

DOING GENDER AND ETHNICITY IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS^[1]

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Abstract: This study investigates gender and ethnicity by following three research traditions: gender and ethnicity as category, gender and ethnicity as construction and gender and ethnicity as deconstruction. The textbooks selected were six of the most popular Japan ministry of education (MEXT) approved textbooks that have been designated for use in public junior high schools from 2006-2010. Naming, identities, roles and verbosity/turn initiation were analyzed with regards to gender/ethnicity construction. There were distinct gender and ethnicity differences in how naming contributed to visibility or invisibility of a group. Furthermore, although there were superficial equalities in verbosity, when it came to turn initiation there were some disturbing albeit unintentional tendencies. An analysis of images and positioning also revealed striking tendencies that may contribute to an entirely hidden/unfortunate curriculum. The analysis closes with a look at the staged, twisted and meaningless messages of gender and ethnicity as masquerade that somehow made their way into these textbooks.

Keywords: gender; ethnicity; critical discourse analysis; positioning

Critical Discourse Analysis studies examine text and talk within the context of institutional settings like that of the classroom and have shown how text/talk functions to maintain social order. Language can act to both reinforce as well as to challenge the status quo's perceptions and expectations of gender and ethnicity. In other words, language can reinforce both true facts and false beliefs—our words are never neutral (Fiske 1994). “We should never again speak, or read/hear others' words, without being conscious of the underlying meaning of the words. Our words are politicized, even if we are not aware of it, because they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak” (McGregor 2003). Knowing this, we should be very careful about the language in textbooks to ensure that they are not carrying a hidden curriculum.

In their study of gender in textbooks, Jones and Sunderland caution, “a text book carries a unique authority which is created and maintained through its texts....these are understood as the legitimate version of a society's sound knowledge” (p. 8). Knudsen (2003) notes that even in the highly advanced Nordic countries (advanced in terms of gender studies) “such gender perspectives are rarely reflected in textbooks or textbook research” (p. 1). It is even rarer to find foreign language textbook analyses focusing on both gender and ethnicity as social, cultural and educational constructs (Dominguez 2003).

Knudsen reports that gender research as it has been done in Europe and North America falls into three varieties: 1) Gender as Category, 2) Gender as Construction, and 3) Gender as Deconstruction. Knudsen suggests that future research methodologies should

follow three steps in the research process by using “research in gender as category and gender as construction before moving into gender as deconstruction” (p. 2) as well as working with wild practices and remnant capital analysis, looking for the meaningful, the staged and the fragmented.

This study will follow the three steps that Knudsen proposes in order to understand how gender (and ethnicity) is being done in Japanese Junior High School foreign language textbooks. More than a decade has passed since Sakita (1995) and Farooq (1999) examined sexism in EFL textbooks used in Japan. This study may be timely since a large proportion of Ministry of Education approved foreign language textbooks are still written by committees predominated by middle-aged Japanese males. It is one of the tenets of CDA that the words we speak or write are purposeful—they are not arbitrary—regardless of whether the choices are conscious or unconscious (Sheyholislami 2001). Research of this kind is of interest because textbooks may inadvertently contribute to cultural prejudices and personal biases that learners, unwittingly and unfortunately, absorb as a byproduct of study.

GENDER AS CATEGORY

The first stage of this research involves looking at gender as a category. Knudsen states, “The potential of analysis using gender as a category is that the invisible women, and invisible women's lives, can be made visible” (p.3). Naming, identities, roles and verbosity will be the means of describing the nature of gender and ethnicity based visibility in MEXT textbooks.

Whether a character is named or unnamed is an important part of visibility. Half of all female characters, whether Japanese or foreign were named and half were unnamed whereas male characters were more likely to be named, especially if Japanese (See Table 1). It was interesting to note that almost twice as many Japanese males were named rather than unnamed yet overall they comprised the smallest pool of characters--in the case of *New Crown*, there was only one Japanese male character--a teacher with no first name. The textbook, *Total English* had very few characters yet all were named except for one foreign female--a shop clerk. *Sunshine* had the most characters yet none of its foreign females merited a name--in fact the majority of its characters remained nameless--more foreigners than Japanese and more females than males.

