

# Analysis of Gender Stereotyping in English Textbook from A Sociolinguistics Perspective

## -- The Case of A New English Grammar Coursebook (Sixth Edition)

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**Abstract.** Human language learning is inextricably linked to its cultural environment. Therefore, the Male-oriented perspective of language bias can give rise to invisible gender stereotypes and internalize them in the minds of language learners. The New English Grammar Course, as a commonly used textbook for English-related majors at the university level, is bound to have a profound impact on college students' values and ways of thinking, and its gender perspective has profound research value. This thesis will build a text corpus of A New English Grammar Coursebook based on quantitative method and text analysis, analyze the linguistic phenomena containing gender stereotypes, and explore the defects of the textbook in several aspects such as masculine subject personal pronouns, strong masculine vocabulary, collocative adjectives, and references to professions and famous people. It also extrapolates past research experiences to finally propose effective ways to address gender stereotyping in textbook texts.

**Keywords:** Gender Stereotypes; Male-oriented; Sociolinguistics; Corpus; Linguistic Sexism.

### 1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics uses the methodologies of linguistics and sociology and other related disciplines to investigate the social nature of language. In the past, many researchers have adopted sociolinguistic approaches to explore the various relationships between language and society, using linguistic materials to describe and explain social behavior and examining language as a social phenomenon, with an important line of research exploring Linguistic sexism and the sociocultural factors behind it. These studies on language acquisition view the nature of language as a social phenomenon, and thus argue that human language acquisition is closely linked to the cultural environment in which he lives. Thus, the Male-oriented perspective of language bias can give rise to invisible gender stereotypes and internalize such stereotypes in the minds of language learners.

University is an important stage for Chinese students to learn English systematically, and *A New English Grammar Coursebook*, as a commonly used textbook for English-related majors in university, is bound to have a profound impact on college students' conceptions of consciousness and ways of thinking. According to the textbook evaluation system given by Cunningsworth (2002), gender is also an important criterion for the review and evaluation of textbooks. If there is gender bias in the textbooks, it will not be conducive to the formation of correct gender perceptions or the establishment of a sense of gender belonging and identity among college students. Therefore, the study of the phenomenon of gender stereotypes in university textbooks has profound practical significance and can provide pointers for the development of textbooks.

### 2. Research Background

#### (1) Definition of gender stereotypes

In 1936, J.H. Pleck, a scholar at Wellesley College, proposed that individuals acquire the behavioral norms assigned to gender by social culture through acquired learning in the process of socialization, and this set of behavioral norms is gender roles (Hentschel, Heilman, and Peus, 2019). Gender stereotypes then originate from the differentiation of gender roles, where different genders

gain different experiences in different labor lives, and differences in division of labor produce different requirements, which then form and derive various norms about gender roles (Kahalon, Shnabel, and Becker, 2018) and produce generalized views or stereotypes about a particular gender.

Stereotypes are positive (men are "strong" and women are "gentle") and negative (men are "indifferent" and women are "weak"), but both are essentially the same in that they limit the diversity of people and the opportunities and abilities of different genders (Li and Liu, 2020).

#### (2) Research on linguistic sexism

Linguistic sexism is a common concern in linguistics: "male-dominated Male-oriented language bias can contribute to sexism and, to some extent, devalue the social role of women (Crystal, 1997). This phenomenon of discrimination is not only about language, but also reflects the Male-oriented way of thinking, which is a one-sided examination of women's image and a manifestation of male discourse in a patriarchal society. To a certain extent, the texts of textbooks represent the general social consensus and academic authority, and have a great influence on students' values. Therefore, a study on the issue of linguistic sexism in textbooks is necessary.

### 3. Research Design

#### (1) Research Object

*A New English Grammar Coursebook (Sixth Edition)*, published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

#### (2) Research Purpose

To investigate whether there are gender stereotypes and gender discrimination in the text of The New English Grammar Course from the perspective of sociolinguistics, and to put forward reasonable suggestions for improvement so that the textbook can be written in a more reasonable and better way.

#### (3) Research Questions

1. Does gender stereotyping of terms exist in *A New English Grammar Coursebook*?
2. What are the manifestations of these sexist terms?
3. What are the socio-cultural reasons for the gender bias in the textbook?

