



An Investigation of Linguistic Sexism in the North Star Workbooks: 1, 2, and 3

Dr. Adnan Mohammad Bataineh

University of Buraimi, Oman

P. O. Box: 890

adnan.m@uob.edu.om

Mobile: +96895848621

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3888-4759>

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze linguistic sexism in three North Star Reading and Writing Workbooks used at the University of Buraimi to teach Foundation English courses I, II, and III. Quantitative content analysis is used to examine the following gender-related categories: pronouns, terms of address, proper names, gender firstness, and adjectives. Study findings indicate that gender bias is widespread in the three workbooks. Men were dominant and prevalent in all gender-related categories. Women's presence, on the other hand, was marginal and inferior. In addition, the study findings show that the gender firstness category was the least biased gender-related category against women in the workbooks. In general, the findings of the present study confirm the findings of many previous studies in terms of the presence of gender bias against girls/women in school curricula. The findings of the present study should help book designers and writers produce more gender-equitable teaching materials. Gender equality should be a priority for educators, teachers, and educational policymakers.

Keywords: Female invisibility; Gender bias; Gender representation; Linguistic sexism, Male dominance, Quantitative content analysis

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Introduction

Linguistic sexism in school textbooks is a major issue that reinforces gender stereotypes in society. Studies have found evidence of sexist language and gender stereotypes in composition textbooks (DeShazer, 1981), language textbooks (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018), and government secondary school English language textbooks from various countries (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Textbooks are also seen as a powerful instrument in shaping socio-occupational culture and can contribute to promoting gender stereotypes and lowering self-esteem among girls (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). It is also worth mentioning that gender-biased

images remain present in school textbooks worldwide (Blumberg, 2007). This issue is a hidden obstacle on the road to gender equality in education and society (Blumberg, 2007).

School textbooks are a major tool for the instruction and organization of teachers' pedagogic practices (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018). However, gender stereotypes are still inscribed in the curriculum and become evident inside school textbooks (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018). Sexist language in composition textbooks is still a major concern, as it reinforces gender stereotypes in society (DeShazer, 1981). A study conducted in Greece found that gender stereotypes exist throughout the full range of Greek-language textbooks used in the third grade of primary school (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018). The study also found that there is a need for evaluation of existing language textbooks in primary schools, intending to promote a more gender-balanced learning material (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018).

Gender bias in textbooks is a hidden obstacle on the road to gender equality (Blumberg, 2007). For example, the high level of consistency of gender bias in textbooks suggests that it is a deeply ingrained problem that requires a concerted effort to address. In addition, gender stereotypes in school textbooks can have a lasting impact on children's attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and can reinforce gender inequality in society. Therefore, it is important to evaluate existing language textbooks in primary schools and promote a more gender-balanced learning material to combat linguistic sexism in school textbooks (Blumberg, 2007).

Impact of Linguistic Sexism on Students' Learning

Linguistic sexism refers to the use of language that discriminates against a particular gender (Battaglia, 2020). Sexist language can affect both men and women, but women tend to suffer more from its negative effects in English-speaking cultures (Talosa & Temporal, 2018). Studies have shown that sexist language is prevalent in school textbooks and curricula, which can create a gender bias against women (Bataineh, 2021).

The use of sexist language in learning environments can have a negative impact on students' learning experiences. Battaglia (2020) found that both male and female participants perceived gender-exclusive language to be significantly more sexist. Moreover, women still face clear gender biases in the classroom, despite popular beliefs that they are not affected by gender bias. Battaglia (2020) also stressed that the use of sexist language can work to shame and silence women, creating an environment that is not conducive to learning. Linguistic sexism can also influence students in their choice of life goals and their perception of the life goals of others (Pincus & Pincus, 1980). It is also important to point out that career education can be impacted by sexist language, as it can create a gender bias against certain professions or career paths. It is important to address the issue of linguistic sexism in learning environments to create a more inclusive and equitable space for all students (Pincus & Pincus, 1980).

