

Gender Representation in Japanese EFL Textbooks

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This poster session presents the findings of an analysis of gender representation in the five series of English textbooks approved for use in Japanese junior high schools. Although there are no significant differences in the linguistic features of the overall texts, some textbooks contain gender-biased implicit messages. The researchers also present a checklist of criteria for evaluating textbooks, and suggest ways to evaluate ESL/EFL textbooks for gender bias. Specific ideas for classroom activities conclude this session.

このポスターセッションでは、日本の中学校で採択されている英語教科書のうち上位5社を取り上げ、その中で女性と男性がどのように描かれているかを分析した。表面にあらわれた言語レベルでは統計的有意差は見られなかったが、言外に含まれたメッセージの中に偏った観念が暗に示されていた教科書もあった。最後に、性差別をチェックするリストを示すと共に、男女の共生を評価する方法を示し、教室における意識改革のための活動例も示す。



View PowerPoint Show

Recent moves toward gender equality may have changed lexical choices made in Japanese EFL junior high school textbooks, and may have prompted the exclusion of explicit representations of stereotypical assumptions from previous editions. Regarding gender roles, however, implicit and meta-linguistic messages in the texts suggest the need for a thorough analysis to evaluate the balance of gender representation. This research aims to clarify subtleties and complexities of gender representation in Japanese EFL junior high school textbooks.

Previous studies

Traditional “women’s language” studies

The following is a list of features of “women’s language” based on Lakoff (1975), Freeman & McElhinny (1996: 232):

- Women’s language is more polite than men’s.
- Women use tag questions more often than men.
- Topics considered trivial or unimportant are women’s domain (e.g. women are more particular about colors than men.)
- Women speak in “italics” (use intensifiers more often than men) (e.g., “I feel *so* happy.)
- Women use (hyper-) correct grammar.
- Men interrupt women more often than women interrupt men.

Linguistic studies

A recent study by Sunderland (2000: 152) adds this list:

- Verbs associated with female agents reflect ‘some of the traditional stereotyped female behavioral patterns’ (Hellinger, 1980:272).
- In dialogues, females speak less often, speak first less often, and perform a narrower range of discourse roles (Hartman and Judd, 1978; Poulou, 1997).

Exclusion, subordination, degradation studies

Sunderland (2000: 151) evidences stereotypical phenomena in a) female exclusion and invisibility in EFL textbooks, b) subordination and distortion, and c) degradation as follows:

- a) Males are over-represented (e.g. Hellinger, 1980).
- b) Men tend to occupy both more powerful and a greater range of occupational roles than women (e.g., Porecca, 1984). Both males and females perform gender stereotypical activities (e.g., Cincotta, 1978).
- c) Women tend to be stereotypically emotional and are more likely than male characters to be the butt of jokes (Hartman and Judd, 1978).

Quantitative and qualitative studies

Rifkin (1998) establishes a series of criteria to assess the

equity of gender representation in a number of Russian textbooks. He concludes his Russian textbook analysis study by pointing out that quantifiable data on gender equity may be an unreliable indicator, and urges the incorporation of quantitative and qualitative data.

Method

Research sources

Researchers selected the five series of most commonly used junior high school English textbooks in Japan:

- *New Horizon English Course, Books 1-3.*
- *New Crown English Series, Books 1-3.*
- *Sunshine English Course, Books 1-3.*
- *Total English, Books 1-3.*
- *One World English Course, Books 1-3.*

These five series of three textbooks represent approximately 80 percent of the junior high school English textbooks used in Japan.

Research questions

1. What gender-biased language appears in the textbooks?
2. What is the gender balance of speakers?
3. What is the gender balance of the subjects referred to or addressed?
4. What is the gender balance of chapter topics in the textbooks?

Criteria

To answer these questions, the presenters created the following list of criteria:

1. Appearance of gender-biased language
2. Gender influence on verb use
3. Gender influence on choice of verbs
4. Gender of the speaker or narrator of the sentences
5. Gender of the subject or topic of utterance
6. Gender in chapter topics
7. Gender actually focused on in each chapter

Analysis

After analyzing the five series of three textbooks using the criteria above, the researchers conducted a quantitative analysis to see if there was any significant gender imbalance in the measured figures. The researchers then qualitatively analyzed verb types and chapter topics to see if there were any implicit stereotypical assumptions.

