
The Representation of Gender in English Textbooks in Indonesia

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Abstract

The urgency of revealing the actual situation of gender equality in education is the background of this study. Two textbooks used regularly in Senior High School level in Semarang namely ‘Bahasa Inggris’ (henceforth BI) and ‘Aim High’ (henceforth AH) were used as the subjects of the study. Briefly, the objectives of the study are to describe the similarities of the representation of gender in BI and AH and to describe differences of the representation of gender in BI and AH. In gathering the data, content analysis for analyzing gender representation proposed by Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) was used as the instrument to gain the data after being adapted in some parts. The results of the analysis revealed that (1) both BI and AH are similar in the domination of male over female in the exercise and images part; they are also similar in depicting male characters engaged with higher education, social, and outdoor-based activities. In another side, (2) Both BI and AH are different in which BI has no one female- or equal shared domination in all of the parts while AH has female dominated the frequency in the course material and equal shared domination in the reading passage and conversation part.

Keywords: Gender representation, content analysis, textbook

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Introduction

The notion of equal gender awareness in society has been devoted since decades ago, especially in western countries. It was pioneered by the study from Lakoff (1973) revealed women were more likely to be in lower-status position rather than men. From this study on, several scholars around the globe have been starting to realize about gender disparity and putting the focus on this topic. One of the concrete actions to diminish gender inequality was Dakar Convention held by UNESCO in Senegal, 2000. The main topic is about Education for All (EFA) which this summit was trying to open State Members to pay attention

more toward equality in every aspect, especially in education. At the end of the meeting, EFA created six goals that ought to be achieved in 2015 following convention. One of the goals is gender equality in education. Recently, UNESCO (2015) has taken a decision to prioritize gender equality in its programs, and considered gender matters as a central issue in the global post-2015 education agenda. Gender inequality or gender bias can be manifested in many aspects of education including access, retention, success career choices, opportunities, and teaching and learning materials. Specifically, the consciousness of political

correctness about gender matters has been forced in teaching and learning aids and materials.

Frankly speaking, a textbook is one of the teaching aids that can be a crucial tool to build students' attitude toward world life. It can be simply defined as a medium for providing materials and also sometimes exercises which are used as a basis for the course. This definition is also supported by Tomlison (1998) that textbooks serve as a basis for language input that learners need and for language practice that occurs in the classroom. The use of textbook inside and outside the classroom may indicate this as a potential tool for introducing social norms and values. As a guidance, students mostly use the textbook to facilitate them in self-studying both at school and at home. It cannot be neglected that there will be much interaction between them and in other words students may acquire consciously or unconsciously both explicit and implicit knowledge provided by the contents embedded in the textbook.

Numerous studies have been conducted to supportively raise the awareness of gender equality in ELT teaching materials, especially in textbooks. Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland (1997) found balanced gender representation in English textbooks. Further, a curriculum of English teaching offered by Sweden government has provided a blueprint in achieving gender equality. This situation may suggest that most of the European countries have started to concern on political awareness, especially gender matters. From local researchers, an across-country study involving Indonesian and Australian researchers namely Utomo, McDonald, Hull, Rosyidah, Hartimah, Idrus, Sadli, and Makruf (2009) reveal gender depiction in 86 textbooks from four major subject areas namely Bahasa Indonesia, English language, Islamic Religion, Science and Biology,

Social Science and Sport and Healthy Living. All the textbooks adopted KTSP curriculum or the Indonesian previous curriculum. The result showed that male frequently appeared in public sphere while female tended to deal with work in private or domestic sphere. Moreover, in terms of social leadership and technology, the male roles were presented dominantly.

As language is used to communicate among people, it then expands the scope of gender that is not only about action that human performs but also linguistic resources used to communicate among humans. Language holds an important role in our society since it influences to what extent our perception of the world and what we understand 'natural' sex roles to be (Mills, 1995: 62). Further, the linguistic evidence shows what kind of things done by man is called as masculine, done by woman is called as feminine, and language with gender free is called neuter (Mustedanagic, 2010). From these roles of language, it can be assumed that gender especially its identity can be represented, constructed and contested through language.

Moreover, roles for both women and men in society need to be balance. This situation is also called as gender equality. It can be achieved when 'women and men enjoy the same status and have an equal opportunity to exercise their human rights and realize their full potential to contribute towards political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results' (UNESCO, 2015: 10). Either woman or man has chances to express her/his ideas and to act freely without being bounded by the sex status. The term gender equality is also interchangeably used with gender equity. Gender bias, however, is the opposite meaning of gender equity. This condition is also called as sexism in which to describe

‘discrimination within a social on the basis of sexual membership’ (Wodak, 1997: 7). The bias or sexism occurs when one gender is treated unfairly than another gender. Later on, the term gender bias is chosen to use more often in this study since it becomes the concern of the study.

