



**A Gender Analysis of the English Language
Textbook "English For Iraq" Used in the
Fifth Preparatory Classes in the Iraqi
Preparatory Schools: An Evaluative Study**

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المستخلص

على الرغم من أن العديد من المجتمعات، في جميع أنحاء العالم، والعراق من بينها، قد بدأت في تبني مواقف جديدة تجاه المرأة وأدوارها في بناء المجتمعات، إلا أننا لا نزال نستطيع العثور على نفس وجهات النظر القديمة المتحيزة ضد المرأة في معظم الكتب المدرسية المعدة لتعليمي اللغة الإنجليزية من غير متكلميها. إن هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لاستكشاف حالة التمييز على أساس الجنس في الكتاب المدرسي الحالي "الإنجليزية للعراق" المستخدم في الصفوف الخامسة في المدارس الإعدادية العراقية. وقد كشفت هذه الدراسة عن جوانب كثيرة من التمييز على أساس الجنس في هذا الكتاب المدرسي. وهذا يدل على أن المرأة في كتاب اللغة الإنجليزية "اللغة الإنجليزية للعراق" هي أقل وضوحاً من الرجال كشخصيات، وقد تم تصويرها في الأدوار النمطية من المهن.

Abstract

Although many societies, all over the world and Iraq amongst them, had started to adopt new attitudes towards women and their roles in building the societies, we still can find the same old sexist views exist in the majority of the EFL textbooks. This study is an attempt to explore the status of sexism in the current EFL textbook "English for Iraq" used in the fifth preparatory classes in the Iraqi preparatory schools. The study uncovers many aspects of sexism in this textbook. It shows that the women in the English language textbook "English for Iraq" are less visible than men as characters, and are portrayed in stereotypical roles with occupations.

1) Sexism: What does it Mean?

Sexism is one such system of beliefs that pervades all aspects of our lives from our social relations and institutions to our home lives, career choices, wages and even the language we use (Sunderland, 1994: 27). That's why it has been given much more attention by scholars and academics. Many definitions have been used to describe this issue. Whilst there are many definitions of sexism, one which is often cited is 'the practices whereby someone foregrounds gender when it is not the most salient feature' (Vetterling-Braggin, 1981). This definition seems to be based on a liberal-feminist notion that sexism is based on an error made by the speaker or writer which can be rectified when brought to their notice. It assumes a position of objectivity from which statements can be judged as sexist and from

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which gender can be seen to be not in fact ‘the most salient feature (Mills, 2008:1). Holmes (1996:336) defines sexism as “... the ways in which language conveys negative attitudes to women”. The free online dictionary, thesaurus, gives two definitions, the first of which overtly refers to a sense of discrimination against women "discrimination based on gender, especially discrimination against women". The second definition, however, talks about promoting stereotyping of social roles based on gender "attitudes, conditions, or behaviors that promote stereotyping of social roles based on gender". Societal attitudes towards women are mostly unjust where women are stereotypically represented in roles such as the overemotional female, the nagging wife or as homemakers and child carers (Hartman & Judd: 1978:387).

2) Sexist Language

Language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of the political, social and cultural attitudes. Certain language can help reinforce the idea of male superiority and female inferiority. What is now termed sexist language often suggests an inherent male dominance and superiority in many fields of life. Sexist language is language that expresses bias in favor of one sex and thus treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner (Cameron 1985:4). It is the language that contains sex bias, particularly in usages such as “he” and “man” to refer to everyone” (Hyde, 1984:697). Sexist language includes “words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between women and men or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender” (Parks & Robertson, 1998: 455).

3) Does Sexist Language in Textbooks Really Matter?

Many studies (e.g., Rem and Rem, 1973; Cole, Hill, and Dayley, 1983) confirmed that same-gender role models provide stronger role identification for some people than models of a different gender. Thus, for example, female characters in texts are stronger role models for some women than they are for some men. Any one portrayal of a female or male, no matter how minor it is; is seen as a particular bias sustained over time and through repetition it gains a growing effect (Lesikin, 2001:275).

