# AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MANIFESTATION OF SEXISM IN EFL/ESL TEXTBOOKS

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# Abstract

The present study was designed to examine the manifestation of sexism in three EFL/ESL textbook series (*American Headway, Interchange (3rd Ed), and Person to Person*) currently used in Iranian Language Institutes. A critical content analysis was conducted over the text and illustrations of each of the textbook series, based on following items: 1. female and male characters; 2. woman and men portrayal in occupational roles and professional settings; 3. first place occurrences; 4. women and men in social roles; 5. women and men in domestic roles; 6. adjectives used for men and women. The results were collected in terms of the frequency of occurrences of gender-linked concepts and views. The findings indicated that the content of these EFL/ESL textbooks still contained and showed stereotypes of masculinity and feminity, i.e. gender stereotypes. Therefore, the results in general seem convincing enough to this claim that EFL/ESL textbooks currently used in Iranian language institutes still present sexist concepts and attitudes.

# Chapter one: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Introduction

In recent years, one of the major issues in the field of sociolinguistics has been the question of sexism and the relationship between language and sex. Regarding this issue, it appears that many EFL/ESL textbooks show stereotypes of masculinity and feminity (gender stereotypes). These sexist textbooks reinforce sexism in society. According to Wardhaugh (1992, p. 310) "the problem is therefore not so much a linguistic one as a cultural one". McDonough and Shaw (1993, p. 74) state "it is possible that the content of some materials will cause offence to some learners". EFL learners in countries such as Iran should also be aware that, like any living language, English too, constantly undergoes changes. One of the most significant changes in the use of English today is the growing demand for the use of gender-neutral language in communication. An effective communication competence, that is the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences and to pronounce words correctly, is the desired goal for EFL students.

This study attempts to accomplish a critical analysis and evaluation of the manifestation of men and women including sexist concepts, attitudes and values in three current EFL/ESL textbooks (*American Headway, Interchange(3$^{rd}$ ed), and New Person to Person* ) used in Iranian language institutes. This study deals with the way sexism is manifested in English textbooks. Also, it aims at exploring the consequences of conveying sexist attitudes and concepts through developing sexist teaching materials. The main objective of the study is

to conduct an investigation of the manifestation of the sexist attitudes in EFL/ESL textbooks being taught in Iranian language institutes. The researcher attempts to do a study on how sex in a society (social /individual roles of females and males in a society) is displayed in EFL/ESL textbooks by the writers and material developers of these textbooks.

## Chapter two: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

## **The Previous Research on Sexism in ESL/EFL Textbooks**

Many Content Analysis studies of EFL textbooks in the 1970s and 80s showed evidence of gender-linked bias. This Gender-linked bias could be classified in three main senses: exclusion, subordination and distortion, and degradation. For example:

> 1) males were over-represented (e.g. Hellinger, 1980), i.e., exclusion; 2) men tended to occupy both more powerful and a greater range of occupational roles than did women (e.g., Porreca, 1984); both males and females performed gender stereotypical activities (e.g., Cincotta, 1978), i.e., subordination and distortion and 3) women tended to be stereotypically emotional and were more likely than male characters to be the butt of jokes (Hartman and Judd, 1978) and of implied slurs (Talansky, 1986), i.e. degradation.

On the relationship between bias in a textbook and the gender identity, Cincotta (1978, p. 60) stated "it can be seen from the few examples [from a popular French language textbook] how sex-role formation is influenced by the textbooks with which children come into contact during the long years of their formal education."

Hartman and Judd (1978, pp. 384-385) conducted a survey of several TESOL textbooks and found that women suffered from low visibility. They counted the sex-linked proper names, titles or non-generic pronouns and reported in their findings that, in most cases, male references outnumbered the female ones. For example, in one of the books that Hartman and Judd examined, the ratio of male to female references was found to be 63% to 37%. They also demonstrated that women's stereotypical roles were related to housework and childcare. Women's household chores were exemplified by cooking, changing diapers, and doing laundry. Men, on the other hand, were depicted fixing the car, changing electrical bulbs and/or mowing the lawn. In their conclusion they stated that "since sexist usage is built into our language (English), it is little wonder that textbooks, including ESL texts, model this usage to the students"(p. 390) and it "reinforces the second-place status of women and could, with only a little effort, be avoided"(p. 390).

