

Topics in EFL Textbooks and the Question of Gender Dominance: A Case Study from Public Schools of Jordan

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of male and female characters in controlling conversational units in Action Pack Series. Such textbooks are assigned to basic stages in public schools in Jordan, namely, grade one to nine. It attempts to analyze the content of each unit in each textbook guided by certain guidelines to decide who dominate the units. Then, it proceeds to analyze each stage book and calculate the frequencies and percentages of gender dominance followed by a discussion and some pedagogical implications to reduce gender bias in EFL instructional materials.

Key words: *gender, control, conversational topics, frequency, percentage*

Introduction

Hellinger (1980) found that male participated in over 93% of the passages with the percentage of 80%. Kalia (1986) showed a study in which EFL texts have been examined in India. It revealed that males were incompatible. They guided 75% of the dialogues as compared to female.

Jones and Sunderland (1997, p. 8) have said that the "text book carries a unique authority which is created and maintained through its texts....these are understood as the legitimate version of a society's sound knowledge". Following such saying, the aspect of gender topic control was looked at as a major indicator in deciding gender- fairness representation. Their findings showed that "John" was the male who always initiating the dialogue; however, "Sally" as a female always complying with the act with shorter responses. It was interesting to notice that John's utterances were also longer than Sally's.

Farooq (1999) analyzed Japanese EFL texts used by junior college students and argued that males were always initiating the dialogues. As far as the length of utterances, number of utterances, and average of utterances are concerned. It was evident that male speakers scored 61%, 51%, and 60 as compared to female speakers who scored 39%, 49% and 40% for the given items respectively. In each dialogue males were found to be dominant as they talk more than women.

Ansary and Babaii (2003) and Sivasligil (2006) paid maximum attention to the length of utterance related to the question of male and female dominance. They counted the number of turns in dialogues and they discovered that the male gender has the control in initiating conversations.

Babaii and Ansary (2003) made an experiment on secondary Iranian EFL textbooks and illustrated that males were present in 67% of the topics as compared to females.

Sivasligil (2006) conducted a study for the 7th grade Turkish EFL text book. He argued that males uttered (262) turns out of (397) while females did only (135) out of the same number in a percentage of (26%) less than males. However, another experiment has been conducted on 8th grade course book and he found that out of the total (190) turns of conversations (84) turns were spoken by females with percentage of (44%) and (106) turns were spoken by male characters i.e., (56%).

In short, all studies reveal that EFL text books conversational topics were guided and dominated by male characters.

It is evident that none of the above experiments have been conducted in Jordan. The studies show that the male characters always the dominant in the conversational topics. The researchers find out that this pattern of dominance may cause a problem to EFL in Jordan as it is bias to male side; therefore, both roles are to be checked carefully with fairness.

The Study

The objective of our study is to examine accurately the dominance of gender in conversational topics, mainly, dialogues and comprehension passages in Action Pack Series textbooks which are offered to preparatory and elementary students in schools of Jordan. To achieve proper answers, the researchers propose the following question: Which specific sex dominates maximally the conversational topics in EFL used in the series?

Since 1998, Ministry of Education in Jordan has introduced English language as a school subject from grade one; Action Pack Series were selected to be compulsory textbooks from grade one to nine. The researchers are restricted to analyze merely the pupil's book. Each one might consist of 12- 16 units which are to be taught in two semester's time.

Unit Content analysis is based on tables which comprises of the number of units and their dominant character in each textbook. Then, the researchers calculate the frequencies and percentages of unit dominants in each textbook from grade one to nine. The content of dialogues and reading passages are to be analyzed in a qualitative manner to determine the dominant character i.e. male or female of the target theme on the basis of the following criteria: (i) who starts speech in mixed- gender dialogue and in pair work practice?, (ii) what is the length of talk and the number of speech turns? and (iii) who is the main character in the dialogue and the reading passage? Main characters who guide the dialogues and reading passages are meant to solve the problem of the plot.

Analysis and results

Grade one has (14) units in which Miss Majeda, the teacher, is the main female character and so she is considered to be the dominant of the most topics. Grade two has (16) units in which males are the dominant. Male kids are the primary characters. Grade three has (16) units in which Miss Fatima is the dominant character. Grade four comprises of (18) units in which professor X is the female dominant person. Grade five has (16) units. In it, Mr. Yoshiko, Tu, Robinson, Jack and Silvio are the male dominant characters. Grade six consists of (16) units in which the male characters Adam, Sami, Ramzi and John are the dominant. Grade seven has (12) units in which the characters Ahmed, Al-Idrisi, da Vinci, Issa, Ulugh Beg and Einstein and Mahfouz are taken as specimens to be as the dominant. Grade eight consists of (12) units in which there are (6) dialogues entitled with "the boy from the past" shows male dominance out of the title; the other (6) comprehensions are divided by both sexes. The last grade has (12) units in which (5) episodes entitled with "The buried city" are totally dominated by male characters.

