

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN IRANIAN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS WITH A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to investigate gender representation in some English Language teaching textbooks of Iran, namely, English Book 1, English Book 2, and English Book 3. To this end, Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model was adopted in order to examine the manifestation of gender in the three textbooks to extract the ideology behind their constructions. Based on the first part of Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model—description—eight factors were designed, i.e. I) female and male characters, II) female and male's social and domestic roles, III) female and male's semantic roles, IV) female and male's titles, V) female and male's order of appearance, VI) masculine generic constructions, VII) female and male's pictorial representations, and finally VIII) activities. These factors were described, interpreted and explained. Results revealed that these textbooks presented a "sexist attitude" regarding gender in favor of men, in which the men presented more than females. It is suggested that Persian culture as ideology mirrors the way gender represented in these textbooks. In other words, the gender inequality observed in the series rooted in Iranian culture.

KEYWORDS: Critical Discourse Analysis, Gender, Textbook, Sexist, Ideology

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Evaluating materials, according to McDonough and Shaw (2003), is a demanding affair because teachers either have the right to choose or develop their materials or only be the consumers of others' materials. Investigating English Language Teaching materials in Iran began by Amerian (1978) who made a comparative study on two series, namely, *Graded English* and *The Right Path to English series* regarding content and methodology which resulted into no considerable differences between the two series.

The trend of investigating domestic ELT materials as the international ones has been undergone many changes in which the materials have been investigated from different viewpoints and a variety of methods. For example, Rastegar (1992) made a study on the ELT dialogues taught in high schools and guidance schools of Iran in terms of Dispreferred seconds and Dispreferred markers. Her investigation revealed that ELT Materials taught in guidance schools and high schools suffer from lack of appropriate contexts.

Iranian High School English Textbooks were also analyzed by Toolabi (2002) in terms of language functions using T Sui's model (1995) of "Initiation", "Follow up" and "Response". His investigation showed some incompatibility with what Sui claimed in his model. In addition, international ELT textbooks were investigated by researchers all over the world, for instance, *New Interchange*, *Express Way*, *Headway*, *Impact Values*, are among the textbooks which were investigated in terms of gender representation loaded with gender biases.

Recently, ELT textbooks have been considered by critical discourse analysts who are interested in revealing new paths in education. Critical discourse analysis, according to Rahimi and Sahragard (2007), is an analytical research domain emancipating "the power relations, ideological manipulations, and hegemony" (p. 1). Utilizing CDA framework, Nazeri (2010) made a comparative study on dialogues of some domestic and international ELT textbooks, namely, *Iranian High School English Textbooks* and *Interchange Series* in terms of gender representation. Her study upheld the point that dialogues in secondary school English textbooks were de-gendered and the issue of gender in *Interchange Series* presented capitalism.

The aforementioned issues showed that examining ELT textbooks have always been considered by different researchers. Another issue that should be clarified concerning this study is that contrary to the fact that *Iranian High School English Textbooks* were evaluated repeatedly by different researchers; no comprehensive study tried to scrutinize these textbooks in terms of sexism with a critical viewpoint.

It seems that CDA is a fruitful research framework in emancipating hidden power relations governing the way different textbooks are designed. As far as the review of literature is concerned, the existence of sexism was proved in many investigated ELT textbooks all over the world (e.g. Camase, 2009; Johansson, 2009; Paivandi, 2008; Stockdale, 2006; Muto-Humphrey, 2005; Stanley, 2001; Farooq, 1999). In effect, considering gender representation is significant in textbooks which are considered one of the main sources for learning since sexism, according to Rifkin (1998), inculcates gender biases by which the mental models of both genders are shaped and injecting sexism to female or male students affect their learning in a negative way and accordingly, based on Gershuny (1977) wrong and even harmful "gender roles and social values" (p. 150) are perpetuating.

Sexism is a matter learnt from childhood and expresses the ways in which some unconscious cultural biases are communicated to females and through which some negative traits are ascribed to females and the stereotyped roles are reinforced for female characters (Mineshima, 2008).

The review of literature supports the claim that textbooks are places for instilling every society's ideology. It seems that textbooks deployed in conveying not just some information about a particular subject but they are also playing a crucial role in perpetuating the perspectives and ideologies of the textbooks' producers (Mineshima, 2008). As far as Iran is concerned, after political as well as social and cultural changes in Iran since 1979, many changes have been observed in the ways textbooks are presented to schools. Hitherto, textbooks production is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education; hence, these textbooks as places for portraying the ideologies and perspectives of the elites are worth being noticed.

