

PREVALENCE OF SEXISM IN ENGLISH EDUCATIONAL TEXTS IN JAPAN

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This paper examines the treatment of women in currently used materials in English in Japan. It aims at providing evidence for the hypothesis that Japanese English education has not reflected the efforts and changes made in the Japanese to diminish its sexist features. English is taught in junior and senior high schools in Japan as the only foreign language. It is also taught in most of the universities and some of the elementary schools. Since the first language Japanese is claimed to be sexist (Sakita, 1991; Cherry, 1988), then if the only foreign language for Japanese children also has sexist features, it would work as another factor reinforcing sexism in Japanese society.

LANGUAGE
AND
SEXISM

CONTENT ANALYSIS

10 English textbooks widely used in Japanese junior and senior high schools were chosen for content analysis. They were published through 1989 to 1992 from 8 publishing companies.

Introductory level textbooks have a balance between females and males for character roles, and females appear more frequently than males as main characters. At intermediate and advanced levels, males appear much more frequently as characters and as main characters. In introductory textbooks, females are slightly more visible than males, and as the level goes up, females become far less visible than males.

The numbers of females and males in exercises and model sentences show the same pattern. The reasons for this are first, due to the lack of vocabulary and restricted grammatical structures, introductory textbooks mainly deals with topics such as school life and family life in which both genders appear generally in parallel. Second, introductory textbooks have the same characters throughout the textbooks, who are introduced with pictures on the cover pages. It is thus easy to equalize the gender.

Qualifications of main characters in the stories show the imbalance between genders. At the introductory level, the main characters are mostly students, and the only two that have jobs are males. At intermediate level, females have 3 jobs while males have 6. At the advanced level, females have 3 jobs while males have 22. Women's jobs are such as a writer who was forced to use a male pen-name and a lecturer characterized as "The Girl with a Thousand Boy Friends." Five female main characters whose jobs are not given include a girl who received a love letter and a woman who had difficulty getting married. Seven males whose jobs are not specified are cases such as "a boy who talks with animals" or "a boy who sent a love letter."

In terms of qualifications of all the characters in the stories, 24.5% of 53 females have 9 kinds of jobs, and 75.5% appear without occupations. On the other hand, 49.5% of 107 males have 44 kinds of jobs and 50.5% have no occupations.

Women's jobs are very limited. Nurse, secretary, therapist, assistant, and lecturer are assigned only to women. It is a clear stereotype that women have the assisting jobs while men have independent jobs of a very wide range.

When people's gender is not specified, they are often referred to by the pronoun he. This is true for all kinds of people such as an American publisher, a Chinese diplomat, an Italian, my neighbor. It is hard to interpret this use of he as a generic masculine pronoun including both women and men, because when the job secretary appears, all of a sudden the

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pronoun she or he is used as in:

"When talking to a Westerner, however, you had better make your point pretty quickly, or his secretary will come in and say that her boss has another appointment." (New Horizon I p117)

It clearly suggests that the secretary is always a female job, while boss is male.

Although women are described in terms of marital status such as wife and widow (11.3%), there is no equivalent for men. Women doing shopping are often referred to as "housewives" whether or not they have jobs.

The illustrations and photographs which portrayed occupations used females for 7 jobs, and males for 25 jobs.

The adjective category which contain proportionately more adjectives for females than for males is Physical Appearance. In this category, for men 7 out of 8 adjectives (87.5%) concern height or size, while for women, 11 out of 15 (73.3%) suggest attractiveness: beautiful; charming; pretty; lovely. This means that women are described by their appearance and men by their body size. The Intellect/Education adjectives are used more for women than for men. But careful examination of the sentences reveals that the adjectives are used differently for women and for men. For men, wise (2), learned, and clever simply modify nouns as in: "He must be a very wise man to do such a thing" (Why English p116). On the other hand, when these adjectives are used for women (intelligent (2), clever, cleverest, excellent, foolish), they accompany nouns or other adjectives implying that intellect for women is secondary: "She may be clever, but she is too selfish." (Daily p38) "... an excellent housewife ..." (New Age English p186); "She was intelligent as well as kind." (New Age English p60); "The girl is both beautiful and intelligent." (New Age English p186). Moreover, the effect of "cleverness" given to a woman is judged only among women: "No other girl in her class is as clever as Jane" (Daily p41). In Physical State/Condition category, 7 out of 8 adjectives (87.5%) used for women concern illness or weakness. Among Rapport/Reputation/Environmentally Descriptive adjectives, famous, successful, and distinguished are used only for men. It suggests that fame and success are associated only with men. Similarly, in Emotionality/State of Mind category, calmness is suggested as a men's domain because calm is used only for men.

