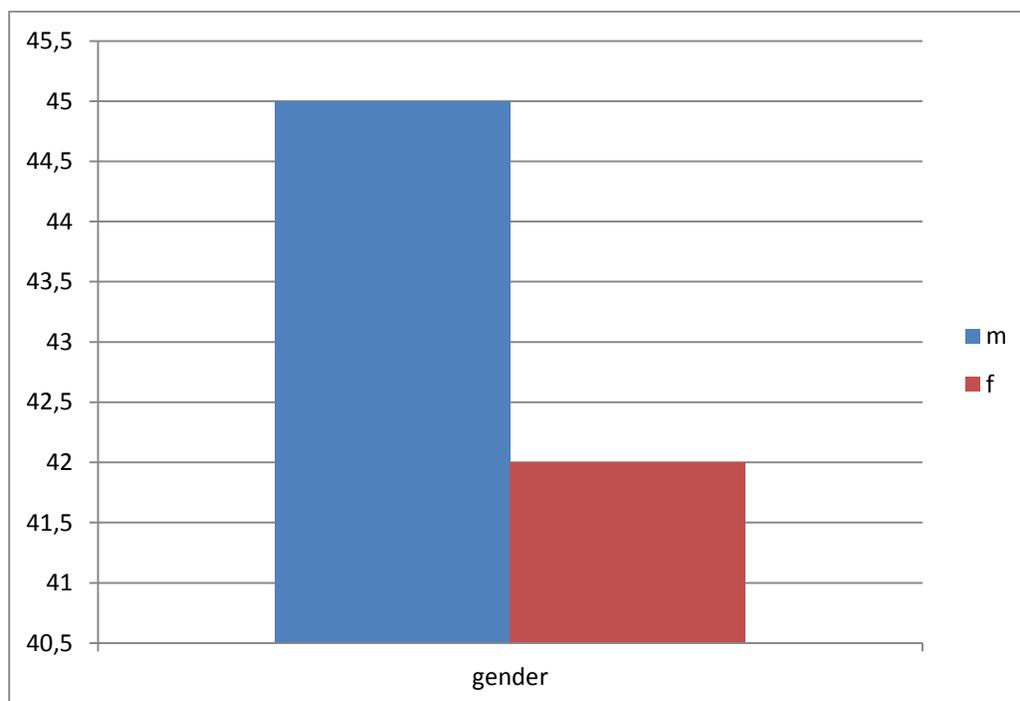
Figure1.Males and males in occupational roles

According to the figures 3. both men and women occupy approximately equal occupational roles .Interestingly ,It can be seen that women occupy jobs such as a scientists , engineers or managers .The finding of the study showed that women as well as men occupy a large variety of occupational roles .The results of the analysis are not in line with previous studies which have been done before .(Ansari and Babaii, 2003; Bales, 2002; Florent and Walter, 1989; Gisnet, 1988; Hartman and Judd, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Porreca, 1984; Renner, 1997; Sunderland, 1994) . Peterson and Kroner (1992), and Sakita (1995) indicate that sexist portrayals of both men and women's occupational roles in teaching materials reinforce gender biases in society.

Regarding to the adjectives, the type and frequency of adjectives mentioned in the texts of EFL/ESL textbook series were examined. The results are showed in table 2.

Text books	Female	Male	Gender shared
Fundamental A &B	37 (35%)	41(39%)	25 (26%)
Levels 1,2& 3	68 (36%)	75 (39%)	45 (25%)
Summit 1 & 2	27 (33%)	35 (43%)	19 (24%)

Table 2.Adjectives in the textbook

As it clear, there is a balance between the adjectives which are used for both males and females. The adjectives used about females or males can reinforce the stereotype attitude toward each of

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the genders in the society .Fortunately , such a case was not observed in Top Notch series ,and the adjectives used for each gender are at the same level in all three levels ,(35 %to 41) in fundamental level ,(36% to 39 %) in levels 1,2 and 3 ,and (33 % to 43%) in Summit 1 &2 .

Considering the data, it can be found that, contrary to the studies which were mentioned in the literature in which women were depicted in the indoor activities and were placed in traditional stereotypical roles, Top Notch series do not manifest sexism .It seems that since the first study of sexism in ESL/EFL materials in the 70's, we have witnessed great changes   in changing the view of the material developers.

It is suggested that teachers should adopt critical pedagogy , critical pedagogy is an approach to teaching and curriculum informed by critical social theory that "seeks to understand and critique the historical and sociopolitical context of schooling and to develop pedagogical practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society" (Pennycook, 1990, p. 24). It is concerned about how language can effect personal and social change.

I addition , Fairclough (1992) has argued that language teachers need to adopt a more critical stance towards traditional sociolinguistic studies which tend only to describe what happens in a speech community as appropriate. Language classrooms can thus provide a forum for critical analysis in which both students and teachers can question issues of language, power, discrimination, etc.

Conclusion

Following the previous literature on sexism in ELT materials includingAnsari and Babaii (2003), Carroll and Kowitz (1994), Florent and Walter (1989), Hartman and Judd (1978), Law and Chan (2004), Otlowski (2003), Pierce (1995), Porreca (1984), and Sunderland (1994), this study was an attempt to accomplish a critical analysis and evaluation of the manifestation of men and women including sexist concepts, attitudes and values in the newly developed textbooks of Top Notch used in Iranian language institutes by using content analysis as the main research method.

According to the results of the study, it can be claimed that, the content of Top Notch EFL/ESL textbooks do not presents sexist views and stereotypical attitudes about females and males. Sexist concepts manifested in EFL/ESL textbooks can enhance and reinforce the gender-linked bias in society.However, this study is not without limitation. The present study was confined to one EFL / ESL textbook series and the results cannot be expanded to other available EFL/ESL textbooks.

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