Gender representation in 'Top-Notch' series: A critical discourse analysis perspective

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate aspects of gender as represented in one of the currently used English language series, namely, *Top Notch Series* from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective. This series is widely used for adult language learners from beginner to advanced levels in numerous Iranian language institutes. In effect, the study analyzed the series in terms of three major aspects of gender (relations, positions, and content). To this end, Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model, as a well-established CDA model, which emphasizes the importance of language/power relationship, was adopted in order to extract the ideologies comprising the foundation of this series. The findings revealed that the series represents both genders in a somewhat balanced way. In addition, the series presents both genders equally in such a way that stereotypical norms ingrained into learners are nearly removed. Furthermore, this textbook is argued to have adopted the discourse of marketing and advertising by exploiting both genders, especially the females.

Keywords: gender; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); ideology; Top-Notch; EFL

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1. Introduction

The world of large-scale commerce, industry and technology like the world of certain human sciences, is an international world and it is linguistically dominated by English almost everywhere, regardless of how well-established and well-protected local cultures, languages and identities may be. The spread of English as a global language has been viewed as both a blessing and a curse. From one view, it has connected people, but at the same time, it has resulted in cultural and linguistic leveling. ELT materials such as textbooks are the primary resources which exercise their power to manipulate learners' opinions and beliefs regarding different socio-cultural issues. The investigation of ELT materials is a demanding task since, as Skelton (1997) stated, a kind of '*hidden curriculum*' might be imposed on the learners. He defined the hidden curriculum as

> *"(a) set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behavior and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory, non-linear and punctuational and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way"* (p. 188).

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) is able to uncover the hidden and implicit ideology in various texts. It unveils the underlying ideological preconceptions and as a result the exercise of power in texts (Widdowson, 2000). CDA is a domain of critical applied linguistics that studies "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enhanced, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 352). CDA aims primarily at identifying socio-political inequalities that exist in society.

English language teaching is in the forefront when it comes to questions of value and ideology. This way of looking at language and English language textbooks is seriously considered by Fairclough (2001) and he calls it critical language study (CLS). This is where the critical pedagogy (henceforth CP), as an approach with the predilection for making learners think critically, came into the scene to show the constitutive effects of the curriculum in making up normative perspective of social issues such as gender, class, etc., in constructing subjectivities and identities.

Thus, critical thinking, according to Ansari and Babaii (2003), is crucial for everyone to live in a world loaded with high-tech industries in which huge expansion of information is a natural and normal thing. In effect, every individual needs to be a critical thinker in order to discover "biases, prejudices and misinformation" (Ansari & Babaii, 2003, p. 67). Recently, critical thinking as an important issue in educational contexts attracted the attention of many researchers. It seems that Iranian students reluctantly accept ideas and the issues presented in the textbooks. Therefore, with assistance of the teachers, learners should be guided to develop skills to think and read more critically; also, they should be instructed on how to unmask texts laden with values as social norms and ideologies. Obviously, representation of gender in language cannot be adequately described unless cultural and sociopolitical specifics of individual languages are considered.

One of the main issues represented in any textbook including ELT textbooks is the issue of gender. In effect, ELT textbooks among other textbooks are the places of portraying and challenging gender. In other words, gender biases shape the mental models of both genders in which sexism is transmitted to them by which their learning might be affected negatively. Accordingly, wrong and even harmful "gender roles and social values" (Gershuny, 1977, p. 150) are perpetuated. Admittedly, investigating this issue may demystify the perspectives and ideologies behind the way gender is formed. In achieving this aim, three major aspects of gender (relations, positions and content) are supposed to be scrutinized in the conversations of *Top Notch* series in order to shed light on the particular ideologies governing its preparation.

Fairclough (1989) began his critical studies by developing the theory of 'critical language study' (CLS), which explores the connections between language use and relations of power. It is adopted here as a model of analysis of the selected ELT textbook. With an explicit neo-Marxist political agenda, Fairclough saw an increased consciousness of how language contributed to the domination of some people by others as the first step towards emancipation. CDA posits a recursive relationship between language and power. Discourse is seen as both socially constituted and socially constitutive as it produces objects of knowledge, social identities, and relationships between people (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Here, discourse does not just describe things; it does things.

