GENDER REPRESENTATION IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract

This study was conducted to describe the representation of gender in Forms 1, 2, 3, and 4 English language textbooks in Malaysian secondary schools. Gender-biased materials have been reported to affect the motivation of students who go through the textbooks (Treichler and Frank, 1989). Computer analysis tools and manual analysis were used to perform content and linguistic analyses. These methods in addition to discourse analysis of the text books aided the researchers to disclose the predictable patterns of sexism in the textbooks in order to identify the existence and extent of stereotypes. The results clearly indicate there is an absolute gender bias with males outnumbering females. Further, certain nouns referring to males precede those referring to females; however, males almost exclusively turn out to represent negative characters.

Keywords: Gender; English language textbooks; Content analysis; Corpus based analysis; Stereo-typed roles

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian social context, being composed of diverse cultures, calls for pooling all resources to take measures in creating and sustaining national unity both within and between these spheres. One of the areas that can be of crucial significance in establishing oneness among Malaysians is the fundamental school environment where the future Malaysian politicians, professionals and laborers find identities. The crystallization of such identities, besides the pivotal role of teachers and peers, depends, at least in part, on the textbooks Malaysian young people focus on repeatedly during

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the classroom practice, follow-up assignments or projects, and preparation for the examination. The sensitive influence that textbooks exert, in addition to their quality of instruction, on learners' understanding of social equality and national unity cannot, thus, be denied. Of equal importance is the development of textbooks that provide a neutral realistic representation of gender. Among other school materials, English language textbooks are of additional importance since learners are required to use their content frequently, which can affect their conscious as well as their subconscious (Zografou, 1990, cited in Sunderland, 1994a).

In the light of the dominance framework that is going to be discussed below, we wish to illustrate how gender is depicted in ELT textbooks in the multicultural context of *The Colorland*. To this end, there will first be a review of the related literature in this area. Next, the method of analysis will be described. Finally, the paper will be concluded with the findings of this study and their pedagogical implications.

According to Cameron (1998), the women's movement in the 1960s triggered studies on women's role in linguistic settings. Such inquiry continued, paving the way for content analysis of foreign language textbooks throughout the 1970s and 1980s in order to illustrate how women were excluded or subordinated in these materials (Sunderland et al., 2001). Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004), aware of the three theories behind the gender and language research: (1) *deficit theory* that had a critical and negative view of the female language (see Lakoff,1973 quoted in Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004); (2) *dominance framework* according to which males' power in society justifies the negative considerations attributed to female speech; and (3) *difference framework* (also known as *dual culture model*) in the 1980s, which holds that diversity in male/ female communication styles is due to different social relationships between the sexes, warn the reader of the misleading and insufficient nature of each one of these three trends. These authors, having called for a combination of reflection and practice that they, following Freire (1970), refer to as 'praxis', conclude that experts in various areas of language teaching should "expose and transform social injustice through research and pedagogical practices within classrooms, schools, communities, and society at large (2004, p. 398)."

THE OPPOSITION

What we are about to do may seem unnecessary and pointless from certain narrow viewpoints. Indeed, there have been grounds on which gender related studies of this kind have been criticized. It is necessary to raise such critical issues.

As Sunderland (1994a) notes, there are textbook writers who deny the existence of gender bias in the textbooks altogether. Among them, O'Neill, raising the subject of character, contends, "most characters we encounter in a textbook are no more than names that occur once or twice and never reappear," and poses the question, "How can such characters be taken seriously either as positive or negative role models?" At the first sight, this argument seems reasonable inasmuch as such characters may appear only in a couple of situations throughout a given book; however, neglecting the following crucial points can cause irretrievable damage to learners who use that book.

Even if a negative personality is attributed to a specific gender only once throughout a textbook, it still can be regarded as an instance of stereotyping because if a certain gender-specific word appears in, say, a dialogue, the teacher will have the learners repeat it for several times. As behavioral psychologists have empirically demonstrated, strong reinforcement of repetition on the human mind should not be ignored. Therefore, in such cases, more important than its frequency is the location of the word, which may require the class to repeat it chorally and individually for several times which "can become a kind of brainwashing" (Zografou, 1990, p. 19, cited in Sunderland, 1994a). Further, O'Neill's opinion sounds justifiable in the case of extensive learning sources like novels, while the nature of textbooks requires the learner to preview, view, review, and post-view the same items on several occasions. Thus, such cases of sexist language, even if sparse, should not be overlooked. Finally, when the matter of firstness is concerned, by having more male characters talk first, the textbook author deprives the female learners from practicing communication initiation as much as male students (Sunderland, 1994a).

