Gendered Word (or World): Sexism in Philippine Preschool English Language Textbooks

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Abstract

Adhering to the notion that language learning is necessarily a culture-learning process, this paper explores the issue of sexism in six Philippine preschool English language textbooks. The study adopts the qualitative-quantitative approach in examining the following categories: gender visibility (illustrations), "firstness," occupational-role representations, character attributes, and interests and lifestyles. Data reveal that the textbooks seem to feature both genders; still, the males appeared more frequently than females in the illustrations of the textbooks. In terms of "firstness," males appear before females more often; this could imply that the textbooks seem to favour males, thus, appearing to be sexist. Also, females are far less visible than men in occupational roles. The occupational roles for females are less diverse and are restricted to stereotypical types of occupation/profession while male occupations show a wider range, thus, providing them with more options than females. Moreover, about the same number of character attributes is allocated to both genders. Females are usually attributed with their "good" looks and passivity; by contrast, males show aggression, dominance, and activity. In the textbooks analysed, the number of interests and lifestyles of females is higher than those of males. However, the females are more particularly represented in indoor activities, i.e., household chores. This paper likewise discusses the implications of the findings for language teaching and learning.

Introduction

There was a time when learning to play sex roles was so much a part of growing up that no one regarded it as a problem. There were culturally approved and prescribed ways for boys and girls to think, to act, and to feel (Myers, 2005). As children passed from babyhood to childhood to adolescence and finally to adulthood, they learned to play these prescribed roles as well as everything else that was considered necessary for a successful adjustment to the pattern of life for their age levels. By the time they reached childhood, they knew exactly the pattern of life that would be for them − the girls would be a good wife and a mother, the boys would be a responsible husband and a father.

People are classified in different ways, yet the easiest and oldest way is to categorize them into man or woman. For the longest time, stereotypes have developed about genders, such as approved appearance (e.g., body build, facial features, and clothes), patterns of behaviour, speech and ways to express feelings and emotions, means to earn a living, and many other qualities. Once formed, these stereotypes act as standards by which each individual is judged by members of the social group to be gender appropriate or inappropriate. Since the time of Adam, man has enjoyed an elevated position in the home, in the workplace, and in society while the woman has been viewed as a mere housekeeper, proud of her man's success outside the home. The woman's place is the home; the man's place is the board room.

As true to all stereotypes, sex-role stereotypes were not built overnight. As new facts were added to the stereotypes based on what members of the social group believed to be true about the differences of the sexes, beliefs about approved patterns of behaviour for the two sexes covered more

and more aspects of their lives. For instance, in the area of appearance, there are approved patterns for grooming, hairstyles, and clothing for the two sexes. Clothes that symbolize abilities to do things are regarded as appropriate for males and those that symbolize dependency − inability to walk long distances because of high heels, or engage in hard work because of fragile clothes − are approved for females. From earliest babyhood, play materials and play activities are different for the two sexes. There are boys' toys and girls' toys, boys' books and girls' books, boys' games and girls' games, and the like.

Even when children of both sexes are educated in the same schools, certain school subjects are regarded as more appropriate for one sex than for the other. Hurlock (2001) cites in her book *Developmental Psychology* that boys are encouraged to concentrate on the sciences and mathematics while girls are expected to be more knowledgeable on languages and the arts. In the area of emotions, it is assumed that girls are more emotional than boys; boys, on the other hand, are more emotionally composed. Boys are also more associated with unpleasant emotions like anger and fear while girls are stereotyped to have pleasant emotions like affection and joy. Hurlock (2001) adds that the typical feminine personality is often geared toward passivity, dependency, and compliance. In contrast, the typical masculine personality pattern is that which shows aggression, dominance, and activity.

