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メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2007-12-26 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 立木, ドナ, Tatsuki, Donna メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://kobe-cufs.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/612

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Doing Gender in Ministry of Education Approved Textbooks

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Critical Discourse Analysis studies examine text and talk within the context of institutional settings like that of the classroom and have shown how text/talk functions to maintain social order. Language can act to both reinforce as well as to challenge the status quo's perceptions and expectations of gender and ethnicity. In other words, language can reinforce both true facts and false beliefs—our words are never neutral (Fiske, 1994). “We should never again speak, or read/hear others' words, without being conscious of the underlying meaning of the words. Our words are politicized, even if we are not aware of it, because they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak” (McGregor, 2003). Knowing this, we should be very careful about the language in textbooks to ensure that they are not carrying a hidden curriculum.

Yet it is rare to find foreign language textbook analyses focusing on both gender and ethnicity as social, cultural and educational constructs (see however, Dominguez, 2003). Knudsen (2003) notes that even in the highly advanced Nordic countries (advanced in terms of gender studies) “such gender perspectives are rarely reflected in textbooks or textbook research” (p. 1). Knudsen reports that gender research as it has been done in Europe and North America falls into three varieties: 1) Gender as Category, 2) Gender as Construction, and 3) Gender as Deconstruction. Knudsen suggests that future research methodologies should follow three steps in the research process by

using “research in gender as category and gender as construction before moving into gender as deconstruction” (p.2) as well as working with wild practices and remnant capital analysis, looking for the meaningless, the staged and the fragmented.

This study will follow the three steps that Knudsen proposes in order to understand how gender (and ethnicity) is being done in Japanese Junior High School foreign language textbooks. This study may be timely since a large proportion of Ministry of Education approved foreign language textbooks are written by committees predominated by middle-aged Japanese males. It is one of the tenets of CDA that the words we speak or write are purposeful—they are not arbitrary—regardless of whether the choices are conscious or unconscious (Sheyholislami, 2001). Research of this kind is of interest because textbooks may inadvertently contribute to cultural prejudices and personal biases that learners, unwittingly and unfortunately, absorb as a byproduct of study.

The first stage of this research involves looking at gender as a category. Knudsen states, “The potential of analysis using gender as a category is that the invisible women, and invisible women’s lives, can be made visible” (p. 3). Naming, identities, roles and verbosity will be the means of describing the nature of gender and ethnicity based visibility in MEXT textbooks.

Whether a character is named or unnamed is an important part of visibility. Half of all female characters, whether Japanese or foreign were named and half were unnamed whereas male characters were more likely to be named, especially if Japanese (See Table 1). It was interesting to note that almost twice as many Japanese males were named rather than unnamed yet overall they comprised the smallest pool of characters—in the case of *New Crown*, there was only one Japanese male character—a teacher with no first name. The textbook, *Total English* had very few characters yet all were named except for one foreign female—a shop clerk. *Sunshine* had the most characters yet none of its foreign females merited a name—in fact the majority

of its characters remained nameless—more foreigners than Japanese and more females than males.

Table 1. Named and Non-named Characters

	J-f		J-m		NJ-f		NJ-m		Text Total
	+N	-N	+N	-N	+N	-N	+N	-N	
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	3	5	2	5	0	8	4	6	33
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	2	2	2	0	3	2	3	0	14
<i>Total English 1</i>	3	0	2	0	2	1	1	0	9
<i>New Crown 1</i>	2	2	1	0	5	0	2	0	12
<i>Columbus 21</i>	2	5	6	3	3	2	3	5	29
<i>One World</i>	2	0	2	1	3	2	3	1	14
Sub totals	12	14	15	9	16	15	16	12	
Total	26		23		31		28		

In terms of the distribution of named roles or identities students make up the majority in all categories. It is interesting that there are no family member characters for either male or female Japanese teachers whereas ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers [foreign teachers]) both female and male have named family members in the stories. Among ALTs with names, most (6) are female yet in the case of Japanese teachers, most are male (5).

The un-named or non-named characters tell another story. Only females play the role of unnamed clerks and most of those are foreign. Female students whether Japanese or foreign make up the majority of nameless students too and both foreign and Japanese mothers appear without names in these texts—Japanese fathers are absent completely thus are neither named nor unnamed but foreign fathers when present have names. Surprisingly, 4 male (foreign) ALTs are present in the texts without names whereas all female ALTs have names.

The popular stereotype that females talk more than males is held up in the textbooks *Total English* and *Columbus 21* (Table 2). In all other texts the amount of speech is virtually even or only slightly higher for males.

