

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER ORIENTATIONS AND TOPIC OF THE CONVERSATIONS IN ELT MATERIALS: THE CASE OF INTERCHANGE, TOP NOTCH AND TOUCHSTONE

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Abstract

Despite so many researches which have been done on the issue of gender in ELT textbooks and the essential role of conversations as a source of natural language, little has been focused on analyzing conversational topics from the perspective of gender in ELT textbooks. In the light of this gap, the present study investigated gender representation in conversations of ELT textbooks regarding three aspects of gender orientation, the topic of conversations, and distribution of male and female interlocutors. To this end, an aggregate of 108 conversations from three ELT textbooks commonly used in Iran, namely Top Notch, Interchange and Touchstone series were randomly selected. Then, gender orientation was examined by quantifying the frequency of same-gender and mixed-gender oriented conversations. Subsequently, through the qualitative analysis, different conversational topics were listed based on the Tomlinson's (2003) topic classification of ELT textbooks and the relationship between gender orientations and topic of the conversations was explored. Finally, the quantitative analysis and comparison was followed by calculating the frequency of males and females in conversations throughout three textbooks and also across three levels of language proficiency. The results indicated that conversations in textbooks are mostly mixed-gender oriented, while there is a balance between male-male and female-female conversations. Moreover, gender orientation extremely influences the topic of conversation. Furthermore, a balanced representation of males and females in conversations is conveyed throughout three levels of textbooks. Finally, implications of the findings for ELT material developers, language teachers, and practitioners are discussed.

Key Words: natural language; ELT material developers; balanced gender representation; conversational topics; proficiency levels

Introduction

Gender roles are learned as a subsidiary subject conveyed by educational materials. According to Holmes (2009, as cited in Healy, 2009) “Gender describes social expectations, rules and norms attached to femininity and masculinity” (p.18). Gender inequality which is brought up by schooling and mirrored in teaching materials is a very important concern, because curriculum and all its components including textbooks, turn out to be “a design for a future society” (Kress, 1996, p.16, as cited in Skliar, 2007). Thus, for choosing a textbook we have to consider significant factors such as gender bias, the portrayal of ethnic diversity and sociolinguistic appropriateness (Otlowski, 2003). It is important to make a distinction between gender representation and gender bias (unbalanced representation) as the first one means how genders are portrayed, but the second one refers to the situation that one gender is under-represented compared to another gender (Johansson & Malmsjö, 2009).

The statistical data obtained by Central Intelligence Agency (2006) shows that there is almost an equal number of males and females in the world. Moreover, following the feminist movement in the 20th century, the sexist language in international ELT materials was substituted by gender-neutral forms. Therefore, we expect that the portrayal of both genders in ELT course books correspond to these facts. However, studies on the areas related to gender representations in ELT materials (e.g. Hartman & Judd, 1978; Porreca, 1984, etc.) provides a clear evidence of male-bias and gender discrimination by leaving females out of the content or stereotyping them (Skliar, 2007). As Wolfson (1989, cited in Otlowski, 2003) asserts:

Teachers and curriculum writers need to be aware of sexist language usage and also of sexist bias in the materials they select for use in the classroom. The monitoring of classroom materials for bias toward sexism as well as racism and other linguistic manifestations of prejudice is very much the responsibility of teachers and administrators. (Wolfson, 1989, p.184)

While investigating gender bias in ELT materials, serious consideration should be given to conversations and dialogs, since they provide an opportunity for practicing actual language use. As Martha Jones, Catherine Kitetu and Jane Sunderland (1995) stated “dialogues are of considerable potential value in providing different types of language learning opportunities” (p.4). They also believe that dialogues present a sample of the target language forms in the way that it should be used in the especial social context (as cited in Johansson & Malmsjö, 2009). Moreover, Xu (2009)

claims that conversation as a means of social interaction is a necessity of everyday life and the language used by participants in a conversation reflects their thoughts, thus, it inevitably incorporates gender differences or social inequalities.

Gender differences in language are caused by the different goals that men and women have in conversation (Tannen, 1990, as cited in Ueno, 2014). According to Maltz, & Borker (1998):

Women tend to discuss problems with one another, sharing experiences and offering reassurances, while men in contrast, tend to hear women, and other men, who present them with problems as making explicit requests for solutions. (Maltz, & Borker, 1998, p.213)

Considering the essential role of ELT textbooks in English language teaching and the prominence of conversations as a source of natural language use, and also the increased controversies over the issue of gender, this paper aims to analyze the relationship between topic of conversations and gender orientation of the participants in ELT materials. Besides, it is going to shed some light on distribution of genders across three levels of proficiency in current ELT materials.

Review of Literature

In this section, previous studies done on the role of textbooks in English language teaching, sexism in ELT materials and gender representation in conversations of ELT materials will be reviewed.

The Role of Textbooks in ELT

Among different types of materials, the role of textbooks is of greatest significance. The textbook plays an important role in English Language Teaching (ELT), and particularly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom which provides the primary form of linguistic input (Kim & Hall, 2002, as cited in Razmjoo & Kazempourfard, 2012). Hutchinson and Torres (1994) have also emphasized the crucial role of textbooks as “an almost universal element of teaching” (p.315). Sheldon (1988) also asserts that they represent “the visible heart” (p.237) of any ELT program. All classroom activities are arranged based on the textbooks, so textbooks are considered as an indivisible part of any language teaching and learning context (as cited in Alemi & Isavi, 2012). According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the textbook “can be a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, and an ideology” (as cited in Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012).