Table 1. Named and Non-named Characters

	J-f		J-m		NJ-f		NJ-m		Text total
	+N	-N	+N	-N	+N	-N	+N	-N	
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	3	5	2	5	0	8	4	6	33
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	2	2	2	0	3	2	3	0	14
<i>Total English 1</i>	3	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	9
<i>New Crown 1</i>	2	2	1	0	5	0	2	0	12
<i>Columbus 21</i>	2	5	6	3	3	2	3	5	29
<i>One World</i>	2	0	2	1	3	2	3	1	14
Sub totals	12	14	15	9	16	15	16	12	
Total		26		23		31		28	

In terms of the distribution of named roles or identities students make up the majority in all categories. It is interesting that there are no family member characters for either male or female Japanese teachers whereas ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers—foreign teachers) both female and male have named family members in the stories. Among ALTs with names, most (6) are female yet in the case of Japanese teachers, most are male (5).

The un-named or non-named characters tell another story. Only females play the role of unnamed clerks and most of those are foreign. Female students whether Japanese or foreign make up the majority of nameless students too and both foreign and Japanese mothers appear without names in these texts--Japanese fathers are absent completely thus are neither named nor unnamed but foreign fathers when present have names. Surprisingly, 4 male (foreign) ALTs are present in the texts without names whereas all female ALTs have names.

Similar results have been observed by Omoto (2009) in her parallel study of gender and ethnicity in Ministry approved high school texts—Japanese female characters were more frequently non-named than any other group and twice as many Japanese characters were non-named when compared with non-Japanese characters regardless of gender. Furthermore, the non-named females were associated with occupations that traditionally carry strong gender images—store clerks and nurses whereas the non-named males took roles like immigration officers or news interviewers.

GENDER AS CONSTRUCTION

The popular stereotype that females talk more than males is held up in the textbooks Total English and Columbus 21 (Table 2). In all other texts the amount of speech is virtually even or only slightly higher for males. Farooq (1999) reported a similar balance in terms of overall verbosity.

Table 2. Verbosity by Gender

	f	m	?	m/f	total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	631 (34)	664 (35)	583 (31)	0	1878
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	424 (43)	438 (45)	118 (12)	3	980
<i>Total English 1</i>	510 (40)	293 (23)	477 (37)	13	1280
<i>New Crown 1</i>	510 (42)	514 (43)	177 (15)	0	1201
<i>Columbus 21</i>	641 (45)	579 (40)	219 (15)	0	1439
<i>One World</i>	49 (32)	447 (35)	410 (32)	0	1266

Percentages in parentheses

Table 3. Verbosity by Ethnicity

	F	m	?	m/f	total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	791(42)	504(27)	583(31)	1878	791(42)
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	280(29)	582(59)	118(12)	980	280(29)
<i>Total English 1</i>	363(29)	440(45)	477(49)	1280	363(29)
<i>New Crown 1</i>	531(44)	496(41)	177(15)	1201	531(44)
<i>Columbus 21</i>	620(43)	600(42)	219(15)	1439	620(43)
<i>One World</i>	341(26)	515(41)	410(33)	1266	341(26)

Percentages in parentheses

In two textbooks (*New Crown* and *Columbus 21*) verbosity based on ethnicity was about even (Table 3). Only in one textbook (*Sunshine*) was verbosity highest among Japanese characters--in all 3 other texts the foreign characters spoke the most. When gender and ethnicity are considered together, Japanese female characters in the textbook *Sunshine* are the most verbose over all and foreign females in *Total English* speak more than any other group.