Gender stereotypes are not only seen in the actions and expectations of parents, teachers, and peers in the society but are also magnified in language, literature, and fiction. According to Macaulay (1996):

> Such stereotypes are often reinforced in fiction. Since little information about the prosodic features is contained in the normal writing system, novelists frequently try to indicate the tone of voice by descriptive verbs and adjectives to introduce dialogues. An examination of several novels revealed an interesting difference between the expression of men's and women's speech. (p. 436)

Table 1: Descriptive introductions used in dialogues of men and women in novels.

Men	Women
said firmly	said quietly
said bluntly	asked innocently
said coldly	echoed obediently
said smugly	said loyally
urged	offered humbly
burst forth	whispered
demanded aggressively	asked mildly
said challengingly	agreed placidly
cried furiously	smiled complacently
grumbled	fumbled on
exclaimed contemptuously	implored
cried portentously	pleaded

English, like any other language used by a particular culture, is telltale evidence of the values and beliefs of that culture.

Sexism in English is perceived in its vocabulary and its grammar. Here are some examples:
- Generic masculine pronoun (Every student has to submit *his* project.);
- Word connotations (*call boy*, call actors before they go on the stage versus *call girl*, a prostitute; *woman* with sexual connotations as in "She's his woman");
- Masculine-derived expressions like "manning the space shuttle," "manning the phones," "sportsmanship," "penmanship," and "doing a man-sized job";
- Masculine word first (Mr. and Mrs., boys and girls, his and hers, guys and dolls, he or she);
- Compelling women to define themselves as "Miss" or "Mrs."; and
- Using negative words for sexually expressive women but not for sexually expressive men (bitch, harlot, tart, whore, slut versus stud or male prostitute).

In the traditional language classroom, students have been oriented to use masculine nouns and pronouns in cases when the gender of a subject is unclear or unidentifiable, or when a group they refer is composed of both males and females. However, in the past decades, a great change has taken place in the lives of women. This upheaval liberated the woman who has been chained to the kitchen sink for years. It sent her out of the home where she was a mere housewife and babysitter. She still attends to her domestic chores, but she now has a career to balance her old responsibilities. Many working mothers double as government officials, journalists, social development workers, engineers, and the like. Nowadays, more and more women take on roles previously perceived for men only. This reality influenced how writers, teachers, and students have reconsidered ways in expressing gender identities and relationships. According to The Writing Center of the University of North Carolina (2012), "writers today must think more carefully about the ways they express gender in order to convey their ideas clearly and accurately to their readers" (para 1). Thus, this allows for the use of more "creative" (emphasis, mine), gender-sensitive or gender-neutral expressions, such as *person* or *individual* (man), *first-year student* (freshman), *people* or *humanity* (mankind), *artificial* or *machine-made* (man-made), *postal worker* or *mail carrier* (mail man), and *chair* or *chairperson* (chairman).

Research on linguistic sexism and gender-role stereotyping has shown that there is a strong gender bias in textbooks (Malik & Ayaz, 2010; Bahiyah Abdul Hamid, Mohd. Subakir, Kesumawati Abu Bakar, Yuen Chee Keong & Azhar Jaludin, 2008; Saeed Paivandi, 2008; Liew, 2007; Blumberg, 2007; Otlowski, 2003). In an attempt to address the issue of how school textbooks instill sexism and sex-role stereotyping at a young age, Bahiyah et al. (2008) found that females are still depicted as playing a supporting role to males. Males are depicted as more active than females, and females are associated with stereotypical gentle roles; thus, the gender representations do not mirror the changing realities of the Malaysian society at present.

In 2003, Otlowski explored gender bias as reflected in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks in Japan to emphasize the importance of textbook selection for EFL students with regard to gender representation in a specific culture. In most cases, he found that in EFL textbooks, women are stereotyped as mothers and homemakers. The study also found that the conversations and illustrations in the textbooks do not mirror the current roles of women in their society, thus, still depicting the stereotypes of man and woman. Sexism seems to be found in English grammar as well. Macaulay and Brice (1997), for instance, analyzed a grammar reference book and discovered that females appeared slightly more often as direct objects (43%) than as subjects (41%) while males appeared much more often as subjects (84%); hence, gender bias and stereotyping appears to be prevalent in syntax textbooks.

