A Comparative Study of Female Portrayals in Two EFL Textbooks

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Abstract. This study provides a comparative analysis of the portrayal of women in two widespread English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks: China's New Standard College English (NSCE) and the globally recognized EFL textbook Interchange. Drawing on Goffman's framework as modified by Benattabou, this study focuses on the seventh dimension: image framing, how gender bias is displayed in textbooks. Three key questions are posed around the presentation of women in two textbooks This study assesses whether NSCE exhibits more gender stereotypes than Interchange, explores differences in visual depictions, and makes recommendations for improvement. Through a systematic analysis of visuals and illustrations, It is found that both textbooks generally represent gender relatively fairly, but that gender bias still exists. And, the images in NSCE do show more severe gender stereotyping in terms of image framing compared to similar international textbooks. This study provides insights to enhance visual gender portrayal in EFL textbooks for the benefit of educators, textbook editors to promote gender equality in language learning materials.

Keywords: Gender bias, Female portrayals, Textbooks, Visual depictions.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the changing social environment has dramatically improved the status of women, bringing gender equality to the forefront of global discussions on fairness and inclusiveness. China has also recognized the importance of gender equality in this trend and has been actively working on the advancement of women in various fields. According to Feng, infusing values into textbooks is a direct and powerful way to bring about social change [1]. Thus, the portrayal of gender in textbooks has become a key area worthy of study. The distribution of male and female roles, titles, jobs, activities, and family duties in these textbooks have all been extensively investigated by educational academics as a result of this [2]. This paper compares gender representations in two English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, with a particular emphasis on how they are depicted in visual imagery. This study utilizes Benattabou's innovative seventh dimension based on the Goffman image framework, adding a new coding method for data collection of all images in the two textbooks. In addition, in order to further explore the differences in the visual portrayal of women in different textbooks, a comparative case study of typical images from the textbooks was conducted. Finally, this study provides suggestions for improving the visual depiction of gender stereotyping in NSCE published in China.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Related theories

Regardless of the cultural setting, gender has always been a contentious issue in academic research and educational development [3]. It has been established that textbooks, which serve as communication tools in education, have a significant influence on students' cognitive and behavioral development [4-6]. It has also been investigated how gender neutrality in textbooks interacts with class, race, and gender [7-9]. Scholars have employed a variety of theoretical frameworks to investigate this topic in depth, with Goffman's paradigm, which covers Relative Size, Feminine Touch, Ritualization of Subordination, and Licensed Withdrawal, being the most well-liked [10]. This

framework was first applied to analyze the visual representation of women in graphic advertisements and is also applicable to comprehensively analyze gender representation in music videos in Wallis' work [11]. Furthermore, Kordjazi blends Goffman's theory with gender roles in contemporary English learning software apps and investigates the impact of these programs' textual and visual content in influencing students' views of gender [12]. Benattabou adds image framing as a seventh dimension to Goffman's six in response to the visual presentation of gender in textbooks. She then applies these seven dimensions and a socio-semiotic analytical approach to critically examine gender representation in Moroccan English language textbooks with an emphasis on visual elements [13]. The study acknowledges the significance of visual representations of gender beyond textual content and the importance of visual signals that have a significant influence on students' perceptions and attitudes by concentrating on the visual elements of textbooks. Adopting Benattabou's innovative seventh dimension of image framing as an analytical lens [13], the present study assessed the portrayal of women in textbooks from two different textbook series, the New Standard College English (NSCE) textbooks used in China and the Interchange (IC) textbook series used in the United States. At the same time, it further refined the concept of image framing and coded the images in the textbooks according to the new concept and conducted a comparative content analysis of the images in the two books based on the results. Through this comparative view, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the continuous discussion of gender equality in education and to inform future curriculum development and teaching practices in EFL settings.