Theorists sometimes hold different views regarding the textbooks which contradict with each other. Some of the theorists like O'Neil 1982; Sheldon 1988; Hutchinson and Torres 1994; Cunningsworth 1995; and Haycroft 1998, regard textbook as a key element in the ESL/EFL classrooms; nevertheless, other researchers such as Porreca (1984), Florent and Walter (1989), Clarke and Clarke (1990), and Carrell and Korwitz (1994) have criticized textbooks for being inherently biased. Tomlinson (2001, as cited in Alamri, 2008) asserts that:

Proponents of the course-book argue that it is the most convenient form of presenting materials, it helps to achieve consistency and continuation, it gives learners a sense of system, cohesion and progress and it helps teachers prepare and learners revise. Opponents counter that a course-book is inevitably superficial and reductionist, in its coverage of language points and in its provision of language experience, it cannot cater for the diverse needs of its users, it imposes the uniformity of syllabus and approach, and it removes initiative and power from teachers. (Tomlinson, 2001, p.67)

Reviewing the literature reveals the advantages of textbooks in the processes of learning and teaching. O'Neill (1982), for example, has indicated that textbooks are responsive to students' needs, and they are also efficient in terms of time and money (as cited in Birjandi & Alizadeh, 2012). Furthermore, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) have pointed out that textbooks are considered as agents of change. They introduce change gradually and support teachers by creating scaffolding upon which they can build a more creative methodology of their own. Additionally, Cunningsworth (1995) argues that textbooks are useful means of self-directed learning, a source of ideas and activities, a resource for spoken and written materials, a reference source for students, a syllabus with pre-determined objectives, and support for less experienced teachers (as cited in Soleimani & Khosroabadi, 2013). Finally, McGrath (2002) stated that the textbook is essential since it specifies direction and content. Similarly, he emphasized on teachers' attitudes toward textbooks which will influence the way they employ them (as cited in Islam, 2013).

However, in the opposition front many scholars in the field have contradictory views and they have downgraded the critical role of the textbooks. Allwright (1982), for instance, argues that textbooks are pedagogically, psychologically, and linguistically biased. They implicitly or explicitly determine the methods, processes and procedures of language teaching and learning (as cited in Birjandi & Alizadeh, 2012). Moreover,

many researchers including Porreca (1984), Florent and Walter (1989), Clarke and Clarke (1990), Carrell and Korwitz (1994), and Renner (1997) have demonstrated that many EFL/ESL textbooks involve racist attitudes, linguistics biases, sexism, gender bias, and stereotyping (Ansary and Babaii, 2003). Graves (2000, as cited in Alamri, 2008) identified some disadvantages of using a textbook. He believes that the textbook's content may not be at the right level or appropriate to the group you are teaching, and it may not include all aspects of language. Also, the activities may be boring or there may not be the right mix of activities. Furthermore, according to Dominguez (2003), textbooks can greatly contribute to cultural and personal biases which learners can absorb in their learning.

In spite of the fair amount of controversies regarding the use of textbooks, no one can deny the vital role of the textbooks as the main ELT material.

Sexism and Gender Representation in ELT Textbooks

Gender bias in English language came from Anglo-American society and it was emphasized through the texts (Skliar, 2007). However, linguists and researchers became increasingly interested in the topic of language and gender by development of the feminist movement in America in the 1960s (Xu, 2009). Despite over 40 years of research focusing on gender bias in textbooks, it is still widespread and persistent worldwide.

Studies done in recent decades have found that an unbalance representation of genders and traditional gender roles still exists in text and dialogues of EFL textbooks (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Jones et al., 1995; McGrath, 2004; Bayyurt & Litosseliti, 2006, as cited in Johansson & Malmsjö, 2009). However, some other researchers showed an increase in the balanced representation of female and male characters in texts and dialogues over the years (Jones, Kitetu & Sunderland, 1995; Poulou, 1997). Recent writings on textbook content (Ansary and Babii 2003; Beebe 1998; Kanemaru 1998; Pierce 1990; Wolfson 1989) indicate that textbooks should represent a balanced view toward the role of women in society and not maintain inaccurate generalizations about women and their roles (as cited in Otlowski, 2003).

Research interest on gender bias in language teaching materials goes back to the 1970s. Graham (1975) was among the first who investigated sexism in a school children's dictionary and found that the nouns used to describe male activities were seven times as many as those referring to female activities (as cited in Amini & Birjandi, 2012). However, the first influential study was done by Pat Hartman and Elliot Judd in 1978. In their study on texts and

visual images in ESL materials, they investigated gender bias in TESOL's textbooks and revealed that in these textbooks "women are often less visible than men, are often the butt of many jokes and are often placed in stereotypical roles and assigned stereotypical emotional reactions" (p.383). They claimed that gender bias manifested itself in all three examined areas of omission, first place occurrences in texts, and occupational roles assigned to both genders. Their study showed gender stereotypes in which women were treated linguistically as inferior, and were generally given subordinate status only because of their gender (as cited in Lewandowski, 2014). Five years later, Karen Porreca (1984) conducted a similar study to explore sexism in ELT textbooks commonly used on that time by looking at texts and illustrations quantitatively. She reported that "Although females comprise slightly over half the population of the United States, they are depicted or mentioned only half as often as males in both text and illustrations" (p.718). She also concluded that the implicit message behind such omission is that women themselves as human beings or their accomplishments are not important enough to be mentioned.

