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Gender in English language teaching coursebooks

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Abstract

The relation between gender and language is bi-directional; that is, gender is reflected by language and language helps to shape gender. English Language Teaching coursebooks are important as tools of learning a second language and a second culture. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to maintain gender equality in them to enhance gender equality in life. The aim of this study is to investigate how gender is embedded into English teaching course books in the first four-year period of state schools in Turkey and to discuss whether gender is explicitly or implicitly presented; the indirect aim is, however, to raise teachers' and textbook writers' awareness in gender related issues.

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Gender, which is part of our lives, isn't a biological factor like sex but a social product. Since 1950s when Simon de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex*, we know we are not born men and women but we learn the behaviours and beliefs that are assigned to our sex by our culture. Gender as a part of our identity is not stable but under continual construction with the influence of the factors we are exposed to. Among these factors are family, school, and media. Language is a factor that is existent in all them. Like gender language is a social institution and language use is a social practice (Fairclough 1989). All the beliefs and systems of a culture are embedded in its language. The relationship between gender and language is a mutual one; that is, gender is both reflected and constructed by language.

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Research on gender and language began in 1970s with the studies of linguists with feminist perspectives. One of the first who published in this field is Robin Lakoff, and since her articles and books, great strides have been taken, and the course of the studies has assumed many different forms. The history of gender and language can be roughly classified into four approaches chronologically: deficiency approach, dominance approach, difference approach and postmodernist approach. In deficiency approach the weaknesses of female language are highlighted; in dominance approach the reflections of male dominance in language is studied; in difference approach how female language is different from male language is the focus of the studies. In postmodernist and post structural understanding, gender is performed, constructed and displayed in written and spoken discourse; therefore it is important to eliminate the gender discriminating elements in any language to be able to establish gender equality in the society.

Since 1970s much has been written about how gender is portrayed in coursebooks all over the world (De Crow, 1972, Coles 1977, Britton and Lumpkin 1977, Hoomes 1978, Michel 1986, Sleeter & Grant 1991, Davies 1995). In Turkey, similar research was conducted and several articles and books were written (Gümüşoğlu, 1995, Helvacıoğlu 1996, Arslan 2000, Esen & Bağlı 2002, Arıkan 2005, Özkan 2013, Kuşcu 2014). Almost all of the research in the world and in Turkey agrees that there is bias in favour of men in the coursebooks. Language teaching coursebooks and materials were also under inspection to search for gender bias; and several research was carried out from 1970s till the present time (Hartman & Judd 1978, Hellinger 1980, Porreca 1984, Sunderland 1992, Giaschi, 2000, Arıkan 2005, Sivashlıgil 2006, Na Pattalung 2008, Söylemez 2011, Diktaş 2011, Yılmaz 2012, Çubukcu & Sivashlıgil 2012, Bilgin 2013, Şeker & Dinçer 2014). The results of the analyses of English language teaching books were consistent with the results of the analyses of textbooks for other courses. The aim of this study is to investigate how gender is embedded into English teaching course books in the first four-year period of state schools in Turkey and to discuss whether gender is explicitly or implicitly presented; the indirect aim is, however, to raise teachers' and textbook writers' awareness in gender related issues.

When the research and publications in Turkey on English Language Teaching coursebooks are considered, it is noticed that there is a great interest in gender bias among scholars, and the studies cover almost all levels of education from primary schools to the universities. Arıkan in his article titled "Age, Gender and Social Class in ELT Coursebooks" focuses on the visual materials in two different series of textbooks used for intermediate levels. He finds out that "women are underrepresented in these visual materials (29.80% females versus 70.20% males) (2005: 36). He points out activities related to child rearing and doing housework are associated with women and "the father is depicted as the head of the family often sitting and watching the activity in the house in which the mother is taking care of the children ... the family around the table listen to the father who is doing the talking" (ibid).