Next, following specific guidelines to avoid gender bias has been criticized since it is claimed that it blocks the textbook author's creativity (O'Neill, 1994). This observation does not question the existence of such guidelines; rather, it calls for a correct textbook revision method. Such a creativity barrier can simply be eliminated by content analysis of the textbook *after* it has been written. The results can highlight the need for revising the text.

Moreover, from a sociocultural perspective, it can be debated that in some societies, women themselves regard Western woman's freedom, particularly in their comfortable clothing, more as an exploitation than an instance of liberty. In some cultures, cases of this type may be considered so offensive that, publishers may choose to exclude such visuals (Haines,1994) states. However true as this opinion may sound, there is no point in raising such issues since the limits imposed on depictions of women or men in pedagogical materials, as we know, follow certain unwritten yet agreed-

upon norms that are not cultural but universal. There is some kind of a consensus among publishers on what the difference should be between the illustrations of a language textbook and a fashion magazine. Otherwise, the illustrations would distract the class from its learning objectives instead of facilitating or motivating the learning process.

Related to this argument is the international publisher's viewpoint. Haines (1994) aptly notes sexism is not regarded as a taboo in some countries where the textbooks are going to be taught; therefore, it seems pointless to go through so much trouble to make such books gender-fair since it is the target market that determines the textbook content. However, any publisher's claim that a certain book will *only* be taught in a definite country seems neither realistic nor cost-effective. A book aimed at learners in Middle East may be selected as a course book in Far East.

It is also believed that there are times when the inclusion of stereotypes appears to be inevitable. For O'Neill the primary objective of language textbooks is to transfer the communicative functions to their learners; that is why, writers "borrow predictable stereotypes from other sources … immediately recognizable … [that] re-affirm rather than challenge accepted notions of what a woman's role is or what kind of behavior is or is not appropriate for a male" (1994, p. 70). In order to deal with this argument it first seems necessary to know what exactly is meant by stereotyping. Sunderland (1994) quotes from Redding et al., (1992) who defines stereotyping as 'a received "wisdom", which may or may not contain a "grain of truth," which is then distorted and exaggerated to fill the whole picture'. Such wisdom cannot be received if it is not circulated across through the media one of which could be the textbook one of whose stereotypes of a woman that is not criticized is the "pretty and empty headed, or unable to make decisions on her own" (p. 59). O'Neill's statement can be supported if the primary goal of stereotyping really *is* facilitating learners' understanding of the message, but in reality, this usually happens not to be the case. There is no point in depicting *men* only as the rule breakers of society and *women* as the cooks, and if such depictions occur otherwise, it will not challenge learners' understanding.

Finally, O'Neill (1994, p. 68) mentions, "stereotypes can be and often are created with deliberate intent to wound, to insult, to denigrate. …The stereotypes that occur in textbooks are rarely if ever intentionally negative." However, as O'Neill himself later notes, "unintentional sexism can be just as offensive as subconscious racism." This means that cases of sexist materials even when they are not designed purposefully will definitely disappoint some learners. In addition, long ago Cincotta (1978) demonstrated the way in which textbooks can affect gender stereotype formation. In particular, in coeducational language classes, girls would lose the opportunity of

practicing the language in the dialogues if fewer female characters were included in them, which would result in the alienation of female students. The available literature provides evidence of such cases; for example, Swann and Graddol (1988) in a video analysis of interaction between male/ female learners identified boys were provided with more opportunities to practice and learn the language and that lack of justice of this kind could be due to the learning materials they used.