Table 2. Verbosity by Gender

	f	m	?	m/f	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	631 (34)	664 (35)	583 (31)	0	1878
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	424 (43)	438 (45)	118 (12)	3	980
<i>Total English 1</i>	510 (40)	293 (23)	477 (37)	13	1280
<i>New Crown 1</i>	510 (42)	514 (43)	177 (15)	0	1201
<i>Columbus 21</i>	641 (45)	579 (40)	219 (15)	0	1439
<i>One World</i>	49 (32)	447 (35)	410 (32)	0	1266

Percentages in parentheses

Table 3. Verbosity by Ethnicity

	f	m	?	m/f	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	791 (42)	504 (27)	583 (31)	1878	791 (42)
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	280 (29)	582 (59)	118 (12)	980	280 (29)
<i>Total English 1</i>	363 (29)	440 (45)	477 (49)	1280	363 (29)
<i>New Crown 1</i>	531 (44)	496 (41)	177 (15)	1201	531 (44)
<i>Columbus 21</i>	620 (43)	600 (42)	219 (15)	1439	620 (43)
<i>One World</i>	341 (26)	515 (41)	410 (33)	1266	341 (26)

Percentages in parentheses

In two textbooks (*New Crown* and *Columbus 21*) verbosity based on ethnicity was about even (Table 3). Only in one textbook (*Sunshine*) was verbosity highest among Japanese characters—in all 3 other texts the foreign characters spoke the most. When gender and ethnicity are considered together, Japanese female characters in the textbook *Sunshine* are the most verbose over all and foreign females in *Total English* speak more than any other group.

Table 4. Verbosity by Gender and Ethnicity

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	532 (28)	259 (14)	99 (5)	405 (22)	583 (31)	1878
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	153 (16)	127 (13)	271 (28)	311 (32)	118 (12)	980
<i>Total English 1</i>	208 (16)	155 (12)	302 (24)	138 (11)	477 (37)	1280
<i>New Crown 1</i>	302 (25)	229 (19)	208 (17)	285 (24)	177 (15)	1201
<i>Columbus 21</i>	230 (16)	390 (27)	411 (29)	189 (13)	219 (15)	1439
<i>One World</i>	155 (12)	186 (15)	254 (20)	261 (21)	410 (32)	1266

Percentages in parentheses

Gender (and ethnicity) can be used as positions that construct and maintain an ideology in which one group is subordinate to another. As Knudsen says, such a false gender ideology serves to “keep girls in a subordinate position and a traditional feminine identity.” In the following tables conversational turns and firstness will be considered.

Table 5. All Turns by Gender

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	99 (31)	112 (35)	111 (34)	0	322	99 (31)
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	82 (43)	84 (44)	23 (12)	1 (1)	190	82 (43)
<i>Total English 1</i>	87 (38)	45 (20)	90 (40)	4 (2)	226	87 (38)
<i>New Crown 1</i>	104 (43)	99 (41)	38 (16)	0	241	104 (43)
<i>Columbus 21</i>	110 (41)	105 (39)	53 (20)	0	268	110 (41)
<i>One World</i>	67 (30)	78 (35)	80 (36)	0	225	67 (30)

Percentages in parentheses

Although the overall number of turns is related to verbosity, the reason that I would like to look more closely is to contrast all turns with initial turns since the speaker who initiates a conversation may be setting the topic and possibly is in a stronger position to control the direction of the interaction. As would be expected the distribution of all turns by gender shows the similar pattern seen in the verbosity data.

Table 6. Initial Turns by Gender

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	17 (20)	27 (31)	42 (49)	0	86	17 (20)
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	13 (30)	22 (51)	8 (19)	0	43	13 (30)
<i>Total English 1</i>	16 (26)	13 (28)	31 (51)	1	61	16 (26)
<i>New Crown 1</i>	24 (38)	22 (34)	18 (28)	0	64	24 (38)
<i>Columbus 21</i>	15 (38)	14 (35)	11 (28)	0	40	15 (38)
<i>One World</i>	7 (17)	14 (33)	21 (50)	0	42	7 (17)

Percentages in parentheses

However, when we look at who starts the conversations, a different pattern emerges (see Table 6.). In the case of three textbooks (*Sunshine*, *New Horizon* and *One World*), males significantly out

perform females as the initiators of interactions even though in terms of verbosity they were about even. Yet in the case of *Total English*, even though females were more verbose, males initiate marginally more interactions. Only in *Columbus 21* does female verbosity seem to go with female initiation of conversations.

Table 7. All Turns by Ethnicity

	J	%	NJ	%	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	128	63%	76	37%	204
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	57	33%	114	66%	171
<i>Total English 1</i>	132	65%	71	35%	204
<i>New Crown 1</i>	147	60%	96	39%	244
<i>Columbus 21</i>	115	53%	100	46%	216
<i>One World</i>	61	42%	84	58%	145

Percentages in parentheses

Although verbosity in *New Crown* and *Columbus 21* was similarly distributed by ethnicity, when turns are considered, Japanese speakers appear to take the lead. In the case of *New Horizon* this switch is even more dramatic—Foreign speakers may be more verbose but Japanese speakers took more turns. And this pattern is upheld with respect to initial turns (see Table 8).

