

## **Ideology in Textbooks: An Analytical Study of Gender Issues in ELT in Pakistan**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper is part of a doctoral research project titled 'Ideology and Worldview in Textbooks: A Study of Cultural Aspects in ELT in Pakistan'. It highlights the issues related to gender in the English language textbooks (henceforth ELT) being taught at the secondary level in Pakistan. It focuses on how the textbooks observe inequality in representing both the sexes at three levels: professional, social and attributive. At the professional level, it looks at which sex occupies higher professions in the textbooks. At the social level, the societal treatment of both the sexes has been assessed. Finally, at the attributive level, this paper talks about social roles related to both the sexes and the attributes associated with these roles. In fact, the thing in focus here is the ideology of difference or inequality observed in different walks of life towards male and female sexes. We hope that the findings of this research will help the policy makers, textbook authors and ELT practitioners realize the politics of gendered material and exclude such material from the curriculum. They may also help in sharpening the students' critical thinking abilities in understanding the spin of language as an ideological tool in dissemination of such knowledge that favours only the male world.*

Gender bias or discrimination in language may simply be defined as an unequal representation of either male or female sex in written or spoken discourses regarding social roles, power, professions etc. Though the term 'gender bias' is an inclusive term that includes both male and female sexes yet its use in discourses is likely to give an edge only to male sex – it shows that both sexes are a victim of discrimination; whereas the reality is that it is the female sex which is

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mostly a victim of bias and discrimination. That is why we use the term 'Female-Gender Bias' instead of 'Gender Bias' to be clear in our point that it is in fact the female sex discriminated in the textbooks under examination.

The textbooks under analysis are Oxford University Press (OUP) English textbooks and Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) English textbooks being taught at the secondary level in an elitist school and all governmental (Urdu-medium) high schools and private non-elitist English-medium schools respectively in the city of Multan in Pakistan. The OUP textbooks may reasonably be regarded as representatives of different societies such as Pakistani, British, American, etc for their lessons come from different authors all over the world. The elite school's high fee structure, modern standards of education and Western atmosphere attracts the elite class for its children's schooling. Ironically enough, the contents in these textbooks in spite of being close to modernity, Western conceptions of life and world, are replete with instances of female-gender bias or discrimination.

On the other side, the PTB textbooks as a whole represent the Pakistani society. It includes mostly religious, national and cultural events and practices to inculcate the learners with nationalistic, cultural and religious fervour. However, this does not mean to declare these textbooks free from female-gender bias. Just like the OUP textbooks, the female sex is a victim of discrimination in these textbooks as well though in a slightly different way which is not the main issue here. The purpose of analyzing OUP and PTB English textbooks together is to strengthen the assumption that female-gender bias is neither a particular social class' issue nor a regional issue. Varying in degree it is undoubtedly present in all societies in the patriarchal world.

Analysts may detect female-gender bias in texts from different angles quite effectively. This paper is an effort to critically analyze the discourse of the above-mentioned textbooks to explore the instances of female-gender bias from the angle of representation. That is, how the textbooks attach a sense of superiority and inferiority, dominance and subservience, and independence and dependence to male and female sexes respectively through positive and negative representation of male and female characters in contents before the young learners. This in-group and out-group representation, in case if we look at men and women as two social groups, is materialized in a number of ways to

‘have an impact on perception’<sup>1</sup> (a) via professions, where men occupy higher positions than women, (b) via social roles, where women’s have been more stereotypical than men’s, (c) via societal treatment, where son is preferred to daughter and so on. Quite similarly, the choice of lexical items in describing these social phenomena is also ideological. For instance, value of a son is emphasized through ‘I prayed to all the gods...for a son’ whereas value of a daughter is deemphasized through ‘She was upset because her daughter had given birth to a daughter...’