Based on the passages in German ELT textbooks, Hellinger (1980) organized another study on gender representation and found that 80% of the speakers were male and they participated in over 93% of the passages while their roles represented a broad range of occupational options, yet, not even 30% of the texts included women (as cited in Ansary & Babaii, 2003).

Gupta and Lee (1990) provided additional support to these results by analyzing two series of EFL textbooks used in the Singapore Primary schools and concluding that in both series the number of male characters was higher than females. Moreover, males were represented in a remarkably wider range of roles than females whose roles seemed to center on the nurturing professions like teacher and nurse (as cited in Hamdan, 2008).

Farooq (1999) examined an EFL course book written for a women's college in Japan while attempting to explore sexism on two levels of word and discourse. Regarding the word-level analysis, Farooq conclude that sexism was found in almost all areas, particularly in terms of occupation, and also in first-place occurrences of males and females. This result confirms the findings of previous studies such as the one done by Hartman and Judd (1978) twenty years ago and shows that sexism in occupational roles continues to flourish both in ESL and EFL materials. Considering sexism at the level of discourse and in dialogues, it turned out that men dominated women in initiation and moves, and women tend to be responders rather than initiators in dialogues while they speak less than men in male-female interactions. He concluded that the textbook writer provides opportunity for

female participants in woman-woman dialogs, and for male participants in man-woman dialogs while ignoring females in man-woman interactions.

Kaya (2003) examined gender representations in Turkish elementary school textbooks and bigger numbers of male characters in the textbooks were revealed. In addition, traditional female and male family roles were reinforced by textbooks' illustrations. According to the results both female and male students adopted stereotyped gender roles integrated in their educational materials (as cited in Skliar, 2007).

The study done by Otlowski (2003) on the portrayal of gender and the representation of the various ethnic groups in the *Expressway A* series. The conversations and illustrations in each chapter are examined and the results showed that Expressway A, while better than many earlier EFL texts, still depicts women in roles that no longer accurately represent their role in society.

In order to investigate the specific way through which gender bias is reflected in local Iranian EFL textbooks in secondary schools, Babaii and Ansary (2003) followed two types of analysis. First, a quantitative analysis regarding female/male visibility in texts and illustrations, and gender topic presentation in dialogues and reading passages. Second, qualitative investigation of occupational roles, gender-based activity types, stereotypes in social roles, firstness and masculine generic forms. They proved that males were presented in 67% of the topics as compared to females. The authors came to the conclusion that these books are considered sexist textbooks and this sexism reflects an unfair status of women in the society.

Sivaslıgil's (2006) study of gender ideology in Turkish ELT textbooks revealed that females were underrepresented in terms of frequency of appearances, amount of talk, representations in family, social and occupational roles (as cited in Hamdan & Jalabneh, 2009).

Holmqvist (2006) explored the representation of gender and gender roles in English textbooks and concluded that that there is an overrepresentation of male authors and that occupations for females are mainly stereotypical.

Unlike some earlier researches that revealed biased representation of genders in textbooks, the results of the study done by Çubukçu and Sivaslıgil (2007) on the content analysis of English textbook, called *Quick Step* in terms of sexist discourse, indicated that the numbers of female and male representations were almost equal, 144 and 140 respectively (as cited in Dominguez, 2003).

Gender Representation in Conversations of ELT Textbooks

The research focus nowadays is moving from being on the form of language to the function of it in everyday conversations and contexts. For this reason, analyzing conversations from the perspective of gender differences has been the concern of some researchers, recently.

Xu (2009) investigated informal face-to-face English interactions in the TV-series *Friends* in order to analyze gender differences in mixed-sex conversations with a particular focus on interruptions. It turned out that in casual mixed-sex conversations under private conversational settings and with self-disclosed topics women tend to interrupt others more than men do. Moreover, it was revealed that women are not automatically the cooperative speakers and they tend to dominate such casual talk instead of being dominated by men.

In another study carried out by Ethel (1977) in the textbook *Functions of English*, fifteen dialogues occurred between two or three men, eight between a man and a woman, and none took place between women only. So, sexist language was evident and also the number of female characters and their participation in dialogues were far fewer than male characters (as cited in Nagatomo, 2010).

Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland (1997) studied gender stereotyping in textbooks while focusing on the language in mixed-gender dialogues of three widely used EFL textbooks. They examined the number of occurrences of female or male character in the dialogues, the number of turns taken by each character, the number of words spoken by each character per each turn and total number of words uttered by female and male. Additionally, occupational and social roles of interlocutors were investigated. The research did not reveal big gender differences of female and male representations in the dialogues and the results showed a fair level of gender egalitarian attitudes.

Ueno (2014) analyzed gender differences in Japanese conversational styles in terms of three interactional patterns including interruptions, reactions to interruptions, and backchannels in mixed-sex conversations. The results indicated that Japanese women interrupt more frequently than men and Japanese men and women react similarly to interruptions, while Japanese women use backchannels more than men.

