CrossMark

ORIGINAL PAPER

Culture and Gender Representation in Iranian School Textbooks

Ali Salami[1] · Amir Ghajarieh[2]

Abstract   This study examines the representations of male and female social actors in selected Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks. It is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis and uses van Leeuwen's Social Actor Network Model to analyze social actor representations in the gendered discourses of compulsory heterosexuality. Findings from the analysis show that the representations endorse the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality which is an institutionalized form of social practice in Iran. Three male and three female students were interviewed to find out what they think about these representations. Their responses with regard to whether they think textbooks should also include representations of other forms of sexuality were non-committal and vague. To them LGBT people are the "Other" practicing a form of sexuality that is not normal. Such exclusions could obscure the reality regarding the existence of such gender identities and represent the world in a particular manner.

Keywords   Compulsory heterosexuality · Critical Discourse Analysis · EFL textbooks · Iran · Gender · Education

✉ Ali Salami
   salamii@ut.ac.ir

   Amir Ghajarieh
   amirbiglarbeigi@yahoo.com

[1]   Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

[2]   Language and Linguistics Faculty, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2 Springer

Introduction

Textbooks are crucial teaching material (Blumberg 2008), and an important medium of knowledge transmission representing "for both the students and teachers the visible heart of any EFL [English as a Foreign Language] program" (Sheldon 1988, p. 237). Van Dijk (1998) argues that far from being neutral, textbooks are consonant with the dominant cultural beliefs supported by those in power. The significant function of textbooks is brought to light by Choppin (2004) who regards them as a privileged instrument in the construction of identity "… in the same way as the currency or flag, and in this sense they assume an important political role" (p. 553).

English is a compulsory subject in schools and at pre-university level in Iran, and students are required to study English 4–5 h a week using EFL textbooks prescribed by the Ministry of Education. When examining Iranian EFL textbooks in terms of gender content, it is important to bear in mind the way gender is indexed and represented, which suggests the need for textbook language and visual images to be taken seriously. It is necessary to examine them with the gender perspective in mind in order to ensure the provision of a balanced, inclusive and gender-sensitive education.

In this article, we examine the way compulsory heterosexuality as an institutionalized form of social practice is implemented in Iranian EFL textbooks through the representation of male and female social actors in gendered discourses. The term "compulsory heterosexuality" highlights the normality of sexual relationship defined within male and female relationships and the phrase suggests that most human cultures reinforce and privilege heterosexuality (Rich 1980); thus, the element of choice plays little role in this regard.

As a social practice, the recontextualization of compulsory heterosexuality in textbooks involves a set of social actors in certain roles performing certain actions in different culturally defined social contexts (van Leeuwen 2008, pp. 7–8, and p. 36). Secondly, we examine the way the students who use these EFL textbooks at different educational levels interpret the social actor representations. Here we address the issue of consumption, i.e. how the texts are interpreted by the student-reader who may support or resist the dominant beliefs on gender, particularly with regard to the representations of male and female social actors. The final aim is to provide explanations for this state of affairs by bringing into discussion the way these representations reflect assumptions on gender in contemporary Iranian society. It is hoped that this will overcome the inadequacy of the descriptive goals in discourse analysis, i.e. the "lack of concern with explanation—with how discursive practices are socially shaped, or their social effects" (Fairclough 2010, p. 26).

The EFL curriculum in Iran focuses on patterned structures and mechanical drills "which, if based on gender-typed material, may well contribute to the development of sexist attitudes at a subconscious level" (Lee and Collins 2008, p. 6). Gendered discourses in EFL textbooks endorse gender notions (Cheng and Ghajarieh 2009, 2011, 2012) and students may be unconsciously affected both as language learners and as human beings (Ise, n.d). This in part explains the need for us not only to examine how they are instituted in the textbooks to circumvent the transmission of

such ideas to young learners (Pauwels 1998), but also more importantly to find out how the students themselves interpret them.

Gendered Discourses in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL Textbooks

A great number of studies in the literature have focused on gender representations in textbooks. For instance, Lee and Collins (2008) investigated gender representations in textbooks published in Hong Kong. They noted that new textbooks contain less sexist material in comparison with those published a decade ago. However, they suggested such textbooks still featured gender biases against men and women.

Esen (2007), by analyzing old and new textbooks published in Turkey, reported that despite the curriculum which delineates the importance of gender equality, the newly published textbooks are still gender-biased. Kobia (2009) also analyzed gender representation in English Primary School Textbooks in Kenya. In the investigated material, "male gender outnumbered the female gender in usage of characters portrayed in illustrations, photographs, names and titles used to refer to the genders" (p. 57). Likewise, Baiqiang (2008) found gender inequality in the representation of men and women in the Chinese high school EFL textbooks. Male characters outnumbered his female counterparts in terms of unit titles, central roles in dialogues, and male firstness in such textbooks.