2.2. Related Research

There has been a lot of focus on how gender is portrayed in the educational system in various cultural contexts. Pakua, Pawelczyk, and Sunderland investigated the cultural elements affecting gender representations and offered light on gender and sexuality in Polish English language education [14]. The study looked at English textbooks and supplemental materials often used in Polish classrooms using qualitative content analysis techniques. The analysis concentrated on finding gender and sexuality-related themes, representations, and narratives in these materials. Additionally, Barton and Sakwa looked at gender representations in English textbooks used in Ugandan schools [15]; the study employed a qualitative content analysis technique. The researchers looked at the roles and characteristics that were depicted for both male and female characters. The analysis focused on identifying themes, representations and narratives related to gender and sexuality in these materials. Additionally, Barton and Sakwa examined gender representations in Ugandan English textbooks [15]; the study used a qualitative content analysis approach to analyze English textbooks commonly used in Ugandan schools. The researchers examined the way male and female characters were portrayed and the roles and attributes assigned to them. A comparative perspective was provided from different cultural contexts. Lee delved into the hidden curriculum in Japanese EFL textbooks focusing on verbal and visual representations of gender [16]. It reveals how the verbal and visual elements in the textbooks reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes and critiques the subtle ways in which textbooks shape learners' notions of gender stereotypes. Each of these studies contributes to changing stereotypes and eliminating gender bias in textbooks, helping to shape inclusive and equitable learning environments. However, it is worth noting that these studies are limited to examining textbooks from an independent region without comparing with other regions, which confined to a particular context, and lacked comparative studies of gender presentation across textbooks from different regions. This ignores the influence of gender representationsin visuals on learners' perceptions in favor of analyzing texts and conversations. While earlier studies have underlined the significance of encouraging more inclusive and balanced gender representations in textbooks, few studies have provided useful suggestions for textbook reform in response to the occurrence of gender bias in textbooks. By contrasting the visual representations in textbooks in China and the United States, this study aims to close these disparities. It also offers suggestions for encouraging textbook reform from the viewpoints of publishers, instructors, and academics. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1) In terms of image framing, is the portrayal of women in NSCE more stereotypical than Interchange?

2) How are the differences in visual depictions of women in NSCE and Interchange presented in terms of image framing?

Interchange?

3) What improvements can be made to the visual depiction of gender in NSCE to promote equitable representation?

3. Method

3.1. Materials

Two textbook series were selected as the subjects of this study, each comprising two individual books. The initial series under examination is "New Standard College English" (NSCE), which was published in China in 2015 and encompasses "Listening and Speaking 1" (LS1) and "Integrated Course 1" (NSCE1). For comparative analysis, the second series chosen is the "Interchange" textbook series, published by Cambridge in 2013, including "Video Resource Book 1" (IC) and "University Press and Student Book 1" (IC1). These two textbook series were released in close temporal proximity. Although both series were published recently, they have gained widespread adoption within the educational domain in both China and the United States. Additionally, the structural makeup of the two chosen textbook series is comparable, with each comprising a thorough core textbook and an additional audiovisual book as supplemental content. Although audiovisual textbooks are significant parts of educational materials, they are frequently disregarded in assessments of educational performance. It is important to stress that the examination of this study included both the supporting audiovisual materials and the main textbooks.

3.2. Data collection

This study concentrates on the seventh dimension of image framing adapted by Benattabou based on the Goffman's framing theory. As Chandler (1998) aptly noted, "zooming in for a close-up can raise awareness of the figure's importance." The display of foregrounding in an image, specifically through employing a close-up technique, signifies the heightened status and social standing of the subject in question. In essence, the figure of males display in a front or center position in an image can be interpreted as a deliberate method to accentuate their significance and societal standing. Conversely, the display of female figures serving as background element assumes a complementary role to the foregrounded male figure, symbolizing a submissive status or position.

In alignment with the concept of image framing, this study has refined the coding rules to systematically analyze the gender representation within all images found in the four textbooks across the two series. The coding protocol involved an assessment of whether each image contained a gendered figure in the foreground or background, thus identifying which gender image occupied the central position within the frame. Furthermore, color coding has been integrated into the data table to enhance data visualization (Table 1).