Hellinger (1980) evaluated 131 passages from three ELT textbooks. She reported that male characters participated in over 93% of the passages. Also her study showed that 80% of the speakers were male and female characters were rarely shown in "demanding, interesting, or successful" activities and roles, and men were represented in a high range of occupational roles. She also reported that "presence of intellectual or other achievements of women are ignored, downgraded or described as exceptional."(p. 250)

Porreca (1984) conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis on how sexism is manifested in ESL textbooks over fifteen most widely used ESL texts and collected empirical evidences through investigation of below categories:

1. omission (the ratio of females to males) in texts and illustrations,

2. firstness,

3. occupations,

4. the frequency of male nouns to female nouns,

5. female-exclusive masculine generic constructions,

6. the types and frequency of adjectives for men and women,

She concluded that "there is evidence that sexism continues to flourish in ESL textbooks" (p. 718). Furthermore, She stated 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)

More recent scholars, from early 90's onwards, have criticized EFL/ESL textbooks for their inherent social and cultural bias. Researchers such as Ansary and Babaii (2003), Davoodi (1999), Otlowski (2003), Peterson and Kroner (1992), Poulou (1997), and Sakita (1995) have reported that many EFL/ESL textbooks still contain examples of gender-linked bias, sexism and stereotypical attitudes.

In an examination of gender biases existing in textbooks for psychology and human development, Peterson and Kroner (1992, p. 29) reported 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".

The research conducted by Carroll and Kowitz (1994, p. 69) showed how sexism is overtly present in EFL/ESL texts. Their findings indicated that "male pronouns are more common than female pronouns, ranging from 2.55 – 3.85 to 1". They also concluded that in the 22 adjectives they studied, 18 were used for men, while only 9 were used for women. Only 6 adjectives were used to describe both woman and men.

Sakita (1995) conducted a study over ten textbooks published in Japan written for Japanese junior and senior high school students. This study demonstrated some new dimensions like 'activities and topics', 'sexism resulting from translation' and ' a comparison of textbooks stories to their original versions'.

In 1997, Poulou in an examination on the roles of men and women in dialogs at the level of discourse reported that sexist differences between men and women have negative effects on the pedagogical goals of textbooks.

In an investigation of the current Iranian high school EFL textbooks, Davoodi (1999) reported that 59.48 % of the pictures represented in the textbooks were male and 26.72 % were female.

Aside from the above-mentioned studies of sexism on EFL/ESL textbooks, Babaii and Ansary (2001, p. 8) performed an investigation of presentation of women in Iranian TV advertisements. They concluded that "they 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), also in a study based on ethnic diversity and gender bias in EFL textbooks, conducted an examination on two criteria (a) gender bias (b) ethnic group portrayal. His findings showed that the conversations and illustrations under study" still depict women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society" (p. 50). Otlowski believed that for evaluating the appropriateness of the EFL textbooks his study should find answers to following questions:

1. What textbook should teachers choose?

2. Will it be appropriate for all students?

3. Will the selected textbook fairly represent all the groups that make up the target society?

4. Is the language appropriate for situations and for the students?

Ansary and Babaii (2003) in their study explore manifestation of Subliminal Sexism in two current ESL/EFL Textbook (Right Path to English I & II).

They reported that the roles represented women in textbooks were stereotypical and it just reinforced the outdated bias existing in society towards women. They also added that in the textbooks women appeared less than men and in social activities they were shown more passive than men. In conclusion, they asserted that "women often appeared less visible than men" and "male firstness was prevalent, females were more visible in indoor passive activities and were placed in traditional stereotypical roles"(p. 12).

# Chapter three: METHODOLOGY

the present study investigates the manifestation of sexism in three EFL/ESL textbooks using the models of study applied by Ansary 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). The present study is on the basis of the following items:

1. female and male characters,

2. women and men in professional roles,

3. firstness,

4.  women and men in social roles,

5. women and men in domestic roles,

6. adjectives used for men and women,

## 3.1. Materials

Three ELT textbooks, *Interchange Third Edition, American Headway,* and *New Person to Person,* currently used in Iranian language institutes were selected to serve as the corpus of this investigation. These ELT textbook series are being used widely for Iranian adult and young adult language learners. The rationale behind selecting these ELT textbooks was their popularity among Iranian language centers, language teachers and students. Furthermore, they have been written by the most famous and well-known ESL/EFL textbooks authors such as Jack C. Richards, Liz and John Soars, and so on.

## 3.2. Instrument

In the present study, the textbook analysis was carried out based on content analysis in which stereotypical and sexist concepts were chosen for examination and the number of their frequency (frequency of occurrence) within the text was recorded. According to Weber (1990, p. 89), "**Content analysis** is a research methodology that utilizes a **set of procedures** to make valid inferences from text". This kind of analysis is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts or sets of texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner.