Table 8. Initial Turns by Ethnicity

	J	%	NJ	%	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	25 (30)	18 (22)	40 (48)	83%	25 (30)
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	9 (21)	22 (51)	12 (28)	43%	9 (21)
<i>Total English 1</i>	18 (31)	10 (17)	31 (53)	59%	18 (31)
<i>New Crown 1</i>	28 (44)	18 (28)	18 (28)	64%	28 (44)
<i>Columbus 21</i>	21 (54)	8 (21)	10 (26)	39%	21 (54)
<i>One World</i>	8 (19)	13 (31)	21 (50)	42%	8 (19)

Percentages in parentheses

However when ethnicity and gender are considered together the picture is more complex. For instance, in *Total English*, although Japanese characters take more turns, foreign females take more turns than any other group (see Table 9).

Table 9. All Turns by Gender and Ethnicity

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	80 (39)	48 (24)	16 (8)	55 (27)	5 (2)	204
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	30 (18)	24 (14)	52 (30)	60 (35)	5 (3)	171
<i>Total English 1</i>	37 (28)	28 (21)	51 (38)	18 (13)	71 (53)	134
<i>New Crown 1</i>	62 (31)	45 (22)	42 (21)	54 (27)	40 (20)	20
<i>Columbus 21</i>	47 (22)	68 (32)	63 (29)	37 (17)	53 (25)	215
<i>One World</i>	27 (19)	34 (23)	40 (28)	44 (30)	81 (56)	145

Percentages in parentheses

Yet when we look at who takes the initiative (see Table 10), in *Total English*, the foreign females are no longer in the lead. In the case of *Sunshine*, Japanese females were the most verbose (even compared with all other textbooks) yet initiated fewer interactions than foreign males. In the case of *One World*, foreign females and males were equally verbose yet when it came to initiating conversations, males initiated twice as often as females.

Table 10. Initial Turns by Gender and Ethnicity

	J-f	J-m	NJ-f	NJ-m	??	Total
<i>Sunshine 1</i>	15 (18)	10 (12)	2 (2)	16 (19)	40 (48)	83
<i>New Horizon 1</i>	5 (12)	4 (9)	5 (12)	17 (40)	12 (28)	43
<i>Total English 1</i>	9 (15)	9 (15)	7 (12)	3 (5)	31 (51)	59
<i>New Crown 1</i>	17 (27)	11 (17)	7 (11)	11 (17)	18 (28)	64
<i>Columbus 21</i>	10 (26)	11 (28)	5 (13)	3 (8)	10 (26)	39
<i>One World</i>	3 (7)	5 (12)	4 (10)	9 (21)	21 (50)	42

Percentages in parentheses

Firstness is another aspect of gender construction and Porreca (1984) defines it as "Given two nouns paired for sex, such as male/female, the masculine word always came first, with the exception of the pair ladies/gentlemen" (p.706). There were two overt examples of firstness--one in *Sunshine* and one in *Columbus 21* in which boys and girls are mentioned in that order. In the case of three other examples male family members are mentioned before females.

Woman Oh, my change! Thank you.
 Mike You're welcome.

In another dialogue a foreign male student is depicted as incompetent (losing bags, caps and being late). In yet another dialogue a foreign woman is criticized by her Japanese husband for driving too fast. The woman obediently validates the criticism of her husband.

New Horizon(66-67) Mike Oh, no! I'm late! Where's my ticket?
 Mother It's by the computer.
 Mike Where's my bag?
 Mother It's under the desk.
 Mike Where's my cap?
 Mother It's on your head!
 68 Judy You're late!
 Mike Sorry. ...

New Horizon 76 Emi Look! A deer!
 Koji Be careful, Lisa. Don't drive so fast.
 Lisa Oh, right. Thanks.

Knudsen writes, "Gender as deconstruction emphasizes how gender should be studied as staging and masquerade. Gender has to be analyzed SYMBOLICALLY. It is about 'Doing Gender', not about being a gender." (West & Zimmerman, 1987). "Gender is what you interpret and negotiate it to be. The way you cut your hair, for example, is a gender-sign on your body. Your hair is an interpretation of the sign 'woman' or 'man'" (Knudsen, 2003, p.5). In terms of staged images, five depicted females in non-traditional situations—it should be noted, however, that in every one of them, the female was also foreign.

But still some troubling images remain...consider two "meaningless" or twisted messages: There was a picture of a Japanese female declaring that she likes English but not Science. This image is unfairly

paired in the textbook with a Japanese boy who declares that he likes basketball but not soccer. This is hardly an equivalent juxtaposition. Furthermore, why would a language textbook make any learner practice the pattern “Ken speaks English well—I don’t speak English well” reinforced with the stereotypical gesture of male embarrassment. Taken all together these images coupled with the language in these textbooks becomes even more alarming if we recognize that language does not just reflect some aspect of reality—language is a central force in our continual creation and construction of reality (Bergquist & Szcpanaska, 2002; Borch, 2000; Peskett, 2001).

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