

Conversation Analysis with Reference to Gender and Power Relations

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Abstract:

Instructional textbooks are still of prevailing importance as the school's basic framework of learning and as the emblematic reflection of their societies' values and cultures. Likewise, they tend unwittingly to embody a substratum of patriarchal agendas that are discriminatory against females. By reviewing previous research studies that examined textbooks' discourses and by looking at gender prejudice in the Algerian society, this research paper examines gender and power relations manifested through conversations in one of the Algerian EFL textbooks. The results revealed that males spoke more than females did, and they controlled the conversations. Hence, the researcher assumes that the target textbook discursively transmits relations of asymmetry and dominance in favor of males.

Key words: Conversation analysis, textbooks, gender relations, power relations

Résumé :

Les manuels scolaires sont toujours d'importance éminente comme l'élément indispensable de l'école et comme la réflexion des cultures et des valeurs de leurs sociétés. De même, ils ont tendance inconsciemment à incarner un substrat des structures qui sont discriminatoires contre des femelles. Cette étude examine le genre et les relations de pouvoir manifestées par des conversations dans un des manuels algériens utilisés pour enseigner l'Anglais. Les résultats ont révélé que les mâles ont parlé plus alors les femelles ont fait, et ils ont contrôlé les conversations. D'où, la chercheuse suppose que le manuel cible transmet discursivement des relations d'asymétrie et dominance en faveur des mâles.

Mots clés: Analyse de conversation, les manuels scolaires, le genre, relations de pouvoir

ملخص:

لا تزال الكتب المدرسية تحتل مكانة أساسية ضمن المنظومة التربوية التعليمية إذ تمثل الإطار الأساسي للتعليم المدرسي وكذا المرأة العاكسة لقيم و ثقافات مجتمعاتها. و عليه، فإن معظم الكتب المدرسية تقوم بتجسيد الأنظمة الاجتماعية الهرمية والمتحيزة ضد المرأة عن طريق الصور، النصوص، و الخطاب بصفة عامة تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى مناقشة نوعية العلاقة المجسدة بين الجنسين في المحادثات المستعملة في أحد الكتب المدرسية الجزائرية لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. بينت الدراسة أن الذكور احتلوا حيزا خطابيا أكبر من الإناث سواء من حيث الكم أو النوع حيث أن معظم المحادثات استهلها الذكور و تحكّموا في الموضوع المطروح وكذا نقل أدوار الكلام بينما الإناث فقد كان لهم دور سلبي و ثانوي.

كلمات مفتاحية: تحليل المحادثات، الكتاب المدرسي، العلاقات بين الجنسين، علاقات القوة

Introduction

As one of the most vital foundations of any community, education should maintain pace with the urges of its society and the challenges of the outer world as well. It can be used as a tool to empower the individual who starts as a learner and ends up as a citizen since it is supposed to generate, reflect, and direct social change. In fact, education is established as one key agency of socialization, and its institutions, teachers, and teaching materials as socializing agents. Referring to textbooks as the core of teaching materials in the Algerian schools, our focus will be on their potential as either mirrors of traditional social agendas or as tools for social change.

In fact, the textbook under a quality education policy is an educational implement of major significance that can be used as a tool for social change. Cavender and Kahane confirm that “textbooks are intended to provide students with knowledge they will need to be productive citizens and to inculcate the values, customs, and attitudes of the society as a whole” (2009, p. 353). Textbooks, then, are considered as mediators for cultural norms, values, and models of social behavior manifested in the assorted content they present, and gender roles are a significant constituent of those models. The way textbooks portray males and females contributes to the images learners build up of their own roles and that of their gender in the society. This means that designing a textbook is basically the same as deciding on the values, norms, and representations that underline aspirations of sustaining social cohesion and good relationships between individuals and institutions.

The rationale for this study stems from two grounds: From the one hand, gender equality, like human rights, is comparatively a recent value for humanity as a whole, and it upsets patriarchal cultures founded on discrimination and domination. On the other hand, parents and educationists would not dispute the need to promote equal education of good quality for their children, both females and males, created upon universally recognized general values. Based on the findings of previous research that examined EFL textbooks, and by looking at gender discrimination in the Algerian society, this study accounts for the textbook’s possibilities as a vehicle for gender equality in order to meet Education for All goals and respond to modern world necessities. We assume that textbooks’ implications extend beyond the immediate confines of the school. In addition to their educational use, they may also be employed in a social context to promote gender equality or demote it and sustain the patriarchal systems rooted in our societies.