Linguistic sexism in school textbooks can negatively affect students' self-esteem by reinforcing gender stereotypes and biases. Research has shown that textbooks often have a pro-male bias, which can disadvantage girls and lower their self-esteem (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Gender stereotypes in textbooks can shape students' perceptions of the world and strengthen their

gendered worldview. Repeated exposure to such stereotypes can lead to the internalization of these biased perceptions. This can discourage girls from pursuing certain subjects, such as mathematics, due to the gender gap in representation. Moreover, many facets of school culture, including teaching materials and media, reinforce gender stereotypes and biases, which can accentuate gender differences and inequities. To counteract this, it is essential to promote gender equality in textbooks and school culture (Guichot-Reina & De la Torre-Sierra, 2023).

Gender bias in textbooks can indeed affect students' academic performance and perpetuate stereotypes. Biased content in textbooks can limit students' worldviews, career choices, and self-image, as well as their perception of the opposite gender group (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). Moreover, gender bias in textbooks can form stereotypical male and female characters, thinking models, and family roles, which can be passed down from generation to generation (Rong et al. 2021). It should also be taken into consideration that discriminatory gender norms and practices conveyed through textbooks can lower girls' motivation, participation, and achievement in school, affecting their future life chances (Benavot, 2016). Therefore, addressing gender bias in textbooks is essential for promoting educational fairness and providing an equal learning environment for all students (Rong et al. 2021).

Conceptual Framework

The Theory of Linguistic Relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, proposes that the language one speaks influences the way one thinks about reality (Smelser & Baltes, 2001). The hypothesis has three key elements linked in two relations: certain properties of a given language have consequences for patterns of thought about reality, diverse interpretations of reality embodied in languages yield different patterns of thought, and the structure of a language influences the worldview of its speakers (Lucy, 1997).

Linguistic discrimination can also be found in textbooks, where gender bias and stereotypes are perpetuated, reinforcing inequities and discriminatory practices between people of different genders (Cépeda et al. 2021). Moreover, textbooks are considered authoritative not only in terms of discipline-specific content but also concerning the transmission of dominant values, norms, and social practices (Cépeda et al. 2021). In the case of US higher education, this volume examines different forms of language and dialect discrimination on college campuses, where relevant protections in K-12 schools and the workplace are absent (Clements & Betray 2021). Real-world case studies at intersections with class, race, gender, and ability explore pedagogical and social manifestations and long-term impacts of this prejudice between and among students, faculty, and administrators (Clements & Betray 2021).

Linguistic sexism in textbooks can be examined by analyzing various aspects, such as gender representation, implicit bias, stereotypes, and language use (Cépeda et al. 2021). Bataineh, (2014) & Bataineh (2021) recommended the use of some categories to investigate linguistic sexism in textbooks that include the analysis of the language used in textbooks, including words, phrases, and syntax, to identify instances of gender bias and sexist language, analyzing gender firstness by examining the order in which genders are mentioned in the text, as this can indicate a preference for one gender over the other and lastly the study of pronoun usage by analyzing the

use of generic pronouns and their gender, as well as the frequency of male and female pronouns. Gouvias & Alexopoulos (2018) proposed the study of stereotypes in textbooks to identify instances where textbooks perpetuate gender stereotypes, such as assigning traditional gender roles or portraying one gender as less visible or less capable than the other.

The objective of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to identify the existence of linguistic sexism in the Foundation English Reading and Writing Workbooks utilized by the University of Buraimi, Oman. In particular, this research endeavors to identify what forms of linguistic sexism are evident in the three textbooks.

Research Questions

1. Do the North Star workbooks offer an equitable representation of men and women?
2. What are the most and least gender-biased categories against women in the three North Star workbooks?

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study was exclusive to investigating the prevalence of linguistic sexism in three university workbooks used for teaching Foundation English courses: North Star Workbooks. The research did not take into account other North Star textbooks employed for imparting knowledge on Foundation English courses.