Sivashlıgil, in her MA thesis (2006), made a content analysis of the English Language Teaching coursebooks published by the Ministry of Education for 6th, 7th and 8th grades. As a result of her research she found out that there is gender bias in favour of the male in total appearance of characters (42 % female, 58% male), total amount of talk (43% female, 57 % male), and in social occupational roles (39% female, 61% male).

Söylemez (2011) studied the adjectives used for female and male characters in *Face 2 Face* and *New File* ELT coursebooks for the elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels. The results of her study show that that more adjectives are used to describe the physical appearance of female characters and the beauty and attractiveness of women were focused. When it comes to personality "the adjectives with negative connotations... are more common with females", "...adjectives used for female modify more extreme and exaggerated feelings", and "...adjectives such as famous and rich are attributed to male characters" (249). Another interesting finding is that only "intelligent" is used to define intellect of women whereas for men the range of vocabulary is rich "brilliant, bright, clever and genius" (250).

Diktaş (2011) analysed *My English 6*, a publication of the Turkish Ministry of National Education and his results are consistent with the results of the previous studies that point out male dominance over women in gender occurrence (44 % female, 56 % male), amount of talk (43,57 % female, 56,33 % male), occupations (33.82 % female, 66,18 % male) and leisure time activities (32, 8 % female, 67,2 % male).

Yılmaz, in her 2012 MA thesis, studied the first and last editions of *New Headway*, *Cutting Edge* and *Total English* for elementary levels. Her results show that there is gender bias against women in all these coursebooks, but as a result of the increased awareness on gender issues, there is a remarkable improvement in favour of women in the last editions. For example the percentages of presence of female and male character changed from 46 %

female/ 54% male to 50% female/ 50 % male and the distribution of jobs from 41 % female/59 % male to 49 % female/51 % male.

Çubukcu and Sivaslıgil (2012) studied texts and illustrations in *Let's Speak English*, an ELT coursebook published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. Their categories were: appearance of male and female characters, occupations, domestic and social roles, indoor and outdoor activities and speech acts. Their results show male characters dominate the female characters.

Bilgin, in her 2013 MA thesis, focused on *Spot On* for 6th, 7th and 8th grades, a series of coursebooks published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. The holistic results of her written content analysis show varying degrees of bias against women in many categories such as in Community Acts, 33 % female/ 67 % male; in Technology Related Activities, 0 % female /100 % male; in power 41 % female / 59 % male; and in Language Use, 44 % female/ 56 % male.

Şeker and Dinçer in their 2014 study used *Speak Out, Outcomes, New Success* and *Language Leader* coursebooks for pre-intermediate levels as their data. They had three main categories: Attributions of professions, personality features and physical appearance. The result of their research also confirms the existence of male dominance and stereotypes in gender roles in the coursebooks.

As the data of the present study *Fun with Teddy* and *Joyful English-1 Book 1 and Book 2* are chosen. These books were used as coursebooks for the 2nd and 4th grades of state primary schools in 2013-2014 Educational Year. Within the scope of the literature review, no research about these books has been found. English was added as a course to the curriculum of the second grade of primary schools in 2013-2014 Educational Year, and *Fun with Teddy* was the first book used with the second graders at state schools. *Joyful English* is chosen as it was the only other coursebook used in the first part of compulsory education (1-4 grades). Table-1 gives the publication details of these books.

Table 1. Coursebooks used as data

Title of the Book	Date of Publication	Publisher	Writers
Fun with Teddy	2013	Türk Eğitim Derneği Yayınları	Aynur Yiğit Orhan, Özge Günal and Seden Karadeniz
Joyful English 1 Book 1	2013	Turkish Ministry of National Education	A commission appointed by the Ministry of Education
Joyful English 1 Book 2	2013	Turkish Ministry of National Education	A commission appointed by the Ministry of Education

Both texts (verbal data) and illustrations (visual data) are analysed through content analysis and findings are classified under the following headings:

- Distribution of the presence of female and male characters
- Distribution of the location of female and male characters in visual data (Indoors-Outdoors)
- Types and distribution of jobs for female and male characters in visual data
- Types and distribution of activities for female and male characters in visual data
- Number and frequency of female and male names in verbal data
- Distribution of giving instructions in visual and verbal data
- Distribution of turn taking in verbal data
- Distribution of asking questions in verbal data

The findings show that the male are more visible than the female in the visual data when their frequency of appearance is considered. The difference between the presence of female and male characters is more significant in *Fun with Teddy* whereas it is slight in *Joyful English 1 Books 1 and 2* (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of presence of female and male characters in visual data

Coursebook	Presence of female characters	Frequency of female characters	Presence of male characters	Frequency of male characters
Fun with Teddy human characters	40	32,20%	82	77,80%
Fun with Teddy animal characters	9	5,70%	147	94,20%
Joyful English 1 Book 1	136	43,58%	176	56,41%

Joyful English 1 Book 2	103	47,24%	115	52,75%
Total	288	35,64%	520	64,35%

The overall results of the distribution of the location of female and male characters in visual data show that the female are represented more indoors than outdoors in all books; however, difference is more significant in *Fun with Teddy* than in *Joyful English-1*. One striking finding is that although the male are represented more outdoors in *Fun with Teddy*, they are represented more indoors in *Joyful English-1* (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of the location of female and male characters in visual data (Indoors-Outdoors)

Title of the Book	Female characters (indoors)	Female characters (Outdoors)	Female characters (unknown)	Male characters (indoors)	Male characters (Outdoors)	Male characters (Unknown)	Total
Fun with Teddy	22 / 18,18%	12 / 9,91 %	6 / 4,95 %	28 / 23,14 %	49 / 23,14 %	5 / 4,13 %	122
Joyful English-1 Book 1	63 / 20,19 %	18 / 5,7 %	55 / 17,62 %	76 / 24,35 %	28 / 8,9 %	72 / 23,07 %	312
Joyful English-1 Book 2	41 / 18,80 %	29 / 13,3 %	33 / 15,13 %	34 / 15,59 %	44 / 20,18 %	37 / 16,97 %	218
Total	126 / 19,32 %	69 / 10,58 %	94 / 14,41 %	138 / 21,16 %	121 / 18,55 %	114 / 17,48 %	652

The biggest difference in their approach to gender bias is found in the distribution of jobs for female and male characters. While the male predominantly have more jobs in *Fun with Teddy*, the female have advantage over the male in *Joyful English-1*. However, in the overall results the female cannot catch up with the male (Tables 4 & 5). It is obvious that the writers of *Joyful English-1* were quite aware of gender stereotyping in jobs and they tried to break them; for instance the driver on page 11 is a woman, the science teacher and the physical education teachers are women, the weather forecast reporter and the speaker are also women.

Table 4. Distribution of jobs for female and male characters in visual data

Coursebook	Number of jobs for female characters	Frequency of jobs for female characters	Number of jobs for male characters	Frequency of jobs for male characters
Fun with Teddy human characters	2	18%	9	82%
Fun with Teddy animal characters	1	12,50%	7	87,50%
Joyful English 1 Book 1	4	80%	1	20%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	4	66,60%	2	33,30%
Total	11	36,6	19	63,30%

Table 5. List of female and male jobs in visual data

Books	Female Jobs	Male Jobs
Fun with Teddy (Human characters)	Teacher, greengrocer	Veterinarian, doctor, grocer, Driver, teacher, policeman, pizza delivery boy, showman, father
Fun with Teddy (Animal characters)	mother	Machinist, Artist, Magician, Singer, Student, Acrobat, Pilot
Joyful English 1 Book 1	Driver, mother, teacher, student	student
Joyful English 1 Book 2	Teacher, mother, student, reporter	Student, staff

When the activities for the female and male characters are listed, it is found that activities for the male outnumber the activities for the female, and the female characters are more involved in outdoor activities in *Fun with Teddy*. In *Joyful English-1* the female and male characters do almost the same things.