Taking into consideration what have been discussed earlier, the questions that guided this study are: (1) which gender relations did the authors construct through the textbook conversations? (2) which power relations can be revealed through applying the IRF model of Sinclair and Coulthard to textbook’s conversations?

Gender Hierarchies in Society

Social systems worldwide are structured on the basis of gender differences between males and females; a set of defined psychological and emotional attributes “which a given culture expects to coincide with physical maleness or femaleness” (Tuttle, 1986, p. 123). Gender builds on biological sex; it amplifies biological difference and shifts it into spheres where it is utterly irrelevant (Eckert & McConnel-Ginet, 2003). Virtually, these differences govern the expectations members of a given society will have about each others’ behavior, social roles, careers, interests, and even personality traits. In fact, gender confines the zone of activity for both males and females on the basis of appropriateness to social norms and

stereotypes. Individuals should integrate themselves according to what their maleness or femaleness decides on, and they will be treated accordingly. On the one hand, maleness empowered men with a wide range of privileges and options as the superlative group that owns authority and power. On the other hand, femaleness disempowered women with traits of weakness and dependence as the deficient group that errs and needs constant supervision. Consequently, the political and socio-cultural hierarchal system in which males grew up has been developing and deepening without causing any divergence, disruption, or disorder in the public system. A system that responds to the interests of a male-dominated society, saturated with social exclusion and women's repression (Meghazi, 2010).

Nevertheless, the twentieth century witnessed the consecration of international human rights and principles of universal values due to different movements of liberation. The international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) demands in Article 16 the party countries to avow the complete equality of man and woman's rights in personal status and family.

And so does the Algerian Constitution outlaws any bias founded on birth, race, sex, belief. Also, the government has taken many steps since the 'Beijing Declaration' to ensure changes to be made. Within modern Algeria, women are guaranteed equal access to education, employment, health, and the judicial system at least by the force of the law. It currently aspires for a strong civil society whose aim is to advocate equal human rights for both females and males. Accordingly, we ask the same question about the Algerian society that Jassey had about the Japanese one, whether "gender equality and inequality in Japan have been presented in textbooks in ways that reflect the changes in Japanese society" (Jassey, 1998, p. 87). Since textbooks mirror their society's beliefs and practices, we expect that the Algerian textbook would reflect the current policies of the state and would be used as a tool for social change.

Gendered Discourses and Power Relations

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) described language as both constructed and constructive. Language is constructed as it makes use of meanings and connotations agreed on among the members of the society where it is articulated. Also, language is constructive as it shapes the ensuing recognition of those meanings according to that society's values and norms. Likewise, Weatherall (2002) believes that rules about language are strongly knotted with the beliefs of the dominant systems in a society. The language used about women, for example, is not a neutral or an insignificant concern, yet it is extremely political and ideological. Cameron (1992) also in her work on verbal hygiene claims that rules about language reflect specifics about the structure of power in society. As a reason, many feminists assumed that language change and social change are interrelated, and a multitude of research on language and gender emerged. Spender (1980) explained the powerfulness of those who can control language, like men with public speaking privileges, as they can take advantage of the power of language itself to endorse certain beliefs and attitudes to become ideologies. Thus, how we speak about gender characters does not only mirror our beliefs about gender roles, but it also sustains and affects our thoughts. Decoding language use then, or discourse, can help us understand societies' structures and systems of power. As Fairclough argues,

There is a strong case to be made for a mode of language education which emphasizes critical awareness of ideological processes in discourse, so that people can become more aware of their own practice, and be more critical of the ideologically invested discourses to which they are subjected. (2006, p. 90)

The Textbook as Discourse

The textbook, like any other text, echoes the beliefs, values, and attitudes of its authors and of their ideologies. In this study, the textbook is considered within its context as an active agent in the socialization process a learner might go through; thus, its analysis will bring particulars about changes in society as a whole. Ideally, the textbooks' content and didactic approaches respond to the goals stated in the curriculum, which changes by the side of society and its changing ideologies. Therefore, the discourses used in the textbooks would be thoughtfully and purposefully selected according to the ideology and values they stand for. According to Sunderland (2006), discourses are seen as possible ways of representing the world, or as larger systems of meaning that help to make sense of the world. For that reason, we consider the textbook's potential in promoting gender equality through equal representation of both gender characters in discourse and images as well.

