Journal of Gender Studies

Construction of gender: a comparison of Australian and Hong Kong English language textbooks

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Available online: 08 Jun 2010

To cite this article: Jackie F.K. Lee & Peter Collins (2010): Construction of gender: a comparison of Australian and Hong Kong English language textbooks, Journal of Gender Studies, 19:2, 121-137

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589231003695856

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This article examines whether the later development of awareness of gender issues in Hong Kong compared to Australia is reflected in patterns of gender representation in the English language textbooks published in these two places. A comparison of 10 currently-used Australian books with 10 Hong Kong books revealed that such awareness has impacted most on the use of gender-inclusive terms and symmetrical phrases in both places. The Australian writers tended to use generic *they* while their Hong Kong counterparts preferred either the coordination *he or she* or ‘generic’ *he*. Both sets of writers maintained the convention of male-first presentation, depicted women in a more limited range of social roles, and presented stereotyped images of women as weaker and more passive than men, and as operating primarily within domestic domains. The visual representations also reinforced traditional gendered roles. Hong Kong textbook writers, nevertheless, paid more heed to the inclusion of females visually. Controversy persists over whether textbook writers should reflect reality or whether they should lead social change and strive for gender equality.

**Keywords:** Australia; gender; Hong Kong; sexism; sexist language; textbooks

**Introduction**

While in Australia a growing public awareness of gender issues occurred in the early 1980s through discussion prompted by participants in the women’s movement, it was not until about a decade later that a comparable development occurred in Hong Kong, for example with the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance of 1995 and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996. In this article we shall consider whether differences in the period of time marked by community awareness of gender issues in Australia and Hong Kong are reflected in differential patterns of gender representation in written materials. More specifically, we selected a set of English language school textbooks published in Australia and Hong Kong to pursue our comparison. This choice of data was prompted by evidence that schools serve as important agents in shaping children’s gender-based attitudes and behaviour (e.g. Jones *et al.* 1997, Sunderland *et al.* 2000, Youdell 2005), and furthermore that a significant role is played by their textbooks (e.g. Britton and Lumpkin 1977, Cincotta 1978, Kelly and Nihlen 1982, Hsu 1992, Patt and McBride 1993).
Women in Australia and Hong Kong

We begin by presenting some statistical information about the status and roles of women in Australia and Hong Kong. The first thing to note is that women now outnumber men both in Australia (by a ratio of 1:0.988 in 2006) and in Hong Kong (1:0.911 in 2006). In both communities women enjoy improved educational opportunities, with women accounting for 55% of all higher education students in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008), and for 53.5% of students in programmes funded by the University Grants Committee in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department 2008).

Another notable change that has occurred is an increase in the participation of women in the workforce. The female participation rate in Australia increased from 48.7% in 1986–1987 to 57.6% in 2006–2007, compared to a drop in the male participation rate, from 75.6% to 72.2%, over the same period. The participation rate for women in their peak child-bearing years (aged 25–34 years) jumped from 61.2% in 1986–1987 to 72.5% in 2006–2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). In Hong Kong as well there has been an increase in the female labour force: for females aged 25–29, from 71.5% in 1986 to 87.4% in 2006, and for those aged 30–34, from 55.4% to 79.2% (Census and Statistics Department 2007). Overall, the increase in the labour force from 1986 to 2006 was significantly larger for women (65%) than for men (14%).

There remain large-scale gender differences in occupations in Australia and Hong Kong. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008) women workers are more likely to be engaged in clerical occupations (26% women vs. 8% men), men in trades (21% men vs. 3% women). In the more highly-skilled occupations a higher proportion of men (11%) are employed as managers and administrators than women (5%), while a higher proportion of women are employed as professionals (22% compared with 17% of men). Similar gender differences in occupations are found in Hong Kong. According to the Census and Statistics Department (2007), in 2006, 73.2% of clerks and 63.2% of those engaged in elementary occupations were women. By contrast, over 90% of skilled workers, 70.9% of managers and administrators, and 63.8% of professionals were men.