Assigning women, men, girls, and boys to the social categories of females or males can have significant consequences. Talbot (2003) postulates "on the basis of this gender assignment, naturalized norms and expectations about verbal behavior are imposed upon people. There is a strong tendency for gender stereotyping to set in" (p. 468). Gender assignment is deeply implicated in stereotyping, which Cameron (2009, p. 8) defines as the tendency "to interpret [someone's] behavior, personality, and so on in terms of a set of common-sense attributions which are applied to whole groups [e.g. 'Italians are excitable'; 'Black people are good at sport']."

Despite rich literature on gender bias and stereotyping in EFL and ESL textbooks (see e.g. Babaii and Ansary 2003; Lee and Collins 2008), most studies involve content analysis looking at quantitative differences (and deriving meaning from this quantification) rather than meaning as an interaction between the text producer and the reader in a particular socio-cultural context bound by a certain gender belief. There are very few studies that investigated students' responses to gender representations. Given the interconnections between text at the micro level and its interpretations at the discourse practice level and its explanation at the macro-level of social practice (Fairclough 1995a, b, 2003), it is clearly not sufficient to restrict the examination of text to the description of linguistic features. Fairclough (2003) strongly argues "we cannot for instance claim that particular features of text automatically bring about particular changes in … knowledge or behavior or particular social or political change" (p. 5).

According to Garcia and McManimon (2011, p. 6), cultural beliefs are dominant in a society and "are necessarily held by the dominant members of any given

society". Cultural notions could be endorsed through language use (Mayer and Wodak 2009), and the choice of linguistic items by text-producers could construct or reproduce conservative gendered discourses (Sunderland 2004). Such gendered discourses may naturalize and legitimize gender beliefs regarding men and women, and ensures the power imbalance and maintain the social status quo (Fairclough 2001; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; VanDijk 2008; Wodak 2012). While some gendered discourses could be subversive and bring new opportunities for men and women, conservative gendered discourses endorse gender notions, the overarching discourse of gender differences (Sunderland 2004), and the dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity (Coates 2003).

Methodology

We take a critical approach to the examination of gender-related issues in English language education in Iran, drawing on Fairclough's notion of discourse as language use which shapes and is shaped by society (Fairclough 2001), and which is institutionally controlled to ensure power imbalance in texts and talk (Fairclough 1992, 2001). In this regard, discourse which is understood as textually mediated social action plays a constitutive role "by representing and constructing society" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). It is therefore not surprising that the gendered discourses in textbooks support and privilege compulsory heterosexuality with children living with heterosexual parents being taken for granted as normal and natural. This *heteronormativity* is not only linked to sexuality, i.e. that masculine men and feminine women are heterosexual, "but also to gender relations, and to a social hierarchy in each" (Sunderland and McGlashan 2012, p. 192; see also Baker 2008).

Since Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is very much an analytic technique that can identify the discursive practices that legitimizes structural or social injustices, the present study adopts CDA as a tool to unfold how social and political factors in a country work in educational settings and more specifically in school textbooks. Given that critical thinking is an important component of any curriculum at schools, using CDA in this study could be a roadmap illustrating how cultural and social beliefs regarding gender can be investigated critically in textbooks. In so doing, socio-cultural as well as political textures of Iranian society can be examined through the lens of Iran's school textbooks.

In this article, our analysis is not restricted to the level of description, but goes beyond linguistic and visual representations to look also at the way the student-readers interpret particular gendered discourses.

The two sets of data selected for analysis are Iranian EFL textbooks and interviews with students at secondary, high school and pre-university levels. Grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA), the article draws on van Leeuwen's Social Actor Analysis Model (2003, 2008) to examine the way social actors are represented in the data. At this micro level of analysis, verbal representations and images of male and female social actors are examined, because both interact to communicate meanings. Van Leeuwen's *sociosemantic* inventory

views agency as a sociological concept which is not only realized by 'the grammatical role of "agent"' but in many other ways including the use of possessive pronouns and a prepositional phrase 'in which the agent is sociologically "patient"' (Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 23) .

In order to find out how gendered discourses are interpreted by the students, three male and three female students at different levels of education were interviewed individually to find out whether they support or contest the gendered discourses and male and female social actor representations in the gendered discourses of compulsory heterosexuality. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in the students' mother tongue. To ensure participants have voiced their thoughts with no reservations, some follow-up queries were asked from participants and each was encouraged to think of any issue which the interviewers should have raised. In doing so, the authors tried to reach some level of saturation in data collection. By way of minimizing the interviewer-participant dynamic which potentially skews the results, the authors kept a neutral tone in queries and all of the follow-up questions so that the participants could not realize their stance. Additionally, this study assigned one interviewer to talk with participants and the other was tasked to record any relevant observation during each interview session. One possible limitation of the design of this study was that school authorities refused to give the authors contacts numbers of the participants for any further enquiries following each interview. This made the authors leave out sections of the interviewers' responses which needed more clarification on the part of the participants (Table 1).