Adhering to the notion that language learning is necessarily a culture-learning process, this paper explores the issue of sexism in six preschool English language textbooks published in the Philippines. The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:
1. How is sexism portrayed in the local preschool English language textbooks based on the following categories: gender visibility (illustrations), "firstness," occupational-role representations, character attributes, and interests and lifestyles?; and
2. What are the implications of these findings about sexism in textbooks on language teaching and learning?

Theoretical Framework

Apparently, language sets the stage for the development of self-conscious behavior and thought. Through language, people conceptualize their ideas and feelings about the world around them. Language allows humans to make sense of objects, events, and other people in the environment; thus, language is a mechanism through which people perceive the world (Sapir, 1949 as cited in Montgomery, 1995).

How does language promote certain points of view or versions of reality? According to Halliday (1994), people represent the world through language by choosing words that represent people, things, or concepts. Words are never neutral; they always represent the world in a certain way, and for this reason, language always, to some degree, promote a particular *ideology*.

As children read, they are exposed to the cultural symbols contained in the textbooks. This proves that language learning is necessarily a culture-learning process. Children's books are a microcosm of ideologies, values, and beliefs from the dominant culture, including gender ideologies and scripts. Learning to read forms part of the socialization process and of a mechanism through which culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Although language plays a critical role in the socialization of children, it can also be "a primary factor through which gender biases are explicitly and implicitly perpetuated" (McClure, 1992, p. 39). In support of this belief, Kabira and Masinjila (1997 as cited in Sydney, 2004) argues:

> …writers of textbooks create a human world in which children learn about what people do and how they relate to one another. It is this second part of humanizing effect of textbooks that if not handled carefully could lead to the discrimination of some categories of learners and in this case a discrimination that is based on gender role stereotyping (p. 13).

As early as age four, children begin to understand gender as a basic component of the self. Literature affirms that many masculine and feminine characteristics are not biologically programmed at all; they are acquired. For instance, the gender schema theory explains that youngsters develop a sense of femaleness and maleness based on gender stereotypes and adapt and adjust their behaviour around them (Bem, 1981; Eagly & Wood, 1999). Thus, children's books may be a source of gender stereotypes that children use to organize gendered behaviour.

Method

The study used the qualitative-quantitative approach in examining the sexism issues and concerns depicted in six locally published preschool English language textbooks (i.e., nursery, kindergarten, and preparatory) in 2011 by two publishing houses. Since the study dealt with the delicate issue of sexism in textbooks and based on an agreement, the anonymity of the two publishing houses was assured. Bahaya et al. (2008) stressed that textbooks play a critical role in the formation of cultural and social values as far as gender relation is concerned; therefore, it is important for the researcher to investigate the textbooks used for the preschool level. A detailed content analysis was done to identify and examine the contents and the language used to show the occurrences of sexism and sex-role stereotyping in the corpora. The following categories were covered in the analysis: gender visibility (illustrations), "firstness," occupational-role representations, character attributes, and interests and lifestyles. Two independent coders were asked to code one-third of the study corpora.

Results and Discussion

The first aspect of sexism examined in the textbook is gender visibility, and the study conducted an analysis of the gender representation in terms of the number of female/male characters. For instance, when females do not appear more often than males in the text (as well as in the illustrations that reinforce the text), the implied message is that women seem to be not that important enough to be included.

Table 2: Number of female/male characters illustrated in the textbooks.

Gender	Number of Characters	%
Female	935	49.16
Male	967	50.84
Total	**1,902**	**100.00**

The total number of female and male characters is 1,902; 935 of whom are female (49.16%) and 967 are male (50.84). The textbooks, thus, seem to feature both genders, with a slight margin or difference of 1.68%. Still, the males appeared more frequently than females in the illustrations of the textbooks.