Kid: Mama, why doesn't Papa have any hair?

Mother: Because he thinks so much, dear.

Kid: Why do you have so much, Mama?

Mother: Because - go away and do your lessons.

(Enjoy English p80)

Pets are female-dominant. All 6 instances of Taking Care are with females, and none with males.

The pronouns referring to animals increases the gender imbalance. 85% of 20 animals are referred to by he and 15% are by she.

Girl is often used in contrast to man in the sentence as "Girls should take their rightful place in society, beside men" (New Age English p132).

Women are often not even given names. In Enjoy English IIB Lesson 16, all of the 7 males appear with title plus full name 5, full name, or first name, while the sole female character is referred to as "his sister" although she plays one of the most important roles.

Many jokes use certain images of women as stereotype. For example, a stereotype manifested in the adjective survey that intellect is a male dominant category is used in a joke as follows: Kid: Mama, why doesn't Papa have any hair? Mother: Because he thinks so much, dear. Kid: Why do you have so much, Mama? Mother: Because -- go away and do your lessons. (Enjoy English p80)

Translation causes a problem, because the Japanese language demeans women considerably in the way it refers to women (e.g., Cherry, 1988). For example, in one exercise, students are instructed to translate a cat's utterance in a Japanese novel *I Am A Cat*: "Shujin wa mainichi gako e iku (My master goes to school everyday)" into English. A note says, "Be careful not to translate shujin (master) into husband in this question." The word shujin is defined in *The Sanseido Japanese Dictionary* as (1) master; (2) the person one is serving; (3) husband, common way to talk about one's husband. So the textbook author warns that shujin in this case means "master" not "husband." This reminds students that "master" and "husband" are treated as same in the Japanese language.

The authors often lack attention to the quality of information they convey as well as to the psychological effects the textbooks have on students. For instance, "housewife" and "full-time mother" are argued as some female students' future careers in the last chapter of one of the advanced textbooks, which the students read right before finishing school.

Finally, it is shown that the materials in currently published Japanese English textbooks are hardly "current." 48.9% (n=44) of all the stories examined were written before 1974, or most likely much before 1974 since many of them are not the original years. More than half of them were written from the 1920s through 1974.

CONCLUSION

In every category of this study, there is evidence that sexism flourish in Japanese English textbooks. Women's deep-rooted invisibility was clear in gender participation in number, content, and even in pronoun usage for animals. It was manifest in occupational roles in both texts and illustrations. Far more women appeared without occupations, or they had limited stereotypical jobs assisting males. Stereotyped sex roles became clear both in adjective usage and in activities and topics and so on.

The unconscious influence of the sexist textbooks on the students at the age of building up their value systems is immeasurable. The sexist textbooks would lead the foreign language education to fail to achieve one of its goals of culture learning, expressed in: "A traditional rationale for foreign language learning has been the expansion of the individual's cultural horizons, the development of tolerance for cultural diversity, and the acquisition of more data for deciding where one fits in the world" (Hartmen & Judd, 1978). If we teach children English without reflecting its change, in addition to their already sexist first language, we surely fail to expand the children's cultural horizons. The teachers and publishers in Japan should become aware of the biased features in the textbooks and start setting the guidelines for the textbook design. Let us achieve teaching children more egalitarian use of the language and world-view.▲

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