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Images of Women in High School EFL Textbooks

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An examination of the images of women expressed specifically in literary stories in Japanese EFL senior high school textbooks in order to improve EFL education from the perspective of gender equality. Images in literary stories reflect a reality which people experience in daily life and influence the conduct and thoughts of people on a daily basis. Therefore an analysis of the negative and positive images of women present in these stories is required and through these analyses it is possible to raise gender consciousness in EFL and to improve the contents of EFL textbooks.

高等学校EFL教科書に表示される文学的題材の探索を通して、日本のEFL教育を、男女平等視点に対して一層敏感なものに発展させることを目標とする。小説、神話及び一般人の体験に基づく物語的な実話に着眼し、そこに描かれる女性のイメージに焦点を当てる。小説、神話及び物語的な一般人の実話から表示されるイメージは、読者が日々直面する現実を反映するものであるし、また読者の日々の行動、思考態度に直接常に影響を与えるものである。数量分析、そして男女平等社会実現推進に疑問がもたれる物語及び積極的であると考えられるものの具体例分析より、日本におけるEFL教科書のさらなる発展を考察する。

Introduction

Gender inequalities still exist and in more complex ways than before in Japanese society (“Fighting Unfairness,” 2002). As for gender issues in EFL education, Sunderland (2000) argues for the importance of increasing gender awareness among language professionals by investigating EFL textbooks. Moreover, Ferguson (1986) indicates that the images in stories reflect the reality which readers face in everyday life and influence their thoughts and conduct on a daily basis. It is important therefore to be aware of the images of women shown in stories when we consider developing Japanese EFL textbooks.

Aim

I will examine the images of women expressed in Japanese EFL textbooks in order to improve EFL education based on gender equality.

Scope

In terms of examining textbooks related to gender, I have conducted two research works: one (Nakamura, 2000) focusing on cultural aspects, and the other (Nakamura, 2001) on linguistic ones. In this paper I will focus on literary aspects. I will examine the images of women specifically expressed in fictional stories and stories based on real experiences of ordinary people in all EFL senior high school textbooks for the first grade now in use.

Method

My research will be conducted through quantitative and qualitative analysis from the viewpoint of postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism encourages the recovery of women's experiences or voices which have been neglected, while criticizing simplified generalizations. It also rejects binary thoughts and tries to deconstruct the hierarchical system while valuing historically informed analysis on social, cultural, and gender issues (Parpart & Marchand, 1995, pp. 1-22).

Quantitative Analysis

I have examined 48 Senior High School English textbooks. From this data, 75 stories can be considered as fictional stories or stories based on real experiences of ordinary people. There are 62 stories (82.6%) which delineate men, and 39 stories (52.0%) which focus on men with no or little mention of women. 28 stories (37.3%) show women's representations regarding gender clearly. Eight other stories (10.6%) mention both women and men but give no information on gender roles. This data shows that the number of male representations from a literary aspect is significantly higher than that of female representations.

Qualitative Analysis

In analyzing gender relationships within these stories, men are connected with the messages of strong bondage between father and son, friendship, adventure, greatness, warm-heartedness, development, self-control, achievement, among others. The images of women seen in the twenty-eight stories analyzed are twofold. Regarding stories which can be eventually considered as disadvantageous from a gender perspective, women are shown as being sacrificed, unreliable, emotional, sad, less expressive, strange, seducing, cunning, guilty, dangerous, foolish, and punished. As for the stories that could encourage gender equality, only five stories show women as trying to acquire their own identity, conquering obstacles, crossing traditional gender roles, and cultivating wisdom.

In a further analysis of the data, I exemplify representations of women through an analysis of two examples from textbooks. First, I examine "Arachne," a Greek mythological story as an example of a story which doesn't promote gender equality. I then examine "Find Derrek!", a true story, which helps create gender equality.

Disadvantageous Example "Arachne" (Oak English I, Lesson 14)

Overview of the story

In ancient Greece, a girl Arachne is well-known as the best weaver. The goddess Athena condemns Arachne's pride in her weaving because Arachne shows no modesty at all in her achievements. Athena tries to change Arachne's way of life. Athena, equipped with helmet and shield, challenges Arachne to a contest of tapestry weaving in public. Athena's tapestry shows foolish people who are proud of being better than the gods and

goddesses and are punished because of their egotism. Arachne's shows the foolish behavior of the gods. Outraged, Athena splits Arachne's tapestry in two. In shame, Arachne hangs herself. Athena lets her live, but furiously transforms her into a spider.

Analysis of "Arachne"

I analyze "Arachne" from this textbook in light of postmodern feminism. I raise two questions: (1) why is Arachne punished? and (2) what is the meaning of "a lesson" from the introductory remarks of this story: "There are many old Greek stories which not only...but also teach a lesson about how to live. The story of Arachne also has such a lesson" (p.149).