Another aspect of sexism investigated in the textbooks is termed "firstness" or masculine-word first, such as *boys and* girls, *his and* hers, *guys and* dolls, and *he or* she. Hartman and Judd (1978) examined the order of mentioning of two nouns paired for sex, such as *Mr.* and *Mrs.*, *brother* and

sister, and *husband* and *wife*, and discovered that the masculine word always comes first. They argue that "such automatic ordering reinforces the second-place status of women…" (p. 390). In addition, when a male and a female are mentioned, the male is almost always put first (There is no real reason to say "John and Mary" when "Mary and John" would convey the same message.).

To further explore this issue, the present study analysed the instances in the textbooks in which two genders are mentioned together in tandem and checked which appears first.

Table 3: Gender "firstness" in the textbooks.

Gender	Number of Characters	%
Female	35	42.68
Male	47	57.32
Total	**82**	**100.00**

In terms of "firstness," males appear before females more often (M:F=47:35), with a difference of 14.64%. This could imply that the textbooks seem to favour males, thus, appearing to be sexist.

The following are examples of the "firstness" issue: Dialogue: [Enzo and Bel are talking to each other, telling something about themselves.]

Hello! My name is Enzo Cruz. I am five years old. I study at Divine Light Academy. I am in Kinder, section Hope.

I am glad to meet you. I am Bel Perez. I am five years old. I study at Joy Learning Centre. I am in Kinder, section Faith.

A poem – "I Love Them All"
Father, strong and tall,
Mother, sweet and prayerful,
Brother, bright and helpful,
Sister, caring and beautiful,
Baby, cute and playful
My happy family,
I love them all.

 (A grammar lesson)
Remember
Father, mother, brother, sister, and baby are names of persons. Names of persons are nouns.
Sample sentences for the lesson on pronouns:
Father, mother, and I go to the mall.
The janitor (picture of a male) and the street sweeper (picture of a female) keep places clean.

A chant: "Tomorrow, Tomorrow" (for the lesson on future tense of actions words)
Boys: When I grow up,
          I will work hard.
          I will be good
          Just like my dad.

Girls: When I grow up,
          I will be charming
          I will be pretty.
          I will be caring.

Boys: When I grow old,
          I will have grandbabies.

We will play in the yard.
I will tell them stories.

Girls:　　When I grow old,
I will have grandbabies.
I will teach them to darn
And bake them some cookies.

Table 4: Occupational-role representations of females and males in the textbooks.

Female	**Male**
teacher, nurse, street sweeper, housekeeper, school principal, librarian, storekeeper, office worker, dressmaker, pharmacist, market vendor, beautician, baker, policewoman	driver, teacher, baker, barber, doctor, policeman, fireman, dentist, priest, janitor, mailman, school principal, nurse, carpenter, plumber, security guard, garbage collector, market vendor, shoemaker, farmer, writer, politician, office worker, butcher, fishermen
Total: 14	**Total: 25**

Another reflection of sexism in textbooks is the portrayal of males and females in occupational roles. Females are far less visible than men in occupational roles. In the textbooks analysed, the number of occupations allocated for males is higher than those of females (F:M =14:25). The occupational roles for females are less diverse and are restricted to stereotypical types of occupation/profession while male occupations show a wider range, thus, providing them with more options than females. Likewise, the males seem to be associated with more-paying and high-status jobs than females. Occupations for females are often restricted to service jobs, such as housekeeper, office worker, dressmaker, market vendor, beautician, and nurse, occasionally including a token professional job, such as school principal or policewoman.

Nair (2009), in his content analysis of gender representation in Malaysian children's literature, found that male characters are more likely to be portrayed as belonging to positions associated with the upper-class society, like kings and princes. Males are more frequently appropriated with prominent positions of authority and power than female characters.

Table 5: Character attributes of females and males in the textbooks.

