

The Imbalanced Power Field: A Study of Gendered Occupational Roles in Example Sentences from Teacher's Book for University English Textbooks

Biwen Chen

Guangzhou College of Commerce, Guangzhou 510530, China

Abstract: This study investigates gendered occupational roles in example sentences from the Teacher's Book of a widely used university English textbook series in China. While previous research has focused on student textbooks, teacher-oriented materials constitute an influential yet under explored component of the hidden curriculum. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a corpus of 774 sentences containing explicit gender markers was analyzed through quantitative frequency counts and qualitative content analysis. Occupational roles were classified into explicit professional identity, implicit relational positioning, and systemic role allocation, and further grouped into authority/leadership, professional/technical, public/creative, and service/support categories. Results show that men are over represented as discourse subjects and dominate high-status and authority roles, whereas women are largely assigned creative, performance-based, or auxiliary roles. These findings indicate that teacher-oriented materials subtly reproduce traditional gender hierarchies. The study highlights the need for gender-sensitive textbook design and pedagogical practices that challenge implicit occupational stereotypes.

Keywords: Gender Representation, Occupational Roles, Teacher's Book, English Language Teaching, Critical Discourse Analysis.

1. Introduction

Textbooks serve not only as medium for linguistic knowledge but also as implicit transmitters of mainstream societal values. As one of the texts students encounter most frequently during their schooling, textbooks exert a subtle influence on shaping learners' gender awareness, career expectations, and social identity. With the growing emphasis on educational equity, scholars worldwide have extensively studied gender representations in English language teaching (ELT) textbooks. Their research has revealed persistent "male-centered" tendencies while also identifying emerging trends toward gender equality in some English textbooks.[1,2] However, previous studies have predominantly focused on the "Student's Book"-the primary resource learners use-while relatively neglecting another key locus of power within the textbook development system: the "Teacher's Book." [3,9,12]

Within the context of university English instruction in China, the Teacher's Book holds significant authority. It not only dictates teaching pacing and priorities but also provides extensive supplementary materials, particularly the "illustrative sentences" in vocabulary explanations. For many frontline teachers, these sentences from the Teacher's Book are often directly transcribed onto classroom blackboards or delivered orally. Thus, the gendered discourse within the Teacher's Book constitutes a hidden curriculum: it transmits curated gendered perspectives to students through the authoritative intermediary of the teacher. If the illustrative sentences in Teacher's Book are saturated with gender stereotypes, teachers unconsciously become reproducers of gender bias.

Current academic discourse on gender bias in textbooks primarily focuses on analyzing student textbook content, lacking quantitative examination of micro-corpora within teacher reference materials. Therefore, this study adopts Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its

theoretical framework. Using the Teacher's Book of the widely adopted New Start Comprehensive University English Course as its research object, it constructs a custom corpus and focuses on examining the lexical example sentences within this textual form. This research centers on macro-level sociological representation, aiming to address two core questions:

1) Visibility: Do male and female figures exhibit significant frequency differences in the standard example sentences provided by the Teacher's Book? Who occupies the discursive center, and who remains the "voiceless" other?

2) Social Role Assignment: What social identities and occupational labels does the textbook assign to different genders? Does it reinforce stereotypical gender roles such as "men in the public sphere (careers/skills), women in the domestic sphere (family/service)"?

Through quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation of these questions, this paper aims to reveal the hidden gender power structures within collage English course Teacher's Book. It explores the potential negative impact on students' gender perceptions and offers evidence-based recommendations for future textbook development and revision. In today's higher education landscape, where cultivating globally-minded individuals with modern civic literacy is paramount, examining and reconstructing the gender order within textbooks holds significant practical importance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Evolution of Gender Discourse in Textbooks: From Macro-Level Invisibility to Micro-Level Reinforcement

As carriers of national educational philosophies and cultural values, textbooks have drawn widespread attention for their latent ideological disciplinary functions. Within the

research trajectory examining gender representations in foreign language textbooks, early studies established two macro-level critical dimensions: gender visibility and role allocation.[14] Research consistently revealed that male presence and discourse dominance in textbooks have long outstripped female representation, creating a quantitative imbalance.