As for the first question, citing words from this story, I argue that Arachne is punished because she is using (a) "strong" words, is showing (b) "too great pride," is not (c) "modest," or is not (d) "grateful." The words in (a) and (b) lead to being determined or independent, while the words in (c) and (d) are associated with people who conform to the lifestyle which puts its priority on building harmonious relationships between individuals or between individuals and groups based on the value of mutual understanding. Lykes and Qin (2001) consider these people as "relational and other oriented" (p.625). In the story, the goddess Athena also condemns Arachne as "foolish," because the girl cultivates her independent side, ignoring the other side which consists of being "relational and other oriented." Athena judges Arachne's way of life to be illegitimate. In addition, Eisler (1995) points out that the goddess Athena consents to central power structure by men or gods.

Considering these points, it can be said that Athena's view supports the simplified generalization that men belong to what the words (a) and (b) represent, while women are associated with the words (c) and (d). This generalized concept leads to a dichotomy,

which postmodern feminism criticizes as negative, that men belong to the norm while women to other. Herewith, it needs to be noted that Cartridge (1993) argues that the obvious negative polarity consists in gender difference in terms of Greek civilization.

Furthermore, there are cases of male characters in stories who impress readers with their integrity. This includes their pride in both being able to pursue their growth and being "modest," as Enoch does in "Enoch Arden" (*Orbit English Series I*, Lesson 8). So, it can also be said that Arachne is punished so that she will not have the opportunities to cultivate her integrity as Athena "split the cloth (of Arachne's) in two" (p.154) in the story, while Enoch embraces it.

I move to the second question of what a lesson means. I clarify my observations pertaining to this second question based on three points. First, from this textbook it is clear that it is Athena who gives a lesson as written in "teach her (Arachne) a lesson" (p.151). So it can be said that the introduction of this story totally sides with Athena's point of view. Second, the story "Arachne" begins with the sentence "It is often dangerous to challenge the gods and goddesses" (p.150). Considering this and Athena's view, a lesson means that Arachne's primal concern should be how to develop the power to become a "relational and other oriented" person rather than how to develop the power to pursue her independence or self-determination. Third, Athena's final words in this story are "you must hang forever—you and all who come after you" (p.155). The final words of Athena's indicate that Arachne's weaving cannot be considered as central in society any more because Arachne "must hang forever" (p.155). Eisler (1995, p. 14) indicates women used the loom as central figures in "Old European life."

In sum, "Arachne" in this textbook shows the image of a woman who is denounced, withdrawn from her central position in society, and deprived of the chance to grow through various

experiences. She is degraded because she insists on pursuing her creativity without following Athena's advice which is based on a gender dichotomy. The other crux in "Arachne" is that a lesson is told from Athena's point of view.

Encouraging Example "Find Derrek!" (English 21 I, Reading 1)

Overview of the story

On a Saturday evening, the Clays discover their two-year-old son Derrek is lost in the desert. Over 500 rescuers try every means possible to find him, in vain. Nancy, a 35-year-old computer analyst who also volunteers to find lost people in the desert or forest flies with her shepherd dog Kallie, to search for Derrek that Monday. After dark, Nancy, Kallie, and her partner Jackie begin their search, relying solely on the scent from Derrek's socks, but fail to locate him. Nancy and Jackie start to worry that the infant might die soon, but they are determined enough to continue their search however difficult it may be. The next night, Nancy and Jackie finally succeed in rescuing Derrek. He barely escapes death thanks to their determination.

Analysis of "Find Derrek"

There are several reasons for considering this story as an inspiration for crossing the ascribed gender roles or pursuing gender equality. Nancy's job as a computer analyst is quite different from traditional, restrictive gender roles. The image of this woman makes readers feel that women will be able to have a variety of job opportunities in the future, expanding their ability or creativity beyond cultural restrictions, as men can. Moreover, we perceive that she develops herself through

many experiences, and that she is independent economically, physically, and spiritually. In this story, Nancy is described as "she (Nancy) decided to become a search-and-rescue volunteer and try to spare others such pain" (p.90) and "they (Nancy and Jackie) never gave up hope" (p.91). It shows that she is determined and compassionate enough to offer people her help through her power, warm-heartedness, thoughtfulness, and high self-esteem. In other words, we can see the process of Nancy's growing integrity. It is clear that the great success of Nancy and her partner Jackie in this story inspires readers to try to clear tall hurdles in society and transcend the ascribed gender roles based on gender imbalance.

To sum up, this story delineates the image of women who have the enthusiasm and power to cross over traditional gender roles, struggle to make their progress, and pave the way to attain integrity with high spirits and warm-heartedness through a variety of experiences with other people.

Conclusion

I have examined the images of women in fictional stories and stories based on the experiences of ordinary people in order to improve the contents of Japanese EFL textbooks focusing on gender. Three points should be kept in mind. First, the stories in textbooks should be free from negative gender dichotomy through both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Second, the images of women in stories should be connected with the message that the position of women in society can change beyond the boundaries of fixed social and cultural construction under which women find it difficult to develop themselves creatively. Finally, they should show readers that women can pursue integrity or truth in all fields equally as well as men can.

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