One major difference between Australia and Hong Kong is that recognition of the importance of gender equality began to be enshrined in legislation and codes of practice over a decade earlier in the former than the latter. In 1983 the Australian government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This, according to Pauwels (1987), contributed to heightened awareness of gender issues and led to the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act of 1986, making it an offence to discriminate on the ground of gender. Many government departments, public and private-sector organizations, including most tertiary education institutions, publishers and media organizations, have drawn up or adopted guidelines for the use of non-sexist language, recognizing the power of language as ‘a vehicle of discrimination’ (Pauwels 1991, p. 3). For example, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (the public, state-funded broadcaster) has maintained a policy of non-discriminatory language use since 1984 to ensure that its employees use non-sexist and non-racist language on air. Similar codes of practice have been developed for other media (e.g. Wood 1980, Commercial Radio Australia 2004) and public institutions (e.g. University of New South Wales 1994, University of Sydney 2006). In 1988 the Style manual for authors, editors and printers, the authoritative reference manual for writing and public speech for all public office employees in Australia, incorporated a chapter on non-sexist language and has continued to do so in every new edition since then (Australian Government Publishing Office 1988).
These moves have effected a change in the choice of language in the Australian media. In an analysis of the impact of feminist language reform and sex discrimination legislation on the language used in Australian newspaper job classifieds, Pauwels (1997) noted that in only 5.4% of the sample were gender-exclusive terms used (e.g. chairman, cleaning lady, foreman) and a clear majority of the occupational terms were gender-neutral (e.g. salesperson, storeperson). Another recent study conducted by Pauwels and Wrightson-Turcotte (2001) examined generic pronoun use in public speech as exemplified in radio programmes broadcast in Australia, and found that the preferred choice was semantically singular they.

In Hong Kong public awareness of gender issues was not strongly in evidence before 1995, when the government passed the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, making it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of sex. In 1996 an Equal Opportunities Commission was established to work towards the elimination of discrimination and to promote equal opportunities for men and women. Since 2001, the Women’s Commission, a central mechanism for promoting the wellbeing and interests of women in Hong Kong, has played a strategic role in advising the government on policy direction on women’s issues. Public education and promotional activities have been organized to reduce gender stereotyping, as well as to raise public awareness of, and sensitivity towards, such gender-related issues as preventing sex discrimination in play and sexual harassment at work and in schools. The relationship between language and gender, and the effects of sexist language on personal development, however, are not given much weight by the Hong Kong government, which has not as yet implemented a formal code of practice for publishers to observe in the production of textbooks. The guiding principles for quality textbooks proposed by the Curriculum Development Council Ad Hoc Committee on Textbook Quality (2003), with effect from 2001, include merely the following stipulation: ‘The content and illustrations do not carry any form of discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, race, religion, culture and disability etc., nor do they suggest exclusion’. Different publishers can interpret the stipulation in their own ways.

Previous textbook research

In recent decades a number of researchers have turned their attention to gender stereotyping and the underrepresentation of females in school textbooks and children’s books. Earlier studies of the depiction of gender roles in Hong Kong textbooks include Yau and Luk’s (1988) study of Chinese history and social studies in junior secondary textbooks, Au’s (1992) study of social studies, Chinese language and health education in primary textbooks, and the Equal Opportunities Commission’s (2000) report on the nature and extent of stereotyping in printed educational materials, including textbooks and examination papers. Australian textbook studies of gender representation include Freebody and Baker’s (1987) investigation of children’s first school reading books, Clarkson’s (1993) study of primary and secondary mathematics textbooks, and Ritchie’s (2005) analysis of a French textbook for Australian secondary-school students studying French as a foreign language. The same types of behavioural stereotypes have been noted by most of these researchers: women are typically depicted as passive, dependent, generally weak and physically attractive, men as active, independent and strong (Hartman and Judd 1978, Evans and Davies 2000). Meanwhile, men are depicted as occupying a wider range of social and occupational roles, with women largely restricted to domestic and nurturing domains (Cincotta 1978, Gupta and Lee 1990, Hsu 1992, Gooden and Gooden 2001, Law and Chan 2004). Men consistently outnumber women, textually and
visually (Britton and Lumpkin 1977, Hellinger 1980, Porreca 1984, Freebody and Baker 1987, Gupta and Lee 1990, Clarkson 1993, Patt and McBride 1993, Whiteley 1996, Equal Opportunities Commission 2000). On a more positive note, some recent studies have noted an improvement in the representation of women in newly-written books and in revised editions of some texts. For example, Gooden and Gooden’s study (2001) revealed a large increase in female main characters compared with those found in LaDow’s earlier study in 1976 (23% vs 10%). Clark and his associates (2004) examined a sample of 19 American high-school history textbooks published in the 1960s, the 1980s and the 1990s, finding that the mention of women increased over time.