Briefly, gender bias or sexism in language occurs when a certain gender is exploited unfairly and discriminated in terms of linguistic resources. Vetterling-Braggin (as cited in Mills, 1995: 62) defines it as ‘a statement that is sexist if it contributes to, encourages or causes or results in the oppression of women’. She then suggests the wider scope of definition as ‘a statement is sexist if its use constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes’ (ibid.). Commonly the sexism exists when male-related language is considered as a norm and standard in language use. If it does, female seems to feel being excluded and treated exclusively.

In this study, stereotyped sex roles are examined broader in regards to sex-linked job possibilities and sex-based activity types. These are in connection with occupational and social roles suggested by Jones et.al (1997). Therefore, what kind of jobs addressed to both female and male is important to be studied in order to know the ideology about gender occupational roles contested in the textbook. As for example, female is restricted to occupations such as being a student and a nurse while male is portrayed in diversity jobs such as being a police officer, a doctor, a farmer, a soldier and a teacher (Ansary and Babaii, 2003). In similar vein, appropriate activities for male and female suggested by each textbook also needs to be scrutinized. Thus, the general perspectives concerning gender social roles can be explained in detail. For instance, in

case of one of Indonesian pictorial textbook studies, Damayanti (2014) revealed females were depicted more dependent than males and were also construed to be admirers of an action carried out by the males.

In this present study, it investigates the way gender is portrayed in the course materials, the reading passage, the conversation, the exercises, and the images in the English textbooks. Theoretically speaking, there is no in-depth study that focuses on these part of the textbook used as the source of the analysis; this current study fills this gap. Furthermore, this study also compared two distinctive textbooks’ authors background in which one textbook is written by non-native speakers entitled ‘*Bahasa Inggris*’ (henceforth BI) by Widiati, Rohmah, and Furaidah and another one is by native speakers entitled ‘*Aim High*’ by Falla and Davies (2010). For the sake of being clear, this study aimed to answer research questions namely: (1) what are similarities of the representation of gender in BI and AH? (2) What are differences of the representation of gender in BI and AH?

Methodology

To gather linguistic evidence in a whole textbook, content analysis is deployed as it is a systematic way of looking at the texts for their content (what they are about, and elements in them) rather than structure of language (Sunderland, 2011: 39-40). As the concern of the study is about gender, thus the contents of the textbooks being analysed are everything related to gender issue. The identification process is guided by gender-related categories in which later the occurrences of all the categories are counted. In determining what the categories are being used in this study, methodological framework proposed by

Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) is employed. In this model, the gender-related issue is brought by a character. Thus, the unit of analysis in this study is about sentences that embed the character in them. The content analysis is only used to identify the existence of the gender based on the categories or provide quantitative results. Later, to complete the findings, the analysis of discourse in terms of how the specific gendered-character is represented in the certain context. In short, the design generated in this study is to reveal what the textbook is broadly about concerning gender issue, who the characters are and how they are represented.

The instrument of the current study is generated from the adaptation of Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) framework. There are some adjustments on the categorization to fit to the current study condition. Since the original framework is not specifically addressed for EFL textbook which is designed to all school textbooks, there are deletion and limitation of each category in order to make it more appropriate

and adequate enough to answer research questions in this study.

Findings and Discussions

The first finding is about the overall representation of gender in both textbooks. Based on chart 1, the identifiable similarity of the two textbooks is the domination of female characters as the whole. In BI, the proportion of male characters 48% is higher than the proportion of female ones which is only 35%. And only 17% of neutral or gender-free language is used in the textbook. From this general overview, there is a bias related to visibility of gender. The characters in the textbook were dominated by male-related nouns and pronouns. In the similar vein, the thorough analysis about gender represented in AH suggests the domination of male characters over female ones also. The proportion of male-related characters is 48% while female ones is only 39%. In this textbook, the neutral characters were barely used as the optional characters.

