

Gender Representations in the Dialogs of an Italian as a Foreign Language Textbook

Representaciones de género en los diálogos de un libro de texto del italiano como lengua extranjera

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Abstract

The present study analyses gender representations in the dialogues of a textbook of Italian as a foreign language (IFL). While many studies focus on gender representations in textbooks of English as a foreign language, it appears that no studies have been done on these representations in textbooks of IFL. Based on a quantitative discourse analysis of the dialogues in the IFL textbook— number of words, turns, starting and ending sentences, characters, roles, and language functions for female and male characters—a short qualitative interpretation of gender biases is provided. The findings highlight that, despite a balanced character and role distribution between female and male characters, the distribution of words and language functions between the sexes remains biased. In particular, the large use of expressive language functions by female characters reinforces the stereotypical ideas about women as emotional, fragile beings. On the other hand, the directive, informational and phatic language functions performed by male characters depict them as active, more assertive, decision-taking and well-informed. The study presents a discussion on the pedagogical implications that gender-biased representations in textbooks might have on the students' learning process. In conclusion, pedagogical implications of the gender biases in the dialogues analysed in this study can only be predicted. Empirical research is needed to disclose how teachers and students actually address gender biases in foreign language textbooks.

Key words: gender representation, textbook, Italian, pedagogical implications

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Resumen

Este estudio evalúa la representación de género en los diálogos de libros de texto de enseñanza del italiano como una lengua extranjera en el sistema Universitario del Reino Unido. Diversos estudios se han enfocado en la representación de género usando análisis de libros de texto de enseñanza del inglés, pero este tipo de estudios no existen para libros de enseñanza del italiano, de aquí la contribución del trabajo. La evaluación se realizó mediante un análisis de discurso cuantitativo usando el número de palabras, participación, inicio y final de enunciados, roles y funciones del lenguaje para caracteres femeninos y masculinos. Los resultados enfatizan que, a pesar de una distribución balanceada de caracteres y roles entre personajes femeninos y masculinos; la distribución de palabras y funciones del lenguaje entre los géneros es sesgada. Más específicamente, los personajes femeninos mostraron un mayor uso de la función del lenguaje expresiva, lo cual refuerza ideales femeninos que estereotipan a las mujeres como seres frágiles y emocionales. Por otra parte, las funciones del lenguaje directiva, informativa y fática estuvieron más asociadas a personajes masculinos, mostrando a estos personajes como activos, asertivos, decididos y bien informados. En términos de implicaciones pedagógicas, se presenta una discusión sobre las repercusiones que una representación de género sesgada en libros de texto puede tener sobre el aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Se concluye que tales repercusiones sobre los sesgos de género se pueden predecir solo mediante estudios empíricos que se enfoquen sobre como los tutores y estudiantes los textos.

Palabras claves: la representación de género, libros de texto, italiano, implicaciones pedagógicas

In this article, the dialogues found in the textbook of Italian as a foreign language *In Giro per l'Italia* (Lazzarino, G., Peccianti, M., C., & Dini, 2006) were analysed to find whether they presented gender biases, and if so, what kind of biases. Based on a mostly quantitative method (the number of words, turns, starting and ending sentences, characters, roles, and language functions for female and male characters were counted), this study focused on two main issues: What consequences do gender biases— as

portrayed in the dialogues of the textbook—have on the learning process? And what treatment should teachers of foreign language give to gender biases? The authors that mainly inspired this research and its methodology are Poulou (1997), and Jones, Kitetu and Sunderland's (1997); they were the first scholars who focused on dialogues only. Previous research (ETHEL, 1980; Gupta & Yin, 1990) had dealt with dialogues, but these studies treated dialogues as part of the whole textbook and did not focus on them exclusively.

In Giro per l'Italia (Lazzarino, et al., 2006) was the textbook used for some years to teach Italian at Lancaster University, where I taught during the academic year 2007/2008. The textbook was first published in 2002, but for this study I used the second edition (2006). The dialogues analysed are those intended to be spoken by students. Therefore, it will be possible to relate my findings to pedagogical implications in terms of speaking practice, that is, the oral output produced by students.