Gender-biased (sexist) language in textbooks can affect students adversely and it creates an oppressive world for them because this gender-biased language is most often unjustified and unfair (Cameron, 1988: 13). Studies of gender and language have found that gender bias and gender stereotypes in written texts and pictures have deleterious effects for female students. These effects include feelings of exclusion, devaluation, alienation and lowered –expectations (Lesikin, 2001:281). Macaulay and Brice (1997: 820-821) as cited in (Lesikin, 2001:281) report on several empirical studies in education. These studies suggest that “the stereotyping of mathematics as a male domain negatively affects female students’

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attitudes toward, performance in and perceived proficiency in the subject". Furthermore, the studies revealed that graduate students (females most especially) who perceived gender-biased behavior in their classes were negatively affected; in some cases they withdrew from the discipline or graduate program.

Overt gender-biased references in textbooks may have destructive effects on students' personality. Lesikin (2001:281) commenting on studies that tried to evaluate the effect of gender-biased representations in textbooks "...these studies suggest that our female ESL students..... may also construct less powerful and prestigious identities than their male counterparts from similar sources. The undervaluing of women potentially adds to the female language learner's sense of alienation and worthlessness, making adjustments more problematic and perhaps slower than for her male counterpart.

So, it is recommended for textbook designers to take care with regards to any kind of bias or possible destructive elements that might be found in the textbooks they design.

4) Methods of Analyzing Gender Bias in Texts

Gender bias in texts has been examined differently by researchers. One way is by surveying the language content in the texts and quantifying language items and critically analyzing them. Macaulay and Brice (1997) cited in (Lesikin, 2001:276) used a different method. They looked at grammatical function, thematic role, and lexical choice. Their study shows widespread gender bias and stereotyping in the example sentences of syntax textbooks.

Lesikin (2001:276) proposed another method, which both interprets language content and quantifies language items, to detect gender bias. The methodology is based on M. A. K. Halliday's examination of the functions of language, specifically his concept of participant roles of nouns and pronouns and the division of theme and rheme from the Prague School of Linguistics and reconstituted by Halliday (1985). Lesikin proposed the use of these concepts to determine the relative social prominence of females and males in written texts.

5) Review of Related Literature

The study of gender bias in ESL/ EFL materials had gained much interest by researchers all over the world. The first known published study was conducted by Graham (1975) where she investigated sexism in a school children's dictionary. In Coles' study (1977) five sets of popular adult basic educational materials were studied to examine omission/visibility manifestation of sexism. The results firmly indicated that males outnumbered females. Hoomes (1978) conducted a systematic examination of twenty eight high school literature anthologies for grades 9 through 12 and found that the visibility of females was much more less than of males, the overall ratio of total female characters to total male characters

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in the books was one to three and a half. Arnold-Gerrity (1978) did a content analysis of a 1976 series of primary reading textbooks, examining, among other things, the visibility of female characters. She found that in the first four textbooks, for grades 1 and 2, there were twice as many male-oriented stories (i.e., about males) as female-oriented; in the three readers for grades 3 and 4, male-oriented stories were five times as frequent; and in the two textbooks for grades 5 and 6, there were three times as many male-oriented as female-oriented stories.

Firstness, the order of mention of sex pairs, is another manifestation of sexism that had been investigated. Hartman and Judd (1978) explored, amongst other issues, the issue of firstness. They found that, given two nouns paired for sex, such as male/female, the masculine word always came first, with the exception of the pair ladies/gentlemen. This "reinforces the second-place status of women and could, with only a little effort, be avoided by mixing the order (Hartman and Judd,1978:390).

Another reflection of sexism is in the portrayal of males and females in occupational roles. Hellinger (1980) studied 131 randomly chosen passages from English language textbooks found that women were rarely engaged in any "demanding, interesting, or successful" activities, while male roles represented a broad range of occupational options. Only two women had gained professional status through their own efforts, and one of these remained anonymous.

Porreca (1984) examined the problem of sexism in ESL materials-how sexism is manifested in ESL textbooks and with what consequences. The study focused on six categories of occurrence; omissions in text and illustrations, firstness, occupational visibility in text and illustrations, nouns, masculine generic constructions, and adjectives. Porreca found that women were mentioned half as often as men, firstness for men was three times as prevalent as female firstness and women were less visible in occupational roles.

