Roles Assigned to Gender in Some Selected Nigeria’s Coursebooks

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ABSTRACT

There is a good and a mutual relationship between language and gender. Gender is replicated by language while language is used in assigning a gender to a particular sex. English Language Teaching coursebooks are very significant instrument in learning both the second language and the second culture. As a result, it is very important at the cause of designing a coursebook, material writers should maintain gender equality. This study aimed at investigating how gender discrimination is embedded in coursebooks used in the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria’s schools.

Keywords: language; gender; gender discrimination; learning of English language

1. INTRODUCTION

The words Sex and Gender have been first distinguished by the British and American psychiatrist and other medical personnel working with intersex and transsexual patients in the 1950s and 1960s (Moi, 2005). Since then, people tend to use the word gender in differentiating between sex as biological and gender as socially and culturally invented. From this perspective, sex can be said to be fixed and based on nature while gender is fluid and based on culture (Goldstein, 2003). If gender is based on culture, then it is subject to change with time as culture changes do to some factors. Language is one of the factors and it can never be separated from the culture. All norms and values of a society which portrays one’s culture are embedded in a language.
This shows that language plays a significant role in a human life. Many researches have been conducted by many scholars across the world on the role of coursebooks in the process of learning culture and assigning roles to the different genders. Most of the studies show that females are assigned the traditional roles like cook, receptionist, secretary, mother, housewife, etc., while males take the professional roles of doctor, scientist, king, footballer, etc.

U’Ren (1971) is among the early researchers on the discrimination of gender in ELT textbooks. She conducted a content analysis on “The Images of Women in Textbooks.” She took thirteen textbooks among the most recent textbooks used in the second to sixth grade in Californian schools. Her findings were females are assigned the traditional role of a cook, cleaner, etc., while males have all sort of adventurous and interesting activities.

Hellinger (1980) did her research taking 131 passages from ELT coursebook used in German schools. Her findings were: 93% of the participants in the passages were males and not even 30% of the passages include females. In addition to this, 80% of the speakers were males and female are rarely engage in any interesting, successful or professional activities. Most of the interesting activities were assigned to males.

In 1995, a survey of ten ELT coursebooks used in Japanese Junior and Senior High Schools was conducted by Sakita. The distribution of occupational activities assigned to females according to Sakita is limited. The roles given were the traditional roles of a Student, Maid, Actress, Mother, and a Ballet dancer. While male were assigned the roles of an Artist, Clerk in a big office, Lecturer, Priest, Physician, Colonel, Carpenter, etc. Males were assigned to independent and managerial jobs while females were assigned to a subordinate jobs. For example: the secretary was a female; the boss was a male.

Equally in 2003, a research was conducted by Shteiwi where 96 primary school coursebooks in Jodan were studied. The purpose of that research was to examine the representation of gender roles in those coursebooks. Shteiwi was able to find 6,159 roles assigned to different genders. Among the 6,159 roles, 87% were assigned to male gender. With regards to public roles which constituted 65% of the total roles, 93% were assigned to male gender. Majority of the roles assigned to females were traditional roles like teaching. Almost no female was assigned to a political or professional role.

These kinds of research was also conducted in Hong Kong. Lee in 2006, in his comparative analysis between the most recent and in use coursebooks and early and not in use coursebooks with regards to gender representation, found out that there is no change over time. Lee selected twenty English coursebooks from the recommended list by the government of Hong Kong. Ten of the books were published in previous five years and are in use at the time of the study. The other ten had been published in the 1980s and are not in use at the time of the study. Lee found that females continued to occupy the traditional roles such as Secretary, Maid, and Typist.

Belgin’s MA thesis was on “Spot On” for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. It is a series of coursebooks for teaching and learning which was published by the Turkish Ministry of Education. The results Belgin found were at varying degrees of bias against females. These varying degrees of bias were categorized by the researcher as Community Acts, where females were assigned 33% compared to males with 67%; Technology Related Activities, females 0% compared to males with 100%; in Power, 41% was assigned to females while males were given 59%; also in Language Use, 44% was assigned to female compared to
males with 56%. This clearly show female are discriminated giving priorities to male counterpart.

