The representation of women and men in a modern EFL textbook:
Are popular textbooks gender biased?
by
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(Manuscript received September 30, 2009)
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Abstract 
This paper investigates the question by first looking at the history of gender use in popular EFL textbooks 
from the sixties through to the nineties. It then goes on to show what differences there are in the speech patterns 
between female and male participants focusing on mixed sex conversations. It examines firstness in relation to 
gender biasness and finally applies Sinclair and Coulthard’s analysis of discourse, IRF to the transcripts in the 
text to research if one gender is dominant in these conversations. 

Keyword : gender, EFL, speech pattern
1.0 Introduction

Gender is not just the difference between having two X chromosomes or having one X and one Y this is the basic physical difference between the two sexes. But rather what society expects and molds of each person into what is accepted and thought of as being feminine or masculine. Holmes says “Gender describes the social expectations, rules and norms attached to femininity and masculinity.” (2009: 18) From the moment a baby is born, gender norms and rules are part of their life. “Cameron gives one compelling example of how our gendered social subjectivities are fabricated discursively from the day we are born:” (1992: 161)

Recently a woman who had just had a baby told me that in the hospital nursery, each newborn’s crib bore a label announcing its sex. The label said either ‘I’m a boy’ or ‘It’s a girl’. Obviously none of the infants was yet capable of speech. But on the day they were born, the culture hailed them differently: boys were hailed as active ‘speaking subjects’, unproblematically ‘I’; girls were not. This is the order which, as they grow older, these children will be forced to enter. (Cameron 1992 cited in Jaworski and Coupland 1999, p.413)

As mentioned above society molds your ideas and behavior, each society has different norms and rules, therefore the students I will teach will already have a view of gender from their society’s prospective.

I will look at how femininity and masculinity is represented in an EFL textbook through firstness, occupations and conversations. What order are female and male nouns and pronouns represented? In the conversation sections, which sex is represented and how many utterances and words are used? In addition, by using Sinclair’s and Coulthard’s analysis of discourse, (1992: 25-30) I will look in detail at the structure of free exchanges and which gender uses the Initiation, Response and Feedback stages.

2.0 Textbook Analyzed

The textbook chosen for analysis was Touchstone Book 2. The series is authored by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, and Helen Sandiford, and published by Cambridge University Press. This book is intended for adult and young adult learners at the high beginner’s level. The topics it covers are both interesting and engaging for their intended market. Touchstone Book 2 is the second book in a series of four. It does not have a set storyline, but consists of twelve separate teaching units, each covering all four skills of reading, speaking, listening and writing. Each unit is separated into four lessons. Lessons A and B introduce a different but somewhat related grammar point, Lesson C is a dialogue unit and lesson D is a reading and writing unit.

3.0 Early EFL textbooks

In the nineteen sixties, seventies and eighties many EFL texts were biased against femininity. At that time the world was a different place. A woman’s place was in the home raising a family and supporting her husband from the sidelines. There was no need to represent women in a different light. Putting it bluntly, men were more important than women. Men led interesting lives out and about, doing things and making important decisions in companies and governments, on the other hand women lived for two things only, to be
the best homemaker and care giver she could be, or so it seemed (was portrayed) in many EFL texts. Because women led mundane daily lives compared to men’s adventure filled days, women were represented far less than men. “In 1967… girls were all but invisible as subjects of study.” (Baron and Kotthoff 2001: 4)

In Hartman and Judd’s research carried out in 1978, in the book English Sentence Structure “the ratio of male to female referents was found to be … 73% to 27%” (1978: 385). Five years after this study, Porecca published another paper in the same journal to see if textbook writers had taken account of the report given by Hartman and Judd. Her report showed, with the exception of two books, little improvement in the then fifteen most popular texts. Showing that “[women] are depicted or mentioned only half as often as males in both text and illustrations”. (1984: 719) A quantitative research paper by Jones et al. focused on the language of dialogues in three popular textbooks at that time. “The results showed an encouraging level of gender fairness”. (1997: 469) "The results of [their] analysis [suggested] that [the] authors and publishers indeed gave (considerable?) consideration to social roles, language use and gender.” (1997: 481) It has been twelve years since that article was published. I will next consider if textbook authors and publishers have continued to produce gender fair books.