With the advancement of gender equality movements, new-century textbooks began focusing on quantitative balance, but the issue quickly shifted to deeper role stereotyping. Recent studies on university English textbooks indicate: while women are no longer invisible, their roles remain concentrated in domestic, consumer, or auxiliary professions (e.g., secretaries, waitresses),[8] while men almost exclusively dominate high-power, high-tech, and decision-making professions in the public sphere.[4] The reproduction of this vertical and horizontal occupational segregation in educational texts constitutes implicit constraints on young learners' social cognition and career choices. Therefore, assessing gender bias in textbooks must transcend simple frequency counts to deeply examine the allocation of social roles and the construction of power positions.

2.2. Teacher's Book: Power Nodes and Disciplinary Effects of the Hidden Curriculum

Teacher's Book hold unique authority and guidance within China's foreign language teaching system. They serve not only as instructional road-maps but also as scaffolding for classroom discourse. Many teachers directly reference or even replicate example sentences, contextual explanations, or exercise answers provided in these books during lesson preparation. Every component of textbooks participates in ideological construction.[13] This study posits that Teacher's Book represent a critical power node within the gender discourse of textbooks. Compared to student textbooks, example sentences in Teacher's Book are often directly adopted by educators as "standard language materials" for input. This value transmission mediated by the authoritative figure of the teacher carries strong disciplinary effects. Even the smallest linguistic units-vocabulary examples-possess the power to amplify their ideological influence in classroom instruction. Therefore, a systematic and in-depth analysis of gender representations in Teacher's Book examples is crucial for revealing the hidden curriculum mechanisms within the textbook system.

This study focuses on vocabulary examples in Teacher's Book, conducting a systematic and in-depth analysis of their gender representations to uncover the gender ideology concealed behind pedagogical authority.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Corpus Selection and Construction

This study adheres to the principles of critical discourse analysis, selecting the Teacher's Book accompanying the New Start Comprehensive University English Course as the research corpus. This textbook series enjoys high prevalence and authority in China's university foreign language teaching, with Volumes 1 and 2 being the most widely used. According to the accompanying online learning platform, approximately 220,000 students had enrolled in the Volumes 1 and 2 courses by June 2025. This study specifically selected all vocabulary example sentences appearing in the Volumes 1 and 2

Teacher's Book as the corpus data source. These sentences exhibit high recurrence rates and instructional value in actual teaching practice.

Corpus extraction primarily relied on explicit gender markers, including all sentences containing gender pronouns (he, she, him, her, etc.) or core gender nouns (man, woman, father, mother, etc.). After deduplication and cleaning, this study constructed a corpus comprising 774 example sentences. Using the corpus analysis tool AntConc, the total frequencies of masculine pronouns and nouns, as well as feminine pronouns and nouns, were counted. By calculating gender ratios and applying the Chi-square test to verify whether observed frequency differences were statistically significant, the study avoided misinterpreting random variation as discourse bias. This study employs a combined quantitative and qualitative approach to examine gender visibility and role identities in the Teacher's Book.

Quantitative statistics based solely on keyword searches cannot reveal implicit gender biases hidden within example sentence contexts, interpersonal interactions, and general statements. Therefore, this study further employs Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as its core research approach. This method allows researchers to transcend superficial word counts and delve into the semantic layers of text, systematically coding large volumes of textual data into meaningful categories through a structured process. This study employs a strategy combining inductive and deductive approaches: During data collection, multiple types of analytical units are identified based on existing gender studies theories. In the coding phase, adhering to a data-driven principle, researchers repeatedly examine the corpus to distill localized occupational identification criteria and classification systems. This ensures the analytical framework authentically reflects the contextual characteristics of Chinese university English textbooks.

3.2. Unit of Analysis and Identification Criteria

The unit of analysis in this study consists of complete sentences containing gender references from the Teacher's Book. To accurately define the core concept of "Occupations and Social Roles," this study does not limit itself to sentences containing specific occupational nouns (e.g., doctor, teacher). Instead, through repeated analysis of the corpus, three Standards of Professional Representation were established. Any example sentence meeting any one of these criteria is included in the occupational role analysis.

Standard 1(S1): Explicit Professional Identity.

The example sentence directly assigns a professional identity to the subject through explicit job titles or highly specialized descriptions of professional behavior. This is the most direct representation method.

Example: Professor Smith is giving a lecture. (Explicitly assigns the identity of "professor")

Standard 2(S2): Implicit Relational Positioning.

Though specific occupational terms are absent, the example implicitly defines the subject's social standing by describing their interactions within workplace power dynamics or through emotional/behavioral responses to specific work situations. This "relational definition" often better reveals underlying power structures (e.g., hierarchical relationships).

Example: He criticized his subordinates for the delay.