The aforementioned issues motivated the researcher in undertaking this study. For this end, three-dimensional model of Fairclough (2001) has been selected and adopted to investigate Iranian High School English textbooks taught in Iran's high schools in order to provide some bases for eliminating the weaknesses of these textbooks.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any differences between the roles played by gender in *Iranian High School English Textbooks* 1, 2, and 3?
2. Are there any particular patterns in presenting gender in *Iranian High School English Textbooks* 1, 2, and 3? If so, what are they?

METHODOLOGY

CDA investigates the ideas, assumptions or ideologies trying to sustain the inequality and bias between the elites and non-elites and campaign against these ideas and assumptions (Widdowson, 2007). In effect, this study was an attempt to examine the already existing data in three domestic ELT textbooks employing a critical discourse analysis approach. Hence, this study involved both quantitative and qualitative analyses, but the overall design of this investigation was a qualitative position. The following sheds light on the methodology in details.

Corpus

English language is one of the compulsory subjects that has been taught in Iranian high schools as well as in guidance schools. In Iran, all textbooks, among them *High School English Textbooks* are produced solely by the Ministry of Education. Three English textbooks taught at high schools in Iran, entitled as *English Book (1)*, *English Book (2)*, and *English Book (3)*, were chosen as the corpus of this study, because these materials are exposed to millions of learners across the country. In fact, different parts of these three ELT textbooks were analyzed in terms of gender representation in order to extract the ideology behind their constructions. All these three textbooks were published in 2009 that have been undertaken the last revisions.

The Theoretical Model

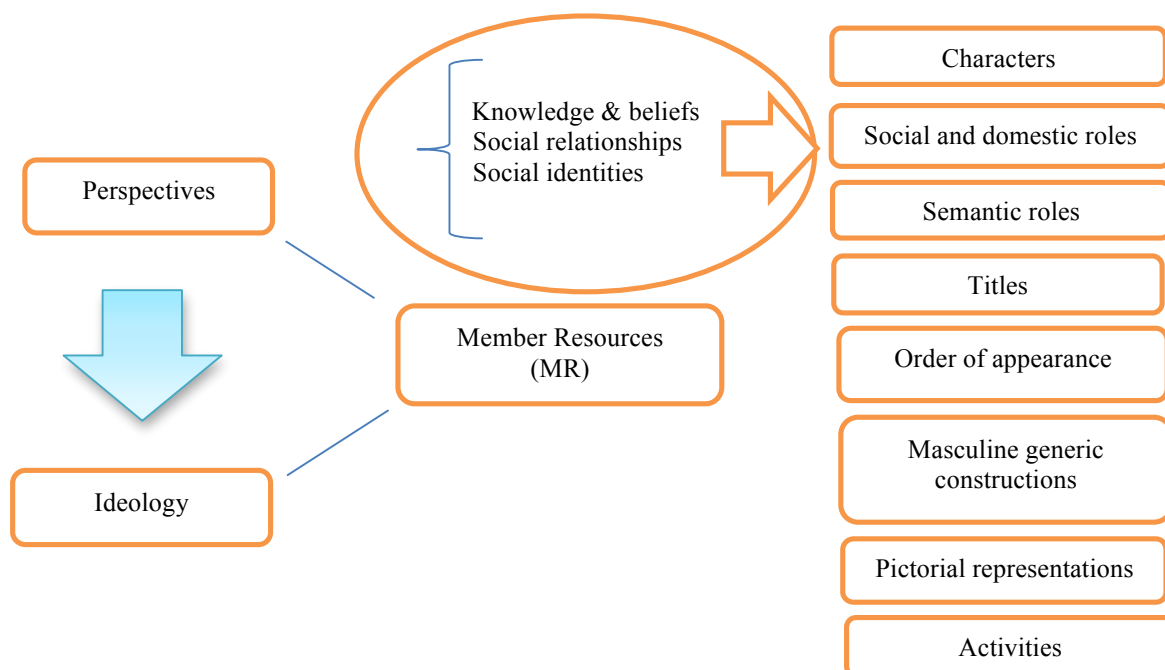
Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model was adapted to the present study in order to emancipate the ideology behind the presentation of gender. Fairclough (2001) emphasizes that power is exercised and enacted in discourse; hence, there are relations of power behind discourse. In fact "power is won, held and lost in social struggles" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 61). Consequently, three types of constraints, based on Fairclough (2001), may be exercised by powerful participants, here elites, over the contributions of non-powerful participants, here learners. These three types of constraint are "constraints on contents, relations and subjects" (p.61).