Johansson & Malmjö (2009) intended to explore if there is any over-representation of female or male characters in textbooks' dialogues in terms of the number of initiated dialogues, turns taken, number of characters and words used. The findings revealed that over-representations of males and

females exist in all textbook series. Moreover, it was indicated that while a textbook series might over-represent one gender it does not necessarily mean that the individual textbook within that series over-represents the same gender.

When the comparison between topic of conversations and gender of the participants is taken into consideration, one systematically study was done by Henry Moore in 1992 and he stated that gender differences in topic choice would persist over time, since they were manifestations of men's and women's "original natures" (p.214). Moore observed that when conversations were female-female oriented, most of the conversational topics were about persons of the opposite sex, clothes, buildings, and interior decoration, however, when the orientation is male-male, most of the conversations centered on money, business, and amusement (as cited in Bischooping, 1993).

As far as the review of literature is concerned, researches on the role of textbooks and gender representations in ELT educational materials drew essentially divergent results. Moreover, despite many studies which is done on gender-related issues in the field, only a few ones are conducted specifically on the influence of gender on "conversational discourse" of ELT textbooks. Moreover, there is almost no comprehensive study analyzing the relationship between gender orientations and topic of the conversations in ELY materials. So, the present study aims in filling this gap by evaluating orientations of gender and topic of the conversations in ELT textbooks through answering following research questions:

How is the orientation of genders in conversations of ELT textbooks? Are they mostly male oriented, female oriented or male-female oriented?

How the gender of the interlocutors affects the topic which they are discussing about? What are the types of topics discussed in male-male oriented conversations? What are the types of topics discussed in female-female oriented conversations? What are the types of topics discussed in female-male oriented conversations?

How is the distribution of males in conversations of ELT textbooks? How is the distribution of females in those conversations? Is there an equal number of female and male in conversations of ELT textbooks?

Methodology

Corpus & Data Collection Procedure

The source of materials in the present study comprises three series of ELT textbooks which includes 15 textbooks for students in elementary,

intermediate and advance level of English language proficiency.

According to Guerin (2004, as cited in Soozandehfar & Sahragard, 2011), in order to have an appropriate sample size in conversation analysis, we should analyze samples of “natural” conversations based on the topics. So, in this study the corpus data is consisted of all the dialogues provided by three series of student’s book. In order to collect the intended data, the researcher first listed the page number of all conversations through the whole series, then, randomly selected 12 conversations from each level of language proficiency namely, elementary, intermediate and advanced in each series of books. So, the total number of conversations going to be analyzed will be 36 conversations from each series which would be 108 dialogs from the whole corpus.

Data Analysis Procedure

The entire analysis of the present research is carried out by careful inspection of 108 selected conversations from 15 textbooks. Basically, the quantitative analysis which is performed includes simple statistical analyses as well as the percentage presented in different tables. The analysis applied in this study is organized according to three research questions. In order to answer the first research question regarding the gender orientation of conversations, two different types of gender orientations were identified as same-gender and mixed-gender dialogues. Same-gender dialogues represent male-male and female-female communication, while, mixed-gender dialogues involve female-male interactions. Then, the frequency of occurrence of each category was counted and the numbers of female-oriented, male-oriented, mixed-gender oriented dialogues were found. In the view of second research question about the relationship between topic and gender orientation of the conversations, first of all, the topics of the 108 randomly selected conversations were listed and then the content of them was carefully scrutinized in order to recognize the exact topic which was discussed by interlocutors. Then, based on the categorization of topics extracted from Tomlinson’s (2003) categorization and also by referring to the personal choice of the researcher, the topics were classified. In the next step, three different types of gender orientations including male-male, female-male, and male-female interactions were listed. Then, the frequency and percentage of each type of orientation regarding the specific topic was counted and compared. Considering final research question about the distribution of females and males in conversations, the numbers of male and also female characters in conversations were counted across three proficiency levels of textbook.

Instrumentation

In order to collect the data, three ELT textbook series were implemented. The first one was *Top Notch* series comprising seven student books which was written by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher and published in the United States of America by Pearson Longman Incorporation in 2006. The second one is *Interchange* series (3rd edition) comprising four student books, written by Jack C. Richards and published by Cambridge University Press in 2005. The last set of textbooks was *Touchstone* series including four student books, authored by Michael McCarthy, Jeanne McCarten, and Helen Sandiford, and published by Cambridge University Press in 2005.

The choice of these books is governed by the personal interest of the researcher and also the current situation in Iran that nowadays, these three series have become widely implemented in most of the English language institutes in Iran. The categorization of each textbook series according to three levels of language proficiency is presented in the following table:

Table 1. *Classification of Three Textbook Series*

Title	Number of units	Level
Top Notch fundamentals A	7	Elementary
Top Notch fundamentals B	7	
Top Notch 1	10	
Top Notch 2	10	Intermediate
Top Notch 3	10	
Top Notch Summit 1	10	Advanced
Top Notch summit 2	10	
Interchange Intro	16	Elementary
Interchange 1	16	
Interchange 2	16	Intermediate
Interchange 3	16	Advanced
Touchstone 1	12	Elementary
Touchstone 2	12	
Touchstone 3	12	Intermediate
Touchstone 4	12	Advanced

Results

This study was intended to discover the influence of gender of the participants on topic of the conversations in ELT textbooks. Besides, by quantifying the distribution of men and women in conversations, the aspect of gender-bias in current ELT textbooks in Iranian context was examined. To this end, different types of gender orientation and different topics of the

conversations were classified and the frequency of each category was counted and the relationship between them was analyzed. The detailed description of the final results is discussed in the following sections.

