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The representation of gender in English textbooks in Uganda

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The central role played by textbooks in children's education in developing countries has been highlighted previously in this journal. This paper reports on how an English-language textbook used commonly in Ugandan secondary schools reinforces gender stereotypes which are prevalent in society. The paper is based on a mixed-methods investigation of gender representation in *English in Use, Book 2* by Grant and Wang'ombe, a textbook recommended by the Ministry of Education for teaching English to students aged 14–15 in Ugandan schools. Documentary analysis elicited the data which were analysed quantitatively using Porecca's framework for the analysis of English as a Second Language textbooks and then qualitatively using critical discourse analysis. This revealed that positive female role models are under-represented and that the language of the text is not inclusive of females. Lesson observations of two teachers using the textbook, along with follow-up interviews, revealed that they mostly ignored gender issues by dealing with them uncritically, purely as a means of enhancing linguistic skills. We argue that the content of such textbooks, and the way in which they are mediated in the classroom, undermine the Ugandan government's commitment to equity and inclusion.

Keywords: Uganda; textbook; gender; stereotypes; inclusion; critical discourse analysis

The context of the study

Uganda, a former British colony located in East Africa, has a population of about 31.8 million of which 80% is engaged in subsistence agriculture (Uganda Bureau of Statistics. 2011). It is one of the poorest countries in the world with a history of civil strife and political instability (Lang and Murangira 2009). Ugandan society is multiethnic, comprising a variety of cultures interwoven with 'common strands of gender inequality rooted in patriarchal beliefs' (Mirembe and Davies 2001, 402; Kikampikaho and Kwesiga 2002). Kaleeba, Ray, and Willimore (1991) and Obbo (1995) illustrate how women's subservience to males is acted out in such socially acceptable practices as bride price, polygamy, intergenerational marriage and

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male adultery with multiple sexual partners. The gender imbalance to which school children are introduced from an early age at home is reinforced in schools through the school curriculum (Mugumya 2004, 5) and subject choice is highly gendered, with girls tending towards subjects like home economics, and boys woodwork (Muhwezi 2003, 10). The authorship of curriculum texts seems to reinforce this gendered subject preference; the authorship of primary school-level textbooks in mathematics and science is predominantly male while the authorship of books in English and social sciences is more equally balanced (Muhwezi 2003, 12). In addition, girls tend to do better in subjects like English and social studies while boys perform better in mathematics and science (Namatende 2009; Kagolo 2010).

The study is significant to Uganda which is a signatory to the Salamanca Declaration of 1994 which advocated equity and inclusion in education. Uganda is also party to the 1st World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtein, Thailand (UNESCO 1990). EFA is party to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000 whose goal number three is promotion of gender equity, and empowerment of women. The paper is therefore timely since Uganda, through its commitment to EFA, has put gender on the national agenda (Wyrod 2008).

The government of Uganda has developed a number of policies that govern the education sector including *Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards Indicators for Educational Institutions* (Ministry of Education and Sports 2001), *The Government White Paper on Education* (Ministry of Education and Sports 1992), *Education Strategic Investment Plan* (1998), and *Education Sector Strategic Plan* (2004–2015). The policies have mostly focused on increasing access to education and have led to increased enrolment in all institutions of learning. While such policies target equality of opportunity in widening access, they fail to address the issues of gender inequality which are prevalent in the curriculum and in pedagogy. This study investigates how gender inequalities are perpetuated in Ugandan classrooms – and, subsequently, in Ugandan society by focusing on the representation of gender in English textbooks.

Gender representation in textbooks

The question of gender as a factor in language education continues to interest researchers (Rifkin 1998, 218). Connell (2008, 10) explains gender as ‘the way human society deals with human bodies, and the many consequences of that “dealing” in our personal lives and our collective fate’. Language is an important aspect of gender (Connell 2008, 9) through which individuals make sense of their ideas and feelings about the world (Holmes 2008, 339; Mineshima 2008; Montgomery 1995, 223). It plays a central role in the socialisation of children (Mineshima 2008) and is an important pedagogical influence on developing conceptions of gender: ‘language can also

be a primary factor through which gender biases are explicitly and implicitly perpetrated' (McClure 1992, 39). Research in the area of gender and education shows much evidence that 'within schools, textbooks play a significant role in the gender socialization of children' (Lee and Collins 2008; Britton and Lumpkin 1977).

