



A hidden curriculum in Japanese EFL textbooks: Gender representation



Jackie F.K. Lee*

Department of Linguistics and Modern Language Studies, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, Hong Kong

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 13 August 2014

Keywords:

Corpus
Gender
Hidden curriculum
Japan
Sexism
Textbook

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to uncover the hidden curriculum in relation to gender representation in two popular series of contemporary Japanese EFL textbooks. The criteria examined include male-to-female ratios, use of gender-marked and neutral vocabulary, titles of address for women, order of mention, and common attributes and types of activities associated with men and women. Instead of the generally manual methods of analysis employed in many previous studies, corpora and modern software tools are used (frequency counts, collocation, and concordancing analyses via WordSmith tools) in an attempt to investigate whether the Japanese government's attempt to promote a gender-equal society through education in recent years has been put into practice by textbook writers and publishers. The findings reveal common use of gender-neutral vocabulary and the neutral title *Ms* to address women. However, gender disparities in the forms of female invisibility, male firstness and stereotypical images are still prevalent in the textbooks examined.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Gender is socially constructed through human interaction and interpretation, rather than biologically determined (Berkowitz, Manohar, & Tinkler, 2010; Lorber, 1994; Odhiambo, 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to Lorber (1994, p. 22), individuals are born “sexed” but not “gendered”. In the social construction of gender under the influence of parents, schools, peers and the mass media, children learn to walk, talk and behave in the way that their community expects boys and girls should.

Manifestations of gender norms can be found in educational materials. If a language contains words and phrases that indicate prejudice against a particular gender group, these gender biases may be imparted to children through textbooks in the form of linguistic sexism. Many languages, including English and Japanese, have features that background or degrade women, including asymmetric expressions and the default presentation of male gender as the norm (Pauwels, 1998; Takemaru, 2005). Apart from linguistic sexism, omission of females and gender stereotyping are other common manifestations of gender inequality found in educational materials (Matsuno, 2002; Mineshima, 2008; Pauwels, 1998; Porreca, 1984). It is important to uncover the hidden curriculum relating to gender construction in school textbooks, as any biases transmitted to learners may have a pernicious impact on their personal and cognitive development. Gender perceptions can influence children's behaviour in very gendered ways (Odhiambo, 2012).

* Tel.: +852 2948 8402; fax: +852 2948 8015.
E-mail address: jfklee@ied.edu.hk

Japanese EFL textbooks have been selected for the present study because while Japan has traditionally been regarded as a patriarchal society in which female inferiority is the norm (Saito, 2005; Storm, 1992), social changes have been effected through such instruments as the new Basic Act on Education, passed in 2006, which includes the objective of fostering an attitude that values justice, mutual respect, and equality between men and women. It is therefore deemed timely to examine whether the hidden curriculum in school textbooks reflects the ancestral tradition of male supremacy or conforms to the present Japanese government's vision of establishing a gender-fair society.

The hidden curriculum

School curriculum is defined as “an explicit, conscious, formally planned course with specific objectives” (Kentli, 2009, p. 83), which include learners' development of instructional knowledge and skills. Learners, however, may acquire much more than what is explicitly specified in school textbooks and teacher manuals through an unwritten curriculum in the social environment provided by the school. The unwritten, hidden curriculum, or sometimes called a “covert” and “latent” curriculum, is generally acknowledged as “the socialization process of schooling” (Kentli, 2009, p. 83), and functions to reinforce dominant beliefs, values and norms among learners (Giroux & Penna, 1979). The difference between the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum is that while the former specifies openly what students are intended to learn, the latter involves that which is not openly intended but which students learn regardless.

Martin (1976) suggests two kinds of hiddenness: unintended and intended. A cure for cancer, which is unknown to us, is an example of the former, and a penny hidden in the game Hide the Penny is an example of the latter. Martin incorporates these two kinds of hiddenness in his definition of a hidden curriculum, saying that “a hidden curriculum consists of those learning states of a setting which are either unintended or intended but not openly acknowledged to the learners in the setting unless the learners are aware of them” (p. 144). The sources of hidden curricula include textbooks, a teacher's use of language, standard learning activities, and the social structure of the classroom, among others.

Although there have been suggestions that textbooks may not be the most appropriate focus in the study of gender construction, as bias may be found outside text (Sunderland, Cowley, Abdul Rahim, Leontzakou, & Shattuck, 2000), there is no doubt that textbooks play a major role in formal education. The learning activities, organization of the classroom and teachers' use of language are often based on textbook design. There is a general consensus that school textbooks play a very important role in both formal and hidden curricula. Not only do textbooks disseminate knowledge to learners, but they also reflect, construct and reproduce certain worldviews as well as the writers' beliefs, and have the potential to influence impressionable young learners in various ways (Gullicks, Pearson, Child, & Schwab, 2005; Hino, 1988; Liu, 2002; Sileo & Prater, 1998). Stromquist, Lee, and Brock-Utne (1998) argue that textbooks and educational materials have lasting influences on learners' beliefs about gender roles, as the phrases and stories heard and learnt regarding women and men condition their minds. Further, the textbooks used, which shape repeated classroom practice, follow-up assignments and examination preparation, will exert influence on learners in terms of their learning motivation (Treichler & Frank, 1989) and their understanding of social equality (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008). Mustapha (2012) adds that the linguistic sexism that can be found in textbooks has harmful real-world and damaging pedagogical consequences, especially for females.

Heightened gender awareness in Japan was revealed in the new Basic Act on Education passed in 2006, which includes the objective “to foster an attitude to value justice, responsibility, equality between men and women, mutual respect and cooperation, and actively contribute, in the public spirit, to the building and development of society” (MEXT, 2006). In its attempt to promote human rights education and learning opportunities to respond to social issues, including the formation of “a gender-equal society”, one measure taken by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is to improve textbooks through its authorization system.

The impact of textbooks may be especially strong in Japan, where textbooks have institutional authority, as they have to be approved by MEXT before being adopted, and where school lessons tend to follow textbooks closely (Matsuda, 2002; Otlowski, 2003). The important role played by textbooks in elementary and secondary education in Japan was openly acknowledged by MEXT (2013):

Textbooks are the principle teaching material in school curriculums and fulfil an important role in students' pursuit of learning. As such, enhancing the quality and quantity of textbooks is essential, and the authorization of textbooks is underway to ensure compliance with the new Courses of Study.

The adoption of the textbook authorization system in Japan and the free distribution of textbooks to elementary and junior high school students by the government may encourage students to attach great credibility and authority to textbook materials. According to Jassey (1997), almost all Japanese children are raised with the assumption that what is taught in school is always right. In view of the significant role played by textbooks in formal education, the hidden curriculum in Japanese textbooks in relation to gender construction is thus a topic worth exploring.

Previous textbook studies

Scholars interested in gender studies have examined the various manifestations of gender inequality that may appear in textbooks (e.g., Graci, 1989; Hellinger, 1980; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009; Mannheim, 1994; Porreca, 1984), including (1)

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/366201>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/366201>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)