Gender Orientation in Conversations of ELT Textbooks

The orientation of gender in conversations can be divided into two main categories of same-gender and mixed-gender dialogues. While, same-gender dialogues represented male-male and female-female communication, mixed-gender dialogues involves female-male interactions. In order to calculate the frequency of each category of gender orientation across three series of textbooks, the researcher listed the page number of all of the conversations in three selected textbooks and then randomly picked up 12 conversations from every proficiency level in each series of textbooks which mean 36 conversations from each set of books. So, the total number of selected conversations turned out to be 108 dialogs from the whole corpus. Then, the orientation of participants' gender was examined in each of the 108 dialogs. The detailed description of the results is presented in the following table (table2):

Table2. *Gender Orientation in Conversations of ELT Textbooks*

Textbooks		Top Notch		Interchange		Touchstone		Total	
Gender-orientations		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Same-gender	Male-Male	5	14	6	17	2	6	13	12
	Female-Female	7	19	4	11	1	3	12	11
Mixed-gender	Male-Female	24	67	26	72	33	91	83	77
Total		36	100	36	100	3	100	108	100

Note. Numbers in the right side of each column indicate percentage.

As it is clear from the above table, the total numbers of male-male and female-female oriented dialogues across three series of textbooks are almost equal, 12 and 11 percentages respectively. Moreover, most of the conversations (77 percentages) in current ELT textbooks are mixed-gendered which means that the majority of interactions occur between participants of the opposite sex.

There are some small differences regarding the frequency of each orientation across three textbook series. With respect to male-male orientation Interchange series has the most frequency (17 percentage) compared to Top Notch (14 percentage) and Touchstone (6 percentage). Female-female interaction is highest in Top Notch series (19 percentage)

with regard to Interchange (11 percentage), and Touchstone (3 percentage). While, female-male interaction is the most in Touchstone series (91 percentage) in comparison with Interchange (72 percentage) and Top Notch (67 percentage).

Comparison between Gender Orientations and Topic of the Conversations

The focus of second research question was on making a comparison between the types of gender orientation and topic of the conversations in ELT textbooks. The anticipation was that there should be a kind of relationship between the participants' gender and the topic which they discuss in their interaction. For example, when both of the interlocutors are female, the topic which they are talking about would be something related to fashion, food or house-holding affairs but when both of them are male, the topic would be related to issues such as occupation, transportation, money, and politics.

The process followed in determining the relationship between gender orientation and topic of the conversations comprised some steps. First of all, the topics of the 108 randomly selected conversations were listed and then the content of them was carefully scrutinized in order to recognize the exact topic which was discussed by interlocutors. Then, based on the categorization of topics extracted from Tomlinson's (2003) categorization and also by referring to the personal choice of the researcher, the topics were classified. In the next step, three types of gender orientations, namely, male-male, female-female and male-female were listed. As the final step, every orientation was assigned to one topic and the total frequency and percentage for each topic was calculated. Table 3 below demonstrates the results more clearly.

Table 3. *Comparisons between Gender Orientations and Topic of the Conversations*

Topics \ Orientations	Male-Male		Female-Female		Male-Female		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Names, introduction & greetings	0	0	1	8.33	8	9.6	9	8.3
Family, friends & Relationships	0	0	0	0	4	4.8	4	3.7
Address & direction	0	0	0	0	2	2.4	2	1.8
Routines	0	0	1	8.33	1	1.2	2	1.8
Life matters	2	15.4	2	16.7	19	22.9	23	21.3
Weather	1	7.7	0	0	0	0	1	0.9
Technology	1	7.7	1	8.33	3	3.6	5	4.7
Fashion & clothing	0	0	1	8.33	2	2.4	3	2.8
Transportation	0	0	0	0	1	1.2	1	0.9

Entertainment & leisure activities	1	7.7	0	0	6	7.3	7	6.5
Food	1	7.7	0	0	3	3.6	4	3.7
Personality & behaviors	0	0	1	8.33	6	7.3	7	6.5
Geography	0	0	0	0	1	1.2	1	0.9
Apologize	1	7.7	1	8.33	0	0	2	1.8
Requests, invitations & ordering	1	7.7	0	0	6	7.3	7	6.5
Suggestions & recommendations	2	15.4	0	0	5	6	7	6.5
Money	1	7.7	0	0	3	3.6	4	3.7
History & past experiences	0	0	1	8.33	2	2.4	3	2.8
Hopes & plans for the Future	1	7.7	1	8.33	3	3.6	5	4.7
Neighborhood	0	0	0	0	4	4.8	4	3.7
Holidays & Traditions	0	0	2	16.7	2	2.4	4	3.7
Occupations	1	7.7	0	0	2	2.4	3	2.8
Total	13	100	12	100	83	100	108	100

Note. Numbers in the right side of each column indicate percentage.

By examining various topics and also different types of gender-orientation in the above table (Table3), we can draw following conclusions. Firstly, it is revealed that among different topics, conversations on “life matters” are the most frequent (21.3 percentages), nevertheless, the least frequency refers to three topics, namely “weather”, “transportation”, and “geography” (0.9 percentages).