#### (4) Research Methods

1. Quantitative method: AntConc, a monolingual corpus analysis research tool, was used to build a text corpus of *A New English Grammar Coursebook*, and statistics and analysis were conducted on the frequency of gender roles, the frequency of masculine words, and the collocation of adjectives or phrases of both genders.

2. Text analysis method: The text content with gender overtones appearing in the New English Grammar Tutorial was analyzed to deeply explore the stereotypes existing behind the text.

### 4. Research Results and Analysis

#### (1) Frequency of occurrence of both genders in example sentences in the textbook

Statistics on the frequency of occurrence of gender subjects in *A New English Grammar Coursebook* (the words repeated in the same paragraph are counted in the total) show (Table 1) that the number of occurrences of male subjects far exceeds that of female subjects, and about 70.35% of the example sentences have male subjects, nearly three-quarters. The serious imbalance between the two genders and the large number of texts focusing on describing men's behavior, emotions, and states intensified students' Male-oriented way of thinking, and implicitly acquiesced to the inertial way of thinking that "men are the subject of behavior", and women's subjective initiative was greatly weakened.

**Table 1.** Frequency statistics of the occurrence of gender subjects

Terms	Frequency	Terms	Frequency	Terms	Frequency	Terms	Frequency	Sum
She	798	Girl	75	Women	37	Woman	39	1419
He	2339	Boy	134	Men	99	Man	296	3368

Inspired by the great difference in the frequency of gender subjects, this can be further explored. Not only the overuse of masculine subjects, but also the use of a variety of strong masculine words in the New English Grammar Course, and the use of male pronouns to refer to all men and women is not uncommon. Statistics show (Table 2) that the textbook repeatedly uses masculine words, such as "chairman" and "mankind", which imply that "man" is the subject and the center of the textbook. The use of strong masculine words, such as "chairman" and "mankind," which imply that "man" is the subject and center of the textbook, once again intensifies the Male-oriented gender perception. At the same time, textbooks widely use male pronouns to refer to all men and women when the gender of the subject is not specified or when the subject is a specific group (Table 3). One study found that "he" could refer to both genders in 40% of cases, while "she" could do so in only 10% of cases (Martyna, 1978). This is a reflection of the greater power of men's voices in various groups and classes, and reflects the widespread social psychology that men are the main group that constitutes society, which undoubtedly intensifies the isolation, division, rejection and alienation of women in the social culture and subconscious of the general public.

To sum up, there is a default of men as social subjects and objectification of women in textbooks, which dissolves women's subjective ability and subjective initiative. As a university textbook with certain authoritative attributes, this value orientation is questionable.

**Table 2.** Frequency of occurrence of masculine terms

Terms	Frequency
chairman	17
sportsman	4
businessman	2
mankind	1

**Table 3.** Examples of men to refer to the whole group

Sentence	Type
No teacher would profess that he knows all the answers.	Use "he" to refers all the teachers
No manager should do for his staff what they could do for themselves.	Use "he" to refers all the manager
The teacher must speak clearly so that his students can understand well.	Use "he" to refers all the teachers
...a student should be allowed to decide for himself whether...	Use "he" to refers all the students

(2) Characterization of both genders in the textbook example sentences

**Table 4.** Adjectives used with both genders in the example sentences of the textbook

Terms	Adjective Category	Adjectives	Total Number
girl/woman	Personality	funny, clever (2), intelligent (2), nasty, smart	17
	age	Old (5), young, little (4), mature, aged	
	Appearance / external features	Charmed (3), pretty (2), haggard	
	State / action	Noisy, terrified, frightened, divorced	
Boy/man	Personality	behaved, bright, dull, good (5), intelligent7, pleasant, timid, clever (2), tame, wild, aggressive, brilliant, great (4), honest, reasonable, wonderful, determined, selfish, tempered, rash, hardworking, kind	52
	age	Little (8), old (2), small (2), young (19)	
	Appearance / external features	Lovely (6), tall (2), hairy, bald, fat, blind strange (2), fair, thin, short, black, shaven handsome (2), strapping	
	State / action	smiling (2), unhappy, busy, injured (2), happy, lonely, accused (4), poor, wronged, free, lucky	

The following table (Table 4) counts the different adjectives that go with both genders in the example sentences of the textbook. By exploring the adjectives, it is possible to show the basic characterization and image of both genders implied by the textbook. The number of occurrences of the same adjective is shown in parentheses in the table, or one if there is no parenthesis.