Fairclough (2001) clarifies the point that these constraints are either in "relatively immediate and concrete terms, (a matter of power in discourse), or in a relatively structural and long term way, (a matter of power behind the discourse). The second one, the power behind the discourse, has "long term structural effects of a more general sort" (Fairclough, 2001, p.61). This kind of constraints is the focus of this study. "The knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities of an institution or society" and here of the learners may be long-term affected if they are exposed to the "systematic constraints on the contents of discourse, and on the social relationships enacted in it and the social identities enacting them" (Fairclough, 2001, pp.61-62), the one related to the issue of gender representation depicted in textbooks. Fairclough (2001) assumes that any society enjoys a mechanism in "achieving coordination and commonality of practice in respect of knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities" (p. 62). He classifies these mechanisms in three main types: universally followed practices and discourse types, "inculcation" and "communication" (p.62). It is worth mentioning that this study follows the second one, which is the coordination "imposed in the exercise of power in a largely hidden fashion" (p.62).

In this regard, based on Fairclough (2001), three dimensions of description, interpretation and explanation were investigated in this study. In the first dimension the formal features of text were taken into consideration. In simpler terms, the representation of gender, namely, *female and male characters, female and male's social roles, female and male's domestic roles, female and male's semantic roles, female and male's titles, , masculine generic construction, activities females and males engaged in*, and finally *the pictorial representation of both genders* were described and interpreted. According to Fairclough (2001) in interpreting any social phenomenon, member resources (MR) plays a crucial role by which the situational context and intertextual context are clarified (MR refers to "the shape of words, the grammatical forms of sentences, the typical structure of a narrative, the properties of types of objects and person, the expected sequence of events in a particular situation type, etc." Fairclough, 2001, p.9). The third and last stage deals with the aspects of MR which was drawn upon as interpretive procedures as means for text's producing.

On the whole, the aforementioned issues were examined to see whether or not they follow any specific ideological pattern of manipulation in presenting gender. Hence, the series of textbooks were critically analyzed to see whether or not the roles played by females and males present any gender inequality shedding light on the ideology behind their constructions. It is worth mentioning that the focus of this study were put on the linguistic features and not to paralinguistic

or extralinguistic features. The following diagram illustrates the method chosen and adopted based on Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model:



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the achieved results are presented through description, interpretation and explanation based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model. In addition, the results were followed by some discussion in order to emancipate the perspectives and ideologies behind the construction of gender roles in the textbooks.

One of the issues that was investigated in this paper in order to demystify sexism or sex bias was the issue of omission which refers to exclusion of one gender. Based on the review of literature the exclusion of each gender, whether female or male, affects the suppressed sex negatively. In other words, when one of the genders does not appear as the other sex; it may be implied that the suppressed sex and their accomplishments are not worth noticing. Moreover, presenting sex bias in textbooks influences the potentialities of learners in a negative way so that both the suppressed as well as the dominated sexes are not able to bring their potentialities into reality. Investigating *Iranian High School English Textbooks* showed the supremacy of males over females. Generally, 1832 cases presented gender, out of which 1363 cases were related to males in forms of proper nouns, pronouns, or other representations; while, females occupied 469 cases. Put it differently, 74% and 26% constituted the frequency of males and females in these three textbooks, respectively. It means that males occupied nearly trifold of representation of gender compared to females; and this issue seems to be critical since it may influence the learning potentialities of female learners. The ratio of females to males is nearly 1 to 3.

Sexist attitudes are perpetuating not only by imbalanced distribution of females and males in textbooks, but also by prevailing sex stereotypes. Sex stereotype refers to the generalized ideas regarding female as well as male and the kind of roles they are ascribed as appropriate. Following the review of literature, we also dealt with social roles in five main categories: male-monopolized (performed by men only), male-dominated (largely performed by men), female-monopolized (performed by women only), female-dominated (largely performed by women) and gender-shared (performed by both gender equally). Table (1) indicates that these textbooks suffer from a major deficiency in terms of the range of social roles ascribed to each gender. It is worth mentioning that both genders were presented with a limited range of social roles in *Iranian High School English Textbooks*. The table indicates that 62% of the social roles presented in *Iranian High School English Textbooks* as male-monopolized; whereas the percentage was 10% for female-monopolized social roles. In terms of dominated roles there was equality between women and men—each with 14%. Hence, there was no equal sharing on the social roles between females and males.