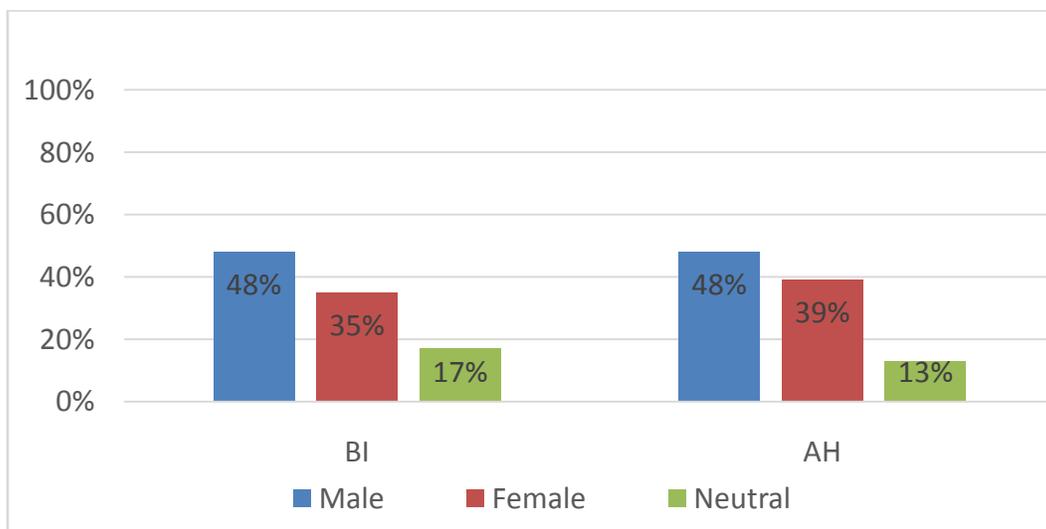


Chart 1. The Overall Gender Representation in BI and AH

Furthermore, regarding the components in a textbook, the findings are delivered in detail by dividing the results of the analysis based on the course material part,

the reading passage part, the conversation script part, the exercise part, and the images. The percentages are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The percentage of female and male in BI and AH

Part of The Textbook	BI			AH		
	Female	Male	Neutral	Female	Male	Neutral
Course material	31%	47%	22%	60%	27%	13%
Reading Passage	47%	53%	0	48%	48%	3%
Conversation Script	43%	57%	0	47%	47%	6%
Exercise	32%	36%	32%	30%	45%	25%
Image	36%	60%	4%	44%	54%	2%

Table 1 suggests male domination in all components of the textbook. Firstly I report the results from BI. In course material, the proportion of male is 47% that is higher than female which is only 31%. Fortunately, neutral characters are also used about 22% of the whole characters in the textbook. In reading passage, the significance number between male and female characters becomes smaller in which the representation of male 57% is only slightly higher than female 47%. There were 8 male and 7 female characters appeared as the main actor in the reading texts. In conversation text, male characters domination once again exists over female ones with the proportions are 57% for male and 43% for female. In the exercise part, the female characters are still underrepresented with only 32% of the characters are related to a woman while 36% of them are male characters. However, this gender bias is slightly faded away for the sake of the existence of gender-free language used as neutral characters which has 32% of the

proportion in the exercise part. The last identified gender bias is in the image part which consists of 59 male characters or 60% and only 36 female characters or 36% of the total characters. The rest of them or only 4% depicted neutral characters. The results suggest the high domination of male characters over female in BI. This condition is even worse by the fact that never did female characters dominate the proportion of appearance than male ones in every component of the textbook. This suggests the supremacy of males over females. The exclusion of female from textbook has been shown in other research (Ansary and Babaii, 2003; Barton and Sakwa, 2012).

The underexposed of females is vital with respect to the development of sexist attitudes unintentionally (Barton and Sakwa, 2012: 175). This is supported by the underpinning reason that a textbook is one of the compulsory materials needed by the students and it is exposed regularly and repeatedly. Accordingly, students may be

influenced by this sexist knowledge unconsciously. Furthermore, most students trust on the credibility of a textbook as an educational material and they ‘tend to absorb and assimilate the materials in minute detail without comment, and to be susceptible to their influence’ (Lee and Collins, 2008: 128).

Secondly, the analysis goes on findings in AH. When looking at the result of the analysis in depth as being depicted in the table 2, in some parts there are some parts seem to have equal gender representation. In reading passage and conversation script, the proportion between male and female is surprisingly exactly balance. The both percentage of male and female characters in reading texts is 48% and the rest of them or the proportion of the neutral characters is 4%. The same case also occurred in conversational texts where the proportion of male and female

is 47% and the rest of them is 6% left for neutral characters. The domination of male characters still occurred in the exercise and image part. The intriguing result takes place in course material part when female characters are significantly higher than male ones with the ratio 9:4.