The impact of textbooks on the development of learners both cognitively and behaviourally has been widely researched (see Briere and Lanktree 1983; Peterson and Lach 1990; Lee and Collins 2008; Britton and Lumpkin 1977). Lee and Collins (2008, 128) affirm that 'Learners, who generally attach great credibility and authority to educational materials, tend to absorb and assimilate the materials in minute detail without comment, and to be susceptible to their influence'. Many of the textbooks in Uganda involve patterned structures and mechanical drills which, if based on gender-biased material, may well contribute to the development of sexist attitudes at a subconscious level.

Gender representation in English-language textbooks has been equally widely researched (Johansson and Malmsjo 2009; Lee and Collins 2008; Pihlaja 2007; Porecca 1984; Hellinger 1980; Rifkin 1998) albeit from a European and Asian perspective (Australia: Lee and Collins 2008; UK: Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland 1997; Japan: Pihlaja 2007; Sweden: Skolverket 2006; Russia: Rifkin 1998). Textbooks published for use in developing countries, however, appear to have received far less attention in spite of the teaching of English being widespread and gender and educational opportunities much debated (Sunderland 2000).

Gender bias often manifests itself in English as a Second Language (ESL) textbooks with an over-representation of males (Ansary and Babaii 2003; Johansson and Malmsjo 2009) and with women often being caricatured and assigned stereotypical roles and reactions. Men tend to occupy more powerful positions and have a greater range of occupational roles (Gupta and Yin 1990) while, generally, women are of inferior status (Harashima, 2005).

Teachers' mediation of textbooks

The paucity of research on teachers' use of textbooks has been highlighted in recent studies in this field (Sunderland et al. 2001, 255; Holmvist and Gjorup 2007, 10). The importance of such research is predicated on the argument that the impact of the textbook on learners is determined not just by the content but by the teacher's mediation of it. Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland (1997) argue that since reader response is unpredictable, the way teachers handle texts should be highlighted as it may influence students' interpretation of the text. This is reiterated by Holmvist and Gjorup (2007, 28) who urge teachers to 'bear in mind that they have a huge responsibility for providing a more versatile view on gender representation than is provided in the textbooks'.

It has been argued that there is a need for teachers to critically analyse the content of textbooks before using them in the classroom since textbooks may undermine the objectives and principles of the school curriculum. According to Skolverket (2006, 70), a majority of English teachers in compulsory schools in Sweden use textbooks on a daily basis and view them as authoritative and as their most important teaching resource. However, in the same study, Skolverket points out that textbooks are not always in agreement with the primary ideals and goals in the curriculum and therefore need to be questioned by teachers.

For Holmvist and Gjorup (2007, 9) it is a 'small but nevertheless important task for teachers to analyze the material used in the classroom'. We would argue that this is not a 'small' task for teachers in Uganda who are immersed in a culture which promotes gender discrimination against females.

Methodology

According to Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004, 385), there has been a shift in second language research from the positivist view of gender as an individual and generalisable trait, to viewing it as a social construction within specific cultural and situational contexts (Sunderland 1994; Thorne 1993; Willet 1995). This study takes a constructivist approach, investigating gender in the context of language learning in order to explore the relationship between the two. It has been pointed out that many students learning English as a second language belong to cultures which have a history of discrimination against women (Yepez 1994) and this assertion is substantiated in our study of a Ugandan ESL class which is immersed in a culture predominantly biased against women (Mirembe and Davies 2001; Kikampikaho and Kwesiga 2002). Constructivists 'acknowledge the historical, political, social and cultural aspects of language learning' (Davis and Skilton-Sylvester 2004, 383) and, furthermore, note that gender is not a fixed, immutable construct but one which can be re-shaped by external factors including textual influences (Sunderland et al. 2001).