Table 1: Female and male's social roles in Iranian High School English Textbooks

Social Roles	Iranian High School English Textbooks
Types of social roles	frequency
Male-monopolized social roles	62%
Male-dominated social roles	14%
Female-monopolized social roles	10%
Female-dominated social roles	14%
Gender shared social roles	0%

The third issue undertaken by the study was investigation on the semantic roles played by both genders in reading parts. In effect, the semantic roles were investigated based on Halliday's *systemic Functional Linguistics* on the concept of transitivity that was represented by Fairclough (2001) on text analysis. In achieving this aim, five semantic roles were recognized, namely *actor*, *patient*, *recipient*, *experiencer* and *beneficiary*. Investigating this issue as the previous ones showed that male characters got the supremacy in terms of semantic roles. In other words, men outnumbered women in terms of semantic roles. Maybe one reason for this situation is related to the higher frequency of men to women in these textbooks. In effect, the results of investigating social roles revealed that 84% of the cases were related to males and 16% to females in which men enjoys from 39% as *actor roles*, 7% *patient roles*, 38% *experiencer roles* and 1% *beneficiary roles*. Furthermore, women's share of the social roles composed of 57% for *actor roles*, 14% for *patient roles*, 21% for *experiencer roles*, and 7% for *beneficiary roles*.

Investigating *titles* was another factor shedding light on the differences between females and males. In English, there are differences between females and males' titles in terms of marital status. In other words, in referring to females, it is crucial to signal the marital status of women—whether they were married or single. *Ms.* is coined as a female title equivalent to *Mr.* in which the marital status of women is not revealed in order to decrease gender bias.

In *Iranian High School English Textbooks*, there was no cases in which *Miss* or *Ms* were utilized. It seems that application of titles in these textbooks has no relation to perspective towards marital status of women. Put it aside, two titles of *Mr.* and *Mrs.* were the titles presented in these textbooks with the frequency of 69.5% and 30.5% respectively.

"Order of appearance" as another manifestation of gender representation was also investigated which refers to the position occupied by each gender (whether females were presented in the first position or in the second). As far as *Iranian High School English Textbooks* were concerned, there was not even one case spelling out *order of appearance of presenting females and males*. It seems that because of the lack of authentic contexts in these series of textbooks and the perspective these textbooks have regarding gender and the kind of relations and the activities expected from females or males, analyzing this factor entangles us in a pitfall, though this part of study paves the way on the pattern observed in these series of textbooks.

Another manifestations of sexism in language is *Masculine generic construction* which refers to the generic use of masculine nouns or pronouns in referring to people—whether they are female or male. Investigating this issue resulted in some cases of using the pronoun of *he* in referring to both genders in general which is suggesting some degree of sex bias. Furthermore, the activities presented in the textbooks in which females and males engaged in were investigated. Table 2 shows that *Iranian High School English Textbooks* have reinforced traditional gender roles. In effect, it was revealed that some activities were monopolized to or dominated by one gender.

Table (2) shows that all the activities are monopolized or dominated by males—*housework*, *playing* and *studying or going to school* are excepted. In effect, 66% of the total activities was dedicated to males and 34% to females. Among the activities, reading newspaper, doing sports, engaging in social activities, and traveling, going restaurant or party as well as washing or driving car were solely monopolized by males. Moreover, watching cartoon/TV, working and engaging in personal activities were heavily dominated by male characters. The results indicated the fact that the only activity which was monopolized by females was doing house work. Furthermore, it was revealed that studying at school and Playing were dominated by female characters.