In this study, the illustrations were also observed and examined on the basis of the number of appearance of females/ males and occupational settings and roles displayed by each illustration.

## 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

This study comprises critical analyses over dialogs, exercises, illustrations, reading passages of the selected textbooks, in which a number of different aspects will be taken into consideration. The data collection was carried out by counting words and male/female referring terms. Then, the data analysis was conducted on the basis of frequency of occurrence and also observing each reading passage and conversation. Meanwhile the illustrations related to each reading passage or conversations were examined in terms of stereotypical views of men and women.  To this end, the selected ELT textbooks were examined to determine:

1. the ratio of female to male characters both in texts and illustration,

2. the extent to which the women / men were portrayed in occupational roles both in texts and illustrations and the way they were shown in professional settings,

3. the instances of first place occurrences where both male and female words occur in pairs and one of them comes first,

4. the extent to which men/women were depicted in social and domestic roles,

5. adjectives used for men and women( types and frequency),

## Chapter Four: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

## Findings of Content Analysis

For simplicity, all percentages of the results in this study were rounded to the nearest whole number (by counting fractions of 0.5 and over as a whole number).

## 4.1. Female and male characters

The number of male and female characters in the texts and illustrations of each textbook is respectively indicated in table 4.1. The raw numbers show the number of occurrences and the numbers in parentheses indicate the percentage of male and female characters in both texts and illustration.

Table4. 1. female and male characters and frequency ( texts and illustrations)

| Textbooks | Texts | | | Illustrations | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | Male | Total | Female | Male | Total |
| **American headway** | 2039 (47%) | 2330 (53%) | 4369 | 691 (44%) | 875 (56%) | 1566 |
| **Interchange** | 1259 | 1091 | 2350 | 771 | 887 | 1658 |

|  | (54%) | (46%) |  | (47%) | (53%) |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Person to Person** | 431 (53%) | 380 (47%) | 811 | 180 ( 41%) | 255 (59%) | 435 |
| **Total** | 3729 (50%) | 3801 (50%) | 7530 | 1642 (45%) | 2017 (55%) | 3659 |

## 4.1.1. Female and male characters in texts

As table 4.1 shows, *Interchange* and *Person to Person* are approximately at a reasonable and equal balance level of presenting male and female characters in their texts. *American Headway* has the highest level of representing male characters in its text in comparison to the other two textbooks. The results show that *American Headway* owns the highest level of sexism towards women in manifesting female and male characters in text.

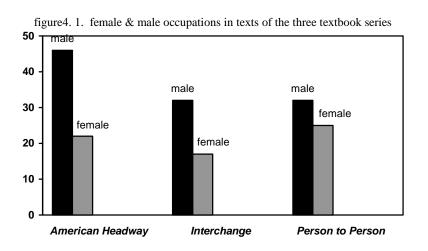## 4.1.2. Female and male characters in illustrations

As we can conclude from above results, *Interchange* among the other textbooks seems to be in a more satisfactory and acceptable level of manifestation of female and male characters in its illustrations and *Person to Person* has the highest level of presenting males in illustrations. *Person to Person* owns the highest level of sexism in illustrations, and *American Headway* stands in the second position, respectively.

As a conclusion, sexism is more obvious in illustrations than texts of the examined EFL/ESL textbooks in terms of manifestation of female and male characters (male to female: 55% to 45%). Ansary and Babaii (2003) in their recent study achieved similar

results. They reported that women often appeared less visible than men. Evidence was also found that English was basically taught through the presentation of male-oriented topics.

## 4.2. Women and men portrayal in occupational roles and professional settings

The analysis of the data is based on the frequency of occurrences of female and male occupational roles in illustrations and texts of the three EFL/ESL textbook series. The numbers mentioned in parentheses show the percentages.

figure4. 1. female & male occupations in texts of the three textbook series
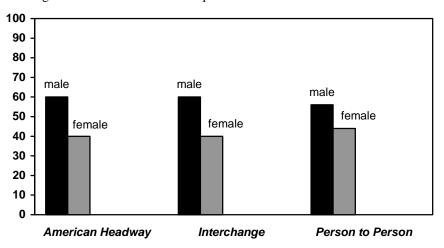
figure4. 2.  female & male occupations in illustrations of the three textbook series



Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show females in fewer occupational roles than males. Also, the achieved findings indicate that, males occupy a large variety of different occupational roles. Previous studies conducted in this regard show the same results (Ansary and Babaii, 2003; Bales, 2002; Florent and Walter, 1989; Gisnet, 1988; Hartman and Judd, 1978; Hellinger, 1980; Porreca, 1984; Renner, 1997; Sunderland, 1994). According to Davoodi (1999), Peterson and Kroner (1992), and Sakita (1995) Sexist portrayals of both men's and women's occupational roles in teaching materials reinforce gender biases in society.