RESEARCH ON GENDER-BIASED ELT MATERIALS

Having considered the above opposing views towards gender-related studies, we now hope that our intention to turn to the related literature in this area is justified. Sunderland (1994a) mentions textbooks, dictionaries, pedagogic grammars and tests as the language materials analyzed for their gender representation. Further, she roughly summarizes the instances of sexism (Sunderland, 1994a, pp. 55-56) as follows:

- *Invisibility*: fewer males than females or vice versa
- *Occupational stereotyping*: females/ males in fewer and more menial occupational roles
- *Relationship stereotyping*: women more in relation with men than men with women
- *Personal characteristic stereotyping*: e.g. women as emotional and timid
- *Disempowering discourse roles*: more males talking first
- Degradation: blatant sexism to the point of misogamy

It is generally assumed that such issues are important as they are associated with factors that concern learning, and thus, may both consciously and subconsciously play a fundamental role in the motivation of students who go through the textbooks. Also, unfair linguistic sexism has empirically been found to create deleterious real-world and damaging pedagogical consequences especially for women and girls (Treichler & Frank, 1989; Poulou, 1997).

In their analysis of the occupations held by males or females in ESL textbooks, Porecca (1984) and Schmitz (1984) both concluded that women held lower positions as compared to men. In addition, some researchers took a step further, and through the discourse analysis of the conversations in the textbooks they showed how women uttered fewer words and talked first less often than men did (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Talansky, 1986).

On all these issues, remarkable amount of research is available some of which are mentioned in this section of the present paper. Pasco (1989, quoted in Sunderland, 1994a) in her analysis of *Streamline Departures* (1978) found the textbook heavily loaded with gender-specific pronoun *he*, which occurred three times more than *she*; however, such a high frequency dropped drastically in a more recent English series, *Headway*, (1986) where almost more than half of the third person singular pronouns comprised *she*. The content analysis of *Excel in English* written by Alexander (1985, 1986, and 1987) indicated that key social roles were given for men and that female characters appeared often when household chores and child care were the topic under discussion (Kowitz & Carroll, 1990).

Carroll and Kowitz (1994) show how it is possible for some words to look neutral, yet how their implicit connotations can be unearthed after some scrutiny in their shades of meaning. They provide two examples, the first of which is related to the words *busy* and *work*. They assert while *busy* "has no denotation of reward or payment, and can therefore refer to paid or unpaid activity - including the use of excessive energy or (possibly wasted) effort," the word *work* conveys the meaning of productivity and payment (p.80). They, then, apply the Concordance software to analyze *Welcome to English* (Book 1) and to show the number of the instances of the occurrence of *busy* with women and *work* with men, concluding this suggests gender-bias. Their second example concerns the words *letter* and *letters*. They assume when you write a *letter* (s)he is involved in active communication like a manager, while writing *letters* connotes that you are only writing *for* someone. They search for the two key words as they appear in *Excel in English* (Book 1) and predictably reveal that males frequently write, read, send, or receive a *letter* while females deal with *letters*! In this way, they infer that men are of "higher occupational standing" in this textbook (p.81).

Mannheim (1994) using questionnaires and follow-up interviews as her methods of data collection from 72 language learners on their perception of issues like 'proportion of males and females in teaching materials,' 'reflection of reality,' and 'male/female role characters,' highlights instances of learner sensitivity to sexism in ELT materials, contending that learners are aware of "the invisibility of women … and the stereotyping and narrowness of certain roles (p.89)."

Hennessy (1994) in a study of three English learners' dictionaries dated between 1987 and 1989 points out that these dictionaries fail to present instances of non-sexist language, like 'singular' *they*, as acceptable and correct English usage.

Gender studies diminished in the 1990s and whenever a textbook *was* analysed, it was not found to be biased; for instance, Jones et al., (1997) in their study of three EFL textbooks of the time found a common awareness

of such bias amongst authors. However, Plumm (2006) warns, despite the fact that it was hoped with the emergence of technology in the area of instruction sexism would dwindle, this has not resulted in gender-neutral language classes since teachers tend to attribute "technology-related activity to boys more so than to girls," (p.13). Also recently, Amare (2007), as an English teacher, with the assumption that on-line materials, being up-to-date, would provide her learners with non-sexist account of language, encouraged them to refer to such sources; however, "a detailed analysis of the exercises and example sentences in on-line grammar guides for the purpose of identifying any gender bias" clearly shows sources of bias against women (p.164). She makes some useful recommendations for the revision of such materials and mentions some insightful implications.