1.1 Significance of the study

It is obvious that evaluating the materials used in EFL classrooms is a demanding job since materials and especially textbooks comprise the second main resources after the teacher that language learners have access to. Therefore, there is no doubt regarding the crucial role played by textbooks in language learning (Ansari & Babaii, 2003; Nazeri, 2010; Esmaili, 2011). One of the issues recently attracted the attention of researchers, especially the critical discourse analysts, is the investigation of gender bias or sexism in different domains including textbooks.

Sexism is something learnt from childhood expressing the ways in which some unconscious cultural biases are communicated through females and through which some negative traits are ascribed to females and the stereotyped roles are reinforced for female characters (Mineshima, 2008). In this regard, Gershuny (1977) warned against sexism and stated that although textbooks are supposed to instruct some discipline, in fact, these textbooks view secondary information that is "gender roles or social values"(p. 150). Consequently, if there is any sexism or gender bias in any textbook, there is the possibility of the pitfall that learners internalize this biased information and their learning may be negatively affected.

Therefore, all aspects of schooling including teachers and textbooks designers, along with attitudes of all members of a given school transmit a huge number of values to the students. In such a pedagogical realm, values resting in textbooks seem to be important because students are in interaction with them both inside and outside the classrooms.

Thus, students are exposed to values both societal as well as ideological ones through many aspects of the textbooks including pictures, examples, conversations, reading passages, discussion questions, and many other skill-based activities. Similarly, gender as closely related to ideology, has different representations in different ELT textbooks based on cultural, societal, and ideological norms and values of the society where they are published, and English language learners are exposed to these representations through different aspects of schooling. However, there have been few studies on gender representation in English discourses on the basis of ideological differences with regard to gender.

Another aspect of the significance of the present study is that the findings of the study clarify the critical roles of teachers and learners. As mentioned earlier, good language teachers in order to compensate for the shortcomings of textbooks with regard to gender representation, need to adopt some more critical approaches in their classrooms. They are able to create an atmosphere so that they can provide a forum for critical analysis in which both learners and teachers can question issues related to gender, culture, and ideology. Likewise, learners need to be reflective; that is, they should think about their own intentions to challenge and question their own practices, and to be responsible as participatory agents for the construction of societal ideals, values, and structures.

1.2 Research questions

Considering the above-mentioned merits of Fairclough's model, and working within the CDA framework originally developed by Fairclough (1989), this study investigates how gender is represented in the conversations

of *Top Notch* series, a popular language textbook series taught in Iranian language institutes. This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How is gender represented in *Top Notch* series?

2. Is there any difference between the roles played by males and females in *Top Notch* series?

2. Literature review

Language as a social practice is representative of multifaceted and complicated social issues in which a socio-cognitive perspective seems to be crucial in investigating such a discursive phenomenon. Gender is one of the issues entangled in the language textbooks, which represent norms and values of societies, ideologies or even cultures. It is obvious that investigating language textbooks is crucial in order to shed light on the socio-cultural environment through manifesting gender representation.

From 1970s to late 1980s, some gender-related books such as Key's (1975) Male/Female language, Thorne and Henley's (1975) Difference and Dominance, Hartman and Judd's (1978) Sexism and TESOL Materials, Helinger's (1980) For Men Must Work, Women Must Weep, were crucial in the study of language and gender. The same types of behavioral stereotypes have been noted by most of these researchers: women are typically depicted as passive, dependent, generally weak, and physically attractive, and men as active, independent and strong (Hartman & Judd, 1978).

In recent decades, a number of researchers have turned their attention to gender stereotyping and the underrepresentation of females in school textbooks and children's books. The same types of behavioral stereotypes have been noted in the literature: women are typically depicted as passive, dependent, generally weak and physically attractive, men as active, independent and strong (Hartman & Judd, 1978).

Coles (1977) examined five sets of adult's education materials and found out that men outnumbered women by a ratio of 3:1. He also demonstrated that in textbooks women are expected to have just traditional, passive, and stereotyped occupations, and work as housewives. By contrast, males had 73 different occupations, ranging from truck driving to medical jobs. In general, women managed little and owned nothing, while men holding a large number of unskilled jobs, were the predominant occupants of skilled, managerial, and ownership positions (p. 42).

Nilsen (1977) analyzed words of females and males in a standard dictionary. Her analysis revealed a number of inequalities towards women and men, reflected in the vocabulary. There were more than five times as many words for things named after men. Words for women reflected a passive role. Women were referred to as different foods and flowers (e.g. peach, wallflower, etc.). Men were called by such words such as wolf, while women were restricted to names for helpless creatures such as chick and kitten.