Secondly, by examining the above table more carefully, further outcomes are noticeable which can be classified into three main categories. The first category is the related to topics which are mostly *mixed-gender oriented*, which includes “Names, introduction & greetings”, “Family, friends & Relationships”, “Address & direction”, “Life matters”, “Transportation”, “geography”, “Neighborhood”. The second category is specified to those topics which are mostly *male-oriented* including “Weather”, “Entertainment & leisure activities”, “food”, “Requests, invitations & ordering”, “Suggestions & recommendations”, “Money”, “occupations”. The last one involves topics which are mostly *female oriented* namely, “Routines”, “Technology”, “Fashion & clothing”, “Personality & behaviors”, “Apologize”, “History & past experiences”, “Hopes & plans for the Future”, “Holidays & Traditions”.

Thirdly, considering the topic “fashion and clothing”, the occurrence of female-female conversations is 8.33 percentages while there is no male-male

interaction at all (0 percentage). However, when the conversational topics are “money” and “occupation” most of the interactions occurred between males (7.7 percentages) and there is no female-female interaction (0 percentage) on these topics.

Although, number of male oriented and female oriented conversations on the topic “life-matters” are almost equal, 15.4 and 16.7 percentages respectively, most of the conversations discussing this subject are mixed-gender oriented (22.9 percentages). Moreover, when we consider the topic “routines”, we recognize that there is a high difference in percentage across three types of orientations. In female oriented conversations, its percentage is 8.33, but in female-male and male-male interactions it is 1.2 and 0 respectively.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from table.3 is that with regard to some topics including, “life matters”, “technology”, “apologize”, and “hops and plans for the future”, the percentage of male-male orientation is almost equal (the little difference can be ignored) to female-female oriented interactions. Furthermore, in the case of some topics namely, “Family”, “friends & Relationships”, “Address & direction”, “Transportation”, “Geography”, and “Neighborhood” the percentage of both same-gender oriented categories is equal to zero.

Finally, in the case of some topics, the results turned out to be in opposition to our expectations. For example, when the topic is technology we discover that the number of male-male conversations (7.7 percentages) is less than female oriented (8.33 percentages) ones, and this is contrary to our expectation that most of the conversations on the topic of technology should be male oriented. On the other side, when the conversational topics are “entertainment & leisure activities” and “food”, it is interesting that they are mostly male oriented which is again quite against our expectation.

Distribution of Male and Female Characters in Conversations of ELT

Textbooks

Considering the last research question about the frequency of each gender in selected conversations of three ELT textbooks, quantitative analysis and comparison was done throughout three textbooks and also three levels of language proficiency in each textbook series. As it was explained in the previous section related to data collection process, the three selected textbook series were divided into three proficiency levels of elementary, intermediate and advanced. Then, the researcher randomly selected 12 conversations from each level of language proficiency in each series of books. So, the total number of selected conversations from the whole corpus is 108. In the next

step, the overall number of males in 108 conversations was counted. Then, the same calculation process was done with regard to female character. The result of this quantification analysis is presented in Table4 below:

Table4. *Distribution of Male and Female Characters in Conversations of ELT Textbooks*

Textbooks Gender	Proficiency level	Top Notch		Interchange		Touchstone		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	Elementary	14	19.5	12	16.65	11	15.3	109	50.5
	Intermediate	9	12.5	14	19.5	13	18		
	Advance	11	15.3	12	16.65	13	18		
	Total	34	47.3	38	52.8	37	51.3		
Female	Elementary	10	13.9	12	16.65	13	18	107	49.5
	Intermediate	15	20.8	10	13.9	11	15.3		
	Advance	13	18	12	16.65	11	15.3		
	Total	38	52.7	34	47.2	35	48.7		
Total		72	100	72	100	72	100	216	100

Note. Numbers in the right side of each column indicate percentage.

With regard to the above table (table 4), various outcomes can be inferred. The first and most clear one is that the distribution of male and female character throughout the overall series of textbooks is almost equal (50.5 and 49.5 percentages respectively) and there is only a slight difference which can be ignored. Therefore, there is an encouraging level of gender balance in current ELT textbooks used in the Iranian context.

The second finding can be achieved by comparing the total frequency of males and also across three textbooks. The highest total number of male character is presented in Interchange series (52.8 percentages), while in the case of Touchstone and Top Notch, it is 51.3 and 47.3 respectively. Moreover, in terms of female occurrences, Top Notch series has got the highest total number which is 52.7 percentages and it outnumbered Touchstone (48.7 percentages) and Interchange (47.2 percentages) series respectively.

In order to draw the third conclusion, we need to pay attention to each textbook and compare the frequency of both genders in the specific textbook in order to find out which one is biased. The first textbook to be analyzed is Top Notch and the results show that the total number of male character in this textbook is 47.3 percentages, while the overall number of female participants is 52.7 percentages. Therefore, Top Notch series over-represents the female character with 5.4 percentages difference. Considering the second textbook which is Interchange series, the results are exactly the opposite, since

the percentage of male character is 52.8 but the percentage of female character is 47.2 and this textbook over-represents the male character with 5.6 percentages biasness. By examining the third textbook which is Touchstone series, we discover that the total number of male-gender occurrences (51.3 percentages) is more than the frequency of females (48.7 percentages) and this book is 2.6 percentage biased toward the male gender.