Several researchers in ESL textbooks have used a quantitative method where they have counted the numbers of male and female characters to establish their prevalence (Johansson and Malmsjo 2009; Jones, Kitetu, and Sunderland 1995; Gupta and Yin 1990; Porecca 1984; Poulou 1997). Such surveys tend to be superficial, however, in failing to reveal *how* males and females are presented (Porecca 1984, 713). Others have realised that a qualitative approach can give a different picture of gender bias compared to a quantitative method (Johansson and Malmsjo 2009, 191; Jones Kitetu, and Sunderland 1997, 474) and have recognised that a quantitative approach is 'limited in its capacity for exploration and is not always preferable to use when the aim is to uncover the underlying reasons for an underlying

phenomenon' (Dornyei 2007, in Johansson and Malmsjo 2009, 20). Several studies, like this one, have consequently used both qualitative and quantitative methods in textbook research (Ansary and Babaii 2003; Harashima, 2005; Poulou 1997). A quantitative approach was initially adopted to map out the gender representation in the text; this was followed by a qualitative method in order to gain deeper insight (Johansson and Malmsjo 2009, 20).

Content analysis using Porecca's (1984) criteria for assessing equity of gender representation in ESL books was used for analysing the textbook. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989) was then used to do the qualitative analysis. Krippendorp (2004, 18, in Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007, 475) defines content analysis as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts ... to the contexts of their use'. Content analysis has often been used as a means of evaluating the bias inherent in texts and has dominated ESL/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook research (Gupta and Yin 1990; Harvey 2009; Johansson and Malmsjo 2009; Mineshima 2008; Porecca 1984; Sunderland et al. 2001). Porecca's (1984) framework for the content analysis of ESL texts was chosen for the quantitative analysis because it appears to be more comprehensive and systematic than the other methods (Harashima 2005, 1007), and is specific to the study of ESL textbooks. Porecca's framework includes the following categories: omission in the text; occupational visibility; masculine generic constructions; and adjectives (1984, 712). These categories provide the framework for the textual analysis in this paper.

Qualitative analysis, using critical discourse analysis (CDA), was used to complement the content analysis. Its usage in this kind of research is advocated by Mills (1995, 14–15, in Jones Kitetu, and Sunderland 1997, 471) who notes that 'content analysis is essentially static and does not allow for different interpretations; it may be valuable, but needs to be done alongside a more dynamic and essentially wider discourse analysis'. CDA propounded by Norman Fairclough (1989), Fairclough (2003) is based on the premise that 'language is an irreducible part of social life dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life' (Fairclough 2003, 3). CDA is concerned with analysing written texts and spoken word to reveal the sources of imbalance (power, dominance, inequality and bias) and how they are initiated and preserved (Dijk 1997). CDA scholars seek to expose these imbalances by looking behind words to uncover the ideological assumptions in written texts or oral speech (Fairclough 1989) in order to provoke people to corrective action (Fairclough 1992).

Following Sunderland's assertion about the futility of gender and textbook research independent of text use (Sunderland et al. 2001, 251), lesson observations were carried out which created an opportunity to see first-hand 'what teachers in naturalistic classrooms actually *did* with textbooks in their lessons' (Allwright and Bailey 1991). Two 80-min lessons were observed with two senior 2 classes in a school in which all teachers in the English

Department collectively produce one scheme of work for all parallel classes in the same year group, such that different senior 2 classes study the same topics using the same textbooks. This enabled us to observe how two different teachers – one male and one female – taught using the same text.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with each teacher after the lesson observation, each lasting approximately 30 min. The interviews elicited information on how the teachers felt they had dealt with the text during the lesson, and their rationale behind this approach. CDA of this ‘talk around the text’ (Fairclough 1992) was again used as the basis of the analysis.

The textbook

English in Use (Grant and Wang’ombe 2004), recommended by the Ministry of Education, was selected as the basis for this study. It is one of a series of four books, each associated with one year of lower secondary. Book 2, which is used by the senior 2 classes (aged 15–16), was the focus of our analysis. The book’s authors – a British national and a Kenyan – have both published widely in the field of English as a second language in the African context. This book sets out to cater for the needs of secondary school students, specifically to prepare them for the East African Certificate of Education (now superseded by the Ugandan Certificate of Education), which is equivalent to the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) in England. The book was chosen because it is particularly well-known and popular in secondary schools.