4.0 Research

4.1 How do women and men’s speech differ?

Montgomery notes that men’s speech was often classed as the norm against which women’s speech was gauged. But many researchers have noted that women’s speech generally uses the more formal dialect or prestige form, whereas men’s uses the vernacular to a greater extent. (Montgomery 1995: 151; Labov 2001: 281; Holmes 2008: 163) In mixed gender interactions women are less direct than men. They use a greater number of indirect questions which are regarded as more polite and less imposing giving the recipient a choice to refuse without losing face. Women use affiliative language strategies such as showing support and agreement. They encourage participants to continue talking by agreeing with their views and opinions.

There is a great deal of evidence that in informal and casual interaction women tend to adopt the strategy of seeking agreement to a greater extent than men do, both in single-sex and mixed-sex contexts […] (Coates (1989: 118) cited in Jaworski and Coupland, 1999: p. 337)

In a research paper by Leaper and Ayres, it was discovered that women used significantly more affiliative speech than men. (2007: 351)

Women are often more polite when speaking. According to Wardhaugh (2006: 277) by speaking politely people have a choice of two kinds of politeness, positive and negative. Positive politeness leads to solidarity, we treat others as friends and allies and we don’t impose on them, which as mentioned above is one form of women’s speech. Negative politeness leads to indirectness
and formality in language. Again this form also mentioned above is used by women in their speech. Holmes reports the same findings. (1999: 343) Holmes also reports “Women’s greater use of politeness devices can be regarded as another aspect of their consideration of the addressee.” (2008: 303)

All the above conversational styles portray a power difference in mixed gender conversations. Socially men are often portrayed as the dominant gender and women reinforce this gender discrimination by using the above mentioned styles in gender mixed conversations. Men try to initiate conversations and lead them in the direction that they want, interrupt when they want to get their point across or change the direction of the conversation. In studies carried out by James and Drakich it was shown that in,

fifty-six studies dealing with adult mixed-sex interaction males were found to talk more than females overall in twenty-four, or 42.9% of the studies---only two studies (3.6%) found females to talk more overall. (Tannen, 1993: 284)

Why have nearly 43% of the studies found that women talk less than men in mixed-sex interactions? "Many researchers have attributed this in a straightforward way to the fact that men have greater status and power than do women". (D. James and J. Drakich 1993: 284) Is this a result of genetics or social upbringing? All the studies carried out by James and Drakich were with white middle-class Americans, so it could be a result of social pressures on women to be less dominant in mixed gender meetings. Although Americans are at the forefront of gender equality, there is still a feeling in middle and upper-class society that a woman who doesn’t act ‘Ladylike’ more like a ‘Tomboy’ is not socially responsible. Lakoff states that,

As children, women are encouraged to be ‘little ladies’. Little ladies don’t scream as vociferously as little boys... ‘high spirits’ are expected and therefore tolerated in little boys; docility and resignation are the corresponding traits expected of little girls. (1973: 50, 51)

Little girls grow into ladies and this social expectation continues into adult life. Although this was written thirty-six years ago, I still feel it is relevant in today’s society. Holmes also feels that this is still relevant today, she states that,

Social institutions such as family, school, the workplace and the media teach us that girls should act in certain ways, such as being caring, and boys in different ways, such as being strong and independent. (2009: 3)

In the last few years some researchers have been looking at the differences in speech styles between both genders from a genetic view not a social one. This is often referred to as nature verses nurture. It has been suggested that the make-up of female and male brains are different. Rueckert shows that women have stronger feelings of empathy (2008:162-167). Women are less aggressive. They have better language ability (Nikolaenko 2005: 689-699) and a superior nonverbal receiving or decoding ability. (Knapp and Hall 1992 cited in Andersen, 2006, p.119). All the above features due to differences in the female and male brain make women’s speech different
from men’s.