Female	**Male**
kind, pretty, happy, sad, tall, short, beautiful, quiet, graceful, slim, stout, neat, lovely/lovable, polite, cheerful, charming, caring	busy, handsome, sad, mad, tall, short, stout, thin, young, cute, friendly, neat/tidy, strong, good
Total: 17	**Total: 14**

About the same number of character attributes is allocated to both genders (F:M = 17:14). Females are usually attributed with their "good" looks and passivity, such as pretty, beautiful, lovely/lovable, charming, graceful, quiet, polite, and caring. Although males are characterized as handsome and cute, by contrast, they show aggression, dominance, and activity, with attributions like busy, mad, and strong.

Ernst (1995) in his book *Gender issues in books for children and young adults* describe girls and females as sweet, naïve, conforming, and dependent.

In the textbooks analysed, the number of interests and lifestyles of females is higher than those of males (F:M = 16:12). However, the females are more particularly represented in indoor activities, i.e., household chores. Women cook, bake, clean, polish, mend, sew, and wash. If men are assigned household tasks at all, they consist, without exception, of painting, gardening, repairing malfunctioning appliances or automobiles, or taking out the garbage. This confirms Walters's (1985) findings on gender roles in the media. He found that men are likely to be advertising a car or a brand company whereas women are mainly shown as housewives and mothers. Men are likely to be shown outdoors in a suit and in business settings while women are seen wearing aprons in household settings.

Table 6: Interests and lifestyles of females and males in the textbooks.

Female	Male
play in the community, help in the community, sing, read, go to the school library, write in school, listen in school, dance, pray, wash clothes, cook/bake, sweep the floor, brushing her hair, arranges the tables and chairs, reads stories to children, sew/darn dresses	play basketball, jog, swim, clean in the community, drive a motorcycle/car, go to the school library, read in school, colour, write, water the plants, watch TV (a basketball game), saw a wood, go to office
Total: 16	**Total: 12**

Conclusion

According to Fromkin and Rodman (1993, as cited in Bahiyah et al., 2008), "language reflects sexism in the society. Language itself is not sexist… but it can connote sexist attitudes as well as attitudes about social taboos and racism" (p. 306) Therefore, it is clear that language is not neutral; it is moulded and influenced by cultural norms and perceptions of people about how the world should be seen.

The local preschool English language textbooks analysed in the study revealed linguistic features and symbols that are sexist. Gender bias mirrored males as more dominant than females, i.e., the males appeared more frequently than females in the illustrations of the textbooks; in terms of "firstness," males appear before females more often; females are far less visible than men in occupational roles, and males seem to be associated with more-paying and high-status jobs than females; and females are usually attributed with their "good" looks and passivity while males are attributed with strength and aggression.

Pedagogical implications arise from the study. One is the crucial role of the teacher in preventing gender discrimination from sneaking into the classroom. Although the analysed textbooks revealed gender biases, the teacher could deal with such issues more appropriately in the classroom. For example, when constructing sentences for illustrations of a lesson, they should review their own writings (and pictures) for the sexual attitudes they depict. In textbook writing, these questions may be considered:
• Are remarks, especially those demeaning to sex as a class, avoided?;
• Are both men and women shown in a variety of roles, e.g., are men shown with children doing dishes, cooking a meal, and the like?;
• Are women depicted as strong and active, not just pretty and affectionate?; and
• Are sex-linked or sexist terms, such as *poetess*, *janitress, lady lawyer*, and *policewoman* avoided?

Studies on sexism in textbooks can help language teachers in choosing their teaching materials. Although linguistic contents is a prime consideration, the potential effects of explicit and implicit sexism in textbooks should not be underestimated, for it can influence the development of learners. Finally, since one goal of teaching English is to help learners gain personal control over language in

the eventual fulfillment of their potentials, then the teacher should always be sensitive and cautious of sexism and gender bias in the learning environment.

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