Sakita (1995) completed a content analysis of 10 textbooks specific to English education in Japan. Sakita concluded that women were invisible in number, content, pronoun usage and occupational roles. Stereotyping was revealed in adjective usage, activities and topics related to women. Other sexist features were the use of girl for adult woman and the "use of women as a class as the butt of jokes". Poulou (1997) explored differences in the discourse roles of men and women in dialogues of textbooks for teaching Greek as a foreign language to adults. She found that male dominance was still prevalent; however, females were dominant only quantitatively as far as visibility is concerned.

Ansary and Babii (2003) conducted an evaluative study of two English Language Teaching textbooks designed for Iranian students in secondary schools. Both textbooks were analyzed with regards to "dialogues, reading passages,

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exercises and illustrations". They collected their data with reference to visibility, male female topic presentations, sex linked occupations and activity types, stereotyping, firstness and masculine as generic conceptions. As with earlier studies the authors found that women were less visible than men, male orientated topics, male firstness and women placed in stereotypical traditional roles.

Lee and Collins (2006) studied gender representation of English textbooks in Hong Kong. They examined sexism in seven categories including omission (visibility), roles, masculine generic constructions, titles, order of appearance, pictorial representation of both genders and their roles and activities. Their study however differed from other studies since they included the investigation of semantic as well as domestic and social roles in their study. They investigated gender bias across five semantic processes (material, verbal, relational, mental and existential) and five categories of participants in terms of the Systemic-Functional concept of transitivity and its primary semantic categories of *participant* and *process*. Close examination of various semantic roles revealed subtle gender stereotyping and semantic role shifts in recent versus earlier textbooks.

6) The Textbook

The textbook chosen for gender analysis is "English for Iraq" by Olivia Johnston and Mark Farrell (2013). Johnston and Farrell's book has started to be taught in the fifth preparatory classes in the Iraqi preparatory schools this academic year (2013-2014). A very large population of students aged between 16-18 years old makes use of this book for five lesson periods per week. Owing to the fact that females outnumbered males in Iraq, we expect more females make use of the book than males do.

7) Data Collection and Method of Analysis

The selection of the textbook "English for Iraq" for fifth preparatory classes was the first step in the present study. The second step was putting the selected textbook under scrutiny and studying it in depth. The book consists of eight units and a literary focus at the end of the book. Each unit deals with four language areas, namely: listening and speaking, reading and writing, grammatical areas and functions and lexical areas. The gender analysis process extended over the eight units and the literary focus with the exclusion of *Grammar and Functions Reference* appendix (pp 104-113).

In order to explore the sexist status in this textbook, the researcher followed Porreca (1984) where different aspects of sexism were examined through a systematic quantitative content analysis. This analysis was carried out in terms of visibility/omission of both sexes and occupational roles. The next step was tabulating; characters that appear in the text and illustrations, how many times these male and female characters are referred to directly by name or indirectly

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through the use of personal pronouns, the number of occupational roles, the kinds of occupations filled by both sexes and the ratio of men to women employed and masculine generic conception.

Although it is notified in the previous paragraph that the researcher followed Porreca (1984), the sexist manifestation of firstness was excluded from the study due to the fact that not a single example was found of men mentioned before women in sentences where both of them are present. The authors of the *English for Iraq* textbook were fully alert to this issue, so they avoided side by side references to males and females.

8) The Quantitive Analysis

Table (1) below sums up the findings of our quantitive content analysis in terms of the categories referred to previously.

Table (1) Results of Quantitive Content Analysis of "English for Iraq" Fifth Preparatory

Category	Female	Male
Characters referred to in the text	47	80
Characters referred to in illustrations	56	82
Characters referred to by names	20	25
Characters referred to by personal pronoun	29	33
Masculine generic reference	-	5

8-1) Visibility/Omission

The findings in table (1) above show that males are more visible than the females in texts and in pictures. All the sex-linked nouns, proper names or titles, and non-generic pronouns in textbook were counted. The result showed a striking imbalance, male referents heavily outnumbered female. Out of 127 occurrences of characters referred to in the text, 47 were females which represent 37% of the total number of occurrences and 80 were males which count 63% of the total number of occurrences. So, the females were overlooked by a ratio of 1:1.7 in favor of males.