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted on linguistic sexism in textbooks, with mixed results. Some studies have shown that some textbooks display a balanced and equal representation of men and women, while the findings of other studies have indicated the presence of gender bias against women (Bataineh, 2021). In addition, a study by Jasmani et al. (2011) examined the presence of gender inequality in English language school textbooks by using the Hidden Curriculum Theory. The researchers also interviewed the English teachers to validate the study's findings. The study findings found that gender inequality is still inherent and visible in English language textbooks used at Vietnamese upper secondary schools, with these textbooks portraying women as less visible than men. Another study examined the problem of sexism in ESL materials and how it is manifested in ESL textbooks, finding that sexism is present in these materials and has consequences (Porreca, 1984). It is also worth mentioning that a study on gender bias in linguistics textbooks found that male-gendered arguments are almost twice as frequent as female-gendered arguments, indicating that gender bias still plagues the field of syntax and linguistics today (Cépeda et al. 2021). Bataineh & Kayode (2020) conducted a study on gender firstness in sixteen Omani textbooks. They analyzed the following categories using content analysis: masculine and feminine third-person pronouns, titles, and names found in these Omani school textbooks. The study findings showed that the textbooks are gender biased against

females, with males being more visible and active than females (Bataineh & Kayode, 2020). In general, the study results have revealed that females' presence is marginal. One study specifically looked at gender positioning within the visual discourse of Algerian secondary education English textbooks using critical image analysis. In addition, they surveyed the perceptions of EFL school teachers using a self-report questionnaire. The study findings have shown that “ while the majority of the images display clear signs of bias against females, most teachers hardly view any imbalances between the two genders as far as visual representation is concerned” (Ziad & Ouahmiche, 2019). The researchers pointed out that the EFL school teachers did not view any gender imbalances in the textbooks because the teachers believe that gender bias is not of major importance in education (Ziad & Ouahmiche, 2019). In other words, the study findings found that the English language textbooks were the least gender fair and displayed bias towards females⁵ (Ziad & Ouahmiche, 2019). Overall, while some textbooks may display a balanced and equal representation of men and women, many studies have found the presence of gender bias against women in school and non-school textbooks, with women being portrayed as less visible and active than men.

Moreover, Abdul Hamid et al. (2013) used the corpus linguistic approach along with critical discourse analysis to examine the presence of gender stereotyping and linguistic sexism in Qatari primary school science textbooks used in Grades 1 to 6. The findings of the study showed the presence of “a large number of neutral gender roles which seem to indicate that the textbook writers were making a conscious effort to promote gender equality” (Abdul Hamid et al. (2013). It is also worth mentioning that the study indicated the textbooks portrayed men as more powerful and successful than women. Abdul Hamid et al. (2013) stressed that “The second-place status of females is still deeply rooted in the textbooks investigated”. In addition, Vahdatinejad & Bahiyah (2017) performed a systematic quantitative content analysis to investigate linguistic sexism in three volumes of Iranian EFL school textbooks. The analysis of the textbooks showed that linguistic sexism is strongly present. It also showed that the presence of women is inferior and marginal. On the other hand, men outnumber women and exhibit a powerful presence. It is also worth mentioning that Tarrayo (2014) investigated whether or not sexism is present in six Philippine preschool English language textbooks. His study used the qualitative-quantitative approach to examine gender visibility, gender firstness, occupational roles, character attributes, and interests and lifestyles. In general, the study indicated that men's presence is more visible than women's. In other words, the textbooks under investigation are sexist. For example, women appeared after men in the textbooks and men had more diverse occupational roles than women. Orfan (2022) employed 14 gender categories (e.g. gender firstness, social roles, masculine and feminine generic forms) to examine gender portrayal in primary and secondary school textbooks in Afghanistan. The results showed that the school textbooks were all centered on men. Men, for example, were more visible than women in all gender categories. Women's presence, on the other hand, was marginal. Men, for example, appeared before women in most textbooks (e.g. illustrations and texts). Women's names were also less frequent than men's. Men's hegemony was visible.