### **Some theoretical and methodological perspectives**

Lexicalization is also in focus in Rahman’s that examines language textbooks of different schools to see how choice of lexical items are related to ideology, worldview and, finally, to power. He mentions certain lexical items i.e. adjectives, whose meanings create intriguing differences in gender attributes. For instance, good and bad, able and unable, right and wrong can attribute distinguishing characteristics to someone. Similarly, words pertaining to women’s honour such as *izzat*, *asmat*, *ghairat*, *sharm*, *haya* can help justify men’s imperative of hiding away the female, seen primarily as a sexual object, from other males. Thus such vocabulary ‘reinforces a worldview contingent upon male-dominating, sexuality-denying and aggression-validating values in the social sphere’.<sup>2</sup> Language constructs this ‘signitive power’ (of languages) as a social reality or put simply, the vehicles of worldview.<sup>3</sup>

The question arises where such worldview comes from. Siddiqui<sup>4</sup> argues that education and educational institutions play a vital role in it. For instance, stereotypical responsibilities and roles that our family settings expose to us in early childhood are endorsed in educational institutions. The social knowledge related to gender is constructed by schools through textbooks. According to him, many researches in the past reflect that textbooks ‘represent female characters as weak, dependent and stereotypically shy, and confined to the home whereas the male characters are shown as strong, independent,

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<sup>1</sup> S. Wareing, ‘Language and Gender’ in Ishtla Singh and Jean Stilwell Peccei (ed.), *Language, Society and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp.75-92.

<sup>2</sup> T. Rahman, *Language, ideology and power* (Karachi: Oxford University Press 2002).

<sup>3</sup> E. De Kadt, ‘Language, power and emancipation in South Africa’, *World Englishes* 121(2), pp.157-68.

<sup>4</sup> S. Siddiqui, ‘Gender and education’. *Dawn*, 19 May 2008.

innovative, outgoing and responsible for the outer world'.<sup>5</sup> And these categories are formed in such a way that the latter category sounds superior and the former one sounds inferior.<sup>6</sup>

Talking about inferiority and subordination of women Rahman<sup>7</sup> argues that literature has always reinforced these ideologies to a certain extent. Mostly, women have been 'playthings of men' particularly in Urdu poetry. For instance, in Lucknow, the beloveds of the poets in *ghazal* were courtesans. They were *shokh* (playful and mischievous), *sharmili* (bashful) and, of course, they were extremely beautiful. Similarly, the image of the woman in other forms of poetry was also negative: she was described as indecent in *hazal*; and sexy in *rekhti* and *vasokht*. She was also represented as weak, dependent, sensitive, cowardly, etc. Rahman argues that the image of women as made by males 'is a response to aspects of a male-dominating society'.

Literature, then, had a profound influence on linguistic and cultural practices of women. Rahman (1999) shows how, at that time, some linguistic expressions were used by women or associated with women. They are *Naoj* (to show disapproval), *Mardua* (man, pejorative use), *Qui* (oh!), *Hae* (oh!). These expressions are obsolete now. Today Pakistani women use such expressions as *Hae* (oh!), *Hae Allah* (oh God!), *Uf* (oh!), *Uf Allah* (oh God!), *Hae maen mar jaun* (oh! I am killed!). Similarly, women and men use asymmetrical expressions to address one another. Women's expressions such as *aap/tusi* (you) are more deferential than those used by men for women such as *tum/toon* (you). All of these expressions particularly those used by women reflect weakness, dependence, inferiority and subordination. It must strengthen the fact that discourses, including textbooks discourses, do support and reflect social realities.

In this paper, data comes from the English textbooks published by Oxford University Press (OUP) and Punjab Textbook Board (PTB). The OUP textbooks are being taught in an elitist English-medium school at the secondary level i.e. O level, in the city of Multan in Pakistan. The PTB textbooks are being taught in the government Urdu-medium schools and private non-elitist English-medium schools at the same level i.e. 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> (Matric) classes. The students in these classes are normally 15 to 18 years old. There is one book for each class. In analysis, the OUP textbooks will be referred to as OUP 1 and OUP 2 and the PTB textbooks will be referred to as PTB 9 and PTB 10. In the OUP

<sup>5</sup> S. Siddiqui, 'Gender and education'. *Dawn*, 19 May 2008.

<sup>6</sup> S. Siddiqui, 'Education and politics of exclusion'. *Dawn*, 5 May 2008.