Do the gender imbalances described above matter? According to a number of writers, the answer to this question is ‘yes’. Smith (1985) states that there are several ways in which educational materials serve to instil values and attitudes in young people. First, since students usually attach a great deal of credibility and authority to educational and reference materials, they are less likely to be critical of these than they are of the media. Second, since learners are frequently required to absorb and assimilate the textbook material in minute detail, they will be attentive to the messages conveyed, and susceptible to their influence. Many writers are of the view that the content of textbooks has the potential to influence the learners’ worldview (Kelly and Nihlen 1982, Freebody and Baker 1987, Sheldon 1990, Hsu 1992).

Several studies have examined the effects on students of gender bias in textbooks. For example, Briere and Lanktree (1983) found that the use of generic masculine nouns and pronouns in written texts affected female subjects’ perception of the attractiveness of psychology as a future career. Crawford and English (1984) found that female subjects recalled information better when it was presented in a context that included them, while their male subjects recalled better when masculine pronouns were used. Further relevant studies include Frasher and Walker (1972), Schau and Scott (1984), Peterson and Lach (1990), Patt and McBride (1993) and Whiteley (1996).

The capacity of grammar drills to condition learners’ gender-based attitudes is also noted by some scholars (e.g. Sartori Stein 1978, Gaff 1982, Macaulay and Brice 1997, Amare 2007). Sartori Stein (1978, p. 123) argues that sexist attitudes contained in grammar drills may have more insidious effects on learners than continuous texts because when emphasis is on grammar and not on content, the information becomes ‘subconscious’, and grammar drills can become a subtle form of ‘brainwashing’. Macaulay and Brice (1997, p. 820), in their study of syntactic examples, add that ‘seemingly trivial things like example sentences can contribute to a hostile environment ... for women in the academic world’. Amare’s (2007) study of seven online grammar guides reveals that sexist language was present and figured prominently in the male-to-female ratio. Given the online accessibility of the texts, significant potential for cognitive influence on users is assumable.

The present study

In view of the potentially significant impact of school textbooks on the cognitive and behavioural development of young learners, the present study aims to examine whether there is balance in the representation of gender in contemporary Australian and Hong Kong English language textbooks. In our sampling of textbooks, we recognized the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance in Hong Kong in 1995 and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996 as landmarks, occurring in a period of heightened awareness of gender issues. Accordingly all the textbooks selected
were published after 1997 (see the next section for details). The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the ratio of female to male characters?
2. To what extent are men/women depicted in social settings?
3. To what extent are women/men depicted in domestic settings?
4. What is the visual representation of men and women?
5. What gender-neutral constructions are used?
6. What is the order of appearance when both men and women are referred to in a single phrase?

These research questions led to the following hypotheses:

1. There will be differences in the ratio of female to male characters in the Australian and Hong Kong textbooks.
2. Women will be portrayed more often in social settings in Australian textbooks.
3. Men will be depicted more often in domestic settings in Australian textbooks.
4. There will be differences in the visual representation of women in the two sets of textbooks.
5. There will be differences in the use of gender-neutral generic constructions in the two sets of textbooks.
6. There will be differences between Australian and Hong Kong textbooks in the order of mention of men and women when they are referred to in a single phrase.

**Method**

Twenty English language textbooks for intermediate students were selected, 10 from Australia and 10 from Hong Kong, and all published after 1997 (see Appendix). The Hong Kong books were selected randomly from the book list recommended by the Education and Manpower Bureau (renamed the ‘Education Bureau’ in July 2007). They were broadly representative of the English textbooks published and used by local high-school students in Hong Kong at the time of the study. Five were for junior forms and five for senior. Of the 10 Australian books, eight were for local native speakers of English of the secondary level, and the remaining two (Understanding everyday Australian 1 and 2) were for intermediate ESL learners. While three series (i.e. NSW English 7 and 10, Viewing and representing in context 1 and 2, and English collection 1 and 2) were written specifically for Stage 4 of the Years 7–10 English syllabus for New South Wales, the other books were designed for English courses across the entire country.