To come to the point, we assume that textbooks depict reality, culture, and social order through the eyes of their authors and editorial board- with or without their awareness. To avoid bias and stereotypes, gender issues must be addressed, and critical pedagogy should be implemented.

Research Methodology

Material

According to Sunderland et al. (2002, p. 223), foreign language textbooks are significant for research as they depict characters in verbal communication and in social interaction as well. Also, they possibly will entail sexism through conversations which are commonly characterized as male dominated. For this study, I purposefully selected a textbook used to teach English in the Algerian secondary schools. The textbook is entitled *At the Crossroads*, and it addresses first year students. It is a unified, compulsory textbook currently used in all the secondary schools all over the Algerian territory. First year, secondary school students' ages range between 15 and 16 years old; they are generally facing adolescence which is identified as a crucial period in the development of a gender identity. The textbook is written by Arab et al. (2005), Algerian authors, to comply with the relevant curriculum set by the Ministry of National Education in 2005.

Method

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to conversation analysis were applied in this study. First, in an attempt to identify the dominant speaker, the length of utterances (by counting the number words in each utterance) and the frequency of utterances by each participant were examined. Second, to identify any latent asymmetrical patterns of conversation between the interlocutors, each recorded conversation was analyzed using the concept of IRF (Initiation-Response-Follow up) which was developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) principally in upper primary classrooms. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) reported how classroom discourse was organized and dominated by the teacher, who acted as both initiator and provider of feedback. The students meanwhile rarely interacted further than giving answers to asked questions. It is intended that by dividing the discourse found in textbook's dialogues into IRF, an understanding of assumed social relations between the interlocutors will be revealed. Hence, all of the mixed-gender dialogues will be examined carefully to see if there exists any imbalance in the dominant roles taken as a whole.

Procedure and Analysis

In order to reveal the aspects of gender and power relations embedded in the target textbook, I had first to identify mixed gender dialogues where both gender characters had to

interact. In fact, I have identified six dialogues and analyzed them both quantitatively and qualitatively. So, I excluded from this research the other dialogues where the interlocutors had the same sex or an unidentified one. The dialogues are named according to the names of the participants, and ordered according to the one who initiates the discourse. In order to find out the amount of talk spoken by each character, male or female, I have identified the length of their utterances by counting the number of words uttered. The article ‘a’ or ‘the’ would be considered a word, and the forms like ‘I’m’ or ‘don’t’ as one word. Then, I have counted also the number of their utterances. An utterance is defined as any sentence starting with a capital letter and finishes with a full stop; even if in the same line. Finally, the length average of characters’ utterances was counted by dividing the number of words uttered on the number of utterances. Then, the total percentages of male and female characters’ amount of talk were calculated. For qualitative analysis, mixed gender conversations were analyzed using IRF Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model. As Healy (2009, p. 96) has explained, “a conversation consists of exchanges; exchanges are made up of moves and moves are made up of acts. The structure of the exchange is: initiation, response, and feedback.” (Table 01 illustrates the use of Sinclair and Coulthard’s analysis of conversations)

Initiation	Response	Feedback	Exchange
<p>Opening move (Elicit)</p> <p>(M*) <i>Do you want to have a computer or a video for your birthday?</i></p>	<p>Answering move</p> <p>(F*) <i>I want both</i></p>	<p>Follow up</p> <p>(M) <i>I'm really sorry</i></p>	Elicit 1
<p>Opening move (Inform)</p> <p>(M) <i>You can have either a computer or a video.</i></p> <p><i>You can't have both.</i></p>			Inform 2

(F*): female (M*): male

Table01: Conversation analysis using Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) Model. Dialogue (01, p. 23)

“At the Crossroads.”