We wish to stress that the overall quality of the textbook is not under investigation here; this is supported by Hartman and Judd (1978, 384) who assert that ‘some of the texts that have unfortunate images of the sexes are pedagogically excellent in other respects’. The book comprises 20 units, 19 of which are intended as the focal point for lessons, and one (unit 19) an assessment unit. The study was based on nine units. We selected every other unit in the book including 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 and 17, in order to study a larger sample of the book than we would have if we had restricted the study to the first nine units.

Findings and discussion

Omission of females

Simply put, this is ‘when females do not appear as often as males in the text as well as the illustration’ (Porecca 1984, 706). A quantitative analysis of gender visibility was done by counting the number of females and males present within the text as shown in Table 1.

Females comprise 35.7% of the appearances while males take up 64.3%. A similar imbalance is reported by other researchers (Ansary and Babaii 2003; Gupta and Yin 1990) and do not reflect the proportion of female to

Table 1. Representation of males and females.

Unit	Female representations	Male representations
1	3	6
3	3	5
5	0	5
7	7	5
9	5	2
11	3	6
13	1	16
15	0	7
17	8	2
Total	30	54

male in the community. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2011), Uganda's official statistics provider, 'more than half of Uganda's population (51 per cent) are females.' The textbook does not, however, reflect this gender balance.

The exclusion of women from textbooks has been shown in other research (Ansary and Babaii 2003; Bayyurt and Litosseliti 2006; Coles 1977; Davoodi 1999). This study, like Ansary and Babaii (2003), revealed that there are more male-oriented stories in the textbook than female-oriented ones. Out of the 12 gender-specific stories in this study, nine are about men only while three are exclusive to women. This seems to send the message that 'women's accomplishments or ... they themselves as human beings are not important enough to be included' (Porecca 1984, 706).

Females are absent altogether from a number of units and are often invisible even in settings within which they feature prominently in real life. For example, one exercise in a unit is set in a classroom; however, all the four participants are male. Another example is a passage entitled 'School Bullies', an experience common to both girls and boys. However, the story does not have any female characters and is narrated by a male speaker.

The representation of females

Some units have a strong female presence; out of the nine units studied, three have more females than males. However, even when females are the central characters in a unit, they are often portrayed in highly stereotypical ways. In two units the main preoccupation of the female is unrequited love from her husband. In one of these, headed 'How to Tame a Husband', the female character attempts to get a medicine man to make her husband love her and will go to any length, even risk her life, to achieve this end. In another, headed 'The Kitchen in My House', the ratio of females to males is 2:0. In this unit, women are positioned to dominate in the kitchen, a

traditional stereotype, implying a dichotomy between the interests of men and women. Such images may serve to reinforce students' stereotypical views of the roles of men and women in the home.

In one unit, headed 'Back Nestling', the only mention of male is with reference to male babies. The strong female presence can be attributed to the subject of baby rearing, traditionally associated with women (Hartman and Judd 1978, 386). Another is based on a poem, 'A Freedom Song', which depicts an exploitative domestic situation. The unit has a strong female presence, with a female to male ratio of 3:1, and it features a girl as the main character while the speaker in the poem is male. However, the females are positioned as helpless; the main character, Atieno, is the object of exploitation, lives a miserable existence and dies. She is the daughter of the speaker's sister, whom he is helping to support. Although there are more female characters, they are all provided for by the single masculine character, who therefore wields more power.

The third unit in which females outnumber males is headed 'The Problem Daughter' and this is the first time women are presented in the textbook. However, they are presented negatively, as the title suggests. When the eponymous daughter bursts into tears, a stereotypical female reaction, the son-in-law seems only to show disgust. He is positioned as a strong character as opposed to the seemingly weak and emotional wife and mother-in-law.