Three chapters from each book were chosen randomly for content and linguistic analysis. A systematic recording and tabulation was made of the characters and mentions of men and women in each chapter selected. The researchers counted: (1) male and female character roles (the character being checked once, regardless of the number of times s/he appeared in the chapter); (2) male and female mentions, taking into account every appearance of the character in the chapter; (3) female and male social roles (e.g. doctor, designer, boxer); (4) female and male domestic roles (e.g. son, daughter, mother, father); (5) occurrences of generic *they*, generic *he*, and paired pronouns *he/she*; and (6) order of mention of female and male characters when mentioned in a single phrase (e.g. *men and women* vs. *women and men*). The assignment of a social role to a character did not preclude assignment of a domestic role as well. Hence an individual who was both a father and police officer was entered in both the ‘domestic role’ and ‘social role’ categories.
Illustrations were included in this study on the grounds that there are a large number of pictures in English language textbooks that are designed to enhance students’ understanding and learning interests. The focus of the picture investigation was on: (1) the number of women and men in the pictures; and (2) the kind of activity undertaken by the main character in each picture. For the sake of simplicity pictures which had shared main characters were excluded in the activity analysis.

At the beginning of the study one investigator completed the analysis of two textbooks and the results were cross-checked by the other investigator. Discrepancies detected were resolved by reviewing the items jointly. A research assistant was then trained to conduct the quantitative analysis. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2$) was applied to the results, with a level of at least 5% ($p < 0.05$) being considered significant. One limitation of the present study is that copyright clearances were not obtained to store the textbooks in an electronic form, so electronic corpus searches for the use of particular occupational terms (e.g. police officer vs. policeman) were not feasible. Frequency counts of gender-neutral and gender-biased occupational terms were therefore not within the scope of the present study.

Findings and discussion

**Representation of men and women in written texts**

As mentioned earlier, the populations of both Australia and Hong Kong currently comprise more females than males. To find out if this situation was accurately reflected in the textbooks, we counted the number of male and female characters, and their mentions. The findings are presented in Table 1.

The Australian and Hong Kong textbooks both had more male than female characters – 57.5% male characters in the former and 53.2% in the latter – with no significant difference between them ($\chi^2 = 3.258, p > 0.05$). The first research hypothesis, that there would be differences in the ratio of female to male characters in the Australian and Hong Kong textbooks, was rejected. However, it was found that the number of female mentions in the Hong Kong textbooks was significantly higher than that in the Australian books ($\chi^2 = 61.067, p < 0.001$).

It was noted that male and female characters were not evenly distributed across the textbooks (A4, A8, A10, HK9 and HK10 having a disproportionately high number of male characters and mentions, and A2, A6 and HK2 having a much higher number of female mentions). Nor were they evenly distributed within the textbooks. Table 2 shows the gender representation associated with particular topics. When it comes to crime, law and order, success stories, national identity, or politics and government, there are far more male mentions than female. By contrast, when the topics involve friendship, gossip between neighbours, the environment, stress, sickness, appearance and trends, females dominate.

| Table 1. Representation of men and women in written texts. |
|---------------------------------|--------------|----------|---------------|----------|
|                                 | Characters   | Mentions |               |          |
|                                 | Men          | Women    | Men           | Women    |
| Australian textbooks            | 391 (57.5%)  | 289 (42.5%) | 1548 (58.4%) | 1102 (41.6%) |
| HK textbooks                    | 628 (53.2%)  | 553 (46.8%) | 2228 (48.9%) | 2330 (51.1%) |
We also examined a range of social and domestic roles. Following Law and Chan (2004), the social roles were divided into five major categories (see Table 3): male-monopolized, male-dominated, female-monopolized, female-dominated and gender-shared. If the type of social role was served by men only, it was classified as ‘male-monopolized’. An example found in Australian textbooks is the role of farmer, for which there were four tokens for male and none for female. Likewise, if a social role was served by women only, it was categorized as ‘female-monopolized’. An example found in Australian textbooks is victim, for which there were two tokens for female and none for male. Female-dominated roles are those assumed largely by women rather than men (e.g. secretary in Hong Kong textbooks: five females vs. one male), while male-dominated roles are those in which men were portrayed more often (e.g. world record holder in Hong Kong textbooks: 30 males vs. two females). Gender-shared roles are those performed by men and women equally.