Table 4. Verbosity by Gender and Ethnicity

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	total
Sunshine 1	532(28)	259(14)	99(5)	405(22)	583(31)	1878
New Horizon 1	153(16)	127(13)	271(28)	311(32)	118(12)	980
Total English 1	208(16)	155(12)	302(24)	138(11)	477(37)	1280
New Crown 1	302(25)	229(19)	208(17)	285(24)	177(15)	1201
Columbus 21	230(16)	390(27)	411(29)	189(13)	219(15)	1439
One World	155(12)	186(15)	254(20)	261(21)	410(32)	1266

Percentages in parentheses

Gender (and ethnicity) can be used as positions that construct and maintain an ideology in which one group is subordinate to another. As Knudsen says, such a false gender ideology serves to “keep girls in a subordinate position and a traditional feminine identity.” In Farooq’s (1999) study of one EFL text used in Japan, despite an overall balance between males and females in terms of verbosity, male characters initiated 63% of all male female dialogs and provided 89% of the follow up moves. In the following tables conversational turns and firstness will be considered.

Table 5. All Turns by Gender

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	total
Sunshine 1	99 (31)	112 (35)	111(34)	0	322	99 (31)
New Horizon 1	82 (43)	84 (44)	23(12)	1(1)	190	82 (43)
Total English 1	87 (38)	45 (20)	90(40)	4 (2)	226	87 (38)
New Crown 1	104 (43)	99 (41)	38(16)	0	241	104 (43)
Columbus 21	110 (41)	105 (39)	53(20)	0	268	110 (41)
One World	67 (30)	78 (35)	80(36)	0	225	67 (30)

Percentages in parentheses

Although the overall number of turns is related to verbosity, the reason that I would like to look more closely is to contrast all turns with initial turns since the speaker who initiates a conversation may be setting the topic and possibly is in a stronger position to control the direction of the interaction. So as would be expected the distribution of all turns by gender shows the similar pattern seen in the verbosity data.

Table 6. Initial Turns by Gender

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	total
Sunshine 1	17 (20)	27 (31)	42 (49)	0	86	17 (20)
New Horizon 1	13 (30)	22 (51)	8 (19)	0	43	13 (30)
Total English 1	16 (26)	13 (28)	31 (51)	1	61	16 (26)
New Crown 1	24 (38)	22 (34)	18 (28)	0	64	24 (38)
Columbus 21	15 (38)	14 (35)	11 (28)	0	40	15 (38)
One World	7 (17)	14 (33)	21 (50)	0	42	7 (17)

Percentages in parentheses

However, when we look at who starts the conversations, a different pattern emerges (see Table 6.). In the case of three textbooks (*Sunshine*, *New Horizon* and *One World*), males significantly out perform females as the initiators of interactions even though in terms of verbosity they were about even. Yet in the case of *Total English*, even though females were more verbose, males initiate marginally more interactions. Only in *Columbus 21* does female verbosity seem to go with female initiation of conversations.

Table 7. All Turns by Ethnicity

	J	%	NJ	%	total
Sunshine 1	128	63%	76	37%	204
New Horizon 1	57	33%	114	66%	171
Total English 1	132	65%	71	35%	204
New Crown 1	147	60%	96	39%	244
Columbus 21	115	53%	100	46%	216
One World	61	42%	84	58%	145

Although verbosity in *New Crown* and *Columbus 21* was similarly distributed by ethnicity, when turns are considered, Japanese speakers appear to take the lead. In the case of *New Horizon* this switch is even more dramatic--Foreign speakers may be more verbose but Japanese speakers took more turns. And this pattern is upheld with respect to initial turns (see Table 8).

Table 8. Initial Turns by Ethnicity

	J	%	NJ	%	total
Sunshine 1	25 (30)	18 (22)	40(48)	83	25 (30)
New Horizon 1	9 (21)	22 (51)	12(28)	43	9 (21)
Total English 1	18 (31)	10 (17)	31(53)	59	18 (31)
New Crown 1	28 (44)	18 (28)	18(28)	64	28 (44)
Columbus 21	21 (54)	8 (21)	10(26)	39	21 (54)
One World	8 (19)	13 (31)	21(50)	42	8 (19)

Percentages in parentheses

However when ethnicity and gender are considered together the picture is more complex. For instance, in *Total English*, although Japanese characters take more turns, foreign females take more turns than any other group (see Table 9).