Even when females are represented, they are often denied a voice. In one unit, where the ratio of female to male is 1:1.5, all the females are silent compared to the four male characters who speak. In another, where the only two characters are a mother and her infant son, it is only the son who speaks. This is significant since, according to Gupta and Yin (1990, 32), 'those characters given direct speech are in general more salient than those who do not speak'.

Females are also under-represented in the illustrations in the book: women comprise 20.7% while men take up 79.3% of the illustrations. The illustrations reflect the content of the text in showing women in stereotypical roles; there is a male doctor and a female nurse; a male party guest and a female waitress. As in the text, the ratio of female to male is higher in those pictures where females are performing domestic roles such as looking after children or carrying water. Even when females appear in the illustrations, they are usually outnumbered by males and in passive or subservient roles. One unit has a female to male ratio of 1:1 but the woman is depicted in a domestic setting performing her traditional stereotypical role (baby rearing) while ostensibly being reprimanded by her husband.

These findings contradict Dominguez (2003, 7) who implies that in the last two decades, publishers have been paying more attention to gender-sensitive visual presentation of EFL/ESL textbooks.

Occupational visibility

Research published several years ago revealed that textbooks published then featured a wide variety of occupations for men and a limited range for women (Arnold-Gerrity 1978; Coles 1977; Gupta and Yin 1990; Hellinger 1980; Hoomes 1978). The current study provides some evidence that the situation has barely changed in this Ugandan textbook. Men take up 73% of the occupations in the textbook (27) while women occupy only 27% (10). In addition, the range of occupational roles attributed to men is of a greater variety, ranging from local medicine man to judge. The better paying and high-status jobs such as ‘judge’, ‘doctor’, and ‘manager’ are attributed to males without giving females anything equivalent. Sunderland (2004, in Castaneda-Pena 2008, 262) points out that some texts now draw upon a ‘gender equality discourse’, which includes the idea that women are capable of operating in the same jobs as men, as evidenced by the results of Harvey’s (2009, 5) materials analysis. Such a discourse is clearly not present in this textbook in which women are relegated to traditional nurturing professions such as nursing and waitressing. Only two (nurse, cashier) out of the 10 occupational roles listed for women require formal education, while most of the roles for men – head teacher, teacher, police officer – require higher education. This seems to send the message that girls need not spend a lot of time in school, since the kind of employment for which they are destined does not necessitate it. Furthermore, when a woman is given a professional role in a given unit, the same unit gives a man a more senior post, as if to overshadow the woman. For example there is a female nurse and a male doctor, a female store cashier and a male manager.

Women’s occupational roles are not only limited but also restricted mainly to the domestic sphere. Four out of the 10 occupational roles attributed to women are domestic in nature. These roles include baby-sitter, seamstress, cook, and waitress. This is reflected in other research such as Arnold-Gerrity (1978, in Porecca 1984, 707) who found that ‘women were most frequently portrayed in a housewife–mother capacity occupied with household tasks and serving their children and husbands’. Rifkin (1998, 218) argues that ‘the problem is not the depiction of women as mothers, but rather in the depiction of women only as mothers’.

Masculine generic forms

This form of gender discrimination is embedded in the use of English grammar (Hartman and Judd 1978, 388; Porecca 1984, 708). It is still largely permissible in the English language for masculine generic forms such as ‘man’ (such as in ‘mankind’ or ‘chairman’) or ‘he’ to be used to refer to people in general, or when the sex of the referent is unknown, although there are alternative, non-gender-specific forms which could be employed for the same purpose. We established the number of

times masculine generic forms were used by counting the usages within the discourse of the selected units. Sixteen uses of masculine generic forms were used in six units.

Most textbooks try to avoid the masculine generic (Porecca 1984, 719) and this is true, to an extent, with *English in Use, Book 2*. When mention is made, for example, of the king's messenger in unit 1, whose gender is not given, the authors use a verb (gerund) in the subject position seemingly to avoid mention of gender and/or masculine generic forms, 'One day a messenger came to summon Walukaga to the King's house, *saying* that the king had a special task for him'. Similarly, unit 3 uses verbs in the first person form – 'my' and 'I' – making it unclear throughout the extract whether the speaker is male or female. The pronoun 'you' is used throughout unit 9 which gives advice on writing a formal letter.