Having stronger feelings of empathy make women better listeners and they will support the speaker and encourage them to continue speaking. Montgomery says that "women are more attentive in their talk to the needs and rights of others" (1995: 161) Holmes mentions two studies which examined the distribution of positive feedback in a New Zealand and American study, both studies “demonstrated that women provide significantly more encouraging and positive feedback to their addressees than men do.” (2008: 309) In single sex conversations, empathy functions to strengthen solidarity and build on relationships between the participants. In mixed sex conversations it lets the male speaker dominate.

In the case of aggressiveness, women use more polite forms in speech, less vernacular, are less likely to contradict and disagree thus showing less aggressiveness where the opposite is true for men. Women can be aggressive but they don’t tend to engage in direct aggression face-to-face confrontations, but instead engage in a less costly form of aggression, indirect aggression. (Archer, 2004; Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992 cited in Griskevicius et al, 2009, p. 982) According to Lippa,

Evolutionary theories argue that, over the history of our species, men and women have been subject to somewhat different evolutionary pressures. Edward O Wilson (1975, 1978), the father of modern sociobiology, proposed that because hominid women were responsible for bearing, nursing, and caring for children, they evolved to be more nurturing. Men were responsible for hunting and fighting; therefore, they evolved more aggressiveness. (2005: 87)

Women’s language ability is better than men’s and women of all ages on average out perform men in language tests. Finally having a superior nonverbal receiving or decoding ability helps women to judge conversations better so as to keep all participants happy in the discussion.

In all the studies reviewed it is suggested that both nature and nurture have a role to play in the differences between female and male speech. Andersen states that,

The fact that biologically based sex differences exist in human communication does not mean that culturally based sex and gender differences do not exist; quite the contrary. Sex and gender differences are affected by both nature and nurture and the interaction between these two forces over time. (2006: 117)

It is easier to see and test the differences in speech with a view to nurture, the area a person grew up, the social standing of the person in society, the type of school attended and the norms of speech for their gender, whereas it’s very difficult to prove that a speech act by a women or man is due to biological reasons. Therefore I tend to put more weight on findings from a social aspect.

4.2 Firstness

Many nouns occur together in a pair examples of these are, salt and pepper, fish and chips, biceps and triceps, warp and weft, rack and pinion. Although these nouns can be used on their own, they are often
paired together. It is possible and grammatically there is nothing wrong with changing the order in which they are spoken, so you can say “Thank goodness it’s Friday, chips and fish for dinner tonight”, but you are bound to get some funny looks from people within earshot. The reason is that these pairs are taught and socially used in a specific order. We also have gender nouns which often occur together examples of these are, Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Husband and wife. In all these pairs bar the first given above, the male noun is placed first before the female. This is a gender bias in the language and I really can’t see how this can be resolved. Of course there is nothing wrong with parents teaching their children the expression with the female noun first. However, I feel it would not be appropriate to teach this to non-native speakers, just by pointing out the irregularity will make them aware of it and if they then choose to use it with the female noun first, they will be able to explain the reason when native speakers try to correct their unusual use of the English language, it might even make some native speakers aware of it.

4.3 Spoken discourse

Using Sinclair and Coulthard’s analysis of discourse which was made for classroom interactions I have adapted a similar approach to the main conversations in this textbook. A conversation consists of exchanges. Exchanges are made up of moves and moves are made up of acts. The structure of the exchange is initiation, response and feedback. An exchange is read across the page. See table below for details In the first exchange below there is an opening move in the first column, the word in brackets shows the type of act being performed by this move, in our case an elicitation and the second column has an answering move. The opening move in the first exchange is performed by a female; the (F) signifies this. The answering move in the first exchange is performed by a male; the (M) signifies this. A single line across the page signifies a page boundary, the end of an exchange. The second exchange starts under the page boundary on the second layer and consists of an opening move, again an elicitation, an answering move and a follow up move. The final column shows the number of the exchange and under it the functional label is shown, this is the characteristic structure of the act. (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992: 26)