(Implicitly positions “he” as a manager/authority figure through the term “subordinates”).

Standard 3(S3): Systemic Role Allocation.

Example sentences do not target specific individuals but make summary, statistical, or “common sense” statements about the macro-level distribution, status, or stereotypes of a gender group within a professional field. Such examples often possess strong ideological construction functions, naturalizing certain social phenomena.

Example: Women make up only a small part of the leaders. (Systematically stating the absence of women in leadership positions).

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Proportions among Females and Males

A quantitative statistical analysis and a critical discourse analysis were conducted on the frequency distribution of gender terms in the example sentences of the Teacher's Book.

As shown in Table 1, the total frequency of male terms ($f=473$) significantly exceeded that of female terms ($f=301$). The Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two ($\chi^2(1, N=774) = 38.22$, $p < .001$). This indicates that the “over-representation” of males and the “under-representation” of females in the text are not accidental linguistic fluctuations but rather a systematic textual selection.

Further investigation into the source of this overall disparity revealed it was primarily driven by a significant imbalance in the “pronoun” category. The frequency of male pronouns ($f=373$) far exceeded that of female pronouns ($f=227$), with this difference also being statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N=600) = 35.52$, $p < .001$). When discourse contexts shifted to “general titles,” “family roles,” and “titles/names,” male occurrences were quantitatively higher than female ones in each category. However, these quantitative differences did not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Gender Terms in Example Sentences from Teacher's Book

Category	Female Term	Freq (F)	Male Term	Freq (M)
Pronouns	total	227	total	373
	she	118	he	211
	her	105	him/his	157
	herself	4	himself	5
General	total	20	total	23
	woman/women	15	man/men	16
	girl(s)	5	boy(s)	7
Familial	total	25	total	29
	mother / mom / Mummy	11	father / dad / Papa	18
	wife	4	husband(s)	2
	daughter	1	son(s)	5
	sister	7	brother	4
	grandma	1	none	0
Titles/Names	total	30	total	40
	Mrs	2	Mr	1
	name(f)	28	name(m)	39
Other	total	0	total	8
	famous-f	0	famous-m	7
	none	0	other: male	1
All	-	301	-	473

4.2. Occupational Roles of Women and Men

Based on the Standards of Professional Representation, a final selection of occupation-related sentence clusters was made from all example sentences, yielding male texts ($N=16$)

and female texts ($N=15$). As shown in Table 2, discursive visibility across genders in the texts achieved nearly a 1:1 balance.

Table 2. Gender Occupation Statistics in Teacher's Book Example Sentences

Analytical Standard	Definition	Male, N=16	Female, N=15	Male:Female
S1	Explicit Professional Identity	15 (94%)	10 (67%)	15 : 10
S2	Implicit Relational Positioning	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 : 2
S3	Systemic Role Allocation	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	1 : 3

After completing the identification process, sentences classified as S1 in the corpus (males n=15, females n=10) underwent open coding. Each sentence was annotated with occupational attributes, including job title, behavioral description, power orientation, and situational position, enabling subsequent cluster comparison. Through the constant comparison process, the S1 statements for both genders were categorized into four mutually exclusive categories.

Category 1(C1): Authority, Leadership, and Power

This category includes roles involving decision-making authority, control, or senior management functions. Characteristic terms include but are not limited to director, boss, president, leader, chief, along with behavioral descriptions involving command, management, or control of situations.

Category 2(C2): Professional, Technical, and Academic

This category denotes occupations requiring extensive specialized training, specific higher education backgrounds, or specialized skills. Characteristic terms encompass knowledge-intensive roles such as scientist, engineer, doctor,

professor, lawyer, and architect.

Category 3(C3): Public, Creative, and Performance

This category involves occupations showcasing talents in public domains, engaging in artistic creation, or possessing performance-oriented characteristics. Characteristic terms include actor, musician, writer, artist, reporter, and others.

Category 4(C4): Service and Support

This category includes occupations providing assistance, care, basic services, or occupying auxiliary positions. Characteristic terms include secretary, assistant, waiter, nurse, clerk, cleaner, and roles occupying subordinate positions in workplace interactions.

As shown in Table 3, gender disparities in dominant occupational identities exist across all four levels. In C1 “Authority, Leadership, and Power,” males dominate completely (4:0); in C2 “Professional, Technical, and Academic,” males hold a significant advantage at 7:3; in C3 “Public, Creative, and Performing” is the only domain where females hold a slight edge (6:5); in C4 “Service and Support” is underrepresented in the S1 text.