However, the textbook also makes frequent use of the male pronoun 'he' when the sex is unstated, reasoning that constructions with 'he/she' or 'himself/herself' sound clumsy and unattractive (Grant and Wang'ombe 2004, 172). While some justification can be found for this in the claim that the sex is often evident from the context (Porecca 1984, 708), many researchers have criticised this stance, arguing that people, including textbook writers, rarely conceptualise females when hearing or reading masculine generic forms (Graham 1975; Martyna 1978; Porecca 1984).

The use of masculine forms dominates in the instructions that accompany tasks in the textbook. For example, in one unit instructions are given on using direct speech: 'Now listen to your teacher reading out each of the following. If he is asking a question, answer...' The use of the pronoun 'he' implies that the teacher is male. This is further illustrated in a different unit where the instructions for the passage require the students to read the passage then '...tell him (your teacher) roughly what the passage is about'. For the learner of EFL, this could be a source of confusion if their teacher were female, and this is highly likely to be the case given that the majority of English teachers in Uganda are indeed female.

Further still, instructions which directly address the students employ masculine generic forms, as if they are intended exclusively for male students, 'No student can hope to pass his exams unless he can read efficiently. This means that he must be able to read at a reasonable speed and must be able to read in his mind or on paper...' Similarly, in a different unit we read, 'If you observe something using your five senses, and then try to bring them naturally into your writing, you will in turn help the reader to use his five senses in his imagination'.

Such masculine forms are potentially exclusive of female students who are represented in the same numbers as males in Ugandan English-language classrooms.

Adjectives

It has been observed previously that adjectives used to describe females tend to fall into one of the following categories (Porecca 1984, 718): ‘emotional-ity or state of mind, physical appearance, environmentally descriptive and physical state or condition’. The adjectives used in this textbook to describe females are not only mostly emotional, but also mainly generated from domestic and/or marriage situations. Nine of the 11 adjectives used to describe females are emotive in context; these include ‘unhappy’, ‘troublesome’, ‘strange’, ‘grumbling’, ‘jealous’, ‘sly’, ‘kind’, ‘attentive’, ‘problem’. This is in line with Hartman and Judd (1978, 383) who attest to the assignment of ‘stereotypical emotional reactions’ to women in textbooks.

Five out of the 21 adjectives describing males are emotive. The emotions attributed to males are, however, elicited by causes other than domestic, and seem justified and/or rational. For example, the judge in one of the units feels ‘offended’, ‘annoyed’, ‘surprised’, and ‘angry’, in reaction to an attempt at bribery directed toward him. ‘Polite’ is used in reference to the judge who remained calm regardless of his dismay at the attempt to bribe him. A headmaster is understandably ‘furious’ about school bullies.

Other researchers have highlighted how the description of women in textbooks often employs negative adjectives (Peterson and Kronet 1992; Ansary and Babaii 2003). Even when positive adjectives like ‘kind’ and ‘attentive’ are used in reference to women, for example in a unit headed ‘How to Tame a Husband’, they are used in the context of a woman working towards regaining her husband’s love. The woman is positioned as subservient to her husband, having to work to secure his affections. Seemingly benevolent emotions are not, therefore, untainted by self-interest and lack the purity of the male emotions described above.

One unit, headed ‘Superstition’, makes use of a commonly used verbal phrase, ‘grumbling old woman’, to describe the woman in the poem. This is reminiscent of the wider cross-section of words used diminutively in relation to women, who are often the ‘butt of jokes’ (Johansson and Malmjsjo 2009, 12) without equivalent words to describe men.