Example table to demonstrate the use of Sinclair and Coulthard’ s analysis of discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening Move (Elicit) (F)</td>
<td>Answering move (M) I think it’s quite good.</td>
<td>1 Elicit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Move (Elicit) (M)</td>
<td>Answering move (F) About two months.</td>
<td>Follow up (M) Wow. That’s a long time</td>
<td>2 Elicit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would like to see whether there is a dominant gender in these conversations or not. If the results show one of the genders initiating a larger proportion of the conversations this would confirm gender inequalities in the conversation. The dominant gender often initiates the conversation. Some men try to be the dominant gender in conversations, by initiating more often than women they control which topic is talked about and how it progresses. Itakura says: “A speaker who makes an initiation… determines what may constitute a relevant response and has the option of maintaining the topic or change to a new topic.” (2001: 1864) If it is found that men initiate more times in the conversations, than this textbook will be gender bias. It should be noted that a follow-up move is not always given. When follow-up moves are given, they are used to show agreement, cooperation and to encourage the other participant to continue talking. McCarthy also says that, ”a follow-up move… may be an act of politeness,” (1991: 16) From research it follows that women should use more follow-up moves.

According to Tannen, an approach proposed in Maltz and borker (1982) focuses on the idea that women and men tend to learn, through socialization, to approach conversational interaction with different goals and to use different verbal strategies in interacting with others. Much evidence suggests that men learn that it is important for them to assert status and to appear a leader in interactions, while women learn to concentrate on using talk in such a way as to establish and maintain harmonious relationships with others. It has been suggested that taking and holding the floor for long periods follows logically from this as a male speech strategy, since this can function as a way of gaining attention and asserting status, while by contrast, being careful not to take up a disproportionate amount of talking time follows logically from the female speech style, since this emphasizes cooperation, support, and equality among interactants. (1993: 285)

I wish to see if this is the case in the main conversations in this book, which if so, would make them gender bias.

5.0 Results

5.1 Occupations

There are eighteen occupations in which forty-three women are represented. These occupations range from traditional jobs carried out by women such as office worker and receptionist, to high esteem jobs such as dentist and architect. There are nineteen occupations in which thirty-four men are represented. The occupations range from shelf packer and office worker to doctor and computer specialist. The kinds of jobs, the variety of jobs and the number of women and men who are represented in these jobs are very even. The writers of this text have managed to give an even portrayal of both sexes in the workplace.

5.2 Names, pronouns and exclusive nouns

There are fifty-two female names given to thirty-seven male names. This is one of the greatest differences between the genders in this book. The number of female pronouns used is one hundred and fifty-nine. Whereas the number of male pronouns used is one hundred and forty-three. Again females have a higher number but this is
very slight. Both female and male exclusive nouns are sixty-four each. Both groups of exclusive nouns are very similar showing little or no gender bias between them.

5.3 Firstness
The order of paired nouns and pronouns is the same with females being represented three times first and males also represented three times first. The writers have chosen not to use just the masculine generic but instead have used a double generic which lets females be represented. The use of the double generic only occurs three times in this book and in all cases the male is represented first. In the case of mixed sex names there are three cases of female names being placed first apposed to one case only of a male name being placed first. Again I feel that the writers of this book have been very fair when it comes to firstness. They have placed very few examples in the book where firstness would become a gender issue, and where they have used pairs of nouns or pronouns, they have distributed it evenly placing females first six times and males first seven times.

5.4 Spoken discourse
I used Sinclair and Coulthard’s analysis of discourse based on classroom interactions for the main conversations in this book. Although this original study was based on classroom interactions it can also be used in more informal conversations as stated by McCarthy, “the Sinclair-Coulthard “Birmingham” model...is useful for describing talk in and out of the classroom;” (1991: 22) As mentioned earlier some males like to dominate conversations and therefore there might be a larger number of conversations started by males. In the fourteen conversations which this discourse analysis was applied to, females started five and males started nine of them, showing that there is some gender bias in the main conversations. But, when we look at the number of moves for initiation, it shows that women made more than men nevertheless, the numbers are more or less even, 34 for females and 32 for males, thus showing that there isn’t any gender bias. Looking at the number of words spoken in initiation there is a difference with men speaking more than women, 334 verses 294, as was expected from my previous research. Follow up moves are used more often by women to show solidarity and encourage the speaker to continue, also as a sign of politeness. As was expected there were more follow-up moves by women, 14 as apposed to 10 for men, showing that these conversations are somewhat gender biased. Finally the number of turns taken by both female and male participants is more or less even, sixty-one for female and sixty for male. This is not what I expected. McCarthy states that “dominant and garrulous speakers often grab too many turns (gender can be a factor here),” (1991: 128), but the writers have again tried to make the conversations as gender even as possible.