Since the first edition of the book is fairly recent, it will be also interesting to see whether the dialogues analysed follow the tendencies found by Jones et al. (1997), who have observed how recent English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks present an encouraging level of gender fairness as compared to the textbooks published twenty or thirty years ago. The research literature has shown that there are no studies on gender representation in textbooks of Italian as a foreign language (IFL), so my findings can only be compared with studies regarding foreign language (FL) textbooks other than Italian.

Literature Review

Before the 1970s, research on gender differences in speech could be found only in unrelated studies in a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, child development, linguistics, speech communication and literature. In the 1970s the feminist movement and women's studies provided a framework for research in Language and Gender Studies. Since then, studies and critiques in this area have proliferated. Among others, one of the aspects of *language and gender* that has been vastly researched is gender representation in textbooks and, in particular, foreign language textbooks.

Most studies have analysed textbooks for the teaching of English as a second or foreign language (Bruce, 1986; Freudenstein, 1978; Gaff, 1982; Gisnet, 1988; Gupta & Yin, 1990; Hartman & Judd, 1978; ETHEL, 1980; Hill 1980; Cherezal, Jimenez, 1990; Jones et al., 1997; Lee & Collins, 2006; Molina Plaza, 1997; Naish, 1979; Otlowski, 2003; Porreca, 1984; Pugsley, 1992; Rees-Parnell, 1976; Sano, Iida, Hardy, 2001; Stern, 1976), while others focused on French (Cincotta, 1978; Hingley, 1983; Schärer, 2000; Schmitz, 1975, Stary, 2002), German (Hellinger, 1980; Willeke & Sanders, 1978), Spanish (Galiano Sierra, 1993), Russian (Rifkin, 1998), Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, and Zulu (Schleicher & Hobson, 2004) and Greek (Poulou, 1997) as a foreign language.

These studies reported poor representation of female characters in terms of visibility, stereotyping of personality traits and occupational roles, and derogatory treatment. Sunderland (2000) identifies three main tendencies concerning bias against women in FL textbooks, and describes them as exclusion, subordination and distortion, and degradation. In regard to *exclusion*, males are over-represented (Hellinger, 1980). Regarding *subordination* and *distortion*, men tend to occupy both more powerful and a greater range of occupational roles than women (Porreca, 1984) and both males and females perform gender stereotypical activities (Cincotta, 1978). With regard to degradation, women tend to be stereotypically emotional and are more likely than male characters to be the butt of jokes (Hartman & Judd, 1978) and of implied slurs (Talansky, 1986). Sunderland (2000) also underlines how linguistic analysis shows that verbs associated with female agents reflect stereotypic female behavioural patterns (Hellinger, 1980), and that in dialogues females speak less, they speak first less often and perform a narrower range of discourse roles (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Poulou, 1997; Talansky, 1986).

Some recent studies carried out in the last decade show that the situation is slowly improving even if it is still far from being ideal. With regard to some EFL textbooks published in the late 1990s, Sano, Iida and Hardy (2001) state that they “contain gender-based implicit messages, even though no explicit linguistic features are articulated on the surface level” (p. 905). Otlowsky’s (2003) findings show that women in EFL textbooks are still represented as housekeepers and mothers. Concerning textbooks of

French as a foreign language, Schärer (2000) analyses feminine and masculine noun forms and finds that feminine and masculine forms are equally represented only as family members, while for all the other areas the masculine form tends to prevail, in particular with names of professions, where feminine forms are five times rarer than the masculine ones. Lee and Collins' (2006) focus on how changes in the status of women are reflected in Hong Kong English-language textbooks. Their conclusions state that compared with the past, many modern textbooks use various strategies to avoid biased or stereotypical treatment of the two sexes. However, women are still commonly associated with housework and the home, and men with paid work outside. Women are weak and passive, while men are strong and active. Finally, men are still more visible than women. More optimistic are the findings of Jones et al. (1997), who analysed dialogues in EFL textbooks and did not find significant gender differences in the dialogues analysed (taken from textbooks published in the late 1980s and mid 1990s). According to the authors, this could be due to a fair gendered distribution of occupational and social roles. Another research focusing on dialogues is Poulou's (1997), where dialogues in textbooks of Greek as a foreign language are analysed; here, a great amount of expressive language is uttered by women. Female characters in mixed-sex dialogues between "non-experts" ask for information and make requests, while men give information and perform most directives.