Hoomes (1978) conducted a systematic examination of 28 high school literature anthologies for grades 9 through 12 and finally found out that the overall ratio of total female characters to total male characters in the books were 1:3.5. She also found out that the mean ratio of available professions for females to those for males was 1:5 in texts and 1:7 in illustrations.

Porreca (1984) investigated how sexism is manifested in ESL textbooks and with what consequences. In a content analysis of 15 widely-used ESL textbooks, she focused on the categories of the ratio of females and males in texts and illustrations, the matter of first- ness, occupations, types and frequency of adjectives, and the frequency of male nouns to female nouns. In every category of her study, she found out that "there is evidence that sexism continues to flourish in ESL textbooks" (p. 718).

Again, Greenwald (1988) analyzed the content of 30 business section front pages in the Columbus Dispatch in Ohio. The researcher coded each page in terms of number of photos and stories, number of stories about

women, stories referring to women as expert sources or spokespersons, stories having a female byline, and number of photos depicting at least one woman.

Sunderland's (1991) '*Gender in the EFL classroom*' is an overview of issues and research in three areas in which gender manifests itself in the EFL classroom. The English language materials (grammar, textbooks, dictionaries, and teacher's guides), and processes (learning styles and strategies, and teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction) were investigated. This article also briefly examines some implications of gender in materials and classroom interaction for language acquisition.

In another study by Dominguez (2003), the interchange Intro was investigated. After the exact analysis, Dominguez stated that there is a balance, generally of male and female representation throughout the book (male: 233 and female: 174). Another issue is that they are wearing casual attire and depicted as being of European background. They do not show any particular race and /or dress code. The setting is quite neutral- the hallway of school; they stand talking to their classmates. At the end, the researcher concludes that the author, Jack C. Richards, does not appear to present any sexist bias.

Lee and Collins (2008) also examined whether the later development of awareness of gender issues in Hong Kong compared to Australia is reflected in patterns of gender representation in the English language textbooks published in these two places. A comparison of 10 currently-used Australian books with 10 Hong Kong books revealed that such awareness has impacted most on the use of gender-inclusive terms and symmetrical phrases in both places. The Australian writers tended to use generic form while their Hong Kong counterparts preferred either 'he' or 'she' or 'generic' he. Both sets of writers maintained the convention of male-first presentation, depicted women in a more limited range of social roles, and presented stereotyped images of women as weaker and more passive than men, and   as operating primarily within domestic domains. The visual representations also reinforced traditional gendered roles. Hong Kong textbook writers, nevertheless, paid more heed to the inclusion of females visually. Controversy exists over whether textbook writers should reflect reality or whether they should lead social changes and strive for gender equality.

Most recently, however, the Iranian researchers, Bahman and Rahimi (2010) attempted to examine different areas of gender-bias in representation of women and men in three volumes of English textbooks taught in high schools of Iran. They tried to find the frequency of names, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives attributed to women and men. They also tried to investigate whether women and men had more or less equal first-place occurrences in instruction, exercises, and sentences. The findings revealed that the manifestation of women and men in these books was not fair. In other words, the presence of men was more highlighted than that of women regarding names, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives attributed to male characters appeared more frequently than female characters. Moreover, these textbooks contained many male-generics in which women were almost invisible. Also, sexism was detected in regard to animal representation.

In another research, Nazeri (2010) compared textbooks from internationally to locally produced ones, New Interchange series to high school textbooks. The analysis revealed the Interchange series as an internationally distributed series mostly taught in numerous Iran's private institutes tend to define gender in capitalist economy and modern world of North American culture in spite of the author's effort to neutralize gender and consciously represent gender and avoid stereotypical norms with regard to both females and males. Moreover, in the locally produced textbooks used in high schools in Iran, conversations are de-gendered and gender issue benefiting a high position in social studies remains ambiguous in these textbooks because they just focus on grammatical features without any regard for its communicative and/or cultural functions. Moreover, neither of these textbooks represents a critical perspective toward gender and promotes passivity rather than critical engagement on the part of teachers and students.