In order to investigate the roles assigned to gender or gender equality in this study, two coursebooks were used as the data. The first one is the “Macmillan Brilliant Primary English Book 3”. This book is chosen because, it is commonly found in many primary schools in Nigeria and it is designed for pupils with age ranges between 7 and 8. At this stage in life pupils know the differences in terms of gender but the roles assigned to a gender is not clearly understood. It is assumed that coursebook can play a vital role at this stage in assigning roles to the different genders. The second book used is the “Junior English Project for Secondary Schools Book 3”. This is also chosen because at this stage children are expected to pick a line of profession i.e. Sciences or Arts. Coursebooks are also assumed to play an important role at this stage. Table-1 gives the publication details of these books.

Table 1. Coursebooks used as data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Book</th>
<th>Date of Publication</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Writer(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Both texts (written data) and illustration (visual data) are analysed through content analysis and findings are classified under the following headings:

a) Visual representation of female and male characters

b) Distribution of occupational activities to female and male characters

c) Division of household activities to female and male characters

In the findings of the visual data, the result shows that male character appeared more than the female character. This can be seen looking at the frequency of appearance in both the texts.

The difference in appearance between female and male characters is more significant in “Junior English Project for Secondary Schools Book 3” compared to “Macmillan Brilliant Primary English Project Book 3.” Table 2 shows the difference clearly.
Table 2. Visual Representation of Female and Male Characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursebook</th>
<th>Presence of Female Character</th>
<th>Frequency of Female Character</th>
<th>Presence of Male Character</th>
<th>Frequency of Male Character</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan Brilliant Primary English Book 3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior English Project Book 3</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall result of the representation shows that there are more female representation in “Junior English Project for Secondary Schools Book 3” and most of the representation are indoors (traditional roles), (U’ Ren 1971, Hellinger 1980, Shteiwi 2003).

Table 3. Distribution of Occupational Activities to Female and Male Character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursebook</th>
<th>Distribution of Occupational Activities to Female Character</th>
<th>Frequency of Female Characters</th>
<th>Distribution of Occupational Activities to Male Character</th>
<th>Frequency of Male Character</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan Brilliant Primary English Book 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior English Project Book 3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Division of Household Activities to Female and Male Characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursebook</th>
<th>Division of Household Activities to Female Character</th>
<th>Frequency of Female Character</th>
<th>Division of Household Activities to Male character</th>
<th>Frequency of Male Character</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macmillan Brilliant Primary English Book 3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior English Project Book 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at the distribution of occupational activities in table 3, it can be seen clearly that the frequency of assigning occupational activities to female gender is more in “Junior English Project for Secondary Schools Book 3.” 25% occupational activities were assigned to female gender which is slightly higher when compared to “Macmillan Brilliant Primary English Book 3” that assigned 22%. The overall result shows that the assigning of the occupational activities to female gender is low in both the coursebooks used. Male were assigned most of the roles with a frequency of 78% in “Macmillan Brilliant” and 75% in “Junior English Project”.

Table 3 shows a very low division of household activities in both the coursebooks. Despite the low division, female are assigned household activities more than male in both the coursebooks. In Macmillan, 21% can be seen when we look at the frequency of division of household activities to male gender and the female gender takes most of the roles. That is a bit better when compared to 0% in Junior English Project. All the household roles are were given to females.

From all the findings, it has been observed that female gender is assigned with low frequency in visual appearance and distribution of occupational activities. Consequently, this has shown the dominance of male gender in these two respective roles over female gender in both the coursebooks used as data in this study. It is only in division of household activities we found male gender assigned with low frequency. This clearly shows that household activities are the roles that best fit the female gender in these coursebooks.

2. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study has shown clearly that there is no difference with findings of the previous researchers like U’Ren (1971), Hellinger (1980), Sakita (1995), Shteiwi (2003) and Lee (2006) where male gender dominates female gender in almost all the roles assigned in the ELT coursebooks. Female gender is assigned the roles of household or some selective roles like typing, secretary, receptionist, teacher, nurse e. t. c. while male counterpart takes the whole professional and managerial activities.

References


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