Table 3. A Four-Category Comparison of Male and Female Occupations Under Explicit Occupational Standards

Occupation Category	Definition	Male S1, n=15	Female S1, n=10	M:F
C1	Authority, Leadership, and Power This category includes roles involving	prime minister, general, judge, police officer	none	4 : 0
C2	Professional, Technical, and Academic	manager, teacher (x3), expert, college professor, translator	law (master's), scientist, English teacher	7 : 3
C3	Public, Creative, and Performance	writer (x2), actor (x2), lead guitarist	celebrity, actor, musician, writer/scholar, artist/painter (x2)	5 : 6
C4	Service and Support	none	sales representative	0 : 1

5. Discussion

Research reveals that gender bias in texts operates not through “quantitative omission,” but through more subtle mechanisms: “qualitative disparity in role allocation” and “fundamental asymmetry in discursive construction.”

Analysis of gender representation in Teacher's Book reveals that while textbooks strive for quantitative gender balance, systemic gender disparities persist in language selection and occupational role allocation. Male subjects dominate example sentences, particularly in foundational language units like pronouns where males frequently serve as

discourse subjects. This implies students may unconsciously internalize male subjects as the default reference for social activities during daily textbook exposure, while female subjects remain relatively marginalized. Although gender disparities are less pronounced in categories like generic titles, family roles, and names/titles-where authors appear to maintain superficial balance-this partial equilibrium fails to eliminate systemic biases embedded in foundational linguistic structures. The textbooks thus implicitly reproduce traditional gender norms even in their most basic linguistic presentations.

This deviation transcends mere linguistic distribution,

revealing the underlying ideology shaping the materials. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, the repeated use of high-frequency male pronouns and male subjects subtly reinforces a cognitive framework where men are the primary social actors.[10] As direct classroom tools, Teacher's Book similarly reproduce gender bias within the classroom, subtly shaping students' understanding of gender roles. This finding aligns with existing research indicating that textbooks predominantly present a male-priority, female-secondary pattern.[5,7] This study further demonstrates that pronouns and other foundational linguistic units play a crucial role in gender representation, providing more nuanced empirical evidence.

In terms of occupational role representation, while surface-level visibility appears nearly balanced, distinct gendered patterns emerge in occupational types and power distribution. Men nearly monopolize positions of authority, leadership, and decision-making, while women are conspicuously absent from these high-power occupations. Male dominance also prevails in professional, technical, and academic roles. Women hold a slight advantage in cultural and performing arts fields, yet these occupations typically lack power attributes.[6] The cultural and performing arts labor market itself exhibits structural inequality: while women constitute a large proportion of practitioners, they are often concentrated in lower-paying roles with fewer opportunities for advancement and managerial authority, while senior/influential positions—such as managerial decision-making and core creative production—remain predominantly male-dominated.[11] Service and support occupations appear less frequently in explicit occupational clusters, yet all mentioned roles are performed by women. This gendered occupational distribution exhibits classic horizontal segregation and power absence: men are tightly linked to social power and professional authority, while women predominantly occupy creative or auxiliary roles. Even when numerical representation approaches parity, this does not alter the asymmetry in power distribution.

This occupational role allocation reveals the reproduction of implicit ideological biases in textbooks. Teacher manuals reinforce gendered social role perceptions through occupational examples. The association of men with high-power, high-status occupations may deepen students' recognition of "male dominance in societal decision-making and positions of power," while women's concentration in creative or auxiliary roles may further entrench the stereotype that "women are unsuited for high-power occupations." Compared to prior research, this study not only confirms gender biases in occupational portrayals but also reveals asymmetries in power monopolization, professional advantages, and creative distribution through detailed analysis of occupational category structures. This highlights how teacher manuals subtly reproduce gendered occupational stereotypes at the microstructural level.