The table below summarizes the socio-demographics of the participants of this study.

It is notable that pseudonyms are used for each interviewee to protect the anonymity of participants in this study. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed following the work of Alvarez (2002) and then analyzed using Hall's idea of interpretation (1980) to codify the participants' interpretative positions with regard to the gendered discourses as dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings. Whereas in the case of dominant or hegemonic reading the reader fully shares the text's code and accepts and reproduces the preferred reading, in an oppositional reading the reader, whose social situation places him or her in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, understands the preferred reading but does not share the text's code and rejects this reading (Hall 1980, pp. 136–138 cited in Chandler 2007, pp. 194–195). The cultural beliefs disseminated through textbook language may have a great influence on students because they are less experienced readers and may not be capable of analyzing their school textbooks, particularly in a critical manner (Sadker and Zittleman 2009a, b). Analyzing the interviews using Hall's idea of interpretation (1980) could illustrate how power and cultural beliefs are constructed and reproduced in a bottom-up process which is of significance to language and gender studies (Baxter 2010; Sunderland 2000).

This idea of interpretation is part of Hall's (1980) 'Encoding–Decoding Model', which is primarily a model of mass communication, and underlines the significance of the reader's interpretation within the hypothetical boundaries of related codes. His model theoretically aims to connect the distinct processes of media production,

Table 1 The socio-demographics of the participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Economic background	Place of residence
Ali	M	14	Lower middleclass family	Tehran
Amir	M	16	Upper middle class family	Tehran
Taha	M	18	Lower middle class family	Tehran
Shirin	F	14	Upper middle class family	Tehran
Maryam	F	17	Lower middle class family	Tehran
Azadeh	F	18	Lower middle class family	Tehran

distribution, and consumption. According to this model, the meaning of a produced text should not be conceived in a linear order and may be decoded differently by the readers (decoders) as their interpretations depend on their social and cultural backgrounds as well as their various frames of interpretation [see e.g. Cruz and Lewis (1994) and Nightingale (1996) for further exploration of media and audience reception].

The Representations of Social Actors

This section examines the way the representation of male and female social actors supports and propagates compulsory heterosexuality. We analyze selected extracts to make explicit how the social actors are represented using the social categories in van Leeuwen's social actor network.

> **Text 1. Book III, secondary level, p.50**
> *My Family. We pray every day. (Two male and two female social actors are featured in the accompanying image)*

In Text 1, the social actor is represented as a class of normal family in relation to praying, a religious activity which represents them as devout Muslims. The accompanying visual image identifies the individual members of the family, two male and two female social actors. They are represented as unspecified individuals and identified in terms of their relational identifications, i.e. two heterosexual parents and two children, male and female. *Family* is assimilated and collectivized as *we* which presents familyas a set of parents of opposite sex and their children. Categorizing their identity as family without nomination suppresses the unique identity of each individual member despite the emphasis on differences in the accompanying images. Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that social actors who are not individualized may lose the identification of the reader, and this may exclude certain groups of people and obscure realities.

The stereotypical family representations which conform to the discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality" have the potential to disadvantage other representations. Representations of the "other", for example, single parents with their

children and two co-parents of the same sex, are radically excluded in both linguistic and visual representations.

Compulsory heterosexuality is also introduced in the textbooks through relational identification and individualization as exemplified in

Text 2: Book II, secondary level, p.59
… This is his mother. Her name is Zahra.

Here the social actor is nominated informally using *Zahra,* a given Iranian female name. She has already been functionalized according to her family relationship as "his mother". Flax (1993) argues that kinship terms presume "a necessary horizon of heterosexuality" in a traditional family (p. 150). Zahra is first identified as a mother then nominated informally using her given name, which suggests that the maternal relation is functionally important in Iranian society. Van Leeuwen (2008) maintains that nomination is an important feature in individualization as opposed to categorization which classifies social actors based on identity and function. Notice the way Zahra is categorized through relational identification that she is "his mother", signifying the stereotypical role of women as mothers, and that possessivization represents mother and son belonging together as a unit in a home context. Relational identification represents Zahra and her son in terms of their kinship relations to each other, foregrounding a traditional heterosexual family and heterosexual normativity.

The included male and female social actors are nominated through formalization with the titles *Mr*, *Mrs*, Miss, and *Ms*, which identify them as male or female, and in the case of *Mrs* and *Miss* as married or unmarried. Here are some examples.

Text 3: Secondary level, Book III, p. 16
Nahid: Our teacher is Mrs Tehrani. She teaches us English

Text 4: Secondary level, Book III, p. 16
Mrs Tehrani teaches Zahra. She is 22 years old.