Table 3 indicates that men served a wider range of social roles in the male-monopolized and male-dominated categories in both sets of textbooks: 45 and 14, respectively, for Australian, and 36 and 17 for Hong Kong. The corresponding figures for the female-monopolized and female-dominated categories were much lower: 15 and six for Australian textbooks, and eight and 12 for Hong Kong. A comparison of the male

**Female and male social and domestic roles**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime/law and order</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK10</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success/images and identity</td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and government</td>
<td>A8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship/neighbourhood</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK7</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving Hong Kong/the environment</td>
<td>HK7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/get well</td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trends/looking good</td>
<td>HK2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HK3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Table 3.** Female and male social roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australian textbooks</th>
<th>HK textbooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male-monopolized social roles</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-dominated social roles</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-monopolized social roles</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-dominated social roles</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-shared social roles</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
categories (both male-monopolized and male-dominated) with the corresponding female
categories (both female-monopolized and female-dominated) revealed no significant
differences between the Australian and Hong Kong books ($\chi^2 = 0.026, p > 0.05$).
The second research hypothesis, that women would be portrayed more often in social
categories with the corresponding female settings in Australian textbooks, was therefore rejected. Women are thus consistently represented as playing a more limited range of social roles than men in both Australian and Hong Kong English language textbooks.

Further examination of the textbooks uncovered a perpetuation of traditional
stereotypes associated with women’s and men’s occupations. Women tended to work in
jobs involving nurturing, service and support, such as fashion/jewellery designer, teacher,
maid, secretary, receptionist and typist. Nevertheless, there are occasional portrayals of
women as astronaut, boxer, film-maker, accountant and university lecturer, which might
indicate a progressive move towards gender equality. However, the representation of men
is still confined to their traditionally ‘male’ roles, ranging from the lower-status roles of
farmer, soldier, hunter and miner, to the higher-status roles of pilot, politician, inventor
and marine commander. Men tend to be more involved in physically-demanding jobs or
activities, including member of the disciplinary forces, cricket player and football player.
This kind of gender representation, though criticized as being gender-biased by some
people, reflects the labour distribution patterns in Australia and Hong Kong as reported in
the census reports in the two places. It is difficult to determine whether it is the job of
textbook writers to reflect reality, which would often entail gender imbalance in the social
roles depicted, or whether they should lead social change and strive for gender equality
through portraying men and women in the same ratios. A proactive pedagogical approach
to this dilemma would provide opportunities for students to reflect upon and explore how
gender imbalance might be redressed. Teachers could also invite students to discuss the
unbalanced gender roles depicted in textbooks and the possible undesirable impacts on
young people’s cognitive development.

As for domestic roles, the world presented in the textbooks is normally one in which
women are more domestically active than men, as witnessed in the following grammar and
vocabulary exercises from the Hong Kong textbooks:

(1) My mother is a housewife. She does not work because she has to take care of my little
sister. My father takes the MTR to get to his office. (HK7, p. 11)

(2) My father is an engineer. He builds roads and bridges. He often goes to China for work.
My mother does not work. She is a housewife. (HK7, p. 25)

(3) She [my grandma]’s a great cook and she always tells me to help myself to her delicious
food. (HK9, p. 12)

As seen in Table 4, it is only women who are described as ‘home-makers/housewives’,
engaging in domestic chores such as cooking and looking after the family in both sets of
books (one occurrence in Australian books and three occurrences in Hong Kong
books). Proportionally more mothers appeared in the textbooks than fathers, and no
significant differences were found in the two sets of textbooks ($\chi^2 = 0.739, p > 0.05$),
confirming the same stereotyped treatment of women as found in previous studies (e.g.
Frasher and Walker 1972, Ittzes 1978). This wider representation of women in domestic
activities in textbooks reflects the reality that females are more domestically active
than males, as revealed in population statistics: there were 647,700 female home-makers
but only 12,600 male home-makers in Hong Kong in 2006 (Census and Statistics
Department 2008).
Table 4. Female and male domestic roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic role</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Domestic role</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandpa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepfather</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stepmother</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stepdaughter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home-maker</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Wife</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandpa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Great-great-grandfather</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Daughter-in-law</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visual representation of men and women

The unbalanced representation of men and women in the textbooks extends to their visual depiction. As Table 5 indicates, while both the Australian textbooks and the Hong Kong textbooks had a higher proportion of male-only and male-dominated pictures, the proportion was significantly higher in the Australian textbooks ($\chi^2 = 16.867, p < 0.001$). While the fourth research hypothesis, that there would be differences in female visual representation in the two sets of textbooks, was confirmed, the finding that it was Hong Kong textbook writers who paid more heed to the inclusion of females visually was contrary to expectation.