So, if the findings show one of the gender characters initiating more often in the conversations, this would imply unequal relations of gender and power in the conversations. Ideally, the interlocutor who initiates the conversation determines which subject to talk about and how it develops, and men in real life tend to initiate and dominate conversations. Thus, women find themselves dominated and obliged to support and follow up their interlocutors’ exchanges.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Table -01- shows the length and frequency of utterances in dialogues spoken by both male and female participants. The results are presented in the table below with an assumption that the more chances a character may speak, the more visible he/she would become.

<i>Dialogues</i>	<i>Interlocutors' gender</i>	<i>Length of utterances (no. Of words)</i>	<i>Number of utterances</i>	<i>Average utterances (length)</i>
Ryan/Lydia (p. 23)	M	27	04	7.5
	F	03	01	3
Karim/Doris (p. 78)	M	14	02	7
	F	12	01	12
Mother/Child* (p. 78)	F	12	02	6
	M	08	01	8
Jamel/Salima (p. 81)	M	04	01	4
	F	02	01	2
Carol/John (p. ii)	F	20	06	3.5
	M	26	07	3.71
Chairman/Mary (p. viii)	M	140	14	10.28
	F	21	04	6
<i>Total</i>	M	218 (75%)	29 (65.90%)	7.75
	F	71 (25%)	15 (34.10%)	5

*Child's gender was defined by looking into the teacher's book.

Table 02: Amount of talk of male and female characters in mixed gender dialogues found in the textbook At the Crossroads

From the results tabulated above, there appears an over representation of males who account for 75% of all spoken words, leaving only 25% for female characters. The length of the utterances is almost even, with the average male utterance containing 7.75 words compared to 5 words for females. This challenges the stereotype which says that females are more talkative than males. May be they are, but they were dominated by men, and couldn't express themselves freely. An analysis of single gender dialogues would confirm or disconfirm this stereotype. Also, most conversations were initiated by males and not balanced between male and female participation, except one conversation where a female spoke more. These findings support earlier research (Zimmerman and West, 1987; Spender, 1980; Lakoff, 2003) which found that males dominate mixed gender dialogues and hold the floor 80% of

time. These findings reinforce former results revealed concerning females' low visibility and omission in EFL textbooks as well. Actually, if males are allowed to control and dominate the conversations, female learners would be academically placed in a disadvantaged position, and if the classroom is meant to be a learning environment that grants equal opportunities for all learners then, such issues must be addressed.

Qualitative Analysis

Restricting our analysis to mixed gender dialogues, we proceed now to a qualitative analysis. After counting the amount of talk spoken by females and males, we found that males dominated the conversations and spoke more than females did. The transcripts for the analyzed mixed gender dialogues are presented with an analysis of the IRF structure using the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) Model.

Initiation	Response	Feedback	Exchange
<p>Opening move (Inform)</p> <p><i>(M1) Well, all in all, we have three suggestions. Let's discuss them in more detail and come to a decision. John?</i></p>	<p>Answering move</p> <p><i>(M2) To my mind, all three suggestions are good. It's OK for building car parks outside the town.</i></p>	<p>Follow up</p> <p><i>(M2) But this solution alone can't work if we don't make public transport cheaper in town and parking more expensive in the centre of the town.</i></p>	Inform 1
<p>Opening move (Elicit)</p> <p><i>(F) Could I say something?</i></p>	<p>Answering move</p> <p><i>(M1) Yes, go on Mary</i></p>	<p>Feedback</p> <p><i>(F) I agree with John.</i></p>	Elicit 2
<p>Focusing move (Inform)</p> <p><i>(F) I don't think any half-measures will work. Therefore, I say let's go for all three measures.</i></p>			Inform 3
<p>Opening move (Elicit)</p> <p><i>(M1) What's your reaction to John's and Mary's suggestions, Peter?</i></p>	<p>Answering move</p> <p><i>(M3) I totally agree. It'll help a lot if we take all three measures at the same time</i></p>	<p>Feedback</p> <p><i>(M1) Right, let's recapitulate.</i></p>	Elicit 4
<p>Opening move (inform)</p> <p><i>(M1) All of us agree that half measures won't work, so we have decided: One, to build cheaper car parks outside the town; two, to make public transport into and in the centre of the town less expensive; and three to make parking in town more expensive.</i></p>			Inform 5
<p>Focusing move (Direct)</p> <p><i>(M1) Let's finish there</i></p>			Elicit 6