Various studies have been performed in different countries on the probable existence of gender-bias in ELT materials. In Greece, in an exploration of negative effects of gender-bias in discourse roles on "the pedagogical value and goals of textbook dialogues," Poulou (1997) examines two language textbooks in terms of male/ female *amount of speech*, *initiation/ completion of dialogues*, as well as *language functions*, and consequently detects "manifestations of sexism against women" in these books (p. 71). In Japan, an unrealistic preference was found for male characters as a result of the content analysis of ELT materials (Narisawa & Yokotu, 1991). In Spain, Cerezal (1991) conducted content analysis on a number of English textbooks in terms of character. The results illustrated that in most cases males appeared superior, had superior occupations and played the protagonist's role. In the German context, Hellinger (1980) found that textbook writers tended to underestimate the role of women and girls in their textbooks. Further, in her analysis of twenty-one pedagogical grammar books published between the years 1972 and 1987 in Britain, Sunderland (1994b) found only one including all the changes in the use of gender specific words like *chairman* to inclusive terms such as *chairperson*. However, in her study of three other pedagogical grammars published in 1988 or 1990, she reports among these newer grammar books, one encourages the readers towards the avoidance of gender-specific language. Despite so much interest among researchers in this area, there have been few studies performed on the Malaysian textbooks (Seng, 2003; Chandran & Abdullah, 2003). Indeed, this study was conducted to evaluate the Malaysian English textbooks, namely Forms 1, 2, 3, and 4, illustrate gender.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(1). What are the patterns of gender representation in the Malaysian secondary Forms 1, 2, 3, and 4 English textbooks?

(2). To what extent are the representations promoting stereotypes?

METHODOLOGY

Language textbooks usually contain between 10'000 and 30'000 words according to their level; therefore, manual analysis appears to be a very challenging method to find out facts like the frequency of occurrence of a certain word in a textbook, its pattern of distribution throughout the book, and its collocational analysis. Once challenges of this type arise, certain computer programs turn out to be very helpful. Concordance software can be used for collocational analysis, showing which words usually appear together, and in what order. For example, the software can show the cases in which male family members like grandfather and father preceded their female counterparts. In analysis of subtle and debated matters like gender representations it is important that the researcher analyze the textbook as a whole; otherwise, he may be accused of tokenism. Concordance software enables the researcher in such cases to view the whole textbook.

However, it is important to note that frequency count *per se* can sometimes lead to certain serious misinterpretations. In their analysis of the frequency counts of the word *husband* and *wife* in the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) corpus, using the Concordance software, Carroll and Kowitz (1994) found despite the fact that *husband* is repeated considerably in fewer occasions than *wife*, at a closer consideration, they surprisingly detected that while *husband* was usually an actor (e.g. My husband rides him/ Her husband took her), the word *wife* was used as

- an appendage (e.g. the solicitor's wife/ naval officer's wife/ schoolmaster's wife)
- a passive participant (e.g. gardener was getting too interested in his wife/ engineer and his wife)
- a definition of wifely status (e.g. A wife led a perfectly blameless life/ charming wife)
- a subordinate (e.g. guests of Mr. Macmillan and his wife/ some poor baby Hawley and his wife adopted.)

With these precautions in mind, the present researchers applied the two analysis tools of Wordsmith Tools 4.0, namely *Wordlist* and *Concord* (see Mukundan, 2003; Mukundan & Hussin, 2006) for a brief and clear

understanding of this program). For this purpose, the textbooks were all scanned and converted to text files through *Finereader 0.8* so that they could be analysed by the aforementioned tools. *Wordlist* provided the researchers with the number of times a certain word was used in a given textbook. In addition, *Concord* was employed whenever it was necessary to identify the actual context in which a vocabulary item was used. Whenever it was necessary to numerate the visuals in the textbooks manual procedures had to be employed. All the data were compiled in tables for later analysis and interpretation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Gender and Family Members

As a first step, the issue was regarded from the viewpoint of distribution of family members according to their gender throughout the four textbooks. As Figure1 shows, except for Form3 English book in the other three textbooks female family members were mentioned more than male ones with the slightest difference in Form1 and the most significant difference in Form 4 textbook. In Form 3, although not remarkable, more reference was made to male family members.