Methodology

Research Design

Quantitative content analysis is a research method used to systematically categorize and record features of textual, visual, or aural material so that they can be analyzed (Luo 2022). Researchers can use content analysis to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data (Content analysis, n.d.).

The process of coding is central to content analysis, which involves following a set of instructions about what features to look for in a text and then making the designated notation when that feature appears (Coe & Scacco, 2017). Researchers can use quantitative content analysis to count and measure the occurrence of certain words, phrases, subjects, or concepts in a set of historical or contemporary texts. Qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, is focused on interpreting and understanding the data. In both types of content analysis, researchers categorize or "code" words, themes, and concepts within the texts and then analyze the results (Luo 2022).

Data Gathering Procedure

By analyzing data collected through the counting and analysis of masculine and feminine pronouns, proper names, terms of address, gender firstness, and adjectives associated with men and women in three different workbooks, the researcher was able to gain valuable insights. These categories formed the basis for understanding how language use contributes to gender bias in society.

Description of the Sample

The sample textbooks include three Reading & Writing North Star Workbooks for levels 1, 2, and 3 (GCC edition). They are published by Pearson Education Limited. The workbooks are designed to teach students reading and writing skills. Each workbook has 8 units. Level 1 workbooks target beginner-level, level 2 workbooks are designed for pre-intermediate level students, and level 3 workbooks target intermediate students. Various themes are used to teach students the two language skills such as *offbeat jobs, everyday heroes, subway etiquette, endangered languages, finding the ideal job, creative thinking, making money, we are what we eat, what's your medicine, endangered cultures*, etc.

Results and Discussion

The study results clearly show that sexist language is still widespread in the three North Star workbooks. In general, all North Star workbooks under investigation revealed the presence of blatant linguistic sexism against women. In addition, the study findings indicate that the least gender-biased category against women was gender-firstness. All the other gender-related categories were almost equally biased against women.

The following gender-related categories provide an in-depth quantitative analysis of the workbooks:

Pronouns

The number of occurrences of masculine (he, his, and his) and feminine (she and her) pronouns was counted and tabulated. In terms of pronouns used in the three North Star workbooks, men outnumber women, as seen in Table 1. The total number of masculine pronouns was 195, while there were only 53 feminine pronouns. Table 1 demonstrates that language sexism against women is not only obvious but also pervasive. The number of pronouns used by men and women differs dramatically. Table 1 also demonstrates that the greatest gender disparity exists in North Star Levels 2 and 3 workbooks. In general, the strong presence of masculine pronouns in the three workbooks indicates a gender bias against women in modern school curricula.

Table 1

Masculine and Feminine Pronouns in North Star Workbooks

Textbook	Masculine Pronouns	Feminine Pronouns
Level 1	45	24
Level 2	99	19
Level 3	51	10
Total	195	53

Proper Names

The total number of masculine and feminine proper names observed in the three North Star workbooks was also investigated. Table 2 appears to provide clear proof that there is still much work to be done to combat gender bias in educational curricula. Table 2 demonstrates that there were 48 masculine proper names in the textbooks compared to only 14 feminine proper names. In other words, significant work remains to be done to close the gender gap. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that the Level 3 North Star workbook has the greatest gender gap. For example, the number of masculine proper names was 7. Women, on the other hand, were completely unnoticed.