Esmaili (2011) also made a comparative study on gender representation between two series of American Headway and Iranian High School English Textbooks with a CDA perspective. She revealed that both series suffer from sexism or gender bias. In her investigation, she argued that American Headway Series follows a

sexism attitude merged with ideology of capitalism economy. Furthermore, she revealed that Iranian High School English Textbooks apparently instill culture as ideology by which females are discriminated or excluded consistently and systematically in such a way in which separation or even segregation between two genders is remained.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials

An ELT textbook series, namely, *Top Notch* series was selected as the materials of this study. The Top Notch Series are multiple-skills general English textbooks authored by John Saslow and Allen Ascher (2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d), which is published by Pearson Education in 2006. The textbook was republished during the following years. *Top Notch*, a dynamic 6-level course for international communication uses the natural language that people really speak. With a learner-centered approach, the *Top Notch* series consist of student's books, workbooks, and teacher's books along with CD and printable activities as well as TV Video programs. These extra materials are useful in that they provide authentic material for foreign students. There are four volumes of *Top Notch*, namely, *Top Notch* Fundamentals, *Top Notch* 1, *Top Notch* 2, and *Top Notch* 3. The volumes consist of 14, 10, 10, and 10 units respectively. Each unit consists of four core modules: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. All skills are presented in three phases of warm-up or review phase, model phase and pair work or practice phase. It provides students an opportunity to confirm their own progress at the end of every two-page lesson. Vocabulary and grammar instructions are presented in context in order to provide a real situation for use. Overall, this book seems to be motivating for both the instructors and students, because of the colorful layout and well-organized presentation of the material on the one hand and authentic language provided in most sections of the course-book on the other hand. In effect, the conversations of the Top Notch series were analyzed based on a model designed and adopted according to the principles of CDA in general and Fairclough's (2001) model in particular.

3.2 Model of analysis

The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates the Fairclough's (2001) model of critical analysis based on which the present study was carried out. In the first part, for analyzing the texts, i.e., conversations, some factors were extracted. In effect, *female and male's characters, female and male's social roles*, and *their positions* were analyzed and described. In addition, the extracted data were interpreted based on the concept of member resources (MR) suggested by Fairclough. This step leads to social roles, subject positions as well as content or themes of the topics spoken by interlocutors. Finally, the extracted data were explained in order to gain deeper insights into the role of ideology in the textbooks series under investigation. In this study, relations, subjects, and contents were tabled to find about those dimensions of meaning which were emphasized in relation to male and female characters.
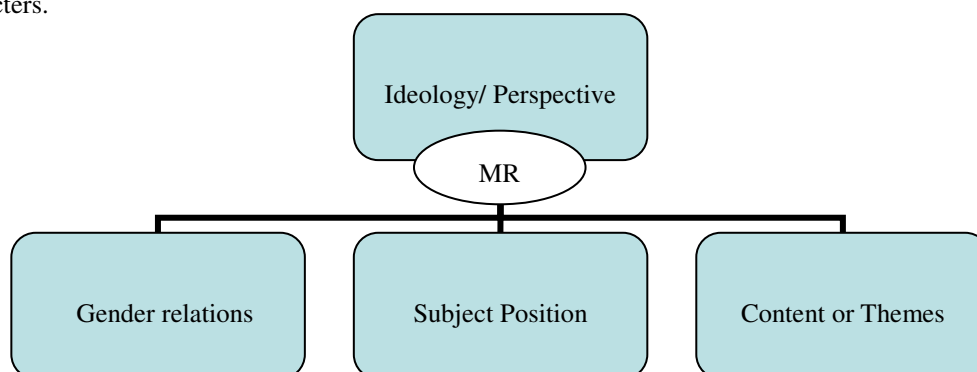

Figure 1. The model of analysis based on Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model

3.3 Procedure

The main thrust of this study was to determine the ideological practices behind the *Top Notch series*. Each of the following categories was investigated to determine if the conversations of the *Top Notch series* are sufficiently gender-balanced or if a significant imbalance exists. To this end, the following procedure was followed:

Dimensions of meaning - A statistical survey of all gender presentations in *the Top Notch* textbooks was done to classify the dimensions of meaning, as enumerated before into a comprehensible set of data. In other words, the number of occurrences of each aspect of meaning, that is, content, relation, and subject positions were counted through the textbooks and the data obtained were tabulated to get a clear picture of gender representation. The rational for examining these dimensions was to see which aspects of meaning with regard to both genders were emphasized or de-emphasized because these choices can reflect the approach these textbooks take in order to manage gender issues.