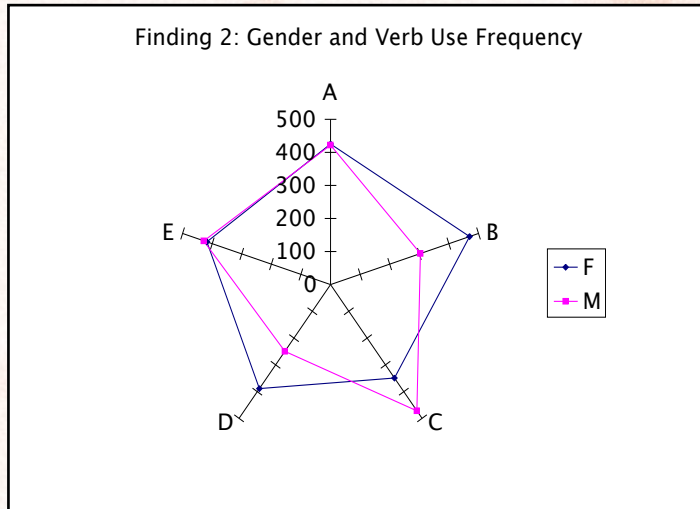
Results and discussion

Finding 1: Gender-imbalanced language

Obviously gender-imbalanced language has been substantially eliminated from EFL textbooks since 1990. There are no occurrences of gender-biased language such as *chairman*.

Finding 2: Gender and verb use frequency

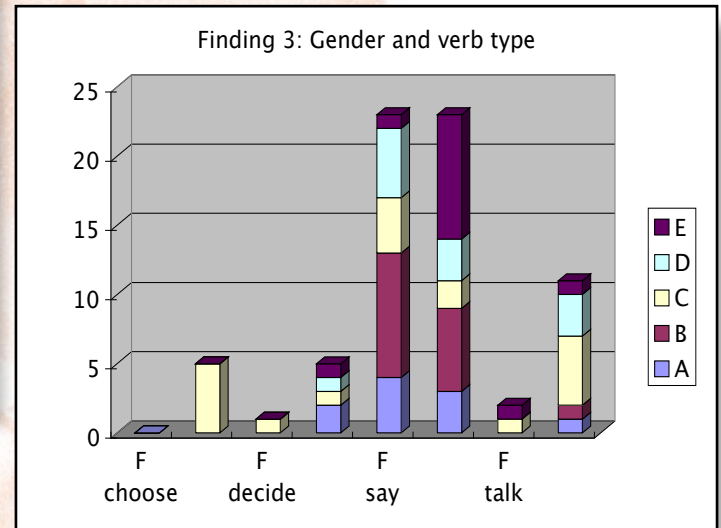
Exclusion studies, such as Hellinger (1980), claim that males are over-represented. This research, however, shows that female characters act and behave more often in some textbooks, and that in total, with all the verbs used in the five series of textbooks included in the data, the number of verbs used by female exceeds in number to those used by male.



Finding 3: Gender and verb type

Gender bias endures in more subtle forms, particularly in the gender-based choice and use of verbs. Though there is great variation among the five series of three textbooks analyzed, and the sample is relatively small,

the researchers noted a trend: society is reflected in the behavior of male characters during activities such as decision-making, in which male characters play major roles while female characters fill subordinate roles. In other words, male characters tend to “choose” and “decide,” while female characters do not. Similarly, utterances by male speakers imply “discourse” and “content” by using the verb “talk,” whereas utterances by female speakers imply hardly any substance.

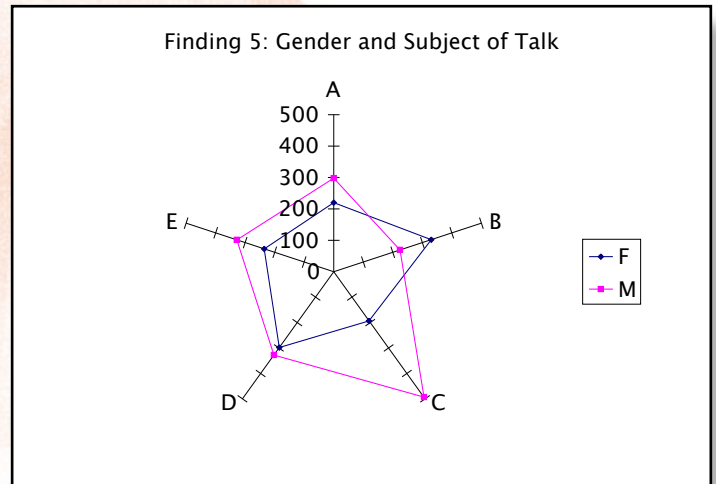
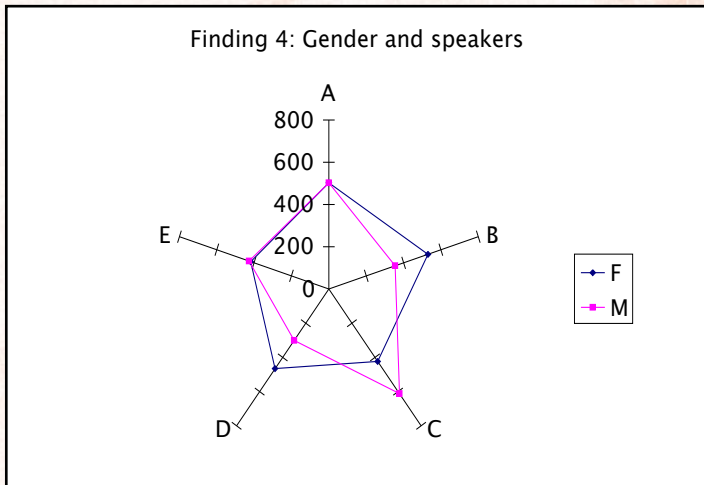