The overall finding discovered through comparisons which are done so far is that Touchstone series has the least degree of biasness (2.6 percentages) compared to Top Notch (5.4 percentages) and Interchange (5.6 percentages) series respectively. Moreover, it is revealed that two out of three selected textbooks have some degrees of male-gender bias and only one of them is biased toward females.

Further outcomes are achieved if we examine each of the textbooks separately through different levels of proficiency. By focusing on *Top Notch series*, we conclude that in the elementary level, male-gender (19.5 percentages) is more represented than female (13.9 percentages), but in the intermediate and advanced levels, the female character is over-represented, 20.8 and 18 percentages respectively. So, the overall conclusion is that in the Top Notch series there is an unbalanced representation of males and females in all three levels of textbooks. The second textbook to be taken into consideration is *Interchange series* in which regarding the elementary and advanced levels in the case of both genders, the percentage is exactly equal (16.65) but in the intermediate level there is more distribution of male characters (19.5) than females (13.9). Therefore, the general outcome is that in the Interchange series the unequal representation of male and female exist only in the Intermediate level of language proficiency. Finally, by examining *Touchstone series*, we recognize that in the elementary level, the representation of females (18 percentages) is more than males (15.3) but in the intermediate and advanced levels male-gender (18 percentages) is more emphasized than female characters (15.3 percentages). Thus, some small degrees of difference and biasness are evident in all three levels of this textbook. To conclude, with respect to three levels of language proficiency, Top Notch and Touchstone series exhibit some degrees of biasness in all three levels but in Interchange series biasness exist only in the intermediate level of proficiency.

Meantime, the important point which should be taken into consideration is that although some small degrees of gender-imbalance is observed in all three series of textbooks, the total number in the right column of the above table (Table4) suggests that the overall frequency of male and female characters is almost equal and the selected textbooks fairly

egalitarian representation of the two genders.

Discussions

The findings of this study will be more deeply discussed by comparing them with results of previous studies. The first finding of this study which revealed that total numbers of same-gender oriented dialogues across three series of textbooks were almost equal and that great number of conversations in selected ELT textbooks are mixed-gender oriented, indicates that current ELT textbooks are less gender biased compared to the past and such mixed-gender dialogues provide equal opportunities for both female and male students' participation in speaking activities. Furthermore, this conforms to the orientation of current English language classrooms in institutes of Iran that are mostly mixed-gender oriented.

Based on the second finding of this research it was claimed that there is a direct relationship between gender orientation of the participants in a conversation and the topic which they are discussing about. For instance, when the conversational topic is "fashion and clothing", most of the conversations are female-female oriented, but when it is about "occupation or money", they are mostly male-male oriented. This finding was quite in line with findings of Moore's study (1992) who observed that when conversations were female-female oriented, most of the conversational topics were about persons of the opposite sex, clothes, buildings, and interior decoration, however, when the orientation is male-male, most of the conversations centered on money, business, and amusement (as cited in Bischooping, 1993).

Another outcome which was achieved in this was that distribution of male and female characters in conversation of selected textbooks throughout three levels of language proficiency is almost equal and there is a fair level of gender egalitarian attitudes in these textbooks. This result is, from one hand, contrary to some of the studies on different aspects of EFL//ESL materials for instance Hartman & Judd (1978), McGrath (2004), Bayyurt & Litosseliti (2006), Farooq (1999), Gupta and Lee (1990), Porreca (1984), Hellinger (1980), Babaii and Ansary (2003), Sivaslıgil's (2006), which all revealed that sexism still exists in terms of both linguistic and non-linguistic representation. Nevertheless, from the other hand, the finding of this study is in line with findings of other studies done by Çubukçu and Sivaslıgil (2007, as cited in Dominguez, 2003) on analysis of sexist discourse in one English textbook which indicated an equal number of female and male characters in the selected textbook and also Jones, Kite and Sunderland's (1997) studies on gender stereotyping in three widely used EFL textbooks which did not reveal big gender differences of female and male in terms of

their occurrences in dialogs, the number of words uttered by each character.

One other result which was gained by examining male and female distribution in three textbooks as well as three levels of proficiency was that *Top Notch*, *Interchange* and *Touchstone* series are among sex-fair ELT textbooks which do not display any sexist attitude. This outcome conforms to the results of the study done by Dominguez (2003) which indicated that *New Interchange Intro* does not over-represent either sex and there is a numerical balance between males and females. Furthermore, another study done by Tahriri & Moradpour (2014) supports the result of this study by analyzing aspects of gender in *Top Notch Series* which revealed that *Top Notch* series equally represents both genders and in such a way that stereotypical norms ingrained into learners are nearly removed. As Schau and Scott (1984) indicate, sex-fair materials broaden students' views about gender roles, and increase the motivation to learn (as cited in Dominguez, 2003), while discrepancy in gender could lead to female students having fewer chances to practice language than male students (as cited in Nagatomo, 2010).

Conclusion & Implications

The current study aimed at investigating the relationship between gender orientation and topic of the conversations in ELT textbooks, also, the distribution of male and female characters was explored through different levels of language proficiency in 108 randomly selected conversations of three international ELT textbooks commonly employed in Iranian language institutes. The qualitative and quantitative analysis was done based on three research questions. With regard to the first research question about the frequency of gender orientations in conversation, the researcher categorized different types of gender orientations and then the number of each category was counted. The results (as presented in Table 2) indicated that there is almost an equal number of male-male and female-female oriented dialogues across three series of textbooks and also, most of the conversations in in selected textbooks are mixed-gendered. So, we can conclude that current ELT textbooks are less gender biased compared to the past and such mixed-gender dialogues provide equal opportunities for both female and male students' participation in speaking activities.