Teachers’ mediation of the texts

The text selected, a dialogue entitled *Fusane’s Trial*, tells the story of how Fusane, as a young girl, became the victim of an arranged marriage to a man much older than herself. Following the death of her husband, Fusane now appears in court and her father appears as a witness, expressing his regret at his decision to arrange the marriage of his young daughter. Although, on first sight, the text appears to uphold gender stereotypes – the ratio of females to males is 2:4 and the judge and lawyers are all men – closer reading reveals that it deviates from the norm. The types of questions

that the lawyer asks Fusane's father seem phrased to paint a negative image of him while constructing Fusane as the innocent victim and generating empathy rather than ridicule for her. In contrast with the stereotypical male, the father breaks down in tears, and the husband is depicted as someone who abused his wife. The text seems to ridicule the custom of arranged marriages and the dialogue presents the male protagonists, rather than the females, in a negative light. Deeper analysis of the text shows that it seems to be exposing rather than endorsing oppressive practices against women. Sunderland et al. (2001, 258) have argued that 'the provision of a consciously non-sexist textbook is no guarantee that teachers' discourse will follow suit'. It was felt that the choice of this text would clearly expose the teachers' gender bias.

Researchers have highlighted the need for teachers to engage with the content of gender-biased texts: Sunderland et al. (2001, 254), for instance, encourage teachers to discuss the roles that are portrayed in textbooks rather than accept them without comment. And Fairclough (1992, in Ansary and Babaii 2003) urges language teachers to 'adopt a more critical stance ... language classrooms can thus provide a forum for critical analysis in which both students and teachers can question issues of language, power, discrimination'. Both of the teachers in this study, however, fail to use the text as a vehicle for promoting gender-inclusive attitudes. The response of the male teacher, whom we shall call Richard, is to make fun of the story of a young girl who has been made the victim of gender discrimination. He instructs the student playing the part of the father in court to sob in an exaggerated fashion as he attributes his reasons for marrying off his daughter to the custom of his people. The student's performance is, predictably, the source of some hilarity for the students in his class. While this text might have been a springboard to discuss gender issues relating to this aspect of Ugandan culture, it becomes, instead, simply the material for a joke and the reverse stereotype that is depicted in the remorseful father character is presented as a comical caricature by the teacher.

The two teachers do not ignore the gendered inferences in the text altogether, however, as both invite their students to respond to broader questions generated by the text. One of the questions Richard asks is directed solely at the girls:

OK. Now I would like to ask a personal question to the girls: How many of you have been given the qualities to look for in a man? [*loud laughter for close to 2 min*] OK. Let us skip that question.

Richard did not pose an equivalent question for the boys. He seemingly positioned females as the ones in need of marriage partners, articulating a discourse that associates females with marriage and foregrounding the idea that marriage is of utmost importance for women.

Towards the end of the lesson, Richard engages with the moral substance of the text by asking for the students' opinions on Fusane's behaviour. He does not, however, develop any of their responses or articulate his own views in any detail:

Richard: ...if you found yourself in Fusane's situation what would you do?

Boy: Elope.

Boy: Marry an old man. Wait for him to age and die.

Richard: I do not agree with that.

Boy: Just marry and get on with life. It is a small thing.

Richard: I do not agree with you.

During the post-lesson interview, Richard was asked why he invited students to respond to the content of the text only towards the end of the lesson and why he chose not to expand on his own views:

That is part of the training. We are supposed to guide learners to think, not to decide for them.

His view is echoed by his female colleague, whom we shall call Caitlin:

And these young ones ... they take our words ... if we tell them bad things ... they will take that...

Both teachers regard it, then, as unethical to influence their students' thinking by divulging their own views. As a consequence of this belief, they refrain from facilitating students' higher-level discussions of gender issues at all. This abstention results in students directing their own discussion in the absence of any guidance from the teacher:

We leave them to give their own opinions in the beginning. They sometimes argue amongst themselves until they see what works. (Richard)

Leaving students to voice their opinions without any teacher intervention may leave many confused, and result in some students' views being corrupted. This is supported by Hartman and Judd (1978, 391) who encourage teachers to take a social stance rather than leave their 'social and political ideologies outside the classroom'.

For Caitlin, gender debates juxtapose males and females, and her stance is informed by her fear of antagonising her students by taking sides with one sex or the other:

I kind of feared to give my opinion ... When you give them your opinion they can be like 'Ah, ah, madam you are not doing it the right way.' If I say,

for example, boys are better than the girls or if I say girls are better, the boys will say 'Because you are a woman? So you have to support the girls?' So somehow I fail to take a side.