Text 5: pre-university level, p. 50
Mrs Rahimi is very concerned about poor children, but her husband doesn't care about them.

The construction of gender in Texts 3–5 simultaneously constructs sexuality. Female social actors are nominated though formalization with the title *Mrs* referring to their marital status, and their female identity is further highlighted in Texts 3 and 4 by the pronoun *she*. *Mrs* identifies Tehrani and Rahimi in their personal relationships to men, i.e. they are the wives. The titulated nomination indexes heterosexual sexuality, and this sexual orientation is further supported by relational identification of a male social actor who is "her husband" (Text 5).

Outside the domestic sphere, both women are represented in relation to children, i.e. as a teacher and as possessing the stereotypical traits of a nurturer, i.e. fond of children, compassionate and sensitive to their needs. In Texts 3 and 4, Mrs Tehrani is identified as an English teacher, a normal occupation for women. In Text 5, while Mrs Rahimi is constructed as being concerned about children, her husband is constructed as being uncaring, suggesting that women are fond of children and are

more natural carers of them (see e.g. Equal Opportunities Commission 1997, p. 13). Here as in Text 2, adult females are subject positioned with attributes of goodness, care and domesticity.

Some feminist scholars argue that female titles (*Miss* and *Mrs*) identify women according to their availability to men, and are therefore, inherently sexist (Pauwels 1998). Titulated nominations support the discourse of 'compulsory heterosexuality', as they suggest that "heterosexual relationships within marriage are viewed as the norm" (Thomas and Wareing 2003, p. 95). Nominated women are rarely titulated as *Ms*, a gender-neutral title with no reference to marital status.

Following van Leeuwen's (2003) model, one can argue that the titulated representations of female social actors through the title *Mrs* in Iranian EFL textbooks could exclude LGBT people and couples, single mothers and fathers and men and women who are not comfortable with a traditional heterosexual family and heterosexual normativity. Such people were excluded in this representation and in the lexis of Iranian EFL textbooks at different educational levels representing male and female social actors through nomination with the titles of *Mr* and *Mrs*.

Male and female social actors are activated in relational processes and assigned clothes that conform to their traditional gender roles. Gender norms of dressing, are strongly linked to sexuality. Here are some examples:

> **Text 6: Book II, secondary level, p. 6**
> Ali has a blue Jacket. Mina has a green dress.

> **Text 7: Book II, p. 46, secondary level**
> Mina has a dress. It is brown.

> **Text 8: Book I, p. 55, high school level**
> Mina is wearing a long dress. It is red.

> **Text 9: Book III, p. 8, secondary level**
> Betty's dress is beautiful. She likes…

Here male and female social actors are nominated through informalization with common Iranian male and female names reflecting their identity as men and women. They are personalized and activated through relational processes. Notice that the possessed attributes of the male social actors are jackets and the possessed attributes of the female social actors are dresses (Halliday 1985; van Leeuwen 2008). They do gender by wearing clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex and according to McIlvenny 'doing gender produces heteronormativity' (2002 p. 8).

Dresses for women are considered traditionally feminine attire, and jackets for men are regarded traditionally masculine attire (Currah 2006), and feminine and masculine clothes are prime indicators of sex roles emphasizing stereotypes and supporting heterosexuality. Following Sunderland's (2004) Gendered Discourses Model, it can be argued that the representations in Texts 6–9 bear traces of the traditional discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality" and support this gender belief. The text images in the analyzed textbooks also support this interpretation.

While clothes may be fixed rigidly into gendered parameters, due to progress and development in many parts of the world, they are less rigidly fixed in terms of

gender exclusiveness (Bolich 2007). For instance, one of the significant desires of transgender people is to wear clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex (Currah 2006). To cite another example, while some homosexual people wear clothes aligned with their biological sex, many homosexuals are fond of wearing feminine clothes; "many homosexuals are also transvestites" (Halleck 1991, p. 382). In the analyzed textbooks, no male or female social actors were activated either in lexis or image as wearing clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex.

In the absence of any representations featuring male or female social actors wearing clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex in the lexis, one can argue that the representations of male and female social actors in samples A, B, C, and D support the gendered discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality". One can also argue that the "Other", including LGBT people and men and women who like wearing clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex and those who do not feel comfortable with heterosexual normativity are excluded in the representations of male and female social actors. They are radically excluded in the representations of Iranian EFL textbooks that activate male and female social actors through relational processes with the possessed attribute of the kind of clothes they wear.