Table 03: Conversation analysis using Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model. Dialogue (06, p. viii), “At the Crossroads”

Table -03- illustrates a discursive analysis of one of the textbook dialogues using Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model. The conversation involves four interlocutors; chairman, Mary, John, and Peter who are in a municipal meeting about the problem of traffic pollution. The first remark about this conversation is the authors’ use of the gender-biased term chairman instead of the neutral terms chair/chairperson as a strong indication of male authority and power. This chairman obviously presided the meeting and dominated the conversation and took final decisions; thus the authors coined and endorsed public power to men. Also, the presence of both gender interlocutors is uneven; we have three males for one female Mary, whose contribution to the conversation is in fact diminutive. She interrupts the conversation with the elicited act “could I say something?”, and then after she was given the floor by the chairman, she has just agreed on the former opinion of her interlocutor.

Actually, this example of mixed gender dialogues reproduces what many conversation analysts have noted about the disproportion in the exchanges and acts performed by males and females, amount of talk by each character, disrupting interruptions and turn taking in mixed gender conversations, particularly in public contexts. Consequently, I assume that supposedly, females are underprivileged in terms of access to and occupation of the public discursive space due to the exercise of social power and male hegemony. Male hegemony in our societies has been legitimized through inculcating gender ideologies; hence, males get greater access to: cultural prestige, political authority, corporate power, wealth assets, material comforts, and many other exclusive privileges. We understand that the authors of the Algerian textbook *At the Crossroads* have just reproduced the traditional gender and power relations of hegemony and hierarchy that favor males over females.

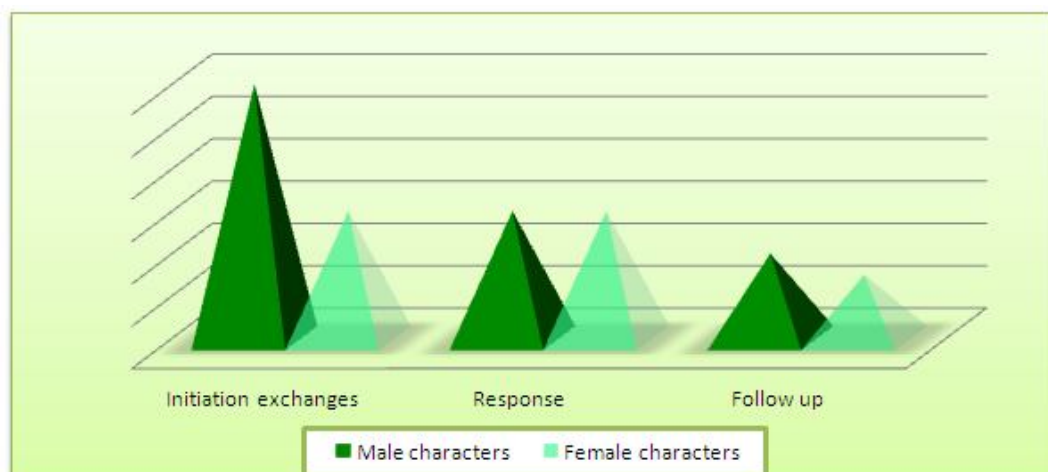


Figure 01: Male and Female Frequency of Exchanges' use

The discourse analysis of mixed-gender dialogues in *At the Crossroads* revealed that over the course of 6 dialogues, male interlocutors used 22 elements of exchange structure, while females used 15 only. There was determined to be a significant imbalance in the type of exchange elements, with males found to initiate more (66.66%) than females (33.33%), and follow-up slightly more (58% and 42% respectively) in their own discourse (figure 01). Most of the I-exchanges whereas, the two gender characters responded equally and were assigned the same R- exchanges. In considering the overall exchange elements used, males dominated discourse and used more exchanges (60% male, 40% female).

From this analysis, we notice that female participants were often passive receivers and were supposed to answer questions more than asking them, except the case of the mother with her child. Even this female character appears in a stereotyped role; a mother punishing her child orally and threatening him because he has done something bad.