Table 2: Activities in Iranian High School English Textbooks

Activities frequency Kinds of activities	Iranian High School English Textbooks	
	Female	male
Doing house work	100	0
Watching cartoon/TV	33	67
Reading newspaper	0	100
Work	7.5	92.5
Studying/ at school	55	45
Playing	74	26
Engaging in social activities	0	100
Doing sport	0	100
Washing/driving car	0	100
Traveling/ going restaurant or party	0	100
Engaging in personal activities	20	80
total	34%	66%

It seems that there is a particular pattern governing the activities contributed to each gender. Investigation of *Iranian High School English Textbooks* in terms of the activity peculiar to each gender revealed the positive and active roles and activities for men; and on the contrary, the most passive activities for women ; this kind of outlook allude another form of sex bias.

The last issue which was investigated in *Iranian High School English Textbooks* was pictorial representation of genders. Hence, the results indicated that the main role of males is breadwinners and females' main duty is defined in charge of the family. The data are summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Pictorial Representation in Iranian High School English Textbooks.

Pictorial representation	Male only	More males	Female only	More females	Equal share	Total
<i>Iranian High School English Textbooks</i>	132 (68%)	5 (2.5%)	43 (22%)	2 (1.5%)	11 (6%)	201

In effect, out of 201 pictures representing gender, 132 pictures are exclusively related to males and 43 pictures to females. This distribution pronounces an unfair drift between the two genders since 68% of the pictures presented in regard to the gender was ascribed to males, while 22% presented females. 10% of pictures manifested males and females together. Only 6% of these pictures showed both genders in an equal sharing and this trivial figure accentuate the inequality between females and males. It is worth mentioning that this 6% of equal sharing between the two

genders presented only the relations between females and males in a family. No picture presenting social cooperation between the two genders was observed.

In a nutshell, the achieved findings stress that the inequality between female and male. It seems that *Iranian High School English Textbooks* have a sexism attitude toward gender. Whereas about 68% of gender-related pictures in *Iranian High School English Textbooks* were contributed to male-only, no image represented equal sharing between genders. In other words, almost all pictures have forbidden any social communication between the two genders.

Hence, examining the eight items mentioned so far confirms gender discrimination in *Iranian High School English Textbooks*. In these textbooks, Females' role were presented as solely bound to household chores; it means that women are forbidden from doing any social roles. Furthermore, any social relationship between two genders was forbidden in these textbooks. It seems that the issue of gender is represented in following a continuous, consistent and systematic trend. In other words, this study revealed that the discriminatory attitude presented in these textbooks is not accidental or sporadic but pursues a particular order. In fact, discrimination between the two genders is obvious in a critical degree except the domestic roles. This investigation may shed light on the fact that these textbooks are trying to perpetuate the stereotypes especially about females. In effect, the roles of females were more represented in terms of *domestic roles*; and this issue may show that the roles of women are more considered as bound in the four walls of home. It is worth mentioning that these textbooks considered the main role of women in domestic chores as cooking, cleaning, etc. hence, this study supports the findings of previous experimental investigation as Farooq (1999), Sano, Lida, and Hardy (2001), Stockdale (2006), Paivandi (2008), or Johansson (2009) who showed the existence of gender inequality in the textbooks.

Hence, in this study, eight factors were investigated by which some insights were clarified regarding the contents, knowledge and the beliefs of the series' publishers. It was revealed that females suffer from a severe and critical stereotypes and intolerance comparing the males. Considering the fact that current society of Iran defines both genders in a particular point of view in which each gender is expected to realize "social and cultural perspective" (Bell, et al, 2006) demanding by the society; the achieved results were interpretable.

In terms of social roles, current society of Iran enjoys a variety of roles for both females and males that these textbooks have never considered. These textbooks portrayed most social roles as monopolized by males and this issue has presented an ideological position. There are many females who drive or work outdoors as engineer, doctor, psychologist, etc. It seems that these textbooks suffer from the depictions they provided for females. The interesting point is related to the monopolized roles considered for women. Domestic chores as cleaning the house, cooking, washing the dishes or clothes are exclusively contributed to females. It appears that these textbooks try to reinforce stereotyped view towards both genders especially the females. Contrary to the changes in the social roles undertaken by females in the current society of Iran; still the traditional stereotypes prevail in these textbooks; and this issue sheds some light on the ideological stance of these textbooks' publishers.

Investigating the distribution of domestic roles revealed another stereotyped perspective towards the roles expected from females. Females occupied nearly an equal share in domestic roles since domestic roles are among the roles expected from them. This part of exploration revealed that the major roles of females are bound to the role as mother, sister, daughter, etc.