By considering the second research question in terms of comparative analysis of gender orientation and topic of the conversations, the researcher classified various conversational topics based on Tomlinson's (2003) categorization and then examined their relationship with gender orientations of the participants in selected conversations. It was revealed that some topics such as "Names, introduction & greetings", "Family, friends & Relationships

“, “Address & direction”, and “Life matters” are mostly mixed-gender oriented, while other topics like “Requests, invitations & ordering”, “Suggestions & recommendations”, “Money”, and “occupations” are mostly male-oriented and topics related to subjects such as “Fashion & clothing”, “Personality & behaviors”, “Apologize”, “Hopes & plans for the Future” are mainly female-oriented. Accordingly, the conclusion is that gender of the participants in a conversation directly influences the topics which they are discussing about.

Another area which was explored in this study refers to the third research question on the frequency and distribution of male and female characters in conversation of selected textbooks throughout three levels of elementary, intermediate and advanced language proficiency. The researcher followed quantitative analysis and calculated the frequency of each participant's gender. The total outcome of this analysis was that there is a balanced representation of males and females in conversations of current ELT textbooks used in the Iranian context. Besides, this result was more specifically explained in terms of three textbooks as well as three levels of proficiency. By focusing on three textbook series it was indicated that Touchstone series has the least degree of biasness compared to Top Notch and Interchange series, respectively. Moreover, it is revealed that Top Notch series is somehow biased toward females, while, Interchange and Touchstone series are male-biased to some degrees. Although, some small degrees of gender-imbalance is observed in all three series of textbooks, it can be ignored as the total number regarding the overall frequency of male and female characters throughout three textbooks suggests. Moreover, when three levels of language proficiency are taken into consideration, Top Notch and Touchstone series exhibited some degrees of unbalanced gender representation in all three levels of elementary intermediate and advanced, but the Interchange series demonstrated biasness only in the intermediate level of proficiency. Therefore, the general conclusion that can be drawn according to the numerical results obtained by counting female and male occurrences is that Top Notch, Interchange and Touchstone series are among sex-fair ELT textbooks which do not display any sexist attitude.

This study has following implications for textbook writers, publishers, educators in the field of English language teaching, and particularly English language teachers and students. Based on the findings of this study, language teachers will become aware of the specific areas and topics in which male or female students are more interested in and this will have many beneficial effects on their teaching process. Since, in this way, teachers will first consider the gender-orientation of their students in the classroom, whether they are

male, female or both, and then, they will decide on the conversational topics, accordingly. Besides, when the topic seems interesting to the students, it will be more engaging and encouraging for them to speak about that. Further, ELT textbook writers and publishers need to pay their precise attention to adjust gender of the interlocutors to topics which they are discussing about.

Further implications of the results can be achieved based on the aspect of gender distribution in conversations of ELT textbooks. From the results gained through the examination of language teaching materials published today which exhibit a more balanced representation and distribution of male and female character throughout conversations of current ELT textbooks compared to the past, it can be implied that unlike textbook writers of the past, current materials developers are more aware of gender bias in textbooks and they are trying to minimize it. Moreover, textbook writers should be very careful about equal distribution of females and males in conversations, since gender imbalanced textbooks may result in some negative outcomes such as underperformance of either gender in the classroom. On the contrary, gender-balanced materials can cause many positive effects on students' learning, because they provide equal chances for male and female students to improve their speaking skills by participating in the interactions and conversation activities. Besides, another group of people who may find the results obtained by the present research useful are the instructional materials committees of institutes and language teachers who are in charge for selecting suitable materials for their classrooms. They should be quite aware of the aspects of gender stereotyping in textbooks, and they should deeply examine the aspect of biasness in all sections of the books, especially the conversation section which is one of the influential parts in every ELT textbook.

The present study included specific corpus data only limited to three ELT series; however, there are many other ELT textbooks used in language institutes and also textbooks implemented in public or private schools and other language courses which lay beyond the boundaries of the study. Furthermore, only 109 conversations were randomly selected from the whole series of books. Due to this limitation, the results regarding topics of conversations, gender representations and gender-based ideologies cannot be generalized to all ELT textbooks taught in different institutes in Iran. Moreover, it should be noted that only student's books were analyzed in this research, and additional course components, such as workbooks and teacher's guides were not taken into consideration.

Therefore, the current study may be improved in some ways. First, a similar study which includes more conversations and greater number of ELT textbooks would broaden the corpus data and provide more information on

both gender representations and topics of the conversations. Second, it would be interesting to explore gender distribution in locally published ELT materials intended for high schools in Iran. Third, it would definitely improve the findings if in addition to the newly published textbooks used in current study, older international ELT textbooks were examined in order to explore the historical changes in representation of genders through a long period of time. Fourth, other comparative studies could be done in order to explore other aspects of conversations in ELT materials, rather than topic or gender. Finally, further attempts require examination of other types of bias in ELT materials such as age, social class, and race. To conclude, it would be great to continue research on this area by involving institutions and authors in analyzing gender orientation and its relationship with other aspects of textbooks.

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