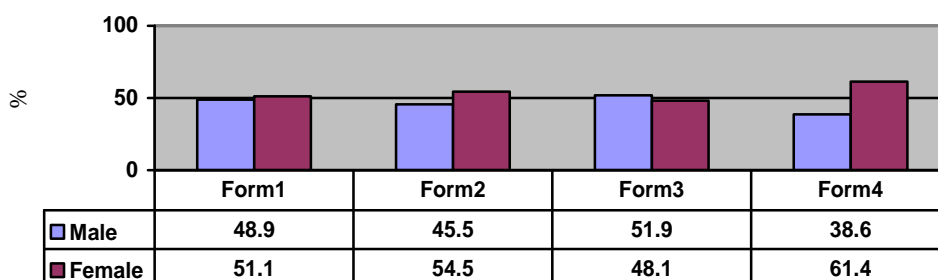| %	Form1	Form2	Form3	Form4
Male	48.9	45.5	51.9	38.6
Female	51.1	54.5	48.1	61.4

Figure 1. Representation of family members according to gender

As it was noted before, Carroll and Kowitz (1994) reported instances of the word *wife* in its stereotyped roles. The four books were analysed for occurrences of *wife* and *husband* in them. Interestingly, even though the word *wife* appears 24 times altogether throughout the books and *husband* does not even once, this uneven distribution cannot be judged as an example of over-representation of females since *wife*, as shown in Table1, in all the cases filled the role of an *appendage*, a *passive receiver*, or a *wifely status*. These include three of the stereotyped roles discussed previously.

TABLE1
Stereotyped roles of wife in the four textbooks

Book	Example	Role
1	*Bell invented the telephone to help his deaf wife… to hear. (×2)*	appendage, passive receiver
2	*William had a wife called Vivian./ He says he loves me and wants me to be his wife./ His wife's handbag was always full of things./ Ranjit's wife hopes to get promoted./My wife waters the plants for me.*	appendage
3	*My brother's wife is a charming woman.*	appendage, wifely status
4	*What would he and his wife do?/ I'm most surprised that Lee Ling's husband adopted his wife's way./ The Drover's wife (×6)/ His wife packed her bags and left him./ He had neglected his wife and children./ Asmin proceeded to help his wife in the kitchen./ Jim was shocked to see his wife's long hair gone./ Jalal had yet to give it to his wife./ His wife wanted a photo frame (×2)*	appendage
	She is also a good wife.	wifely status

Textual and Visual Representation of Gender

According to the census in 2006, sex ratios of the total population of Malaysia depicted a balance between males and females; that is, 1.01 male/female to be exact (Wilkipedia, 2006). In spite of this balanced ratio between males and females, the number of gender-specific words and illustrations referring to males was considerably higher than the number of those indicating females in all the textbooks. This discrepancy peaked in Form 3 where almost two-thirds of gender specific nouns and pronouns referred to males; however, in Form 4, the number of words referring to male and female almost reached a balance (Figure2).

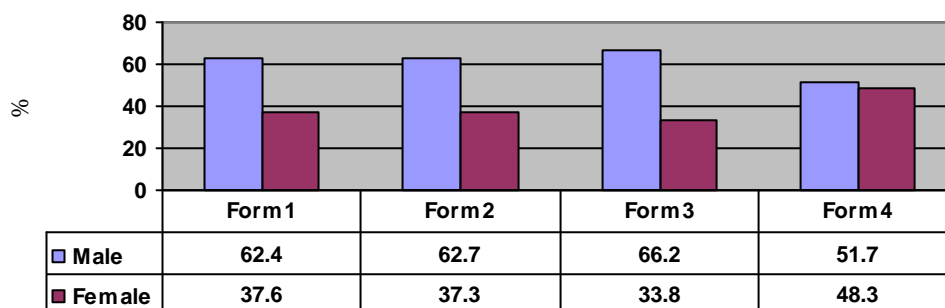|	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4
▢ Male	62.4	62.7	66.2	51.7
▢ Female	37.6	37.3	33.8	48.3

Figure 2. Textual distribution of gender

Next, the number of males and females that appeared in the visuals were manually numerated. In line with findings on the analysis conducted by Seng (2003) on the previous version of Malaysian textbook in English Form 3, the results of this study also demonstrated that there were more pictures of males than those of females in all of the textbooks. The gap was the most considerable in the Form 2 book with about two-thirds of the illustrations being male pictures. Nevertheless, this difference decreased to just more than half of the pictures being those of males in Form 4 (Figure 3).