Relations - In order to classify social relations, each textbook was reviewed page by page and relations were counted any time two characters in the dialogs were in verbal communication and they were denoted by two words divided by a hyphen such as teacher-student or female-male. The number of occurrences of male and female relationships was separately counted one by one for conversations in each textbook. The frequency of these relations was separately counted for both females and males in each textbook and finally these relations were counted altogether for all these textbooks to find out the relations between males and females. Then, all the identified relations were classified into equal and unequal positions. The purpose of this classification was to identify the unequal positions in these relations and finally to recognize which gender had occupied superior position. One point should be noted here is that when counting relations, repetitions were also counted, i. e., if one person was present in two or three relations in the same position these two or three relations were all taken into account.

Subject positions - According to Fairclough (1989), "*all three dimensions of meaning, (relations, subjects, and contents) overlap and co-occur in practice, but it is helpful to distinguish them*" (p. 46). An occurrence of a subject position was counted every time interlocutors in a conversation talked to each other. The subject positions which each gender possessed were grouped in five categories: family, societal, commercial, occupational, and other subject positions. If an interlocutor appeared to be functioning in more than one subject position, the one which seemed more salient in the context was selected. If one subject position could not be put in other categories or it could not be clearly specified, it just denoted the functions they played in conversations but not in their real positions outside the conversations.

The data on subject positions does not include *friends* since the presence of this category is revealed in the data on relations. Thus, repeating it seemed to add little of interest and would simply confuse matters since those falling in this category were often performing other subject positions concurrently. Subjects are defined more specifically than relations before their placement in super-ordinate.

Contents - Classification of contents proved to be the most challenging of all since they simply defy easy classification and, therefore managing all the data was difficult. First, the topic of each dialog for each textbook was separately tabled. Then, the whole data obtained from all dialogues in all these selected textbooks were classified into 12 categories containing various matters. These content categories are sensitive to gender representation. Then content categories were selected in order to explore gender inequalities in these textbooks. For each content category, number of occurrences of relations between females and males was counted. Finally, the overall number of their occurrences for all textbooks was presented. Gender visibility, as another dimension, was explored for each content category and was consequently examined quantitatively. Characters present in each conversation were enumerated in order to investigate gender visibility.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out the relations that exist in the conversations of *Top Notch* series as well as to identify the unequal positions distributed between females and males. Subsequently, it was revealed that both genders nearly play equal relations and positions. As the following tables show, the most outstanding relation that exists in the conversations is friend-friend relation. Out of 133 relations existing in the *Top Notch* series, 35% belongs to friend-friend relations. This is indicative of emphasis on social equals and, therefore, equality in relationship between males and females. Likewise, as the table 1 shows if we consider other relations with two identical positions, it is indicated that 57% of relations are unquestionably between two social equals. As represented in the following two tables, the frequency of equal relations is more than the frequency of unequal relations.

Table 1

Frequency of equal relations

Equal Relations (X-Y)	No. of Incidents	Female as "X"	Male as "X"	Female as "y"	Male as "y"
Friend – Friend	50	24	26	20	19
Student – Student	8	5	3	4	4
Colleague – Colleague	11	4	7	4	7
Passenger- Passenger	2	0	2	2	0
Clerk – Clerk	1	0	1	1	0
Operator – Operator	2	0	2	2	0
Neighbor –Neighbor	2	2	0	2	0
Total	76	35	41	35	30

With regards to gender, the frequency of positions that each gender possesses in these equal relations is almost equally distributed. Each gender almost possesses the frequency of half of these relations which is indicative of approximately equal positions of both genders in the relation dimension in the *Top Notch* series.

Table 2 below shows that out of the overall frequency of 126, 39.7% of relations are between unequal positions. However, these unequal relations are not suggestive of superiority of one position over the other. The table showed that husband–wife, salesperson-customer and host–guest relations comprise the highest relations in the Top Notch series.

Table 2

Frequency of unequal relations

Unequal Relations (X - Y)	No. of Incidents	Female as "X"	Male as "X"	Female as "y"	Male as "Y"
Teacher- Students	1	1	0	0	1
Husband – Wife	8	3	5	5	3
Salesperson- Customer	10	6	4	4	6
Foreigner – Citizen	5	3	2	3	2
Waiter – Customer	2	1	1	1	1
Ticket seller-Passenger	1	0	1	1	0
Mechanics – Driver	1	0	1	0	1
Borrower – Lender	2	1	1	1	1
Clerk – Customer	2	2	0	0	2
Secretary – Customer	4	2	2	3	1
Host – guest	6	4	2	3	3
Receptionist – Citizen	2	1	1	1	1
Engineer – Operator	1	0	1	0	1
Repairman – Customer	2	1	1	1	1
Agent - Car renter	1	0	1	1	0
Shopper – Clerk	1	1	0	0	1
Guest – Clerk	1	0	1	1	0
Total	50	26	24	25	25

The following table illustrates the similarities and differences between the three categorizations of relations. As it is shown in the following table, 43% of relations belong to female-male relations. In addition, female-female relations have the percentage of 30% and male-male relations 23% out of total relations.