A set of non-sexist guidelines for EFL publishers and authors, *On Balance* (Florent, Fuller, Pugsley, Walter, & Young, 1994), was published in Britain in an attempt to help EFL publishers and authors in producing non-sexist textbooks. A similar, yet not identical example, can be found in Italy, where *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua* (suggestions for a non-sexist use of the language) was published in 1986 (Sabatini, 1986). While *On Balance* focuses on EFL textbooks, the Italian document is about the use of the Italian language in general.

Despite this wide variety of scholarship, I could not find a single study on gender representation in textbooks. The only related study I could find is Sansom (2000), who analyses sexism and gender representation in Italian textbooks used in primary and middle school. The results of the study show a consistent linguistic, semantic and

contextual representation of women in a stereotypical, sexist and limited manner. As Sansom states:

Above all it can be seen that females are, for the most part, a significant second (and in many cases a sorry third behind so-called neutral) to males. Not only are they absented by the use of linguistic elements that do not recognise them separately, they are often presented semantically in such a way that it would almost be preferable not to be mentioned at all. (2000, p. 7)

While some of the above studies, having identified gendered biases in the textbook, include suggestions of what the teacher could do when faced with bias (Harman & Judd, 1978; Poulou, 1997; Rifkin, 1998), a recent empirical study (Sunderland, Cowley, Abdul Rahim, Leontazakou & Shattuk, 2001) shows what teachers actually do with biased textbooks and find that teacher treatment of biased texts cannot be predicted from the textbook text itself.

Textbook Analysed

As I mentioned in the introduction, I will analyse the dialogues in the textbook of IFL *In Giro per l'Italia* (Lazzarino et al., 2006), which was used for some years to teach Italian to first year students in the Department of European Languages and Cultures at Lancaster University. The textbook is designed for beginners, and its aim is to bring students to what can be considered level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference. The textbook is made of a preliminary unit and 16 chapters, each of which contains grammar explanations, as well as written, oral and listening exercises. There is also a storyline developed at the end of each chapter in the Videoteca section. The videos in this section portray different characters exploring aspects of the Italian life and culture. In every chapter there are several dialogues; Dialogo-Lampo (Flash-dialogue) at the beginning of every chapter, and other dialogues to help students familiarize themselves with new grammar topics. In the Videoteca section there are parts of the dialogues students are going to listen to in the video. For the present study, I chose to analyse only the dialogues intended to be spoken, that is Dialogo-lampo and the ones that introduce new grammar topics. As Jones et al. (1997) state:

If “male firstness” and male verbal dominance are present, dialogues intended only for listening may inculcate these ideas, but dialogues, which are to be spoken, in addition to this, are actively promoting this verbal practice in female and male students through the students’ own discourse practices (p.474)

Methodology

There are two studies in particular (Jones et al. 1997; Poulou, 1997) which inspired my work—as I mentioned before. I have tried to combine the methodologies used by both in my research.

This methodology is mainly quantitative: I counted the number of males and females who played roles in the dialogues; the number of female and male occupational and social roles; the number of times females and males initiated and ended dialogues; the number of turns taken by males and female characters; and the number of words spoken by females and by males.

In counting the number of females and males playing roles in the dialogues, I did not make the distinction between characters as individuals and the number of times each character appears—distinction made by Jones et al. (1997). Characters never appear twice, and even when the same name appears more than once in different dialogues, there is no evidence that it refers to the same character.

I also focused on the different language functions performed by males and females in the dialogues. Language functions were classified into four categories according to Leech (1974). The first category is informational, which is language that expresses factual information; the second category is phatic, which is language whose function is to keep communication lines open and keep social relationships in good repair. The third is directive, which is the language used to influence other people’s behaviour and attitudes. The fourth category is expressive, which is language that expresses the speaker’s feeling and attitudes. Leech (1974) also makes use of the aesthetic category, which is “the use of language for the sake of the linguistic artefact

itself, and for no ulterior purpose” (p.48), for example, the language of poetry. However, this category does not apply to this study; therefore, I have not included it.

The informational function was then divided into two subcategories (Poulou, 1997); asking for information and giving information. The directive function was divided into four subcategories (Lyons, 1977): 1) ordering/commanding/instructing; 2) advising/recommending/suggesting; 3) offering/inviting; and 4) requesting.