Table 9. All Turns by Gender and Ethnicity

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	total
Sunshine 1	80(39)	48(24)	16(8)	55(27)	5(2)	204
New Horizon 1	30(18)	24(14)	52(30)	60(35)	5(3)	171
Total English 1	37(28)	28(21)	51(38)	18(13)	71(53)	134
New Crown 1	62(31)	45(22)	42(21)	54(27)	40(20)	20
Columbus 21	47(22)	68(32)	63(29)	37(17)	53(25)	215
One World	27(19)	34(23)	40(28)	44(30)	81(56)	145

Percentages in parentheses

Yet when we look at who takes the initiative (see Table 10), in Total English, the foreign females are no longer in the lead. In the case of Sunshine, Japanese females were the most verbose (even compared with all other textbooks) yet initiated fewer interactions than foreign males. In the case of One World, foreign females and males were equally verbose yet when it came to initiating conversations, males initiated twice as often as females.

Table 10. Initial Turns by Gender and Ethnicity

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	total
Sunshine 1	15(18)	10(12)	2(2)	16(19)	40(48)	83
New Horizon 1	5(12)	4(9)	5(12)	17(40)	12(28)	43
Total English 1	9(15)	9(15)	7(12)	3(5)	31(51)	59
New Crown 1	17(27)	11(17)	7(11)	11(17)	18(28)	64
Columbus 21	10(26)	11(28)	5(13)	3(8)	10(26)	39
One World	3(7)	5(12)	4(10)	9(21)	21(50)	42

Percentages in parentheses

Firstness is another aspect of gender construction and Porreca (1984) defines it as “Given two nouns paired for sex, such as male/female, the masculine word always came first, with the exception of the pair ladies/gentlemen” (p. 706). Farooq (1999) reported that when pronouns were listed, ‘male first’ occurred 83% of the time. In this study there were only two overt examples of firstness--one in *Sunshine* and one in *Columbus 21* in which boys and girls are mentioned in that order. In the case of three other examples male family members are mentioned before females.

Sunshine 1 One is for the boys and the other is for the girls.

Columbus 21 Let's have a snowball fight. Boys against girls.

If one considers these textbooks in the context of an equality discourse (Marshall, 2004), it would make sense to look at images and how they might make one gender positive at the expense of the other. Gender “positioning” through textbook images has been investigated by Fairclough (1989) and Berger (1972). According to Glaschi (2000), “individuals or groups of individuals are positioned by discourse as “inherently inferior,” “in control, “ “weak,” “strong,” and so forth” (2000: 33). I decided to collect all the images that went together with the verb “study” and found that in 11 cases the verb was

associated with males and only three with females. When illustrations that depicted embarrassment were collected, it was striking to note that every instance (22 instances in 6 first year textbooks) showed a male student/character feeling or reacting embarrassedly. In some cases the reaction was to some social gaff (running, spilling, breaking) but disturbingly some portrayals of embarrassment were depicted in conjunction with the learning of English or the maintenance of social relations (giving flowers, returning an eraser).

Kawamichi (2007) did a follow up study on the gendered images associated with specific verbs—textbooks often display a verb for vocabulary learning under a picture of a character performing the verb. She selected 18 MEXT approved textbooks to be used from 2006 to 2010 (including the six reported on in this study). She found that although the over all distribution appeared even (46% female; 54% male), there were interesting imbalances at the vocabulary item level. For example, in the area of communication both males and females *chat*, *talk* and *visit* equally but females were depicted more often with the verbs *chat*, *greet* and *write* whereas males were associated more with *email*, *hear*, *listen*, and *read*. Among the highest frequency verbs, males were more than twice as likely to be associated with *do*, *eat*, *get*, *read*, *ride* *study*, and *watch* than females who on the other hand were associated strongly with *have*, *practice*, *take*, *use* and *write*. One very interesting phenomenon however was the distribution of creative arts verbs: males were depicted 60% of the time and represented a whopping 89% of the characters depicted with *cook*. And in the school context males were seen most frequently (68%) and when females did appear they were often depicted as teachers (18%). Kawamichi concludes,

Language is like a mirror that not only reflects the culture but also the social values of the time. Certainly equal rights and consideration for men and women have changed in Japan from that of a dominantly male-oriented society. However in some situations, men seem still to be more dominant than women. ...Although these results are a bit disturbing, I believe that they were largely unconscious on the part of the textbook creators. I think that language teachers should always be sensitive to the idea that the interior of the language and social biases unconsciously appear... (22).