%	Form1	Form2	Form3	Form4
☐ Male	61.3	62.9	58.5	56.2
■ Female	38.7	37.1	41.5	43.8
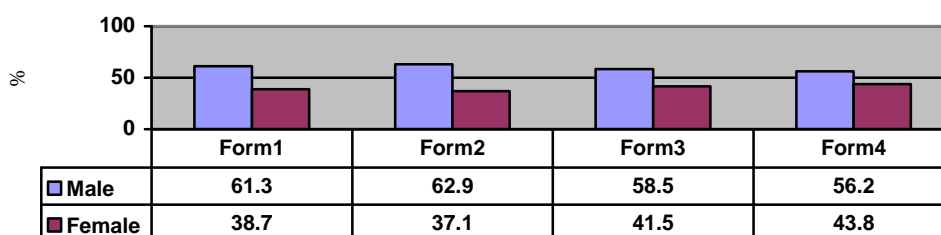
Figure 3. Visual distribution of gender

The findings appear to demonstrate over-representation of males in all of the textbooks, which may be judged to be biased against females even though the authors of all these books were all women. However, in spite of their higher number, the negative qualities unexceptionally were carried by males. In all these books, there were 58 instances of negative characters. According to Table 2, the frequency of the negative characters attributed to females in all of the textbooks was only 4 (i.e., 7%). Therefore, even though the books appear to be over-representing males, they seem to be represented in negative manner more than females.

TABLE 2.
Male/female negative characters frequency and percentage in Forms 1-4 Textbooks

Negative character	Male		Female	
	frequency	percentage	frequency	percentage
aggressive	-12	100%	-	-
banished	-1	100%	-	-
breaking rules	-6	86%	-1	14%
cruel animal (wolf, shark)	-2	100%	-	-
disorganized	-2	100%	-	-
kidnapping	-4	80%	-1	20%
naughty	-10	100%	-	-
negative	-2	100%	-	-
polluting	-6	100%	-	-

stealing	-4	100%	-	-
stupid	-1	100%	-	-
talkative	-	00%	-1	100%
wasteful	-4	80%	-1	20%
Total	54	93%	4	7%

When the textbooks of the four Forms were compared in terms of the distribution of negative characters, bias was found to be 100% present in the case of the Form 2 and 3 books where all negative characters were filled by males (Figure 4).
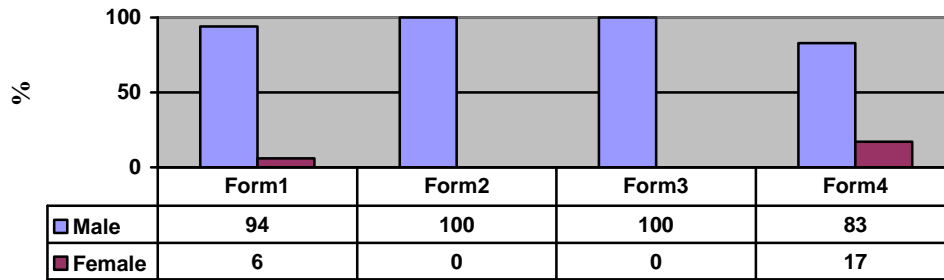

	Form1	Form2	Form3	Form4
Male	94	100	100	83
Female	6	0	0	17

Figure 4. Cases of males/females presented as negative

These results are similar to those of Chandran and Abdullah (2003) who also found a dominance of males in four Form 4 textbooks used in Malaysian secondary schools and fewer negative female characters.
In addition to the content analysis of the textbooks to detect probable traces of bias already discussed, discourse analysis of these books also revealed certain interesting facts about the roles of males and females in them. First, the number of the words used by males and females in all books was counted, and the findings turned out to be in line with those of Sunderland (1994a). As Figure 5 shows, the words spoken or written by males always exceeded, following an upward trend, with the lowest percentage in Form 1 (50.2%) and the highest in the Form 4 textbook (66.7%).