When assessing language functions, I analysed first all the dialogues (both mixed-sex and single-sex) to get the general picture; and then mixed-sex dialogues only to: get a clearer idea of the distinct language functions performed by males and females in mixed-sex dialogues; and to see if the results differed from the ones found in single-sex dialogues. The study also presents limited qualitative research. I highlighted those parts of the dialogues which, in my perspective, present quite a stereotypical and demeaning image of women.

Research Questions

The research questions posed in this study are:

1. How many different male and female characters are there in the dialogues?
2. How many mixed-sex dialogues are initiated by male and how many by female characters?
3. How many mixed-sex dialogues are ended by male and how many by female characters?
4. How many male turns and female turns are there altogether?
5. How many words are spoken by female speakers and how many by male speakers?
6. Concerning language functions: Is there a difference between the type and number of language functions performed by females and males?

Findings and Analysis

The findings for the different research questions can be found in the following four tables (Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Table 1
Discourse Roles in Dialogues in *In Giro per l'Italia*.

Chapt.	Males	Male roles	Females	Female roles	Who starts in mixed-sex dialogues	Who ends in mixed-sex dialogues	Male turns	Female turns	N. of male words	N. of female words
1a	Cliente Impiegato	Costumer Clerk					6		39	
1b	Venditore	Salesperson	Turista Americana	Tourist	M	F	2	2	11	12
1c	Massimo	Acquaintance	Signora Parodi	Acquaintance	M	M	2	1	18	11
1d	Angelo	Friend	Silvia	Friend	M	M	3	2	34	13
2a	Andrea	Friend	Valeria	Friend	M	F	2	2	28	18
2b			Marisa Franca	Friend Friend				4		33
2c			Donatella Giovanna	Relative, friend Relative, friend				3		35
3a	Stefano	Student of History and Philosophy	Priscilla	Student of Italian language and literature	M	M	4	3	26	22
3b	Sergio Giacomo	Friend, student Friend					5		39	
3c	Gianni Roberto	Student Student					4		49	
3d			Mirella Dara	Friend Friend				3		42
4a	Lorenzo Alessandro	Friend Friend	Rita	Friend, student	M	F	4	2	39	29
4b	Simone	Boyfriend	Daniela	Girlfriend, student	M	M	3	2	26	11
4c			Clara Annamaria Silvia	Friend Friend Friend				10		48
5a	Andrea	Friend Barperson			M	M	5	3	27	15
5b	Paolo Massimo	Friend Friend					4		37	
5c			Marianna Carla	Friend Student				2		28
5d	Luigi Antonio	Friend Friend					6		57	
6a	Fabio	Friend	Irene	Friend	F	F	2	3	30	47
6b	Alberto	Relative	Elisabetta	Relative	M	F	3	3	21	36
6c	Gino	Friend	Sara	Friend	F	M	5	5	41	47
6d	Lorenzo	Boyfriend	Lidia	girlfriend	F	F	4	5	14	13
7a	Nicola Simone	Friend Friend					4		86	
7b			Signora Rossi	Mother/childre ner and friend				2		44
7c			Signora Verdi Monica Silvia	Friend Professional, researcher, mother, friend Friend				2		38
8a	Fabrizio	Friend	Rossana	Friend	F	F	3	4	47	35
8b	Luigino Papà	Son Father					4		46	
9a			Roberta Antonella	Friend, student Friend, student				5		66
9b	Oculista	Oculist	Paziente	Patient	F	F	1	2	16	39
9c	Carletto	Son	Mamma	Mother	F	M	3	3	16	20
10a	Mario Daniele	Friend					4		80	
10b	Claudio	Friend	Marina	Friend	M	M	3	2	59	12
11a			Silvana	Friend				6		60