Discussion of the Discourse of "Compulsory Heterosexuality"

Van Leeuwen (2008) argues that any exclusion in texts could be consequential for the groups being excluded and obscure realities regarding such groups. The exclusion of the marginalized "Other" (e.g. LGBT people) from Iranian EFL textbooks at different educational levels and support for the traditional discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality" could obscure the reality that they may face hardship. Many minorities are discriminated and harassed in society (van Dijk 1991); LGBT people are no exceptions in this regard. Our analysis of the textbooks shows that no LGBT people are categorized and individualized and the lack of categorization of such people may lead to functionalization, so that these people are likely to be "sodomitized" (van Leeuwen 2003, p. 55). Sodomization in this context can be referred to other sexual preferences which society considers as crimes including LGBT relations. By viewing such sexual intimacies in this light, society can readily tag LGBT people as so-called criminals.

Likewise, the exclusion of single mothers and single fathers, together with those men and women who are afflicted by the hegemonic norms of a heterosexual family, could overlook the hassle and hardship of these people due to the hegemonic norms of a heterosexual family. Battered wives and domestic violence against women in Iran (Moradian 2009) reflects how people may abuse the hegemonic system of the traditional heterosexual family.

The dominance of the "compulsory heterosexuality" discourse supports both the patriarchal family and masculine hegemony, which results in inequality for women and other gender identities who do not conform to these gender notions (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In addition, the function of this discourse as a conservative discourse could reinforce the overarching "gender differences" discourse (Sunderland 2004), and could put many men and women at a

disadvantage, given that this discourse supports the basic belief of inherent differences between men and women (Sunderland 2004). As Locher and Graham (2010, p. 233) note, "a key part of this dominant hegemonic discourse … is … the view that males and females are inherently different due to biological hardwiring in the brain".

The emergence of a discourse does not occur in isolation (Mayer and Wodak 2009; Wodak 2012), and it should be studied with reference to the dominant socio-political factors (Wodak and Reisigl 2001; Wodak 2012). In Iranian society, the family is defined by the dominant social script of heterosexual relationships, and thus heterosexual families are considered the norm by default (Shahidian 2002). Hence, support for "compulsory heterosexuality" discourse reproduces the notion that heterosexuality is the norm (Baker 2008). Support for this gendered discourse in Iranian EFL textbooks could support this gender notion.

Interview Results

In this section, we discuss informants' responses to the issues raised regarding male and female social actor representations in the chosen textbooks. Their responses wereanalyzed and codified using Hall's (1980) idea of interpretation, i.e. whether they are hegemonic or oppositional.

Overall, the responses are non-committal, giving no clear indication of the informants' feelings about the radical exclusion of LGBT people from the textbooks. What is clear is that they regard LGBT people as the "Other" with a form of sexuality that is not normal. All the responses are vague with regard to whether they think textbooks should also give space to representations of other forms of sexuality.

Consider this response from a male university student named Ali when asked for his views on gender and sexuality representations in his school textbook.

> I can't answer this question… I *did not* write this textbook … I have *no* idea. Maybe all I can say is that … these are representations from my textbook x Maybe good maybe bad … I honestly don't know …*I* think we are not in the position to judge our textbooks x

Overall, the responses are non-committal, giving no clear indication of the informants' feelings about the text's total alignment with the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality and the radical exclusion of LGBT people, i.e. whether it is good or bad. One of the reasons for the lack of critical views is that the students are not trained to think critically, and Sadker and Zittleman (2009a, b) regard this as an important missing component in the education systems of many countries.

Ali presents himself as a person without power, i.e. as someone not being "in the position to judge". Notice how he includes other people in this category of powerlessness with the use of 'we'. Note also his non-committal response: "I can't answer this question", his lack of knowledge: "I have no idea", and his non-involvement: "I did not write this textbook" which reflect how he sees himself in this regard. Power plays a pivotal role in CDA, and CDA is interested in

highlighting how power hierarchies are constructed and reproduced through language (Mayer and Wodak 2009).

Hegemonic Readings of Gendered Texts Supporting Compulsory Heterosexuality

Ali was given some texts and findings from the textual analysis to elicit a response to the way representations of the traditional heterosexual family radically exclude LGBT people. He responded as follows:

> Who are these people? LGBTs are not normal … Men and women have to marry with each other … **I call these people fagots**… when I am with my friends … they are disgusting.

Ali's response is typical of a society that practices "compulsory heterosexuality". It illustrates the resistance to the inclusion of the representations of other sexuality in textbooks. LGBT is represented as the other ("LGBTs are not normal") supporting heteronormativity that "men and women have to marry with each other". There is an indirect contrast set up between Ali and his friends with normal heterosexuality and LGBTs. The underlined segment shows how a hegemonic reading of gendered texts supports the discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality". His views confirm van Leeuwen's (2003) assertion that the lack of categorization may lead to the derogatory functionalization of LGBT people.