Table 6. Types of activities for female and male characters in visual data

The Book	Female	Male
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Fun with Teddy (human characters)	Sitting, standing, waving, eating, hanging pictures, going to a birthday party, holding presents, swinging, walking, reading, showing pictures, hugging, speaking, looking around	Sitting, standing, playing football, playing on the fairground, waving, going to a birthday party, holding presents, lying on the grass, running, sliding, jumping, jumping rope, playing jigsaw, picking up a pencil from the ground, driving a scooter Playing in the sand-pool, doing magic, cutting paper with scissors, going to school by bus, sitting at a desk at school, holding up a book, carrying a school bag, falling down in the school garden, drawing, painting, reading a book, dancing, playing ball, eating, drinking, talking with other animals, talking with human beings, swimming, lying on the grass, driving a train, going to a circus, walking in the park
Fun with Teddy (animal characters)	Shopping, saying good-bye to his son, welcoming a visitor, watering flowers, taking the pizza from the delivery boy, putting children to bed	Standing, talking, introducing herself, introducing others, greeting each other, looking at photos, carrying school bags, asking and answering questions, sitting at a desk, writing, hugging, pointing to things, looking at the sky, listening to the teacher, , raising her hand, watching TV, drawing, giving presents to her children, having pets, smiling, travelling, closing window, telling her children to tidy their room
Joyful English-1 Book 1	Standing, singing, studying, speaking, asking and answering questions, doing experiment in the lab, having exercise, writing, sitting at a desk sitting on the floor and playing with dolls, playing ball in the sea, drawing, playing snowball, looking out of window, giving umbrella to her daughter, giving gifts, having a birthday party	Standing, talking, introducing herself, introducing others, greeting each other, looking at photos, carrying school bags, asking and answering questions, sitting at a desk, writing, hugging, pointing to things, looking at the sky, listening to the teacher, listening to music, raising her hand, watching TV, shaking hands, running after butterflies, sitting on the floor, making noise, going shopping, listening to music, kneeling on the floor
Joyful English-1 Book 2	Standing, singing, studying, speaking, asking and answering questions, doing experiment in the lab, having exercise, writing, sitting at a desk sitting on the floor and playing with dolls, playing ball in the sea, drawing, playing snowball, looking out of window, giving umbrella to her daughter, giving gifts, having a birthday party	Standing, singing, studying, speaking, asking and answering questions, writing, riding a bike, playing ball in the sea, playing in the snow, sitting at a table, skating, sitting on the beach, sitting on a bench, looking out of window, going to a birthday party, giving gifts, speaking on the floor and playing with toys, sitting at a desk, roller skating

Another finding of the study is about the variety of female and male names in the coursebooks. In *Fun with Teddy* no names are given. In *Joyful English-1*, gender sensitive writers almost succeeded in balancing the number of female and male names in Book 1 but were not so successful in Book 2 (Table 7). When the frequencies of the use of female and male names are compared it is found that there is a slight difference in favour of male names (Table 8).

Table 7. Number of female and male names in verbal data

Coursebook	Number of female names	Percentage of female names	Number of male names	Percentage of male names
Joyful English 1 Book 1	53	49%	55	50,90%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	36	42,80%	48	57,14%
Total	92	47,17%	103	52,82%

Table 8. Frequency of the use of female and male names in verbal data

Coursebook	Frequency of female names	percentage	Frequency of male names	Percentage
Joyful English 1 Book 1	209	44,56%	260	55,43%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	164	43,50%	213	56,49%
Total	373	44%	473	55,91%

The result of the distribution of giving instructions indicates the different approaches towards gender equality in *Fun with Teddy* and *Joyful English-1*. In *Fun with Teddy* all the instructions are given by male characters; in *Joyful English-1* the instructions are given almost equally by female and male characters (Table 9).