Additionally, a computational element was introduced, as depicted in Table 2. This experimental approach generated coding numbers of each images in textbooks based on page number and image positioning, allowing for the systematic decoding of images and data collection in accordance with the aforementioned rules. In this context, the color-coding system was utilized: green indicated instances where males were prominently placed in the image, reflecting a positive count, thereby signifying the presence of gender stereotypes in the image; orange, conversely, denoted females in the prominent position and represented a negative count, suggesting the absence of gender stereotypes; red indicated a balanced representation, where both genders were equally displayed in the image, and was considered an invalid count; yellow "N/A" signified images for which image framing was deemed unsuitable for evaluation, and gray "Undefined Notable Case" identified images with

controversial characteristics that precluded definitive evaluation. These latter two categories were not included in the final calculation.

Subsequently, the present study focused on analyzing the results of the data derived from the decoding to draw clear conclusions about the textbook series that exhibited more visible gender stereotypes in terms of image framing. Additionally, qualitative analysis was also used in this study by selecting a selection of typical images from both textbook series for a comprehensive content analysis from a comparative perspective. The purpose of the content analysis was to elucidate the visual information inherent in the gender representations contained in the image framing categories, thus allowing readers to understand the findings more thoroughly.

Table 1. Color-coding rules.

Male	Males are prominent
Female	Females are prominent
Balanced	Equal
N/A	Unsuitable for evaluation
Undefined Notable Case	"Do annotate the relevance"

Table 2. Sample of coding method.

Page Num.	Pict Num.	Coding Num. (Auto)	Image Framing	Positive Counts	Negative Counts	Invalid Counts	Counter-case Counts
6	1	6-1	Male	1	0	0	0

4. Results

Based on the decoding approach, the results of the data from the four textbooks in the two series were shown in Table 3, consisting of the total number of images, the percentage of male and female gender displays, the percentage of gender displays that appeared equally in the image framing and the number of images that did not show this phenomenon. The number of images in which males dominated the framing in the two textbooks, NSCE1 and NSCE LS1, were 9 and 19 with a frequency of 28% and 59%, while the number of images dominated by females was lower than that of males 7 (22%) and 5 (16%) respectively. This suggests that stereotypes of females do exist in both books of the NSCE series, where females are depicted as the background or periphery of the picture in a subordinate position. The dominance of male characters in IC VB1 (35%) is similarly much greater than that of female characters (17%). However, it is worth noting that the data from IC1 is unexpected in that while male characters were found to display image framing in 13 images, female characters were placed in a dominant position in 15 images to emphasize the status of female characters. This suggests that the portrayal of the two genders in IC1 is almost balanced and even more favorable to the position of women.

Additionally, the average of the two textbook series was determined in order to have a better comparison analysis between the two series. According to the findings, there are 44% more males in the major dominant position in the NSCE series textbooks than there are in the IC series textbooks (25%). This suggests that the NSCE has a greater degree of bias than the IC series. Although there are somewhat more female characters in the majority in NSCE than in IC, the results are unaffected by this. In addition, the proportion of male and female gender roles in image framing in IC textbooks is 58% higher than NSCE's 38%, which further suggests that the IC series of textbooks is more focused on the depiction of gender equality.

Table 3. General results of image framing.

	Material Size	Image Framing						
		Male	~%	Female	~%	Balanced	~%	N/A
NSCE 1	55	9	28%	7	22%	16	50%	23
NSCE LS 1	70	19	59%	5	16%	8	25%	38
IC 1	112	13	15%	15	17%	58	67%	26
IC VB 1	155	22	35%	11	17%	30	48%	91
NSCE Avg			44%		19%		38%	
IC Avg			25%		17%		58%	

5. Case analysis of images

Image framing demonstrates gender bias (batten) by showing women and men in close proximity to each other in a visual image. It shows the gender bias of male dominance and female subordination by placing the male at the front or center of the image and the female character at the back or edge.