Ali calls them "fagots" and finds them "disgusting". Here Ali represents himself as a person with a normal sexual orientation, bound by the traditional values of heterosexuality. What is clear is that he regards LGBT people as the Other with a form of sexuality that is not normal.

Concerning the absence of representations of male and female social actors wearing clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex, Ali said in response to *What do you think of men wearing clothes traditionally worn by women?*

> This is laughable for me … I prefer my own clothes—My father always says a man should be a man … should not act like a woman

The text illustrates a hegemonic reading of gendered texts which supports the discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality". The underlined part exemplifies the way the hegemonic reading of a gendered text appeals to a higher authority, which in this case is the father. Notice how Ali expresses his preference for his "own clothes" which suggests clothes that adult male of his age would wear. He supports the hegemonic practice that "a man should be like a man" citing his father (not his mother) and relates being a man to the way to behave which in this case refers to wearing appropriate clothes.

As regards the lack of nomination of female social actors through formalization with the title *Ms*, Maryam said:

> I don't mind being called with Mrs …when I get married at least others know I am married … I am proud of this.

The underlined parts of the above segment show how a hegemonic reading of gendered texts supports the discourse of "compulsory heterosexuality". Maryam considers that being nominated with the title Mrs identifies her as being married and that this is something to be proud of. This hegemonic reading represents marriage in a heterosexual relationship as an asset.

The informants were also asked their views on the representations of heterosexual relationships. This is Ali's view:

> In my textbooks women and men are represented normally. This is how they act in real life. This is the way they learned from their parents, friends and society. I think I *will* do what my father does. He also learned how to behave from his parents x friends x and society.

Ali considers the representations of men and women in the textbooks as normal reflecting "real life". He represents heterosexuality as a normal behavior learned "from parents, friends and society". It is passed down from one generation to another. Notice how Ali represents himself as being influenced by his father who is in turn being influenced by how own "parents, friends and society". Note the repetition of "from his parents, friends, and society".

The textbooks are published by the Ministry of Education endowed with a certain set of authorities. Following Hall (1980), one can argue that the existence of such readings indicates that the messages disseminated through these EFL textbooks may produce the intended reactions in some textbook users.

Oppositional Readings of Gendered Texts Supporting Compulsory Heterosexuality

In this section, the focus is on some oppositional readings of gendered discourses. Here are some extracts illustrating such readings.

In response to some gender issues raised in the interview, when asked what she thought about women wearing clothes traditionally worn by men and the use of title *Ms*, Shirin responded:

> I agree with your interpretation about homosexual marginalization in these pages x I always thought why women should marry *men* x Should it be always like that? I doubt it x **My mother says all people are equal and they should not be discriminated** x **everyone has a choice to live** x So I think men and women can wear whatever clothes they like x

The underlined parts show an oppositional reading of the gendered texts that maintain traditional gender roles. They resist the dominant representations of heterosexual men and women in a heterosexual relationship. Shirin cites a higher authority, i.e. her mother, to support her own take on this issue that "people are equal", "they should not be discriminated' and "everyone has a choice". Notice how important the parents are in instilling gender beliefs in children. In her view equality includes freedom to choose your own partner, the kind of clothes you wear and the terms of address.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study combines van Leeuwen's (2003) Social Actor Network Model and Sunderland's (2004) Gendered Discourses Model to analyze the representations of gender in Iranian EFL textbooks. Findings from the analysis reveal that the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality is endorsed in the textbooks, and that men and women are represented within existing Iranian culture. The stereotypical pictures of men and women and support for dominant gender notions seem to be line with the attempts of people in power to maintain the status quo in society.

When the data was triangulated with the aid of detailed interviews and analyzed according to Hall's (1980) idea of different positions of text readers, it was revealed that the hegemonic readings of gendered texts that maintained traditional gender roles supported the representations of such gendered texts. On the other hand, the oppositional readings which supported traditional gender roles resisted the representations of such texts. These readings challenged the conservative discourse of compulsory heterosexuality. The exclusion of some representations could obscure the reality regarding the existence of these gender identities (van Leeuwen 2003; Sunderland 2004). As Taxel (1989) claims, the distorted representation of reality may convince the reader that the excluded identities and groups are not important.

Grounded in CDA, this study highlights the support of a conservative gendered discourse disseminated through the textbooks set by the curriculum in Iran. As Tadeu da Silva (1999) contends, a curriculum is never neutral; it contains cultural beliefs and legitimizes certain notions through school textbooks. This is part of the hidden curriculum (Kress 1996). CDA is an excellent tool to reveal such beliefs and highlight the invested interests of those who have more access to language recourses to reconstruct and maintain the status quo in texts and talk (Fairclough 1992).

The findings of the present study indicate that teachers should be encouraged to express their views on the cultural notions promoted in school textbooks. By refraining from expressing what they feel, teachers may deprive students of the opportunities to compare their teachers' views with those perceived through their textbooks.