The content analysis of the nine text books is summarized in the following tables.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of gender unit dominance in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Grade pupils' books

Pupils' Book	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	6	33%	12	67%	18	100%
2	14	82%	3	18%	17	100%
3	5	31%	11	69%	16	100%
Total	25	49%	26	51%	51	100%

Table (1) presents the results of male-female unit dominance in dialogues and reading passages. Pupils' book grade one, illustrates that out of eighteen units, six are dominated by males and they score 33%; while, twelve units are dominated by females scoring the percentage of 67%. Hence, the female dominance is swollen. In the second grade, males dominate fourteen units out of seventeen with the percentage of 82%; but, females do only three units with the percentage of (18%). This stage shows male dominance very clearly. In the third grade, five out of sixteen are dominated by males who are scoring 31%; however, eleven units are controlled by females scoring the percentage of 69%. A female dominance in this grade is obvious.

In short, the three books which represent the pre-intermediate basic stage illustrates that male dominate twenty-five units out of fifty-one scoring the percentage of 49%; while, females dominate twenty-six units out of the same number scoring the percentage of 51%.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of gender unit dominance in the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades

Pupils' Book	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
4	3	19%	13	81%	16	100%
5	3	19%	13	81%	16	100%
6	11	69%	5	31%	16	100%
Total	17	35%	31	65%	48	100%

In table (2), the fourth grade illustrates that males dominate merely three units out of sixteen; they score the percentage of 19%; however, females show dominance over thirteen units with the percentage 81%. Thus, female supersedes male in this grade. In the fifth grade, three units out of sixteen are dominated by males while thirteen topics are dominated by female. The former score the percentage of 19% and the latter scores 81%; thus, it shows female dominance. In the sixth grade, out of sixteen units, males dominate eleven ones and have the percentage of 69%; while, females dominate five units and carry the percentage of 31%; hence, this grade shows male dominance.

In short, the three books which represent the intermediate basic stage show that males dominate seventeen units out of forty- eight with the percentage 35%; but, females dominate thirty-one topics with the percentage 65%.

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of gender unit dominance in the 7th, 8th, and 9th Grades

Pupils' Book	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
7	10	83%	2	17%	12	100%
8	10	83%	2	17%	12	100%
9	11	92%	1	8%	12	100%
Total	30	86%	5	14%	35	100%

Table (3) above shows that, in the seventh grade, males dominate ten units out of twelve but females dominate only two units; the former scores the percentage of 83% but the latter scores the percentage of 17%. Eighth grade also indicates male dominance in the sense that males dominate nine units out of eleven with the percentage 83%; but, females dominate only two units of the same number with the percentage 17%. Likewise in grade nine, eleven units out of twelve are dominated by males with the percentage 92%; while, females dominate merely one unit with the percentage 8%

In short, the three books which represent the upper basic stage show that males dominate thirty units out of thirty-five with the percentage 86%; but, females dominate five units with the percentage 14%.

Table 4 contains the distribution of gender unit dominance in Pupils' Books from grade one to nine

Pupils' Books	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1-9	72	54%	62	46%	134	100%

The table (4) shows that the male's frequency is seventy-two times with the percentage 54% as compared to the female's sixty-two with the percentage 46%. It is evident that female characters have less 8% score than male. This study confirms male dominance.

In summary, Grade one shows female's dominance as compared to male. Such results are justified because the main character in the units is the female teacher, Miss Majeda. In grade two, the researchers have noticed an opposite shift in the gender even though the characters and the settings are the same. Males dominate fourteen units out of seventeen; while, females dominate three ones. In grade three, males dominated five units out of sixteen; while, females dominate eleven ones. It is interesting to mention that the teacher who is the main character in book three is Miss Fatima. The three books present female's dominance over male in the sense that females score 51% as compared to male 49%. This result indicates a numerical gender balanced representation.

The intermediate stage, which contains grade four, five, and six, shows females preference. They score the percentage of 65% as compared to 35% of males'. Among the series, book six is the only book that shows male preference. The upper stage contains grade seven, eight, and nine. It shows males dominance. They score 86% as compared to 14% of females.

The final result of the discussion is that male score 54% but female 46%.

Males dominate seventy-two frequencies out of 134 as compared to 62 of women.

Conclusion

Though table (1) and (2) show female preference, still the final result is in the males' side. This is evident in table (3) in which male scores the percentage of 86% as compared to female who score merely 14%. It is confirmed that EFL text studies prefer presenting males as the main acting characters in dialogues and reading passages. These results do not contradict the findings of several studies that have suggested that in mixed- gender conversations, males do speak more than females in upper mediate stage, (c.f. Swacker, 1975, Spender 1990, Holmes 1988, Smith 1985 and Coats 1986).

In Action series, book nine includes five dialogues entitled as "the buried city". It has the episodes (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) which are occurring in page numbers (12, 26, 40, 60, and 74). Males have taken sixty-three turns out of seventy- one with the percentage of 89% while females taken eight turns with the percentage of 11%. This example emphasizes the exclusion of females' roles as active participants in life events. Not only do males tend to control units but also interrupt conversations more successfully than females.

It is interesting to conclude that textbooks practically reflect reality; but, this is due to the fact that women's stereotype is visible more than men's. The impetus is overt as there are fewer females who take turns as compared to male characters. This fact leads to change in socialization in these textbooks. To lessen or even remove gender biasness from EFL in Action series, Ministry of Education is advised to set in advance gender criteria to be followed by authors. But as an immediate remedial work, teachers are asked to analyze students' course books to draw the attention of their students to the defects of these books, mainly, in the domain of male / female conversational topic dominance.

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