As shown in the table, the range of adjectives collocated with males is wider and more numerous than with females, and the words used are richer and more vivid. It is obvious that the teaching materials portray men in a richer and more three-dimensional way, close to the real characters. For example, the descriptions of male character qualities include both kinds, pleasant, and pleasing extroverts, as well as timid, and behaved introverts; both determined, tempered, and other good qualities, as well as rash, aggressive, and other vivid and three-dimensional character flaws. Similarly, the description of the external appearance of both thin, short and other external images, but also shaven, bald and other focus and parts of the specific characteristics. It can be seen that the image of men is vivid, graphic and three-dimensional, close to real life.

On the contrary, the adjectives that go with women are not only few in number and single in kind, but also rigid and boring, full of stereotypes of women's images. For example, the character qualities of women are concentrated on the level of intelligence, or the general character such as funny, which has no characteristics and personal features. Even the term nasty is used to describe the women in the example sentences in a significantly derogatory way. The descriptions of women's appearance and external characteristics are focused on the question of "beauty", and the use of words such as pretty and charmed to describe and define women's characteristics in a general way is not as vivid and three-dimensional as when describing men. The textbook portrays the male characters in the example sentences as independent people with vivid personalities and distinctive characteristics of love and hate, while the female characters are generally portrayed as "people's imaginary women" or "men's imaginary women" from a Male-oriented perspective, full of stereotyped images of women. It is full of stereotypical images of women. This approach to characterization is undesirable.

### (3) The occupational status of both genders in the textbook example sentences

The following table (Table 5) selected the 11 occupations or positions that appeared most frequently in the New English Grammar Course and compared the number of men and women. The results show that among the 11 occupations or positions, there are 109 males, accounting for 54.8%, and 7 females accounting for 3.5%; professor, worker, and other 8 occupations have 0% female appearance.

**Table 5.** Comparison of the number of people with different occupations in both genders

Occupation	Doctor	Teacher	Manager	Writer	Professor	Worker
Women	3	2	0	2	0	0
Men	32	14	12	9	13	10
Not given	27	10	10	7	4	5
Sum	62	26	22	18	17	15
Occupation	Boss	Author	Director	Chief	Leader	
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0
Men	4	4	4	4	4	3
Not given	6	3	4	3	3	3
Sum	10	8	8	7	7	6

It can be seen that in the textbook, such professions as doctor (32 males, 3 females), teacher (14 males, 2 females), and professor (13 males, 0 females), which have higher social status and are more respected, are all occupied by male characters in large numbers; leadership positions such as manager, boss, chief, and leader are all occupied by males, and the number of females is zero; the basic profession of worker also has no female participation at all (10 males, 0 females).

In conclusion, there is a serious stereotype of women in the book uses examples of men to refer to the whole group, i.e., on the one hand, women are considered to be less involved in basic labor in society, and on the other hand, women are considered to be difficult to take up leadership positions

or occupations with high social status and high basic requirements, which are undoubtedly contradictory to each other. Where, then, should women go? The textbook is conveying the idea that women's domestic role is more important than their social role, and women are more desirable and appropriate to fulfill the role of housewife than to realize their personal value in society. The male-dominated social culture of male dominance has created a Male-oriented perspective, and this stereotype is implicitly reflected in the development of teaching materials, which in turn internalizes it in the minds of learners. This cycle adds to the male perspective and gender stereotypes, and even tends to justify employment discrimination against women. In this way, male learners reinforce stereotypical family roles for women, and it does not help female learners develop a sense of identity and belonging to their own gender, making women's career choices narrower. For users of the materials, this perception is very dangerous.

(4) Famous figures of both genders cited in the textbook

The following table (Table 6) counts the famous figures of both genders cited within the textbook, and the results show that there are 33 famous figures for men, or about 91.7%, and 3 for women, or about 8.3%; there is a serious imbalance with 11 times more prominent men than women.