## 4. 3. First place occurrences

Firstness refers to pairs of words where both male and female words occur in pairs and one of them comes first. These pairs can be pairs of pronouns (he and she, him and her, etc), pairs of nouns (uncle and aunt, mother and father, Maria and john, etc) and titles such as Mr. and Mrs. Lennon and so on.

Table 4.2. first place occurrences

| Text Books | Males first | Females first | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| American Headway | 162 (70%) | 70 (30 %) | 232 |
| Interchange | 90 (73 %) | 34 (27 %) | 124 |
| Person to Person | 141 (92%) | 12 (8 %) | 153 |

As indicated in table 4.2, the three EFL/ESL textbooks series were investigated in terms of firstness and the order of appearance. The much higher frequency of male firstness in *Person to Person* is attributable to the use of alternative pronouns to include both males and females, such as *he and she, he/she, his or her, his / her, him/her,* etc. The findings show a much higher tendency for males to be appeared and mentioned first.

Above figures show that *Person to Person* has the highest ration of male to female firstness. The extracted results indicate that, while current EFL/ESL textbook writers are conscious in representing females in the works, they often ignore the significance of the order mention in order to reverse the second-place status of females.

## 4. 4. Women and men in social roles

This study examined the different social roles played by females and males in texts. According to Law and Chan (2004), the social roles are divided into five major categories:

1. male-monopolized (performed by men only)

2. male-dominated (largely performed by men)

3. female-monopolized (performed by women only)

4. female dominated (largely performed by women)

5. gender-shared (performed by men & women equally)

Table 4.3. women and men in Social Roles

| SOCIAL ROLES | American Headway | Interchange | Person to Person |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Male-monopolized** | 148  (45 %) | 119  (38%) | 37  (35%) |
| **Male-dominated** | 13   (4%) | 39   (13%) | 15   (14%) |
| **Female-monopolized** | 58   (18%) | 68   (22%) | 10   (10%) |
| **Female dominated** | 17   (9%) | 24   (8%) | 8   (8%) |
| **Gender-shared** | 93   (28%) | 61   (20%) | 35   (33%) |
| **TOTAL** | 329 | 311 | 105 |

Table 4.3 indicates that men have a higher and wider range of social roles in the 'male-monopolized' category in the three textbook series; 45% for *American Headway,* 38% for *interchange* and finally 35% for *Person to person.* The corresponding figures for ' female-monopolized ' category are 18% (*American Headway*), 22% (*interchange*) and 10% (*Person to person*). These figures show that females play a more limited range of social roles than males in the three EFL/ ESL textbook series. Also, the findings suggest the perpetuation of stereotypical roles for both women and men in society. For example, females occupy such social roles as *student, secretary, nurse, teacher, etc*. Likewise, males tend to occupy social roles ranging from the lower ranking roles of being *robber, driver, farmer worker, security guard,* to the higher ranking roles of being *professor, lawyer, pilot,*

*manager, pharmacist, etc*. Meanwhile, males enjoy a more varied range of occupations than females.

## 4.5. Women and men in domestic roles

In this section of the present study, the three textbook series have been analysis in terms of men's and women's domestic roles.

Table 4.4. women and men in Domestic Roles

| AMERICAN HEADWAY | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Domestic roles | Female | Domestic roles | Male |
| 1 | Mother/mom | 75 | Father/daddy | 55 |
| 2 | Wife | 27 | Husband | 30 |
| 3 | Sister | 47 | Brother | 55 |
| 4 | Daughter | 27 | Son | 17 |
| 5 | Grand mother | 12 | Grand father | 11 |
| 6 | Granddaughter | 3 | Grandson | 3 |
| 7 | Niece | 0 | Nephew | 1 |
| 8 | Aunt | 20 | Uncle | 10 |
| INTERCHANGE | | | | |
| | Domestic roles | female | Domestic roles | Male |
| 1 | Mother/mom | 28 | Father/daddy | 16 |
| 2 | Wife | 5 | Husband | 6 |
| 3 | Sister | 29 | Brother | 37 |
| 4 | Daughter | 3 | Son | 6 |
| 5 | Grand mother | 2 | Grand father | 1 |
| 6 | Niece | 1 | Nephew | 4 |
| 7 | Aunt | 2 | Uncle | 1 |
| 8 | Sister-in-law | 1 | Brother-in-law | 0 |
| 9 | Bride | 5 | Bridegroom | 5 |
| PERSON TO PERSON | | | | |
| | Domestic roles | Female | Domestic roles | Male |
| 1 | Mother/mom | 4 | Father/daddy | 6 |
| 2 | Wife | 12 | Husband | 7 |
| 3 | Sister | 8 | Brother | 11 |