11b			Giovanna Mamma Marta	Friend Mother Daughter			7		50			
11c	Paolo Rocco	Friend Friend					9		63			
11d			Commessa Cliente	Shop assistant Costumer			5		57			
12a	Massimo	Fiancé and friend	Patrizia Antonella	Fiancée, friend Friend	F	M	2	5	35	41		
12b			Paola	Friend			3		65			
12c	Marito	Husband	Claudia	Friend								
12d			Moglie Dottoressa Mancini Segretaria	Wife High-profile professional Secretary	M	F	3	3	33	11		
13a	Giorgio	Son	Mamma	Mother	F	F	2	3	17	51		
13b	Sandro	Friend	Paola	Friend	M	F	2	2	43	25		
13c	Carabiniere	Policeperson					7		144			
13d	Signore Daniele	Driver Friend					8		82			
14a	Antonio Bruno	Friend Friend	Signor Cecchi	Father	Caterina	Daughter	M	M	5	4	54	49
14b	Antonio Bruno	Friend Friend					8		60			
14c	Marcello Pietro	Friend Friend					3		50			
15a	Lorenzo	Student	Professoressa Gori	Secondary school teacher	F	M	3	3	91	25		
15b	Automobili sta	Driver	Passante	Passer-by	M	F	2	1	7	14		
16a			Marisa Adriana	Friend, voter Friend, voter			8		80			
16b	Signor Testa	Pensioner					2		78			
16c	Signor Mazzola Cameriere Professore	Pensioner Waiter Secondary school teacher					4		48			
16d	Francesco Dino	Friend Friend					4		53			
16e			Fiorella Valentina	Friend Friend, mother			4		59			
Totals	56		54		14M/9F	11M/12 F	150	132	1744	1359		

Table 2
Occupational and social roles, by gender, with frequencies, of *In Giro per l'Italia*.

Number of male role appearances	Number of female role appearances
Costumer X 1	Costumer X 1
Clerk X 1	Tourist X 1
Salesperson X 1	Shop assistant X 1
Acquaintance X 1	Acquaintance X 1
Friend X 31	Friend X 34
Student X 5	Student X 6
Boyfriend X 2	Girlfriend X 2
Relative X 1	Relative X 3
Son X 3	Daughter X 2
Father X 2	Mother/childcarer X 6
Optician X 1	Patient X 1
Fiancé X 1	Fiancée X 1
Husband X 1	Wife X 1
Policeperson X 1	Researcher X 1
Driver X 2	High-profile professional X 1
Pensioner X 2	Professional X 1
Secondary-school teacher X 1	Secondary-school teacher X 1
Waiter X 1	Secretary X 1
Barperson X 1	Passer-by X 1
	Voter X 2

Table 3
Number of language functions performed by women and man in mixed and single-sex dialogues of *In Giro per l'Italia*.

Language functions	Man	Women
Informational	122	103
Asking for information	42	47
Giving information	70	56
Phatic	9	1
Directive	17	8
Ordering/commanding/instructing		2
Advising/recommending/suggesting	4	3
Offering/inviting	8	
Requesting	5	3
Expressive	15	22

Table 4
Number of language functions performed by women and man in mixed-sex dialogues of *In Giro per l'Italia*.

Language functions	Man	Women
Informational	45	52
Asking for information	17	25
Giving information	28	27
Phatic	2	1
Directive	11	5
Ordering/commanding/instructing		1
Advising/recommending/suggesting	3	3
Offering/inviting	5	
Requesting	3	1
Expressive	7	14

Quantitative Analysis

As far as visibility is concerned, the distribution of male and female characters is fairly balanced (56:54). By contrast, when looking at male firstness, most mixed-sex dialogues are initiated by males (14:9), but the number of females who end the dialogue is slightly higher than the number of men (12:11). Even though there is a slight difference between the number of female and male characters, male characters speak a consistently higher number of words (1744:1359). In percentages, 56% of words are spoken by males and 44% by females. These numbers refer to all the dialogues analysed, without making the distinction between single-sex and mixed-sex dialogues. In mixed-sex dialogues alone, males still speak more than females (733: 596). In such dialogues, 55% of words are spoken by males and 45% of words are spoken by female characters. Single-sex dialogues are no better; males speak 1011 words (57%) and females 763 words (43%).

As the text has roughly the same number of male and female characters, one would expect to have a fair word distribution, but that is not the case. Considering the overall number of dialogues analysed, with no distinction between single and mixed-sex ones, the average number of words spoken by each male speaker is 31 and by each female speaker is 25. When one looks at turns to speak, males have more turns than females (150:132); 53% of turns are taken by males and 47% by females. In mixed-sex dialogues this discrepancy tends to diminish, males have 68 turns (51%) and females 65 (49%).