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textbooks, there are 9 Units containing 43 lessons in the first book and 8 Units containing 26 lessons in the second one whereas the PTB textbooks (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>) have forty-two lessons in total. The lessons in all these four books are further divided into poems, narratives, letters, essays, autobiographies, articles etc. All these lessons directly or indirectly relate to gender, religion, morality, war, racism, society, science, education, health, nature, general knowledge etc.

This paper being a sociolinguistic research deals only with the contents related to gender. Learning about society via language, it examines female-gender bias in the textbooks from the perspective of representation at three levels: professional, social and attributive. In this way, it seeks answers to the following questions:

- a) Do both the sexes observe equality in representing the professions?
- b) Do both the sexes get a balanced treatment from society (here in form of characters)?
- c) Do the female characters break with the stereotypical roles?

Regarding the first question, the research looks at the variety of professions represented in the textbooks. It further investigates which sex represents mostly the higher jobs and if working together which one performs subordinate roles. In this regard, it is also important to see that certain professions demand certain abilities and, therefore, the occupants of higher professions are likely to be regarded as more able, competent, strong, etc. than the ones who are at lower posts. The second question focuses on societal treatment of both the sexes. In other words, which sex receives a caring attitude from the society? In fact, this part learns about the degree of value attached to each sex. Finally, it looks at the roles the female characters perform in the lessons. Are they traditional or deviate from the past?

Discrimination against the female sex in the textbooks may be observed well by examining what abilities, characteristics and social roles are associated with women and how society (here, in form of characters) deals with them. All of these aspects are likely to help us notice the degree of power, dominance, value and status, women enjoy in the Pakistani and the English society. Moreover, we must also see that these aspects portray a typical image of women to be passed on to the coming female generation. First we may look at certain professions that have been associated either with male or female sex in the textbooks.

- Michael had been a favourite. A talented theatre director ... (OUP 2, p. 50)
- ‘Mummy,’ he (the son) started, ‘you know ... Some (of his friends) want to be doctors, some lawyers, a lot are interested in engineering,

and so on. (OUP 2, p. 58)

- ...Captain MacWhirr could catch a desolate glimpse of a few tiny specks black as ebony...This was all he could see of his ship. (OUP 1, p. 66)

In the textbooks, we can clearly see the male sex occupying different professions being 'theatre director' in the first sentence; 'doctors', 'lawyers' and 'engineers' in the second sentence; and 'captain' in the last sentence. The percentage of representing women with the same professions is shockingly less and will be described later.

The mention of men as doctors, engineers, lawyers etc show the intellectual, physical and financial dominance of men over women. In (only) one lesson where women have been shown working under men also reflects their (men's) authority over women. The textbooks thus show men's dominance in two ways: (a) dominance by numbers i.e. men working in these professions are more in numbers than women and (b) dominance by authority i.e. men have higher designations than women. Consequently, their negative consequences will also be two: the former one declares these professions meant more for men than for women; the latter one represents a somewhat patriarchal situation where men hold authority over women. Unfortunately, most of the female students are likely to think of certain professions meant only for men. Similarly, even if some of them join such professions they will try little for superior positions or at least they will feel natural in accepting subordinate positions. Moreover, this natural acceptance then does not remain limited only to departments and offices; women observe it in social as well as home affairs. For instance,

- Suddenly a voice (from Uncle Jamil) came from the dining table one fine day, 'Today we shall take Hamid to Liberty Market'. (PTB 9, p. 27)
- The whole family got ready quickly and set out in a car for the Liberty Market. (PTB 9, p. 27)

In the lesson, the 'voice' comes from a man – Uncle Jamil. The phrase 'the whole family' indicates the presence of female/s (mother, daughter, wife or all of them) here. We see the dominant position of the uncle who makes this announcement or decision without consulting the family members. The pronoun 'we' has not been used to mean it a mutual decision rather it is likely to be a directive for all to get ready for the Liberty Market *today*. The second sentence reflects the dependent position of the whole family including women in three ways: first, they cannot, and do not, challenge the decision; second, they immediately obey what is directed to them; and finally, obviously they are sitting in the car being driven and run by the uncle (in context). Furthermore, the

act of driving car is more empowering than sitting behind the car as it point towards the skill, courage, strength, and handsome income of the owner / driver of the car.