| 4 | Daughter | 11 | Son | 7 |
| 5 | Grand mother | 3 | Grand father | 1 |
| 6 | Granddaughter | 1 | Grandson | 1 |
| 7 | Niece | 1 | Nephew | 3 |
| 8 | Aunt | 2 | Uncle | 6 |

As indicated in table 4.4, both females and males are shown with such traditionally domestic roles as *mother and father, wife and husband, brother and sister, son and daughter, uncle and aunt, etc.* Thus, women are mainly engaging in domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, and doing such things is rarely found in men. This portrayal of women in such stereotypical roles only reinforces and perpetuates the traditional view that women must stay at home and men only go out to work (Otlowski, 2003; Pierce, 1995)

## 4.6. Adjectives used for females and male

The type and frequency of adjectives mentions in the text of each of EFL/ESL textbook series were examined. The results are indicated in tables 4.5.

Table 4.5. adjectives used in three textbook series

| TEXTBOOK | FEMALE | MALE | GENDER SHARED |
|---|---|---|---|
| AMERICAN HEADWAY | 31 (28%) | 52 (46%) | 29 (26%) |
| INTERCHANGE | 34 (33%) | 31 (30%) | 38 (37%) |
| PERSON TO PERSON | 13 (35%) | 14 (38%) | 10 (27 %) |

*American Headway* can be considered as a sexist textbook in terms of adjectives used to describe females. The adjectives used about females are mainly reinforcing the stereotyped

attitudes about women in the society. Meanwhile, the number of females' adjectives is evidently less than that of males (28% to 46%).

The frequency of adjectives used for males and females in *Interchange* seems to be approximately equal. However, the type of adjectives used to describe females like *American Headway* perpetuate the traditional and stereotypical views about females e.g., *supportive, perfect, talkative, attractive, mysterious*, etc. Meantime, a large number of adjectives are used to describe the females' appearance. These adjectives are *gorgeous, attractive, wonderful, fascinating, pretty, thin, tall heavy, short.*

As the results indicate, females' and males' adjectives in *Person to Person* are approximately equal in number. Considering the first two EFL/ ESL textbook series, however, Person *to Person* seems to have a low variety of adjectives used to describe both sexes. Like the first two textbook series, there are many adjectives used to describe the females' appearance.

## Chapter Five: CONCLUSION

## 5.1. Conclusion

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 three

current EFL/ESL textbooks (*American Headway, Interchange(3rd ed), and New Person to Person* ) used in Iranian language institutes.

According to the subject of the present study, content analysis was applied in accomplishing this work. Meanwhile, the present study was conducted according to models of study used by Ansary 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).

Considering the extracted results, we can claim that, the content of current EFL/ESL textbooks still presents sexist views and stereotypical attitudes about females and males. These sexist concepts manifested in EFL/ESL textbooks can strengthen and reinforce the gender-linked bias in society. It is hoped that this thesis has contrived and contributed to a better understanding of sexism and its manifestation in our current EFL/ESL textbooks.

## 5.2. Limitations

Unfortunately in Iran, little attention has been paid to manifestation of sexism in language teaching materials especially in English teaching textbooks. Thus, it was difficult to find domestic works and records done in this regard. The present study was confined to three EFL/ESL textbook series and the results cannot be expanded to other available EFL/ESL textbooks.

## 5.3. Suggestions for further study

1. This investigation was only carried out over the texts & illustrations of textbooks without considering the related book cassettes/ CDs of each of textbook series.

2. There is a need to investigate and determine whether there have been changes in the nature of manifestation of sexism in EFL/ ESL textbooks used in Iran over the past decade. This study can be done in the form of a comparison between earlier EFL/ ESL textbooks and recent EFL/ ESL textbooks.

3. Considering the recent changes in providing language teaching materials in the forms of computer softwares, CDs, online sources and so on, there is also a need to study these learning/educational sources in terms of manifestation of sexist attitudes.

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