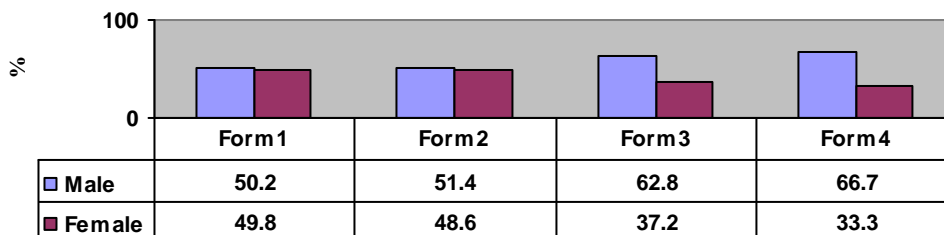|	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4
Male	50.2	51.4	62.8	66.7
Female	49.8	48.6	37.2	33.3

Figure 5. Percentage of words used by males/ females

Subsequently, the number of the characters that spoke or wrote was numerated according to their gender, and once again, the number of males speaking or writing exceeded that of females in all levels. Although in Forms 1 and 4 it was only slightly different, the number of male speakers or writers was considerably higher than that of females in Forms 2 and 3. Figure 6 indicates a summary of these comparisons.
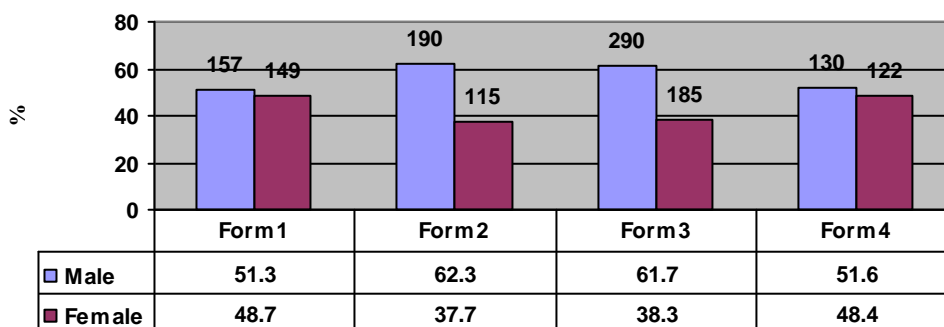
	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4
Male	51.3	62.3	61.7	51.6
Female	48.7	37.7	38.3	48.4

Figure 6. Percentage and number of males/females speaking or writing

In reference to firstness, the analysis of the textbooks unveiled that the number of males leading the dialogues was more than that of females except for in Form 1 where the number of females who started conversations was slightly higher; that is, only 2%. This difference was noteworthy especially in Forms 2 and 3 with males commencing the conversations twice as often as females (Figure 7).

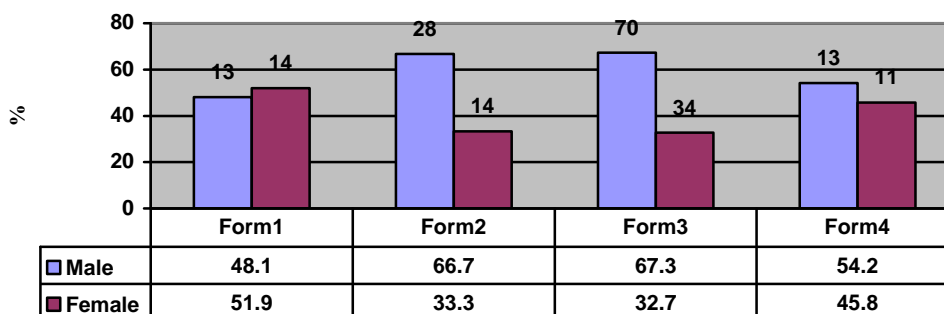|	Form1	Form2	Form3	Form4
Male	48.1	66.7	67.3	54.2
Female	51.9	33.3	32.7	45.8

Figure 7. Percentage and number of males/females speaking first

Finally, the comparison of the number of the cases in which only males or females participated in speaking or writing portrayed that mostly males tended to exclude females from the spoken or written discourse. This exclusion was the highest in Form 3 in which males three times as much as females monopolized the floor (Figure 8).