Importantly, besides the representation of authoritative positions as discussed above, men also represent the most powerful positions such as king, prince, commander, etc which reflects their power and abilities related to rule and command. The instances are as follows:

- Back in the third century A.D., the Chinese king sent his son Prince Tai to the temple to get education from the great master, Pan Ku. Prince Tai was to succeed his father as king. Pan Ku was to teach the boy the basics of a good ruler. (PTB 9, p. 33, l. 1-8)
- After the death of Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) the first Khalifah Hazrat Abu Bakr (R.A.) appointed Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (R.A.) to command the Muslim army. During the Khilafat of Hazrat Umer ((R.A.) the second Khalifah), Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (R.A.) was made the Deputy Commander of the Muslim army. (PTB 9, p. 9, l. 20-26)

Ironically enough, women have no such representation in the textbooks at all which, of course, implies that they are socially powerless and *naturally* lack in qualities related to rule and command. Consequently, the young learners – including particularly the female students – are very likely to regard women as unable to rule and command and, therefore, men's representation/hold of superior roles/positions in discourses as well as everyday life is a *natural* and *just* process for them. In other words, then, there will be no more reluctance in accepting and challenging the inequality in society and discourses. Hence, it is important to see how discourses function to naturalize its ideological aspects to sustain patriarchal hegemony.

Importantly, besides the instances that reflect men's power and authority, there is also an instance of physical abuse which, thus, represents their physical power. Even more importantly, on one hand, it explicitly represents a woman as victim of their physical power and, on the other; it implicitly represents her as a physically weaker creature. The example is as under:

- One morning, while I was polishing brass out front, the boss and his son drove up in their car. A frightened black woman sat between them. They got out and half dragged and half kicked the woman into the store. After a moment or two I heard shrill screams coming from the rear room of the store; later the woman stumbled out, bleeding, crying, holding her stomach, her clothing torn. When I went to the

rear of the store...the floor was bloody, strewn with wisps of hair and clothing. (OUP 1, p.159).

Once again there is no instance in both the textbooks where a woman physically abuses a man. The exclusion of this representation and inclusion of the above one portrays a totally different picture of men and women before the learners.

So far what we should have perceived from the above-mentioned sentences is the creation of superiority complex for the male sex. Though it will be less arguable to regard these sentences as creating an inferiority complex for the opposite sex because they do not mention any women subordinate to men yet the following instances must approve the unjust attitude maintained by the textbooks towards women regarding their representation, professions and roles in the society.

- I can see her strong foot, stained with peat, paddling with the treadle of the spinning wheel (OUP 2, p.8)
- ...my mother had got up early and cooked me a heavy breakfast, had stood wordlessly while I ate it, her hand on my chair, and had then helped me pack up my few belongings. (OUP 1, p.3)
- A young girl with a dark, charming face, ...Thrusts towels against my window And begs me to buy. (OUP 1, p.26)

We see that the occupations and roles being played by the women such as 'spinner' in the first sentence, 'housewife' in the second sentence and 'beggar' in the last sentence are quite less in value and dominance than the ones associated with the male sex. Unlike the previous instances, we do not find any intellectual, financial and physical dominance of women in these sentences. Rather they show women in such social situation that is low in power and authority but high in dependence. Though a textbook can rightly be called a picture of a particular society, it is not always neutral and natural but socially and consciously drawn. Representing women as dependent, powerless and non-authoritative and men as independent, powerful and authoritative in society is an implicit message of the text that tries to create difference on many social levels between the two sexes. On the basis of such distinctions it is justified to assign different social roles to both sexes. This is for the very reason that both sexes automatically adhere to such professional, physical, and linguistic differences in their social functions.

It must be important to discuss that men and women have not been presented together in the previous and present instances. In the previous instances, we find only men occupying higher positions and in the present ones we find only women occupying lower positions in society. It seems to be a consciously ideological effort to hide such female-gender bias and discrimination for the simple reason that such



biases are easy to be noticed when sexes are explicitly presented together without parallel. However, this discrimination against the female sex becomes less severe when we do find also men occupying lower positions such as begging, selling, teaching etc in the textbooks but their percentage of having such occupations is very less than the women's which is still ideological as well as discriminatory.