**Table 6.** Famous figures of both genders cited in the textbook

Gender	Field	Figures	Number
Men	Politics	Abraham Lincoln, Churchill, Czar Peter III, Emperor Charles, King Edward, Martin Luther King, Marx and Engels, Prince of Wales, Woodrow Wilson	33
	Economy	Adam Smith	
	Literature	Hercule Poirot, Henry Lawson, John Alock, John Collins, John Keats, Lu Xun, Sidney Shelton, Shakespeare, Thoreau, Washington Rving, William H. Davies	
	Art	Benjamin Heaton, Earl Marshall, J. Louis, Picasso	
	Philosophy	Anaximenes, Heraclitus, Thales	
	Science	Newton	
	Other	Father Brown, Quisling, Robert Scott	
Women	Politics	Bloody Mary, Queen Victoria	3
	Literature	Agatha Christie	

As can be seen, male famous figures are cited in large numbers and in a wide range of fields, widely distributed in politics, economics, literature, art, philosophy and science, while only a historical figure and a writer is women.

Bandura, an American psychologist, proposed the important observation theory in psychology that human behaviors (especially complexity as) are learned by observing competent role models who are able to deal with and solve problems effectively (Li, M., 2017). By observing and imitating the behavior of famous figures of the same gender, learners can find motivation to learn, develop a sense of gender pride and identity, and establish and promote their own unique values. Therefore, the famous figures cited in textbooks have an important guiding role in the establishment of learners' gender perspective.

The lack of prominent female role models in textbooks can have serious consequences. The serious omission of female prominent figures in the New English Grammar Course not only exacerbates the social devaluation and questioning of women's abilities, but also increases the sense of marginalization, alienation, and alienation of female learners, ultimately leading to a decline in their motivation to learn and an inability to identify with their own gender. The absence of famous female figures and prominent roles reduces the number of role models for women to identify with, which is not conducive to women's struggle for social status and the realization of their values in life. This problem needs to be addressed urgently.

## 5. Improvement Suggestions

Under the gender perspective, the suggestions for textbook development basically focus on the following points: First, strengthen gender sensitivity in textbook development, consciously enhance female participation, and improve the three-dimensional image of women; second, strict textbook review rules, and incorporate gender perspective into the evaluation system of textbooks; third, focus on gender equality education in teaching activities, and improve the shortcomings in textbooks; fourth, grasp the pulse of the times, examine the gender role of women in the perspective of the new era, and cultivate students' awareness of equality.

There has been a lot of criticism about the stereotypical portrayal of women in various textbooks, and there has been no end to the improvement and refinement of each textbook, but few of them have really solved the problem in essence. We can even see that some textbooks still use the "stereotypical method" to solve the "stereotype" which mechanically increasing the number of female characters, citing allusions to famous female figures, and glorifying the qualities of female characters. This is a half-hearted effort. This is a half-hearted attempt to increase the number of stereotypical female characters, cite "famous women" from the male perspective, and celebrate the "good qualities" of women in a male-dominated society. To solve this problem at the root, we must increase the participation of female editors, establish a female-oriented female perspective, let women look at women themselves, let women tell women's stories, and build a complete, realistic, three-dimensional image of women.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, based on the sociolinguistic perspective, the quantitative method and the text analysis method can reveal that there are a large number of texts containing gender stereotypes in *A New English Grammar Coursebook (sixth edition)*. This problem is reflected in: first, there is a huge difference in the number of subject occurrences between men and women, and there are a large number of masculine words and masculine subject personal pronouns; second, there are stereotypes in the characterization of women; third, women have low professional participation and low social role status; fourth, the number of references to famous female characters is low and the fields involved are narrow. The existence of these problems will intensify the stereotypical image of women in society, which is not conducive to female learners' establishment of gender identity, sense of belonging, and pursuit of their deserved social status. Therefore, we should increase the participation of female workers in the textbook writing team, so that women can truly participate in the construction of female characters and establish a female-oriented way of thinking and perspective, so that women's stories can be incorporated into textbooks and transmitted to the world.

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