Table 6 shows the kinds of activities engaged in by the main characters (excluding shared main characters). Although there were only a small number of pictures illustrating household activities, they nevertheless served to reinforce traditionally gendered roles: there were more women than men conducting household chores and caring for children (six vs. zero for Australian textbooks, and seven vs. two for Hong Kong textbooks).

By contrast the number of pictures showing male characters at play was about five times that for female characters in the Australian books, and twice in the Hong Kong books. There were no significant differences between the two sets of books ($\chi^2 = 3.059, p > 0.05$). Male characters are portrayed as being more active and sporty than females. For example, in Unit 3 of HK4 there are eight pictures in which sports are being played: all the participants are boys.

The number of pictures showing women at work was about half that for men: 38 vs. 68 for the Australian sample, and 44 vs. 84 for the Hong Kong sample. No significant differences were found between the two sets of books ($\chi^2 = 0.055, p > 0.05$). In their depiction of women at work the textbooks do not reflect recent increases in the rate of female participation in the modern Australian and Hong Kong labour markets.

The picture analysis also revealed the kind of gender stereotype found in the written texts in the two sets of textbooks: there was a tendency for men to be presented as powerful

Table 5. Visual representation of men and women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men only</th>
<th>More men</th>
<th>Women only</th>
<th>More women</th>
<th>Equal share</th>
<th>Not identifiable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textbooks</td>
<td>(56.9%)</td>
<td>(5.3%)</td>
<td>(19.2%)</td>
<td>(2.5%)</td>
<td>(11%)</td>
<td>(5.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textbooks</td>
<td>(43.3%)</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td>(27.5%)</td>
<td>(3.1%)</td>
<td>(15.5%)</td>
<td>(3.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Activities shown in pictures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Doing housework</th>
<th>Playing</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Studying/ at school</th>
<th>Relaxing</th>
<th>Social activities</th>
<th>Personal activities</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textbooks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textbooks</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
heroes or villains, and for women to be described as victims or carers. For example, A2 displays two posters next to each other (p. 3): one shows a male soldier pointing at the reader with authority, saying ‘YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU’; the other poster from the Salvation Army shows a female worker touching and comforting a depressed mother who is holding her child. In A3 (p. 178) five of the six pictures of heroes and villains are men. Likewise, in Unit 2 of HK3, the 19 pictures which show criminals, prisoners and disciplinary forces are all male; in Unit 11 of HK5, of the 10 pictures showing successful people, only one picture depicts a successful woman.

Overall, as for written texts, no significant differences were found in the visual representation of the two sexes in the activities engaged between the two sets of books. These findings lead to the disconfirmation of the second research hypothesis, that women would be portrayed more often in social settings in Australian textbooks.

**Gender-inclusive constructions**

A common, but increasingly challenged, manifestation of sexism in the English language is the ‘generic’ use of the masculine nouns (e.g. *man, foreman, bushman*) and masculine pronouns (e.g. *him, he*) when they refer to people in general or when the sex of the referent is not known. Many today consider that this practice of considering men as the prototype for human representation reduces women to a ‘subsumed’, ‘invisible’, ‘secondary’ and ‘marked’ status (Schneider and Hacker 1973, Briere and Lanktree 1983, Cole *et al.* 1983, Hamilton 1988).

As in previous studies of Australian English (e.g. Lee 1999, Pauwels 2001), a declining use of the masculine ‘generic’ pronoun *he* was noted. As seen in Table 7, there were 29 tokens of generic *he* in the Hong Kong textbooks, but only one in the Australian books. A comparison of the frequency of generic *he* and other generics across the two sets of textbooks revealed significant differences between them ($\chi^2 = 10.541, p < 0.005$). Some examples follow:

(4) … if a customer is buying a stamp at the post office *he* does not need to say … (A8, p. 11)
(5) If your friend broke your CD, would you shout at *him*? (HK4, p. 99)
(6) Your boss wants you to change some of the words. Read the extract from the report below and replace the words *he* has underlined … (HK10, p. 43)

The use of *they* as an anaphoric pronoun with a singular, generic or indefinite antecedent has had to endure prescriptive censure (e.g. Fowler 1965, Partridge 1965, Burchfield 1981). The figures in Table 7 reflect the increasingly relaxed attitude towards generic *they* in recent years. It was strongly represented in both sets of textbooks, but significantly more so in the Australian than the Hong Kong books ($\chi^2 = 31.477, p < 0.001$). Some examples follow:

(7) A person’s point of view reveals *their* beliefs, attitudes and values – what is important to *them*. (A2, p. 139)
(8) Create another situation in which *someone* lets *their* imagination run wild. (A10, p. 129)

Table 7. Generic pronouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Generic <em>they</em></th>
<th>Generic <em>he/she</em></th>
<th>Generic <em>he</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian textbooks</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HK textbooks</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now interview your partner and write down their answers. (HK2, p. 19)

A person's job is their occupation. (HK4, p. 97)

Another strategy adopted by writers for avoiding masculine generic pronouns is the use of paired pronoun expressions such as he/she, he or she, him or her and his or her. While singular generic they has been criticized for its informality, the dual pronoun has been criticized as being bookish and unnatural (e.g. Fowler 1965, Jochnowit 1982). The dual pronoun was significantly more commonly used by the Hong Kong writers (154 instances) than by their Australian counterparts (25 instances), with the chi-square value being 69.095 ($p < 0.001$). Some examples follow:

(11) How has the writer constructed his or her identity here? (A3, p. 16)
(12) Ask your partner to read his or her words again. (A4, p. 6)
(13) Everyone has the right to choose how to spend his/her own money. (HK3, p. 20)
(14) You should tell your classmate what you think about his/her performance. (HK10, p. 17)

The significant differences in the use of generic pronouns found between the Australian and Hong Kong textbooks examined confirm the fifth research hypothesis that there would be differences in the use of generic constructions in the two sets of books. While in the Australian books singular generic they is well-established and generic he all but gone, in the Hong Kong books the paired pronominal he/she is gaining more popularity, despite continuing support for generic they and he. The relatively recent emergence of the use of non-sexist language in Hong Kong is reflected in cases where writers reveal uncertainty in their use of generic pronouns, as in example (15), with its inconsistent use of generic they and the alternate pronoun his/her in close proximity to each other, and in example (16), with its mixing-up of generic dual pronouns and the masculine generic pronoun in reference to the same antecedent.

(15) When you write to a customer with regard to a complaint, always:
   • confirm the details they gave you ...
   • thank the subscriber for his/her help ...
   (HK3, p. 16)
(16) Your best friend is not very good at Maths, but you are. If he/she asked you for help with his/her Maths homework, would you ... tell him/her he must learn how to do it by himself/herself? (HK4, p. 100)

This study also investigated gender-neutral lexical expressions of the type recommended in guidelines. When the person’s sex was not known, writers commonly used gender-inclusive occupational terms such as sales representative/assistant and shopkeeper (cf. salesman and salesgirl), principal (cf. headmaster), athlete and sports star (cf. sportsman), film star (cf. actor and actress), entrepreneur (cf. businessman), worker (cf. workman) and firefighter (cf. fireman). Also found are compounds with -officer, -staff, -person and -people as the base morpheme such as: police officer, waiting staff, tradesperson, spokesperson, sportspeople and business people.

Another strategy used in the textbooks for avoiding gender-bias was the use of symmetric phrases that include both men and women. A total of 38 and 53 tokens were recorded in Australian and Hong Kong textbooks, respectively. The following are some examples.

(17) ... they also embrace the seas, ... and all things that are in it, including mortal men and women. (A6, p. 50)
(18) What emotional reactions would the photograph be likely to cause in elderly ex-servicemen and women? (A10, p. 87)
(19) Work in pairs. Take it in turns to be your partner’s father or mother. (HK4, p. 91)
(20) Hi, Simon/Carol. Can I talk to you about ...? (HK7, p. 137)
Order of appearance

The conventionalized practice of putting male names first in paired expressions (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*, 梁山伯與祝英台, the names of famous Shakespearean and Chinese plays) exemplifies a widespread perception of male supremacy. In the present analysis, in cases where two nouns were paired for sex, women were occasionally mentioned first. These include the fixed expression *ladies and gentlemen*, co-ordinations determined by considerations of generation or age (e.g. *Maria and little Albert, Mrs Smith and her son*), and those which involve family roles (e.g. *Mum and Dad*). Most paired expressions follow the male-first convention, implicitly according more respect and importance to men (e.g. *Sir or Madam, old Mr and Mrs Chan, boyfriends and girlfriends, his or her view, mortal men and women*). As seen in Table 8, the average ratio of female to male firstness was 1:1.54 in the Australian textbooks and 1:16.55 in the Hong Kong textbooks. The much higher frequency of male firstness in the Hong Kong books ($\chi^2 = 81.355, p < 0.001$) may be attributable to the recent use of alternative pronouns to include both men and women, such as *he/she, his/her, he or she, his or her*, etc. (154 out of a total of 364 tokens). The last research hypothesis, that there would be differences between the two sets of textbooks in the order of mention of men and women when they were referred to in a single phrase, was confirmed.