The urgency of identifying the domain of activities, occupations, and roles of the characters is to reveal stereotype about gender believed by the textbooks authors. Based on the analysis, the characters depicted in both textbooks were represented under the domain of education, social, communication, business and industry (B and I), science and engineering (S and E), leisure, society, family, character, health, sport, transport, and music as the detail result can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The domain of activity, role and occupation in BI and AH

Domain of activity, occupation, and roles	BI		AH	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Education	9	15	11	11
Social	10	14	2	4
Communication	2	1	3	1
Business and Industry (B and I)	1	1	1	3
Science and Engineering (S and E)	0	5	3	2
Leisure	4	3	8	9
Society	0	2	2	8
Family	8	9	14	11
Character	21	17	29	29
Health	0	0	2	9
Sport	3	1	8	15
Transport	0	0	0	4
Music	0	3	0	0

Evidence in course material part was also found that mostly examples of course material in BI were basically composed of male-oriented topics. Specifically, male is depicted as an educated one such as about continuing study and involving in job related to science and engineering. This phenomenon may drive to an assumption that a man is corresponded with educated roles. This such assumption is supported by the evidence *continue his study* and *receive a degree in engineering*. The facts suggest only males can continue their study to get better knowledge and higher degree.

A much closer look to reading passage part, the imbalance occurrence also appears in which female-related passages were underrepresented over male-related ones. This is in line with Ansary and Babaii (2003) revealed there are more male-oriented stories than female oriented ones. The domination of male as the main characters in reading passages is worth mentioning the position of male as a norm in life. This imagines problems and issues in the world are for man-made. This indicates the text engaging with female-related issues is not important. This is pernicious because reading passage as the main material for teaching and learning are recognised as ‘the first official agent and the most powerful engine’ in socializing gendered knowledge (Foroutan, 2012:771). Therefore, the female-related topic should also be added more to give female students equal right as male students do.

For closer analysis in the reading passage part, there are three texts related to female-oriented issues. The two first texts discussed about descriptive text of two female students. These texts denoted what characters of female students have and what kinds of

activities they do in their spare time. In these texts, in engaging with their leisure time, they listen to music and read novel and short story. From these lists of activities, women are suggested to do domestic activities such as dealing with home-related activities. This such result is also supported by Wu and Liu (2015) who argue women are depicted more in the category of domestic activities which they undertake all the housework and perpetuate nursing and caring family.

In male-only texts, otherwise, male characters were portrayed to be inventors as in case of the text about Wright brothers who have invented plane. From this case, science and engineering were area of fieldwork closely related to men as Wright brothers built up a plane firstly based on their ability in science and had background study as engineers. Moreover, it was also represented in the figure of *B.J. Habibie* who have been third president in Indonesia and also established plane factory in Indonesia. In the text entitled *B.J. Habibie*, the story mostly told the biography of Habibie from he was kid until becoming an Indonesian president. Further, male characters were portrayed as a clever and tricky ones represented in a narrative story entitled a *Kanchil*. Though the character in the story originally was an animal, but the authors used male-deixis as pronouns instead of neutral one. This may arise an assumption that male is as the norm and a standard to be a character in a story. The domination of male-related topics suggests that the authors tend to position male as a central in texts. It is not surprising male represents education field because Indonesian Statistics Bureau (2015) noticed about 5.95% of female and only 2.61% of male population were illiterate.

Regarding the conversation part, the number of female speakers show bias in which they had fewer chance to be speakers. Topics of conversation around male-related life were still favoured by the authors. Despite of the domination of the speakers, male, in the other side, only had small number of turns. This such finding was also found by Parhem (2013) but the reverse that she yielded male and female characters have more and less equal occurrences in conversation in which female speakers had more participants and male speakers had more turns. Female speakers surprisingly had many turns in each conversation especially in female-to-female interactions. The traditional cultures in Indonesia, to my knowledge, have indicated female as an active speaker and male as a passive one. This such argument is supported by the findings that among all interactions, five of them were cross-gender interactions while these findings indicated balanced-interface.

From analysis of insight into the exercise part, male still slightly outnumbered female. The comparison of male and female is in the ratio 1.15:1. In terms of character, women were portrayed as the ones tend to involve in action related to feelings. This suggests female is a sensitive creature in which she is sometimes easily to be disappointed, pessimistic, and runaway from problems. It is supported by verbs used in the sentences such as *feel*, *trust*, and *get tired*. In the other side, men were depicted to be problem solver and responsible for what they have done. For instance in the sentence *Joe wanted to bury the dead body of his pet Bonnie at the backyard*. The male name Joe is responsible for his dead pet by not letting it unburied but burying it instead.