8.2) Characters Referred to in Illustrations

Once more the results shown on table (1) above clearly display that male characters in illustrations outnumbered the female characters. The total number of illustrations was 138. The number of illustrations of female characters in the text was 56 only 40.60% in percentage, whereas those of their male characters counterparts were 82, 60.40% in percentage.

8.3) Characters Referred to by Names

The total number of characters referred to by names is 45, 20 or 44% of the references were to females and 25 or 56% were to males.

8.4) Characters Referred to by Personal Pronoun

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The frequency of occurrences of the reference by personal pronoun was 62 times, 29 (46.80%) were of females, and 33 (53.20%) were of males. Pronouns such as *we*, *you*, or *they*, when they refer to both men and women were excluded.

8.5) Masculine Generic Reference

The deeply rooted use of masculine generic reference in the grammar of the English language is another manifestation of sexism in the "English for Iraq" textbook. However; the frequency of use was very little, only five cases of such reference were counted. It seems that the authors tried their best to avoid the use of the masculine generic reference, that's why the frequency of occurrences is so low. It is worth mentioning here that the authors employed the paired pronoun expressions such as *he/she*, *him/her*, *his/her* twice throughout the book in a trail to avoid the masculine generic reference.

8.6) Occupations

The *English for Iraq* refers to a wide variety of characters enjoying different occupations. The females' proportion of these occupations is much more less of that of the males. Table (2) below summarizes in numbers both females and males position in reference to the different types of occupations.

Table (2) Male and Female Occupations

Occupation	Female	Male
Driver	0	1
Painter	2	4
Director	1	2
Detective	0	1
Computer Scientist	0	2
Archaeologist	0	1
Hunter	0	1
Correspondent	1	1
Writer	1	2
Teacher	1	1
Hairdresser	2	0
Flight attendant	1	0
TV Presenter	0	1
Actor/Actress	5	9
Journalist	0	1
Businessman	0	1
Policeman	0	1
Optician	0	1
Beggar	0	1
Singer	1	0
Playwright	0	8
Magician	0	1
Motorcycle Racer	0	1
Weightlifter	0	1
Basketball Player	0	1
Football Player	0	3
Total	15	46

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It's quite obvious from table (2) above that out of the 61 employed characters being referred to in the textbook only 15 were females while 46 were males. This gives a ratio of 3 males for every female employed. We see from the data that male characters enjoy a large range of occupations while there is a lack of occupational diversity for women. Women are represented in the traditional roles of teacher, flight attendant, and hairdresser. All eight references to the occupation of playwright are male, implying that "playwright is a position closed for males only", and all six references to sport occupations are male also, implying that only men have the right to practice sports. Contrarily the only two references to hairdresser are female, implying the same for females. There are no female TV presenters, drivers, detectives, computer scientists, archaeologists, hunters, journalists, opticians, beggars, playwrights, magicians. Add to this there are no females working in the police or in business. The results of this qualitative analysis show that, if Iraq is a country moving toward gender equality in the workplace, then *English for Iraq* does not portray that society.

9) Conclusion and Recommendations

Regardless of the fact that many countries around the globe are taking serious steps towards the reduction of sexist bias towards women, we still find fairly great numbers of sexist reflections in the EFL teaching materials. The *English for Iraq* textbook is not an exception at all. The evidence shows that it contains gender-biased elements. Women are not represented in a way that describes their real roles in society. Despite the presence of women in society and specifically the workplace, they are less visible than men in text and illustration. With regard to occupational roles women are employed less and are placed in a confined occupational position promoting traditional female occupations. Men, conversely, enjoy a diverse range of occupations. Both men and women are portrayed in stereotypical roles that further diminish the presence of females.

The findings of this study will be of great benefit to textbook designers who are interested in diminishing gender-bias in the content and pictures of the textbooks. It is essential for textbook designers to take into account the learners' sex equality in all forms. Textbook designers are advised to take advantage of this study as it reveals the points that the content contains strong discrimination against females, and the pictures are gender biased pictures. This will help them keep a balance

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between male and female characters, occupational roles, social activities, and the frequency of males and females' pictures.

Finally, it should be noted that in this study, the problem of sexism was examined in only one textbook. Perhaps, further research on a wide range of current widely-used ESL/EFL textbooks may give theoretically sound indications of how sexism works and how it affects students' performance.

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