Both teachers also appear to believe that the way males and females are presented in textbooks is not important as the focus is not gender but language learning. The textbook is seen as a means of teaching language and grammar, and, as such, the content becomes largely irrelevant to that end. When asked if they ever encounter texts that are unfair in the way they present males and females, both disagree, Richard with a seemingly firm and final note to his tone which suggests that he does not want to explain this. His response is reiterated by Caitlin who asserts, albeit by implication, that she never encounters bias in the representation of men and women in textbooks:

But I would not say maybe they are biased. [The author] just tried to bring out something ... not that he is biased but maybe to teach us something. Maybe to show us the past experience, how people used to view women ... to just let us know how women were looked at those days.

Caitlin suggests that she had only noticed gender bias in the text for the lesson that had been observed; she probably recognised the gender-related issues in this text because the theme of the study had inclined her to be gender-aware. Nevertheless, she seems to have interpreted this text literally and seemingly defends it as a portrayal of the way things used to be, as opposed to being gender-biased. The repeated use of the word 'just' in her account seems to emphasise that the scenario in the text was being exaggerated to make it a gender issue; her argument is that it is simply showing how women were treated in the past.

Conclusions

While the claim that textbooks are less discriminatory now than previously (Sunderland et al. 2001, 252; Harvey 2009, 4) may have resonance in industrialised nations, the findings of this study suggest that textbooks in developing countries may be far less inclusive. The current study demonstrates that a commonly used English-language textbook in Uganda is overtly gender biased. This is because it largely maintains a traditional representation of gender roles characterised by women's invisibility and silence, their employment in domestic roles and lower rank occupations, and a negative portrayal of their emotional state.

Other research has criticised the lack of authentic content in textbooks used to teach EFL. Pihlaja, for instance (2007, 7), criticises gendered texts like *Planet Blue* which, he claims, depict a superficial

reflection of reality. This is supported by Lee and Collins (2008) who argue that reality should be reflected in textbooks as it really is. We would argue that while this claim may be relevant in contexts where gender stereotyping in textbooks is greater than it is in the societies that give rise to the textbooks, it may not be applicable to Uganda. This is because roles in Ugandan society generally remain highly gendered (Mugumya 2004, 5) with men and women still conforming to traditional gender stereotypes.

Uganda has pledged its commitment to gender reforms through, *inter alia*, its subscription to the MDGs which set out to promote gender equity and the empowerment of women. Recent government policies have set out to widen access to education but, as this study reveals, gender inequity continues to prevail in formal sites of learning. We argue that social reform could begin in the classroom with textbooks presenting both sexes more equitably. As a previous article in this journal has highlighted (Opoku-Amankwa 2010), textbooks play an enormously influential role in children's education in developing countries and inclusive content could help to counter the prejudices which students bring with them into the classroom.

Gender-biased texts are not necessarily vehicles of discrimination, however, if teachers choose to use them critically in the classroom, as a means of challenging students' presuppositions. Our preliminary research in this area has shown, however, that this is unlikely to be the case. Our experience within the field of teacher education in Uganda has shown that initial teacher training programmes do not generally address gender issues and do not encourage teachers to reflect on the content of the resources they are using; rather, textbooks are seen merely as a means of facilitating the learning of a language. Although we recognise that a sample of only two teachers cannot be seen to represent the pedagogical practices of teachers across Uganda, this appears to be borne out in this small study. What matters to the two teachers in this study is the effectiveness of the textbook in securing learning outcomes where those outcomes are solely linguistic. Although both teachers in this study encourage some student discussion of the gender issues raised in the text, they do not use the opportunity to challenge the gender biases inherent in the text since this is perceived as unethical and beyond their pedagogical remit. Further research could usefully reveal whether such attitudes are widespread and, if so, strategies for dealing with issues of gender discrimination as they arise in the textbook, while maintaining a professional, unbiased stance, might be a priority for initial teacher training and professional development programmes.

While the textbook occupies such a prime position in the curriculum, especially in developing countries such as Uganda, its potency to perpetuate or challenge societal norms should not be underestimated.

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