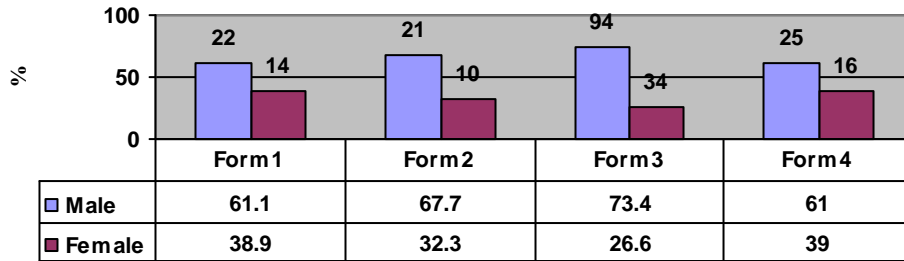|	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3	Form 4
☐ Male	61.1	67.7	73.4	61
☐ Female	38.9	32.3	26.6	39

Figure 8. Percentage and number of males/females speaking or writing only

To sum up, according to the results of the content analysis, there is an absolute gender bias with males outnumbering females, but it was also noted that this bias was, in fact, against males in that they seemed to possess most of the negative traits. However, through the lens of discourse analysis males spoke more, talked first more often, and more frequently excluded females from the conversations they had with the members of their own gender.

IMPLICATIONS

As it can be discerned from the outcomes of this research, there is gender misrepresentation in Malaysian Forms 1-4 English textbooks with males outnumbering females. Females are also seen to be less prominent in conversations and in most cases do not initiate dialogues. There is also negative stereotyping of males as most of the negative personality traits identified in the book are found to be related to male characters. Such discrimination influences both male and female learners' subconscious and triggers prejudice in the developing ideology of these young students showing its negative effects later in their lives and triggering the battle between the sexes.

One possible solution to avoid discrimination seems to be making an attempt to depict the reality in the textbooks; for instance, if males comprise 60 percent of the population of criminals in the country, to include 10 criminals in the textbook where 6 are male and 4 female. This solution, however, does not sound feasible since the same procedure will have to be followed for all, say, the occupations, cities, and family members throughout a series of textbooks, and the author will have to be aware of the accurate statistics for different categories like those of age groups, family members, and gender.

The next remedy is considering the guidelines of the gender-fair material development. There are several working guidelines in the literature that include rules for English material developers to use gender-fair

language some of which include *On Balance* (Florent et al., 1994), *Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications*, prepared by The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 1985, and the Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language published by The Women in Literacy and Life Assembly (WILLA) in 2002.

Another solution could be determining the content according to the target audience of textbooks. For instance if males are going to use the textbooks, more male characters are mentioned in them. Even if it may seem possible to limit materials to a certain age group, it would be almost impossible to ensure the target audience of a certain language book will exclusively be males, for example.

Some may also argue that the objective of textbooks should not be mirroring the reality but representing the ideal world where everything is shared equally. However, textbook designers cannot and should not endeavor to manipulate the reality and show a sterilized picture of human community as O'Neill rightly takes it into consideration:

> That does not seem to me a convincing argument for suggesting that we should pretend in our textbook that women have more equality than they already have. …I do not believe that it will benefit anyone …if we create the illusion in our textbooks that the battle has already been won. …I feel that our textbooks will be better if we try to portray the world as it is and not as we would like it to be. In doing so we do not perpetuate inequalities and injustices. (1994, pp. 71-72)

Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize textbook writers only need to portray the reality and not to beautify it. The final recommendation that seems viable and simple is training and arming the language teacher with certain techniques that empower them to deal with gender-biased materials aptly and present them in an unbiased way (Sunderland et al., 2001). Such a solution seems feasible since there will be no need to go through a lot of trouble and cost to change or revise a textbook that is not treating the issue fairly.

Besides the overt role schools play on students' mental development, there is also an implicit and "covert message that the school endorses and teaches to students" (Addelstone & Stirratt, 1998, p. 216). One of the factors that can affect this hidden curriculum is the presence of a gender-biased textbook that these learners may be exposed to throughout the whole school year.

We hope to have emphasized the importance of gender-fair textbooks as their misrepresentation may result in the books being misfits within the learning-teaching environment. When learners are faced with

situations in textbooks, which portray an imbalanced gender representation, they are likely to lose their motivation, and as a result, this may have serious repercussions on language acquisition and learning. Thus, it is hoped that every possible effort is made not to offend a certain group of people purposively and to highlight a fair share of all society members between males and females in the language textbooks.

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