Table 2

Masculine and Feminine Proper Names in North Star Workbooks

Textbook	Masculine Names	Feminine Names
Level 1	25	10
Level 2	16	4
Level 3	7	0
Total	48	14

Gender Firstness

Gender firstness refers to the practice of positioning the male noun or pronoun ahead of the female noun or pronoun in sentences and conversations (Pillay & Maistry 2017). It is a linguistic feature where one particular gender is often mentioned first (Bataineh, 2017). Gender firstness is considered an indicator of linguistic sexism in curricula (Bataineh, 2021). It reinforces gender bias by prioritizing men ahead of women (Pillay & Maistry 2017). The gender-firstness category revealed that the three North Star workbooks have a balanced representation of men and women. Table 3 reveals that there were 11 instances when males appeared before men, compared to 9 instances when women appeared before men. Furthermore, it's worth noting that there were more instances of women appearing before men in the Level 1 workbook. Women, for example, appeared six times, whereas men appeared only twice. The gender difference favors men in the level 2 workbook as well. Men appeared before women in six distinct locations, whilst women appeared only once. In general, the three workbooks present an equitable portrayal of men and women.

Table 3

Gender Firstness in North Star Workbooks

Textbook	Men	Women
Level 1	2	6
Level 2	7	2
Level 3	2	1
Total	11	9

Terms of Address

Terms of address refer to the words, phrases, names, or titles used to address someone in writing or while speaking. They are also known as address terms or forms of address. Terms of address can be formal, such as "Doctor," "The Honorable," or "His Excellence," or informal, such as "honey," "dear," or "you". Formal terms of address are typically used in professional contexts such as academia, government, medicine, and religion (Nordquist 2019). In addition to formal and informal terms of address, there are also honorifics, which are titles that convey esteem, courtesy, or respect when addressing or referring to a person. Examples of honorifics include "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Ms.," and "Dr."(Wikimedia Foundation 2023). The examination of workbook terms of address revealed that women are invisible. Men, on the other hand, had a commanding presence. Table 4 demonstrates that the total number of occurrences of terms of address in the workbooks is 3 for males and 0 for women. There is gender discrimination in the workbooks. It is also worth noting that there were no terms of address linked with men and women in the level 3 workbook.

Table 4

Terms of Address in North Star Workbooks

Textbook	Men	Women
Level 1	2	0
Level 2	1	0
Level 3	0	0
Total	3	0

Adjectives

The analysis of adjectives associated with men and women found more evidence of gender bias against women in the three North Star workbooks. Table 5 statistics unmistakably show that women's presence remains marginal and second to men's. In the workbooks, men are linked with 42 adjectives, while women are associated with only 10 adjectives. According to the statistics, the level 2 workbook has the greatest gender discrepancy in terms of adjectives linked with men and women in the workbooks. To summarize, the gender difference between men and women remains enormous.

Table 5

Adjectives Associated with Men and Women in North Star Workbooks

Textbook	Men	Women
Level 1	22	6
Level 2	16	3
Level 3	4	1
Total	42	10

Conclusion

Linguistic sexism is a pervasive issue in textbooks, with a significant bias against women. Men are often given priority and prominence, while women are marginalized and underrepresented. This problem is not limited to a particular level of education or language, as it is present in both ESL and upper secondary school English textbooks. The manifestation of sexism in textbooks includes portraying women as inferior to men, as well as reinforcing gender stereotypes and roles. The findings of the present study of the three North Star Reading and Writing Workbooks used at the University of Buraimi to teach Foundation English courses are consistent with the majority of the previous studies that indicate the presence of gender bias in school textbooks. This issue has serious consequences, as it perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces harmful

attitudes toward women. While efforts have been made to neutralize linguistic sexism, such as using gender-neutral language, it remains a cumbersome task. It is crucial to address this issue and promote gender equality in education, as textbooks play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes and beliefs. By creating inclusive and diverse learning materials, we can empower women and promote a more equitable society.

Recommendations

Educators are encouraged to screen their instructional materials for linguistic sexism. In school, they can use manuals designed to combat linguistic sexism. Using such manuals should help combat gender sexism as they offer practical and feasible guidelines to make the school curricula more gender equitable. To combat sexism and gender bias, teachers are also required to adopt more inclusive language in their classrooms. Educators should also promote a balanced learning atmosphere in which boys and girls are encouraged to appreciate each other's goals and aspirations.

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