Should textbook writers challenge the conventionalized practice of presenting male names first in paired expressions? There is no simple answer to this question. Some would maintain that changing the conventional order results in unnaturalness. It is our view that the task of addressing gender equality issues in the classroom is one that must be addressed with patience and sensitivity. Rather than attempting to achieve a rapid elimination of sexist language, teachers should focus students’ attention on selected usages – in this case those involving the order of mention of men and women – and use these as a springboard for discussion of gender issues.

Conclusion

The central premise of the study was that the longer period of time – about one decade – in which gender equality has been promoted and legislated for in Australia, by comparison with Hong Kong, would have resulted in the appearance of a greater number of gender-neutral or even female-empowering textbooks in Australia. The results of the study require us to reject this premise. On some of the dimensions studied no significant difference was found in gender representation between the Australian and Hong Kong textbooks examined. The two sets of books did not differ significantly in the heavily biased ratio of male to female characters, in their representation of female and male social and domestic roles, with women continuing to be associated with a limited and stereotyped set of activities and careers, and with activities in which they serve weaker, more passive roles than men.

On other dimensions, however, differences did emerge between the two sets of English language textbooks. The Australian writers evidenced a significantly higher tendency to use singular generic *they*, and produced only one instance of generic *he*. By contrast, the
Hong Kong writers made greater use of the dual pronoun *he/she*, and a number continued to use generic *he*. The Hong Kong textbooks had a significantly higher proportion of female mentions than the Australian texts, but often produced highly stereotyped representations of the sexes, and practised the male-first convention widely.

Textbooks not only reflect linguistic and social realities, but also influence linguistic and cultural practices. In view of their role in helping to shape gender values and attitudes, we believe it desirable that textbook writers strive for a balanced representation of the sexes. It would of course be unrealistic to expect writers to distribute male and female characters equally across the full range of activities and occupations in which they participate, given that – as census reports in Australia and Hong Kong attest – many men and women continue to experience quite different lifestyles, subject to a good deal of domain-specificity. Nevertheless, as one type of agent for the socialization of future generations, textbooks should promote the kind of social situation to which our communities aspire. In view of the potential for continuing gender-biased practices to impact negatively on learners’ cognitive and behavioural development, we strongly urge that guidelines for textbook writers and publishers be published in Hong Kong. They should include recommendations for – amongst other things – accurate descriptions of contemporary practices and equal visibility for female and male characters with a wider range of occupational roles and personal traits. Even in cases where a balanced treatment of the two sexes may not seem possible (as when excerpts from earlier texts containing gender-biased language or stereotyping are included, as found in many Australian textbooks), teachers should contribute to the process by drawing attention to and heightening awareness of the undesirability of such features, as explicitly mentioned by some Australian textbook writers to encourage gender-neutral discourse.

In the interests of raising awareness of the unbalanced portrayal of men and women and promoting gender equality we pose the following questions as criteria for teachers, publishers and textbook writers to consider:

1. Do the school texts include an unbiased view of the full range of human potential for women and men, both textually and visually?
2. Do the school texts include sufficient information on important men and women?
3. Do the school texts contain any sexist language?
4. Do the school texts show equality in the order of appearance of women and men?

One topic that we have not explored in the present study, but which may well be worth investigating as a complement to the investigation of gender bias in textbooks, is the exploration of teacher behaviour in relation to textbooks, as suggested by Sunderland and her associates (1997, 2000). It would be of interest to know in what ways teachers in Australia and Hong Kong handle the gendered content of textbooks, and to what extent they endorse, subvert or ignore stereotypical ways of thinking.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the reviewers and the editor for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article. This article is one of the outcomes of a project, ‘Gender Representation in ESL Textbooks – The Cases of Hong Kong and Australia’, which was supported by a research grant from the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Note

1. Of the 39 female-first tokens in the Australian textbooks, 11 belonged to the fixed expression *ladies and gentlemen*, while two tokens of such an expression were found in the Hong Kong texts.
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Appendix

Australian textbooks


Hong Kong textbooks