When designing example sentences, authors of Teacher's Book should pay attention to the distribution of power and social status within occupational roles. They should avoid portraying men as exclusively occupying high-power occupations while confining women to support or creative roles, thereby promoting gender equality at the ideological level. Teachers should also consciously introduce gender-swapped or diverse occupational examples in classrooms, guiding students to critically analyze the gendered portrayal of occupational roles in textbooks and heightening their

sensitivity to the relationship between language and gender. Furthermore, this research provides empirical evidence for cultivating students' critical language awareness, enabling them to identify and reflect upon latent gender biases within linguistic resources.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically analyzed example sentences in university English textbooks to reveal underlying biases in gender roles and occupational representations. Results indicate that while overall visibility of women and men in example sentences appears balanced, men frequently serve as discourse subjects in foundational language units such as pronouns, revealing systematic gender bias. Simultaneously, an analysis of occupational roles indicates that men dominate positions of authority, leadership, and high-status professional fields, while women are predominantly concentrated in creative, performance-based, or auxiliary roles. Even when surface-level numbers appear balanced, power and status distribution remain markedly asymmetrical. Through linguistic and occupational examples, textbooks subtly reproduce traditional gender norms, tightly associating male roles with power and professional authority while confining female roles to low-power or auxiliary positions.

The findings of this study offer insights for textbook authors, educators, and students alike. Textbook authors should prioritize gender balance and occupational power distribution when designing examples, avoiding the reinforcement of gender stereotypes through implicit ideology. Teachers can introduce gender-swapped or diverse occupational examples during classroom use to guide students in critically analyzing textbook content and enhancing their gender sensitivity. Simultaneously, this research provides empirical support for cultivating students' critical language awareness, enabling them to identify and reflect on potential gender biases in textbooks.

Additionally, this study has certain limitations. The analysis was confined to example sentences in Teacher's Book, excluding full textbook content and illustrations; the sample size was relatively limited and did not incorporate actual classroom usage contexts. Future research could expand the corpus scope, integrate classroom observations or student perception surveys to examine the practical impact of gender representations in Teacher's Book on students' gender awareness, and explore cross-textbook and cross-cultural comparative studies to provide more comprehensive references for gender-sensitive textbook design.

Acknowledgments

Research project: Guangzhou College of Commerce University-level Research project "Research on the Identification Framework and Influence Mechanism of the Digital Divide in Compulsory Education--Based on the Integration of Urban and Rural Areas" (2024XJYB014).

References

- [1] Huang, P., & Liu, X. (2024). Challenging gender stereotypes: representations of gender through social interactions in English learning textbooks. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1-14.
- [2] Vu, M. T., & Pham, T. T. T. (2023). Still in the shadow of Confucianism? Gender bias in contemporary English textbooks in Vietnam. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 31(3), 477-497.

- [3] Bachore, M. M. (2022). Analysis of Gender Representation in English Language Learning Materials: The Case of Grade Ten Textbook in Ethiopia. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 11(5), 175-185.
- [4] Zhang, L., Zhang, Y., & Cao, R. (2022). "Can we stop cleaning the house and make some food, Mum?": A critical investigation of gender representation in China's English textbooks. *Linguistics and Education*, 69, 101058.
- [5] De la Torre-Sierra, A. M. & Guichot-Reina, V. (2022). The influence of school textbooks on the configuration of gender identity: A study on the unequal representation of women and men in the school discourse during the Spanish democracy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 117: 103810.
- [6] Alacovska, A., & O'Brien, D. (2021). Genres and inequality in the creative industries. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(3), 639–657.
- [7] Koster, D., Dietha & Litosseliti, L. (2021). Multidimensional perspectives on gender in Dutch language education: Textbooks and teacher talk. *Linguistics and Education*, 64: 100953.
- [8] Goyal, R., & Rose, H. (2020). Stilettoed Damsels in Distress: the (un) changing depictions of gender in a business English textbook. *Linguistics and Education*, 58, 100820.
- [9] Sulaimani, A. (2017). Gender Representation in EFL Textbooks in Saudi Arabia: A Fair Deal?. *English language teaching*, 10(6), 44-52.
- [10] Islam, K. M. M. & Asadullah, M. N. (2018). Gender stereotypes and education: A comparative content analysis of Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi school textbooks. *PLoS ONE*, 13(1): e0190807.
- [11] Oakley, K., Laurison, D., O'Brien, D., & Friedman, S. (2017). Cultural capital: Arts graduates, spatial inequality, and London's impact on cultural labor markets. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 61(12), 1510–1531.
- [12] Tajeddin, Z., & Janebi Enayat, M. (2010). Gender representation and stereotyping in ELT textbooks: A critical image analysis. *Teaching English Language*, 4(2), 51-79.
- [13] Ndura, E. (2004). ESL and cultural bias: An analysis of elementary through high school textbooks in the Western United States of America. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 17(2), 143–153.
- [14] Porreca, K. L. (1984). Sexism in current ESL textbooks. *TESOL quarterly*, 18(4), 705-724.