In these dialogues, we found out that male characters provided more frequent feedback than females. This is dissimilar to the findings of some researchers who found males to be less cooperative communicators than females, in both mixed gender conversations and single gender conversations. Whether this is the intention of the authors or not, promoting what is considered a more feminine style of speech can have its advantages. Cameron (2003) argues that while women's style of speech was considered deficient, a feminine style is now the ideal style. She claims that the supportive, cooperative style adapted by females is more appropriate to the vocational requirements of the global market. Accordingly, we hope that this was the Algerian authors' intention, yet we believe more that the power of male characters on the total conversations resulted in their higher frequency in the use of the different elements of exchanges. Whatever the case, the results here necessitate that textbook writers should look for equality so that learners can have equal chances of practice in all elements of conversational discourse. While dialogues are repeated frequently in classroom activities and almost all the students get involved, we must make sure that all the students will participate equally and impartially, and their sex wouldn't obstruct them.

Recommendations

Undeniably, we can assume that textbooks function as cultural mediators since they convey blatant and latent societal ideals and attitudes; they identify what learners grow out to be in society. Hence, they should be assigned a huge importance in any schooling setting; they must be thoughtfully designed so that they can respond to the learners' needs and expectations. Also, taking into consideration the fact that a textbook is as good as the teacher who delivers it, we pay more attention to the teacher than the textbook itself. Teachers are the mediators between the students and the textbook; they can turn a non biased textbook to a biased one, and the opposite would be true. Furthermore, textbooks are used for long periods of time before they are changed; they last for years. In Algeria for example, the last series of EFL textbooks had been published in 2004-2005, which means they are being used for eleven years now. They are designed and published on a national scale with a big budget and can not be changed every once in a while. Consequently, EFL teachers should recognize the issue of gender bias and identify its manifestations in the teaching materials; hence, they would be able to substitute and eliminate it and ensure balanced practice opportunities for all learners. To help EFL teachers do so, training programs dedicated to the subject and gender sensitive pedagogy towards education would be of immense value.

Conclusion

Despite the notable presence of women in society and specifically education institutes and the workplace, they are less visible and misrepresented in teaching materials. Actually, it is not plain to eradicate bias from language teaching materials if it is still rampant in our societies. Hitherto, gender stereotypes, hierarchies, and archetypal power relations are profoundly embedded in our culture, language, and state of mind that it is difficult for authors to avoid them in the production of instructional textbooks. Nevertheless, the role of the teacher is once more of chief importance within the classroom. While revising textbooks to inculcate altered de-gendered representations is extremely needed, textbooks cannot be remodeled overnight. Likewise, we can not simply discard our cultural heritage (tales, fables, works of literature, and other creative works) that depicts epochs when the right to gender equality was not even agreeable. The actual textbook can be delivered to learners yet from a

gender perspective as it should be recast in a way that motivates and develops a critical mind which would stand for educational and social change.

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Appendix

Discourse Analysis Transcripts from *At the Crossroads* textbook.

(M) represents a male participant and (F) represents a female participant.

Dialogue 1: Unit 1 (p. 23)

M: Do you want to have a computer or a video for your birthday?

F: I want both.

M: I'm really sorry. You can have either a computer or a video. You can't have both.

Dialogue 6: Listening Script (p. viii)

M1: Well, all in all, we have three suggestions. Let's discuss them in more detail and come to a decision. John?

M2: To my mind, all three suggestions are good. It's OK for building car parks outside the town. But this solution alone can't work if we don't make public transport cheaper in town and parking more expensive in the centre of the town.

F: Could I say something?

M1: Yes, go on Mary.

F: I agree with John. I don't think any half-measures will work. Therefore, I say let's go for all three measures.

M1: What's your reaction to John's and Mary's suggestions, Peter?

M3: I totally agree. It'll help a lot if we take all three measures at the same time.

M1: Right, let's recapitulate. All of us agree that half measures won't work, so we have decided: One, to build cheaper car parks outside the town; two, to make public transport into and in the centre of the town less expensive; and three to make parking in town more expensive. Let's finish there.