A part from certain professions and occupations, there are also other aspects such as attitudes that are associated with the female sex. For instance, 'females are expected to be dependent, non-competitive, submissive, nurturing, intuitive, and to possess a higher moral and aesthetic sense than men'.<sup>8</sup> These stereotypes of women may clearly be found in the following sentences:

- My mother only said Thank God the scorpion picked on me and spared my children. (OUP 1, p. 64)
- ...my mother had got up early and cooked me a heavy breakfast, had stood wordlessly while I ate it, her hand on my chair, and had then helped me pack up my few belongings. (OUP 1, p. 3)
- I wish I could remain here all my life, hide in my little corner. Where I am alone and no one can see me, not even you. (OUP 2, p. 81)

Cralley and Ruscher<sup>9</sup> are right in saying that '...some individuals expect women to possess certain qualities and to behave a certain way; failure to conform to stereotypic prescriptions is unwelcome'. This is what we see in the lines above – women have been represented with their typical and traditional roles. For instance, women as mothers are expected to be sacrificial (in the first line), and loving, caring and helpful (in the second line). In the last sentence, we find a girl or a woman who is quite shy and lonely and wishes to be so in this social world. Hence, what we see here are certain attributes attached and fixed with the female sex and acting against these attributes is likely to be considered a break with the social norms which is always unwelcome.

In fact, having certain attributes is not a matter of worry. Like women, men have also some restrictions upon them in form of certain attributes. For instance, if a woman has to cook meal for her family inside home, a man has to earn bread for his family outside home. The real problem is that mostly these roles are represented so frequently in the discourses that now they have started appearing to be hard and fast – women cannot go out to earn bread and men cannot stay at home to cook

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<sup>8</sup> E. L. Cralley, & J. B. Ruscher, 'Lady, girl, female, or women: Sexism and cognitive busyness predict use of gender-biased nouns.' *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 24(3), pp.300-14.

meal. The second problem is that these roles bring different facilities to each sex. For instance, earning has been regarded as giving more power, independence and authority than cooking can. This inequality is indeed a part of those ideological works social discourse performs for the patriarchal society. We have given this simple example of earning and cooking so that we may also see the other attached attributes such as loving, caring, helpful and lonely to a particular sex in the light of ideology.

This unjust attachment of power to different social roles through discourses does inform our social attitudes towards both sexes. For example,

- She said...‘and where is Asad applying? I said something like Harvard or Oxford ... (OUP 2, p. 55)
- ‘No, no,’ she cried hysterically. ‘I don’t want to marry. I want to study.’ (OUP 2, p. 78)
- ‘I prayed to all the gods in the world for a son. (OUP 2, p. 79)
- ‘You mean Mrs. Afroz? She was upset because her daughter had given birth to a daughter and the girl’s in-laws were giving her a hard time.’ (OUP 2, p. 59)

Here is a dual attitude of society towards the male and female sex. In the first two sentences, so far as the matter of education is concerned son’s education has been preferred to daughter’s education while in the last two lines regarding the matter of child; son has been preferred to daughter. Attitude towards male sex is extremely positive whereas attitude towards female sex is extremely negative. It is indeed the negative consequence of that social value discourse unjustly attaches with the sexes. In clear words, male sex is considered to be more valuable than the female sex because the discourse being controlled by the patriarchal society attaches more value, more authority, more ability and more independence with the male sex by representing it dominating the opposite sex in almost all social functions or roles. It must not be wrong to regard the socially constructed roles as ‘social boundaries’ constructed to limit more or less both the sexes’ entry into different social institutions working implicitly as power of domains.