Finding 4: Gender and speakers

Approaching the level of discourse, the researchers again recognized some variation among the textbooks: female speakers speak more often in some textbooks, whereas male speakers speak more often in other textbooks.

Finding 5: Gender and subjects

Female speakers are more likely to talk about male characters than male speakers are to ask about female characters. This is not pervasive, but there is a clear tendency.

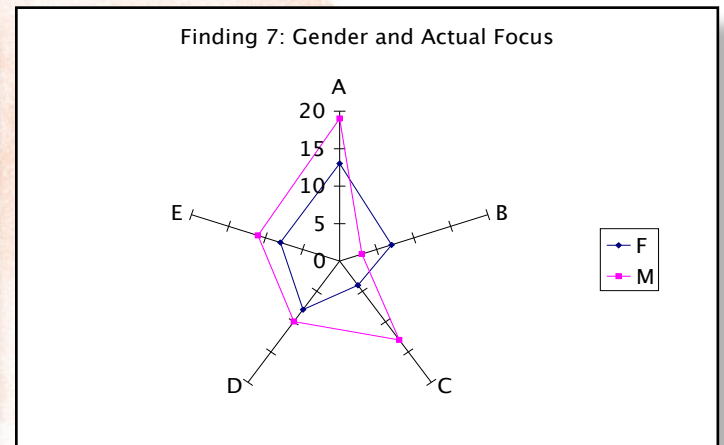
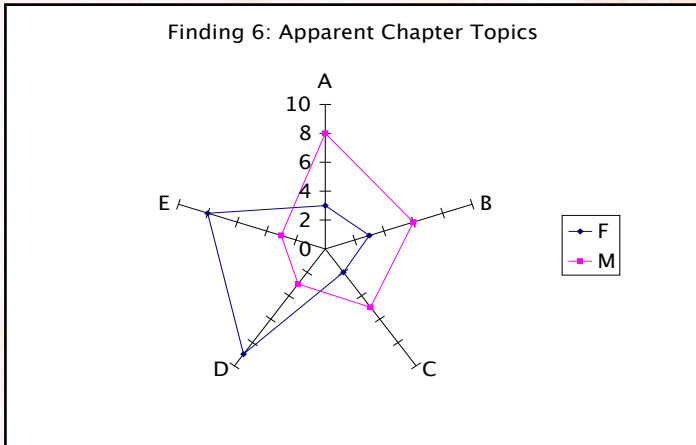


Finding 6: Apparent character topics

There is variation in chapter topic choice among the five series of textbooks, and the chapter topics can be grouped into two: female-oriented and male-oriented. In each group, stories and examples feature female and male characters and issues of interest to both female and male students.

Finding 7: Actual focus

Although there is no significant imbalance in terms of the number of chapter topics, more males are referred to or engaged in actions. Reading through the texts reveals prominence in the number of features focusing on male characters.



Implications

This research suggests that textbooks contain gender-based implicit messages, even though no explicit linguistic features are articulated on the surface level. Awareness should be raised among students, teachers, and textbook writers of a socially constructed self that is not gender-biased.

Classroom Activities

Changing roles

Teachers, being aware of the issues and perhaps having little choice in the matter of textbooks, can try to neutralize any bias. One way is to change roles, for example. If the text calls for Ken to speak to Naomi, have a female student read the role of Ken and a male student read the role of Naomi. If awkwardness occurs, discuss it with the class and raise the students' awareness of sexism in the language.

Blind Reading

Teachers can also give blind readings of the text to students. Read the text to the class without identifying the gender. If the teacher or students can tell the gender of the speakers, based on the language and topic, use it as another opportunity to discuss the issue of gender.

Further Research

This research raises as many questions as it does answer. The following questions can be pursued in further research:

1. What relationship exists between the number of women in writing and editorial teams and the gender bias in textbooks?
2. In what ways do pictorial representations in English textbooks counter or reinforce gender bias?
3. What changes in gender representation and bias have occurred in the new editions of these textbooks?

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