The findings of the present study should make curriculum designers more aware of the possible gender biases in the prescribed textbooks. Ignoring gender bias on the part of curriculum designers has wide implications, as the textbooks are made available to users in remote areas and out-of-the-way villages. It is important to bear in mind that for many young boys and girls living in these areas the first contact with English is likely to be made through textbooks published in the light of covert ministerial angst.

On the other hand, the propagation of gender equality through school textbooks could have positive results leading to greater gender equity in rural areas. If textbooks were to depict gender equality of men and women, devoid of common gender stereotypes, many young girls and boys in rural areas would be made familiar with more gender-inclusive notions and so perceive for themselves the

differences between the notions represented in their textbooks and the realities of sexism in their societies.

There has been a general and strong tendency for scholars to develop the critical consciousness of citizens as a means of challenging social orthodoxies (Moore and Parker 2008). By identifying and challenging gender-biased notions in textbooks, it is possible to present a feasible approach to placing this viewpoint in a practical form. Schools are a microcosm of society (Johnson 2006), and by increasing the consciousness level of students through criticizing gender-biased textbooks, one may increase the number of critically-thinking citizens in the future able to make critical choices in the light of biases and cultural beliefs permeating in different societies.

Finally, teachers have a significant role to play in eliminating gender biases and negative gender notions in education. Many teachers were themselves brought up with traditional gender beliefs. A change in the accepted traditional beliefs may thus be too much to expect of them. These teachers need support to unlearn their own gender notions and learn to adopt more positive gender attitudes, which will assist both themselves and their students. This would require some major reforms in teacher education programs. Gender equality in both textbook content and teacher training programs are surely the missing links in educational reform.

References

Alvarez, R. (2002). Confessions of an information worker: a critical analysis of information requirements discourse. *Information and Organization, 12*, 85–107.

Babaii, E., & Ansary, H. (2003). Subliminal sexism in current ESL/EFL textbooks. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 6.1*, 40–56.

Baiqiang, T. (2008) Identifying and combating sexism in EFL textbooks—with a case study into China. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/3e/4c/94.pdf.

Baker, (2008). *Sexed texts: Language, gender and sexuality*. London: Equinox.

Baxter, J. (2010). Discourse-analytic approaches to text and talk. In L. Litosseliti (Ed.), *Research methods in linguistics* (pp. 117–138). London: Continuum.

Blumberg, R. L. (2008). The invisible obstacle to educational equality: Gender bias in textbooks. *Sex Role, 38*(3), 345–361.

Bolich, G. (2007). *Conversing on gender*. Raleigh, NC: Gardners Books.

Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The basics* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Cheng, K., & Ghajarieh, A. (2009). Gendered language in the classroom. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 6.3*, 35–51.

Cheng, K., & Ghajarieh, A. (2011). Addressing students with disabilities in school textbooks. *Disability & Society, 26*(2), 239–242.

Cheng, K., & Ghajarieh, A. (2012). Education and religion in Iran: The inclusiveness of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks. *International Journal of Educational Development, 32*(2), 310–315.

Choppin, A. (2004). História dos livros e das edições didáticas: sobre o estado da arte [History of books and teaching editions]. *Educação e Pesquisa, 30*(3), 549–566.

Coates, J. (2003). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh: Pearson Education.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity—rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*(6), 829–859.

Cruz, J., & Lewis, J. (1994). *Viewing, reading, listening: audiences and cultural reception*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Currah, P. (2006). Gender pluralisms under the transgender umbrella. In P. Currah, R. M. Juang, & S. Minter (Eds.), *Transgender rights* (pp. 3–32). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Da Silva, Tadeu. (1999). T. The poetics and politics of curriculum as representation. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 7*(1), 7–33.

Equal Opportunities Commission. (1997). *A baseline survey of equal opportunities on the basis of gender in Hong Kong: 1996–1997*. Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission.

Esen, Y. (2007). Sexism in school textbooks prepared under education reform in turkey. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 5*(2). Retrieved from http://www.jceps.com/.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. London: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995a). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1995b). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing discourse and text: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Malaysia: Pearson Education Limited.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as social interaction: A multidisciplinary introduction* (pp. 258–284). London: Sage Publications.

Flax, J. (1993). Mothers and daughters revisited. In J. Verhulst, K. Schreurs, & L. Woertman (Eds.), *Daughtering and mothering: Female subjectivity reanalyzed* (pp. 145–159). London: Routledge.

Garcia, V., & McManimon, P. M. (2011). *Gendered justice: intimate partner violence and the criminal justice system*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Hall, S. (1980) Encoding/decoding. In Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.), *Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972–79.* (pp. 128–38). London: Hutchinson.

Halleck, S. L. (1991). Psychiatry and the dilemmas of crime. *A study of causes, punishment and treatment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Halliday, M. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.