Table 3

Total relations in Top Notch series

Relations	Number of occurrence	% of relations
Female-Male	57	43%
Female-Female	40	30%
Male – Male	31	23%
Not Specified	4	4%
Total	132	100%

The subject positions for all the interactants in all conversations in the *Top Notch* series were investigated in five categories of family, societal, commercial, occupational and other. As it can be seen in the tables 4 and 5 with 27.5% and 30% for females and males respectively of total subject positions, the fifth category possesses the highest percentage. It is obvious that the interlocutors in this group do not belong to any other categories and their subject positions are not clearly specified. The positions considered for them are their positions in the conversations and pictorial representations in which they interact. If the total percentage for both genders is counted, it can be viewed that females possess 49.5% of subject positions, and males 50.5%. Hence, the subject positions are almost equally distributed between both genders.

Table 4

Female subject positions in the Top Notch series

Family	Societal	Commercial	Occupational	Other
11%	18%	15%	18%	27.5%

Table 5

Male subject positions in the Top Notch series

Family	Societal	Commercial	Occupational	Other
9.5%	16.5%	21%	23%	30%

As represented in the above tables, comparison between females and males with regard to subject positions showed that the frequency of family subject positions as well as societal and commercial subject positions, for females, is more than those of males. However, these differences in comparison with other categories are minimal. As for occupational subject positions, the frequency of males' subject positions is more than females.

In general, for both genders equally, there is a heavy emphasis on positioning the language learner within market economy. If occupational and commercial subject positions are grouped under the more general category of market subjects, it accounts for 33% for females and 44% for males, which are higher than other four groups. This conclusion is in line with conclusion drawn by Fairclough noted earlier.

The individual topics treated in each conversation are enumerated in table 6 in order to get a clear idea about the active or passive presence of any gender in which the content were classified into 12 general categories. Afterwards, the frequency of relations between females and males for each content category was counted for all the textbooks separately. Table 6 shall shed light on these analyses.

Comparison between females and males with regard to subject positions showed that the frequency of family subject positions as well as societal and commercial subject positions, for females is more than males. However, these differences in comparison with other categories are minimal. It can be argued that some imbalances still persist in socially 'more important' areas. For example, the fifth category in the following table has twice the representation for men compared with women. It is worth mentioning that even if gender

imbalances in terms of how they are represented is not verified overall, imbalances still may persist in socially 'more important' areas, thereby indicating some forms of discrimination while results from other socially important areas such as the second and the sixth categories may balance this out. Generally speaking, the series seems to follow a fair perspective regarding both genders at least as far as the conversations are concerned. Accordingly, the first, second, sixth and ninth categories dedicated more portions to females, and third, fifth and twelfth categories to males. The findings revealed that greeting and small talks, customs around the world, entertainment, personality, psychology, healthy food, physical activities, staying in shape and fitness are the most frequent categories of the content covered by the conversations.

Table 6

Content categories in Top Notch series

Content / Category	Female Characters	Male Characters
1. Greeting and small talks, customs around the world, entertainment	36	29
2. Personality, psychology, healthy food, physical activities, staying in shape and fitness	25	15
3. Names, occupations, nationalities, people relationship, members of family,	9	15
4. Home and work, weather, ongoing activities, world customs, holidays and traditions	6	6
5. Controversial issues, governments and political terms	4	8
6. Coping with technology, inventions, means of transportation, Living with computer	11	7
7. Staying in a hotel, choose a hotel, international buffet, ordering something	3	3
8. Cars and driving, accident, service station, disasters and unexpected events	9	9
9. Shopping smart, money and travel, bargain for a lower price	4	2
10. Time and events, date and week days, months of year	13	11
11. Clothes, compliment about clothes, compare opinions about clothes	5	6
12. Abilities and requests, accept and decline an invitation	2	5
Total	132	116

It seems that the series, unlike some of other investigated ELT international textbooks (e.g. Headway or Interchange series), attempt to take a neutral position regarding both genders although the series is entangled in gender discrimination and presented females and males with a bit sexist attitude. In effect, almost several previously investigated materials revealed that ELT textbooks are deeply ingrained with sexism. However, investigating *Top Notch* series revealed no noticeable traces of sexism at least in the conversations.