Hence, semantic roles' analysis suggested that men are represented in the series in such a way that they deserve to act as *actor*, *patient*, *beneficiary*, etc. and not the females. Furthermore, investigating other factors especially the activities considered as appropriate to each gender, reinforces the conclusion that the issue of gender representation in these textbooks is either ignored by these textbooks publishers or they are deliberately perpetuating some stereotypes.

Generally speaking, examining these domestic ELT textbooks revealed a systematic, continuous and consistent trend in portraying the roles played by females and males. In other words, the findings revealed that these textbooks are the locus of culture as ideology. According to Aliakbarian (2002) *high school English textbooks* may be viewed from two extremes, on the one hand, English should be treated as presenting western culture, and on the other hand it should be viewed as the locus of religion or Persian ideology. This study supports the second position. In other words, these textbooks are the locus of Persian culture.

In summary, the series presented both genders in a sexist way. The sexist attitude depicted in *Iranian High School English Textbooks* originated from the Persian culture, in which *Iranian High School English Textbooks* consciously instill cultural ideology by which females were discriminated or excluded consistently and systematically in order to remain the separation or even segregation between two genders. Accordingly, the revision of this series is a demanding and crucial step in improving the quality of ELT textbooks in these levels.

It seems that *Iranian High School English Textbooks* follow a cultural-based ideology in which no room for female visibility is tolerable. In effect, the series have been designed and developed based on a blending of Islamic and cultural ideology suitable for Iranian society. Considering the fact that textbooks are some instrument to reflect the social, cultural, political or religious ideologies of any society molded by the writers in general and ministry of education in particular; there is no doubt that female characters were represented in low visibility. Accordingly, the series follow a sexist attitude deeply ingrained in culture, language, and religion of the current society of Iran.

Hence, the results of the study is beneficial for language teachers, language learners, textbook designers and textbook publishers as follows. The findings of this research suggest that a good language teacher needs to adopt a critical outlook towards the sociolinguistic studies in which only particular happenings are described. In effect, s/he may create a forum in which both students and teacher discuss gender-related issues with a critical point of view, a point that is ignored by many teachers.

Moreover, the findings of this study insist that teachers develop professional knowledge and expertise by reflection and self-analysis. For instance teachers may pay attention to different

events taking place in the classroom with a critical point of view. Furthermore, it is recommended that educational programs provide teachers strategies by which they can handle the shortcomings and ideologies behind gender representation in ELT materials. In fact, teachers are expected to ask themselves how for instance this particular textbook presents both genders.

The results of this study are also beneficial for textbooks designers; since textbooks as significant instruments play a crucial role in social improvement of the society. In other words, textbooks designers need to take the issue of gender representation into consideration in order to develop textbooks in which the social matters including the roles played by both genders presented in neutral way by which the students form an enriched perspective toward the roles expected to be performed by them.

CONCLUSIONS

The major intent in analyzing the *High School English Textbooks* was investigating gender representation in order to extract the ideology based on which both genders were depicted. This study revealed that the series suffer from gender intolerance against females. In addition, the findings of this study showed that sexism is reflective of the ideology by which both females and males were represented in these textbooks; this issue denotes what is interpreted by Skleton (1997) as the “hidden curriculum”.

It is evident that some particular values and norms perpetuating throughout these textbooks are inculcated to learners in order to shape the living way expected from them to follow. As it was shown, females were ignored from different parts including social roles and this issue underscores females as in charge of home and their contribution outside of the home is ignored easily. *Iranian High School English Textbooks* consciously instill culture as ideology by which females were discriminated or excluded consistently and systematically in order to keep the separation or even segregation between two genders. In effect, the series has taken a cultural-oriented position in depicting the issue of gender. Hence, these textbooks do not follow a neutral outlook; but has presented a severe sexist attitude in such a way in which many roles were forbidden for females. In fact, these textbooks insisted on the cultural values existing on the current society of Iran.

Generally speaking, the existence of sexism in the series is neither accidental nor sporadic but pursues a systematic and pre-determined direction based on the ideology and perspective behind these textbooks. Hence, it seems that this series consciously presented both genders in such a way by which stereotypical norms were ingrained into learners.

Limitations of the Study

In some domains the study was limited as follows:

- In terms of semantic roles, only three reading passages from each textbook were selected and only five semantic roles were investigated.

- Furthermore, this study makes no attempt to shed some light on the processes, i.e. actions and states females or males engaged in

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