When I considered dialogues in these texts that might depict one gender as incompetent, I found four dialogues. In these, two women are depicted incompetently--Aunt Mari loses her car in the parking lot and a woman forgets her change at the store.

<i>Sunshine I</i>	(48-49)	Aunt Mari	My car is on this floor. <u>Well...where is my car?</u>
		Yuki	What color is it?
		Aunt Mari	It's red
		Yuki	I don't see any red cars here
		Aunt Mari	Oh no! <u>We're on the wrong floor!</u>
<i>New Horizon</i>	(40-41)	Mike	Excuse me.
		Woman	Yes?

Mike	Is this your change?
Woman	Pardon?
Mike	Your change?
Woman	Oh, my change! Thank you.
Mike	You're welcome.

In another dialogue a foreign male student is depicted as incompetent (losing bags, caps and being late). In yet another dialogue a foreign woman is criticized by her Japanese husband for driving too fast. The woman obediently validates the criticism of her husband.

<i>New Horizon</i>	(66-67)	Mike	Oh, no! I'm late! <u>Where's my ticket?</u>
		Mother	It's by the computer.
		Mike	<u>Where's my bag?</u>
		Mother	It's under the desk.
		Mike	<u>Where's my cap?</u>
		Mother	It's on your head!
	68	Judy	<u>You're late!</u>
		Mike	Sorry. ...
<i>New Horizon</i>	76	Emi	Look! A deer!
		Koji	<u>Be careful, Lisa. Don't drive so fast.</u>
		Lisa	Oh, right. Thanks.

GENDER AS DECONSTRUCTION

Knudsen writes, “Gender as deconstruction emphasizes how gender should be studied as staging and masquerade. Gender has to be analyzed symbolically. It is about ‘Doing Gender’, not about being a gender (West & Zimmerman 1987). “Gender is what you interpret and negotiate it to be. The way you cut your hair, for example, is a gender-sign on your body. Your hair is an interpretation of the sign ‘woman’ or ‘man’” (Knudsen 2003: 5). Most of the student characters in these textbooks wore school uniforms, which in Japan are strictly gender coded—skirts for females and trousers for males. Although some female characters wore short hairstyles none of the male characters varied from the traditional short conservative cut. In terms of staged images, five photographs depicted females in so-called “non-traditional” situations (e.g. scientist, hockey player)—it should be noted, however, that in every one of them, the female was also foreign.

Omoto (2009) also examined pictorial depictions in Ministry approved high school texts and found that males were represented more frequently than females—foreign females were found in pictures and illustrations least of all. In two textbooks on pages introducing school activities, only males were depicted taking part in sports. Pictures also supported gendered roles—all pictures of doctors and scientists were male and more than twice as many pictures showed females shopping rather than males.

CONCLUSION

But still some troubling images remain...consider two “meaningless” or twisted messages: There was a picture of a Japanese female declaring that she likes English but not Science. This image is unfairly paired in the textbook with a Japanese boy who declares that he likes basketball but not soccer. This is hardly an equivalent juxtaposition. Furthermore, why would a language textbook make any learner practice the pattern “Ken speaks English well--I don’t speak English well” reinforced with the stereotypical gesture of male embarrassment. Taken all together these images coupled with the language in these textbooks becomes even more alarming if we recognize that language does not just reflect some aspect of reality—language is a central force in our continual creation and construction of reality (Bergquist & Szcpanaska 2002; Borch 2000; Peskett 2001).

NOTE

[1] An earlier draft of this paper appeared in *Kobe Gaidai Ronso* 58(6): 1-11.

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