Ise, M., n.d. *Gender in Japanese EFL textbooks*. Retrieved from www2.hawaii.edu/~cmhiggin/660 P1 F 06/Ise.doc.

Johnson, W. S. (2006). *A time to embrace: Same-gender relationships in religion, law, and politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans.

Kobia, J. M. (2009). Femininity and masculinity in English primary school textbooks in Kenya. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture, 28*, 57–71.

Kress, G. (1996). Representational resources and the production of subjectivity. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practices* (pp. 15–31). London: Routledge.

Lee, F. K., & Collins, P. (2008). *Hong Kong students' attitudes towards sexist language*. Western Australia: Curtin University of Technology.

Locher, M. A., & Graham, S. L. (2010). *Interpersonal pragmatics*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Mayer, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: history agenda theory, and methodology. In R. Wodak & M. Mayer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 1–34). SAGE: Thousand Oaks, CA.

McIlvenny, P. (Ed.). (2002). *Talking gender and sexuality*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Moore, B. N., & Parker, R. (2008). *Critical thinking*. New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Moradian, A. (2009). *Domestic violence against single and married women in Iranian society*. Tolerancy International September. Retrieved from http://www.iranian.com/main/blog/azad/domestic-violence-against-single-and-married-women-iranian-societySept 2009.

Nightingale, V. (1996). *Studying audiences: The shock of the real*. London: Routledge.

Pauwels, A. (1998). *Women changing language*. London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs, 5*, 631–660.

Sadker, D., & Zittleman, K. (2009a). Gender bias: From Colonial America to today's classroom. In J. A. Banks & C. A. Banks (Eds.), *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (7th ed., pp. 137–153). New York: Wiley Custom Services.

Sadker, D., & Zittleman, K. R. (2009b). *Still failing at fairness: How gender bias cheats girls and boys in School and what we can do about it* (2nd ed.). New York: Scribner.

Shahidian, H. (2002). *Women in Iran: Emerging voices in the women's movement*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Sheldon, L. (1988). Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials. *ELT Journal, 42*, 237–246.

Sunderland, J. (2000). New understandings of gender and language classroom research: Texts, teacher talk and student talk. *Language Teaching Research, 4*(2), 49–173.

Sunderland, J. (2004). *Gendered discourses*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sunderland, J., & McGlashan, M. (2012). The linguistic, visual and multimodal representation of two-Mum and two-Dad families in children's picture books. *Language and Literature., 21.2*, 189–210.

Talbot, M. (2003). Gender stereotypes: Reproduction and challenge. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The handbook of language and gender* (pp. 468–489). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Taxel, J. (1989). Children's literature: A research proposal from the perspective of the sociology of school knowledge. In S. deCastell, A. Luke, & C. Luke (Eds.), *Language, authority, and criticism: Readings in the school textbook* (pp. 32–45). London: Falmer Press.

Thomas, L., & Wareing, S. (2003). *Language, society and power: An introduction*. London: Routledge.

van Dijk, T. A. (1991). *Racism and the press*. London: Rutledge.

van Dijk, T. A. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

van Dijk, T. A. (1997). Political discourse and racism: Describing others in Western parliaments'. In S. Riggins (Ed.), *The language and politics of exclusion: Others in discourse* (pp. 31–65). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.

van Dijk, T. A. (2000) *Critical discourse analysis. Discourses in Society website*. Retrieved from http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Critical%20discourse%20analysis.pdf.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2003). The representation of social actors in discourse. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis* (pp. 32–70). London: Routledge.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice new tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

VanDijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and power: Contributions to critical discourse studies*. Houndsmills: Palgrave MacMillan.

Wilbur, G. (1992) *Gender-fair curriculum. Research report prepared for Wellesley College Research on Women*. Washington, DC: American Association University Women.

Wodak, R. (1989). *Language, power and ideology*. Studies in political discourse. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Wodak, R. (1997). *Gender and discourse*. London: Sage.

Wodak, R. (2005). Discourse analysis (Foucault). In D. Herman, M. Jahn, & M. Ryan (Eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of narrative theory* (pp. 112–114). London: Routledge.

Wodak, R. (2006). Images in/and news in a globalized world. In I. Lassen, J. Strunck, & T. Vestergaard (Eds.), *Mediating ideology in text and image. Ten critical studies* (pp. 19–32). Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Wodak, R. (2007). Language and ideology: language in ideology. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6.1: 1–5 to *in Kuala Lumpur*. June 21st–26th, University of Malaya.

Wodak, R. (2012). A Visit by professor Ruth Wodak in Kuala Lumpur. June 21st–26th, University of Malaya.

Wodak, R., & Reisigl, M. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination. Rhetorics of racism and anti-Semitism*. London: Routledge.