Interestingly, the role models in the textbooks also lay the foundation of this entry into different social roles or professions. Most of the young learners idealize their traits and internalize them. What is ideological regarding the representation of role models is the inclusion and exclusion of certain personal traits of their personalities. That is why the role models presented for the girls are contrasted with those for the

boys For instance, the textbook presents Hazrat Ayesha (RA) as a role model for the girls in the following way:

- She proved herself to be extremely faithful, intelligent and a loving wife.
- ...the most authentic reporter and scholar of the tradition of him (SAW).
- Hazrat Ayesha (RA) continued to enjoy the most eminent position of “Ummul-Momeneen”. (PTB 10, p. 21)

Though these traits such as ‘faithful, intelligent and loving’, ‘authentic reporter and scholar’ and ‘Ummul-Momeneen’ may be exemplary for a Muslim woman, we shouldn’t neglect the fact that Hazrat Ayesha’s (RA) other qualities related to battlefield and recreation have not been mentioned. The female young learners are thus exposed only to one bright side of their ideal which demands them to be what goes in favour of the patriarchal Pakistani society, while the male young learners are exposed to other so called manly traits such as courage, bravery, power and strength through another personality as given below.

- Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (RA) was a great warrior of Islam.
- During his youth he had attained enough skill in horse riding and sword fighting. (PTB 9, p. 8-9)

The first sentence describes the personality of Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (RA) in relation to religion Islam. Though its structure could also be ‘Hazrat Khalid bin Waleed (RA) was a great Arab warrior’ or he ‘was a great Muslim warrior’, it would not have shown him as high in his status as his description in relation to Islam had. The second line makes it reasonable to argue that it was his ‘skill in horse riding and sword fighting’ that won him the titles of ‘a great warrior’. As compared to the role model for the girls, here we find a totally different ideal for the boys who is energetic, adventurous, brave and strong. These both sentences give an image of war where armies display their bravery to be successful and, therefore, the soldiers are expected to be expert enough in war skills. But in the lesson ‘Hazrat Ayesha (RA)’ we find a calm and peaceful world where women have no part in warfare – a concept that has no reality. This deliberately excluded fact diverts the female students into certain professions seen as appropriate for their sex.

On another note, the representations are crucial in terms of differentiating between women and men’s roles and constructing discriminatory ideals for young Muslim learners. As a role model for Muslim women, the text portrays Hazrat Ayesha (RA) in the role of a loving and faithful wife to the Prophet (SAW) and *Ummul-Momeneen*, a mother to all Muslims: her other traits are subsumed under these roles:

she is represented as an appendage to the Prophet (SAW); a reporter and scholar of his tradition; a spokesperson not an individual with her own distinct voice. If this role model is to be emulated by Muslim women they would be loyal mouthpieces of their husbands as she is portrayed, at the expense of their own individuality. By contrast, the profile of Hazrat Khalid (RA) is a highly individualized one in that he is not defined in terms of his relationships either to the Prophet (SAW) or anyone else. It is suggested that owing to his qualities of bravery and skill in warfare he attained a high position in society because of these inherent qualities of his own character rather than his association with anyone else. If we compare these two portrayals, there is an assumption that women's position in society is determined in and through their relationships with their men folk whereas men carve a niche for themselves through their individual actions and achievements.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

Language does not come alone and, therefore, it is reasonable to regard knowledge, information and skills in the language textbooks as carriers of certain biases that reflect the dominant views and beliefs of the patriarchal society.<sup>11</sup> Let alone the hegemonic factor, mostly the learners under the influence of these ideologies regarding gender are unable to realize their bias. In fact, years of schooling expose them to such dominant patterns of gender relations and gendered behaviour that these biases either go unnoticed or are taken neutral and unbiased. For instance, women are normally considered to be portrayed in the textbooks as dependent, weak, innocent, voiceless etc; while men to be represented as bold, resourceful, energetic, independent etc and we (both sexes) accept them with the same attributes. Rather, they are more acceptable for women than men.<sup>12</sup> The need is to free our curriculums from all kinds of gender biases so that our young learners may be politically correct in their discourse from an early stage of life and pass this political correctness on to coming generations.

## Reference

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<sup>11</sup> F. Leach, *Practicing gender analysis in education* (UK: Oxfam 2003).

<sup>12</sup> J. T. Wood, *Gendered live: Communication, gender and culture*. (London: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999).