The verbal data alone are not adequate enough to analyze hidden agenda in the textbook. As stated by Mujiyanto (2016) that the dependence of verbal passages on visual representation is relative high. Thus, involving the image part in this study is crucial. The stereotypes depicted in the pictures were female students tend to do indoor activity while male ones tend to engage with outdoor activity. For females, they were portrayed as diligent students which were supported by the evidence in the pictures that they were in library, discussing with friends, and always pictured with books in their hands. Males, on the contrary, were depicted more to do traveling and hiking to the wild forests and mountains.

In the course material of AH, female characters are portrayed under the domestic sphere as the one who actively takes care her family as can be seen in the evidence *she is carrying a baby*. This indicates women nurturing their baby as they are only the one who always carrying their baby, not their husband. Moreover, woman is likely to spend her leisure time at home as it is found in a clause the subject *she* is doing an action *watch* at home when holiday is coming.

In reading passage part, in chapter 1, a text entitled *Supermum* exposed the struggle of a mother having fifteen children. In this text, the main character was described to have a difficult job to take care all kinds of housework. It is supported by the evidence from action verbs used in the text such as *iron*, *clean*, *wash*, *drive*, *help* and *shop*. Her husband, however, only had a small portion of taking care the children because he worked from morning till noon at his office. The text is assumed to portray the real situation in the most European family. Thus, by this evidence, the depiction of female is mostly

appeared under the domain of family in which women thoroughly dominate activities related to housework and have a role as family carer. This statement is also supported by another evidence in the text entitled *The Simpson family*. Marge, a mother and a wife respectively, was depicted as a house wife. Not only having role as a caregiver, occupation suited to female commonly is also shaped into only as a house wife.

In the exercise part, it was revealed that female tend to carry out anything individually in their spare time. Spending time at home was the common activity done by female characters in the texts. Nevertheless, group-based activities were mostly found performed by the male characters. Such as meeting up with same gender friends and playing football were the proof of male involving in same gender colony. The act of doing activities with other indicates male as a social being while female tends to be individual being.

In the conversation part, male has power to control the conversation. It is caused by the fact that men mostly became initiators and women only gave feedback. From this phenomenon, female speakers can be categorized as passive speakers. The total number of turns also indicate men were likely to have freedom to express their ideas more than women did even though the entire number of speakers were equal. This phenomenon once again enhance the ideology of the authors discussed in the previous parts that men have a tendency to be active more in social activities such as interact with other people and their bravery also push them to initiate and control the conversation.

The last part being discussed is images. The authors of AH have a tendency to

utilize real picture rather than animated one or cartoon. Overall, the percentage of female-related pictures 44% was lower than male-related ones 54% which is also similar with Barton and Sakwa (2012) who revealed female were under-represented in the illustrations. Further, the closer analysis related one picture with more than one characters also revealed similar result. However, in terms of mixed-gender pictures, the supremacy of female in the male and female pictures was slightly higher than male. This may not decrease the bias anyway since 'female only' pictures were limited.

Regarding the stereotypes depicted in the images, there was a stereotype in occupation that male characters were depicted to work as doctor and dentist while female ones were depicted as nurse. This such result may strengthen the judgement about female having subservient role. Their existences were expected only to help male's works in which male characters controlled the process of the works since they were addressed to have higher position than female ones.

It was clear that gender bias still occurs in educational setting. So far, the findings were revealed from one of the source of learning materials, a textbook. This issue may be controlled by teachers at classroom as the one who can stir the classroom environment. Further, teachers also can invite parents to have educational perspective (Ali and Mujiyanto, 2017) especially related to stereotype of gender.

Conclusion

From this study it is found that authors' perspective is still bias in terms of gender stereotype at society. The content of the textbook as teaching and learning material

may reflect this phenomenon. From the result of the analysis, both BI and AH are similar in the domination of male over female in the exercise and images part; they are also similar in depicting male characters engaged with higher education, social, and outdoor-based activities. In another side. Otherwise, both BI and AH are different in which BI has no one female- or equal shared domination in all of the parts while AH has female dominated the

frequency in the course material and equal shared domination in the reading passage and conversation part. These such results may be used as the suggestion for the stakeholders in providing adequate and proper textbooks as main source material for English teaching and learning process. At school, teachers as the main actor in the classroom can manage to equalize gender roles through selecting appropriate materials.

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