6.0 Conclusion
I have looked at early EFL textbooks and have noted that gender bias was a serious issue at that time. I have examined the differences in women’s and men’s speech, especially the way women often speak less than men in mixed sex conversations. Although there are some differences, the authors of this book have managed to represent both sexes fairly evenly in the amount of talk. I researched the use of firstness and found that the authors have represented women first nearly as
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often as men. The spoken discourse is very even with women and men making similar amounts of moves, using similar amounts of words and speaking for similar lengths of time. This book has succeeded in avoiding gender bias and therefore I would recommend it for use in English classrooms. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis says that.

we are not simply passive recorders of what we find around us in language; rather, we impose our ideas on our environment as a result of the language we have. (Goddard and Patterson 2000: 5)

If the students encounter gender types and language such as that in the books researched by Hartman and Judd, then their ideas of the position of females and males in English speaking societies will be vastly different from the truth and their ability in English will be gender bias. By using this gender-even textbook, students can confidently produce sentences which will not be gender offensive.

Appendix 1
A conversation copied from the textbook with Sinclair and Coulthard’s discourse analysis applied to it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit 1C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F: Ooh, it’s cold tonight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Yeah, it is. But actually, I kind of like cold weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: You do? Really?... Boy, there are a lot of people out here tonight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Yeah, it gets pretty crowded on weekends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F: Do you come here a lot?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M: Yeah, I do, actually.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| F: So are you a big hip-hop fan? |
| M: Yeah, I am. Are you? |
| F: Actually, no, but my brother’s in the band tonight. |
| M: Oh, Really? Cool... By the way, my name’s Chris. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focusing Move (Inform) (F) Ooh, it’s cold tonight.</td>
<td>Answering move (M) Yeah, it is. But actually, I kind of like cold weather.</td>
<td>Follow up (F) You do? Really?</td>
<td>1 Inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focusing Move (Inform) (F) Boy, there are a lot of people out here tonight.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Answering move (M) Yeah, it gets pretty crowded on weekends.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow up (M) Oh, Really? Cool...</strong></td>
<td><strong>2 Inform</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening Move (Elicit) (F) Do you come here a lot?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Answering move (M) Yeah, I do, actually.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow up (M) Oh, Really? Cool...</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 Elicit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening Move (Elicit) (F) So are you a big hip-hop fan?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Answering move (M) Yeah, I am.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow up (M) Oh, Really? Cool...</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 Elicit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening Move (Elicit) (M) Are you?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Answering move (F) Actually, no, but my brother’s in the band tonight</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow up (M) Oh, Really? Cool...</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 Elicit</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opening Move (Inform) (M) By the way, my name’s Chris.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Answering move (F) Nice to meet you, I’m Eve.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow up (M) Oh, Really? Cool...</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 Inform</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F: Nice to meet you. I’m Eve.

References


Lakoff, R. (1973) ‘Language and Women’s Place’ Language in society 2: 45-80


US biology textbooks highlighted seven men for every woman scientist. And black women were not represented a single time in any of the works analysed. Based on the current rate, it will be centuries before the books used to teach undergraduate biology in the US match the diversity of their readers, say researchers. The study analysed more than 1,000 scientific names featured in seven modern biology textbooks used to teach undergraduates entering science and medicine in the US. They ranged from historical figures such as Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel to contemporary scientists such as Jane Goodall. Overall, 13% of the scientists featured were women, while 6.7% were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. As a result, text analysis, and therefore textbook analysis, entails close scrutiny of the linguistic, visual or more broadly semiotic choices that have been made to present a particular selection of reality as legitimate. Overwhelmingly, these studies have found an imbalance in the representation of gender roles so that there are overall fewer depictions of women and they are limited to a narrow range of social roles in comparison to men. Therefore, English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks could be expected to incorporate culture into their materials beyond knowledge of British or American customs and aim to develop learners’ broader intercultural competencies (Byram, 1997) as part of language learning.