The review of literature related to sexism shows that females occupy a lower status in comparison to the males; accordingly, this issue needs to be considered in designing and developing any ELT textbooks. It is worth emphasizing that the series seems to take this issue into consideration since no noticeable traces of sexism were observed. In effect, most relations of the conversations of the series belong to female-male relations as it was discussed. The subject positions of all the interlocutors in all the conversations in the series were summarized in the previous part. It was revealed that the fifth category is the highest percentage of the five categories. It means that the positions of both genders are not recognizable in the most conversations. Furthermore, it was revealed that males were much superior in terms of occupational category. Finally, the categories of appearance, love, friendship and experiences present women more active in comparison with men; on the other hand, politics as well as occupational issues are attached to men. It seems that the series tries to depict both genders almost equally.

To sum up, the series presents both genders in a somewhat equal manner with some exceptions. The

ideology that leads this series seems to be capitalist-oriented since the content and the theme of the conversations are market-oriented. This ideology tries to expand the economic system in which private ownerships, private productions and private benefits are celebrated. Capitalism inculcates the values and norms related to market as supply, demand, price, distribution, and investment by exploiting both genders especially the females.

5.   Conclusions and implications

The major intent in the analysis of the *Top Notch* series was to investigate gender representation in order to extract the ideology that directed the way based on which both genders were depicted. This study revealed that the series under investigation depicted a more balanced picture of both genders. In addition, the findings of this study showed that gender representation in the series is reflective of the ideology by which both females and males were represented in these textbooks; this issue denotes what is interpreted by Skelton (1997) as the 'hidden curriculum' imposed on students.

It is evident that some particular values and norms perpetuating throughout these textbooks are inculcated to learners in order to shape the living way expected from them to follow. According to Fairclough (2001), capitalism economy is an ideology which aims to expand the economic system in which private ownerships, private productions and private benefits are celebrated. Further studies on other similar ELT textbooks can provide us with further insights into the status of ideology in educational materials and shed light on the critical role played by textbooks as a powerful means of achieving the instructional objectives.

As Dandapat and Sengupta (2012) rightly stated, gender stereotyping needs to be dealt with in the earliest stages in one's life. "The gender specific roles they observe around them … conveys traditional gender roles and stereotypes on what girls and boys 'should' be or do, it is likely that they will try to fit as much as possible with this model, hence, by triggering the cycle of inequalities between women and men throughout life. (pp. 88-89). They further added that

> *"a consorted and coordinated action in different areas, including awareness raising of parents, teachers, peer groups and the members of the society, reform of education systems and material and new legislation concerning the media is therefore highly necessary. This requires a reformation of the whole society"* (p. 89)

The findings of the present study are beneficial for language teachers, language learners, textbook designers, and textbook publishers. The findings of this research suggest that a good language teacher needs to adopt a critical outlook towards the sociolinguistic studies. In effect, s/he may discuss gender-related issues with the students with a critical point of view, a point that is ignored by many teachers. Moreover, the findings imply that teachers need to develop professional knowledge and expertise by reflection and self-analysis. For instance, teachers can pay further attention to different events taking place in the classroom with a critical point of view.

Furthermore, it is recommended that education programs provide teachers strategies by which they can handle the shortcomings and ideologies behind gender representation in ELT materials. In fact, teachers are expected to ask themselves how, for instance, this particular textbook presents both genders.

The results of this study are beneficial for textbooks designers, too since textbooks as significant instruments play a crucial role in social improvement of the society. In other words, textbooks designers need to take the issue of gender representation into consideration in order to develop textbooks in which the social matters including the roles played by both genders are presented in a neutral way so that the students might develop an enriched perspective toward the roles expected to be performed by them.

The findings of this study may also be of interest to policy makers since the effects of market ideology and the norms and values inculcated through textbooks should be considered in order to prevent cultural misunderstanding. Finally, the findings of this research will also hopefully offer some insights to educators and

language researchers, especially critical discourse analysts in that the present study provides them with a practical analysis of gender-related issues.

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