Through data collection and decoding, it was concluded that gender presentation in NSCE is more biased than IC textbooks as a whole. In order to have a better comparative study, this study used typical pictures from the two books as case studies for content analysis. The two images below are taken from two series of textbooks, both of which contain one male character and two female characters, and both of which depict the characters sitting in a conversation. According to Figure 1 and 2, NSCE has placed the male in the foreground at an angle that clearly projects the full body of the male character as well as the frontal aspect of his face, which represents a higher degree of visibility. At the same time the male character occupies the center of the image on the left, highlighting the fact that the male character has a higher power and status in this conversation activity and is depicted as the main character in control of the situation. On the other hand, the two women next to him are positioned in a supporting role through the background, on the outside margins of the picture on both sides. The women who are there in the background are viewed as auxiliary figures and accessories who may be apathetic or inert in their actions. In contrast, IC makes an effort to dispel the myth that women belong to a lower social status. The female characters in IC take up most of the forefront and the main position in the image, and this frontal viewpoint makes the entire expression of the female characters quite evident. This emphasizes that the female characters are in an active and dominant position in this scene. In contrast, the male characters are subordinate as background on the far left side of the picture as weakened peripheral characters. Through the background perspective, the viewer can hardly see the full frontal view of the male character but only part of his back.



Figure 1. An image from *NSCE LS1*[17].



Figure 2. An image from *IC1*[18].

6. Suggestion

In addressing the issue of gender portrayal in two series of textbooks, this study offers several suggestions, especially in the case of the NSCE series of textbooks used in China.

The first part is a suggestion for textbook editors. For editors and publishers, its imperative to prioritize Diversity Representation. It focuses on a balance of visual content reflecting different gender roles, such as increasing the portrayal of women in non-traditional roles from professional settings to family environments. Secondly, textbook editors are encouraged to take into account different perspectives and cultural backgrounds when selecting visual materials. Inclusiveness in presentation is emphasized. It is recommended that publishers involve educators in the textbook editing and decision-making process to ensure the adoption of textbooks that are more balanced and more in line with educational curricula. Furthermore, Content Review is a crucial part. Therefore, its necessary to establish a review committee made up of gender studies experts to assess possible gender stereotypes in visual content. In addition, creating a feedback loop to promote textbook revisions, engaging educators and students to report any concerns or issues related to the portrayal of gender in textbooks is an important method.

The second part provides suggestions for educators. This study advises teachers to promote critical thinking in their students by analyzing and discussing gender portrayals in textbooks. And it is recommended that textbooks be supplemented with other materials (real-life examples, articles, videos, or speeches) that provide a diverse and balanced portrayal of gender roles. Teachers should focus on creating a safe and open classroom environment where students are free to discuss and express their views on gender roles and where respectful debate is encouraged.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this comparative study has examined the representation of women in two widely used English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks, China's New Standard College English (NSCE) and the globally recognized EFL textbook Interchange. Through a comprehensive analysis of visual depictions and illustrations, we have found that both textbooks generally portray gender fairly, but gender bias still exists to some extent. Notably, when compared to its international counterpart, Interchange, NSCE exhibits more overt gender stereotyping.This study highlights how crucial it is to identify and remove gender biases in EFL textbooks in order to achieve equity and equality in language learning resources. This research provides valuable insights for educators and textbook editors, offering recommendations to enhance the visual representation of gender in EFL textbooks. By implementing these recommendations, we can contribute to the ongoing efforts to foster a more equitable and inclusive educational environment, aligning with the evolving social dynamics that emphasize gender equality.

While the research has shed important light on the gender biases prevalent in these materials, it is important to recognize the gap in our understanding that still exists. The breadth of our analysis is a fundamental flaw in our analysis. Other essential elements of gender portrayal, such as language use, narratives, and contextual framing, were neglected in favor of our primary focus on visual images. A more thorough analysis including these components would provide a broader knowledge of the ways in which gender stereotypes are present in EFL textbooks. Additionally, this study primarily compared NSCE with Interchange, omitting an examination of a broader range of EFL textbooks from different cultural contexts. A broader comparison analysis, exposing subtle changes in gender depictions across various locations and cultures, might result from include a more diverse sample of textbooks. Future research must fill up these gaps if it is to have a thorough grasp of gender biases in EFL textbooks. By broadening the scope of analysis and encompassing diverse cultural perspectives and gender identities, researchers can contribute significantly to the ongoing efforts to create educational materials that promote equality, inclusivity, and diversity.

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