Table 9. Distribution of giving instructions in visual and verbal data

Coursebook	Female	Frequency	Male	Frequency
Fun with Teddy	-	-	39	100%
Joyful English 1 Book 1	22	55%	18	45%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	7	43,75%	9	56,25%
Total	29	30,52%	66	69,47%

As for the distribution of turn-taking results, equality is fully maintained in Book 1 of *Joyful English-1*, but in Book 2, there is a significant difference against women (Table 10). In the initiation of dialogues male characters are given more privilege than the female; the difference is more significant in Book 2 (Table 11).

Table 10. Distribution of turn taking in verbal data

Coursebook	Female	Frequency	Male	Frequency
Joyful English 1 Book 1	126	50%	126	50%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	105	37,23%	177	62,54%
Total	231	43,25	303	56,74%

Table 11. Distribution of initiation of dialogues in verbal data

Coursebook	Female	Frequency	Male	Frequency
Joyful English 1 Book 1	9	45%	11	55%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	12	38,70%	19	61,29%
Total	21	41,17%	30	58,82%

The results of the last category, the distribution of asking questions, shows that the males are given priority in asking questions, too.

Table 12. Distribution of asking questions in verbal data

Coursebook	Female	Frequency	Male	Frequency
Joyful English 1 Book 1	36	60%	24	40%
Joyful English 1 Book 2	25	51%	24	49%
Total	61	55,96%	48	44,03%

The results of the study show that the English Language Teaching coursebooks published by the Turkish Ministry of Education are fully aware of the problem of gender bias and do their best to establish gender equality. Explicit gender discrimination is not distinctive in this book but when implicit indications of gender bias are searched for, striking examples can be easily discerned. For instance, even though both the female and male students raise their hands, it is noticed that male students raise hands more than the girls. In *Joyful English*, there are four boys and four girls in the classroom; three of the boys raise their hands whereas only one of the girls raise her hand (52). The same attitude is seen on page 24 where the only student to raise hands is a boy. Similarly, both boys and girls introduce themselves but boys are given priority in this activity too (10). Girls and boys are all involved in outdoor activities and sports but the winners are boys (82). Mothers are not shown cleaning the house but it is still their responsibility to tell children to tidy their rooms (63).

Another finding about the activities of the female and male characters is that the writers of *Joyful English* prefer not to use any figures in the house to avoid stereotyping. The result is empty kitchens; empty armchairs in front of the TV set, empty bathrooms. In one of the pictures about the parts of a house the human figures are on the roof instead of their natural places in the house. This shows that writers feel obliged to be sensitive in gender issues. It is believed that this awareness and sensitivity is a natural result of the researches and publications that study gender representation in coursebooks. It is hoped that with the increase of such studies and researches coursebooks will avoid gender bias more.

On the other hand the coursebook used for the second grades, *Fun with Teddy*, is dangerously full of gender bias. The first exposition of students to a foreign language is very important as it is also their first encounter with the culture of the language. The age of 2nd graders is 6 and 7, an age when children can easily be imposed beliefs and values. For children, knowledge in the coursebooks is unquestionably true. Girls may lose their self-esteem and feel less important; they may be convinced to accept a secondary position in the society and to limit their future job opportunities; they may learn to be reticent to initiate a dialogue or ask questions where there are men around. For this reason coursebook writers should pay utmost care to avoid gender discrimination. However, it

should be admitted that gender bias will exist implicitly, if not explicitly, in the coursebooks as long as gender discrimination exists in the society.

Gender equality hasn't been achieved in Turkey in the 21st century in spite of all the efforts by governments, local administrations, universities and non-governmental organizations. Violence against women, secondary status of women in social, political and economic life, women's limited access to education are all urgent problems that need to be solved in our society. Education is considered to be the best way to improve gender equality but the language used for education can unintentionally reinforce gender inequality, stereotypes and sex segregation. Therefore, it is crucial that the language in the textbooks should be devoid of gender bias and this is, of course, true of the textbooks written to teach a foreign language. Jane Sunderland, one of the early analysts of English Language textbooks, states that "Learning English productively and receptively can... be learning or ... relearning a gendered discourse role (1994:7).

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