The distribution of occupational and social roles seems quite fair, particularly as regards professional roles; there is an equal number of professional roles for males and females (15:15). Nonetheless, some professions stereotypically associated with men are still given to male characters (policyperson, driver), and the same thing applies to females (shop-assistant, secretary). Another interesting point is that within the dialogue between an optician and patient, the role of optician is performed by a man and the patient by a woman. Thus, the “expert” is male. On the other hand, it is worth saying that female characters perform a greater number of professional roles that require a university degree; among the female characters we find a researcher, a high-profile

professional (no better specified in the textbook), a professional, and a secondary school teacher, while among males there is a secondary school teacher and an optician.

With regard to social roles, a greater number of them are performed by female characters (53:44). The ratio mother/father is 6:2, thus confirming a tendency observed in other studies (Harman & Judd, 1978; Otlowski, 2003; Porreca, 1984) of assigning women more parent-roles than men. A slightly higher number of female characters perform roles such as friend and relative. Overall, except the mother/father role allocation, social roles appear to be fairly distributed among males and females. Jones et al. (1997) identify in a fair distribution of occupational and social roles one of the possible reasons for gender balance in dialogues. In my study, though, a fair distribution of social and occupational roles does not correspond to a fair distribution in the amount of words spoken and turns taken by male and female characters.

The last point to notice is that the number of roles exceeds the number of characters; this is because a character is sometimes given more than one role and I chose to include them all.

When examining language functions, one cannot help but notice that informational language functions are performed by males more often than by females (122:103). Men also perform a greater number of phatic functions (9:1) and directive functions (17:8). Women perform a greater number of expressive functions (22:15).

Within the informational category, more females ask for information (47:42) and a significantly higher number of males give information (70:56). Within the directive category, advising/recommending/suggesting, offering/inviting, and requesting were uttered more by men than by women. In fact, acts of offering/inviting are not performed by women at all, while ordering is performed by females only.

If we apply the same categories to mixed-sex dialogues only, some changes can be observed. In mixed-sex dialogues, females perform a slightly higher number of informational functions than males (52:45); and within this category they ask for information more (25:17), while males give more information—though admittedly the difference here is extremely small (28:27). The phatic function is still performed mostly

by males (2:1), and so is the directive (11:5). In mixed-sex dialogues the ordering/commanding/instructing function is performed by a female character, while no females perform the offering/requesting function. An equal number of advising/recommending/suggesting functions are performed by males and females (3:3), while more requests are made by males (3:1). When it comes to the expressive function, females perform this function twice as much as males (14:7).

To summarise, in this text, men tend to give more information, while women tend to ask more for information. Directive functions are performed in greater part by men, while expressive ones by women. From this point of view the dialogues analysed have manifestations of sexism. The greater amount of expressive language uttered by women tends to reinforce the stereotypical view of women as emotional and keener to express their feelings than men. Both in mixed-sex and single-sex dialogues, women tend to ask more for information and men tend to give more information, particularly in single-sex dialogues. These trends reflect an image of women as less informed than men and often in need of help or guidance. Furthermore, if the directive function is constituted by language “which aims to influence the behaviour and attitudes of others” (Leech, 1974, p.48), male preponderance in this ambit reinforces the idea of men as active, energetic, assertive, while women tend to be seen as more passive and weak.

In analysing the dialogues, I noticed that the first five chapters are slightly more male-centred; for instance, most of the dialogues are initiated and ended by male characters, while from chapter 6 onwards, the distribution of characters seems more balanced. Since among the authors of the textbook there are two women and one man, I thought it would be interesting to find out who wrote the different parts of the textbook. I contacted the three authors separately to ask whether each of them edited a particular number of chapters, but they answered that there was no such workload distribution. It emerged, though, that some of the dialogues were edited by Andrea Dini, the male author. Professor Dini told me that some of the dialogues he wrote had been modified by the publishing house collaborator. He added that the publishing house collaborators sometimes change male characters into female characters in an effort to achieve a more balanced distribution of female and male characters.

Qualitative Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the dialogues casts light on other interesting aspects of gender representation. For instance, in some dialogues, women and men are still represented in a stereotypical way. In mixed-sex dialogues set in bars or restaurants, it is always the man who orders food and drinks, both for himself and the woman. This relates to what has been observed above about men performing a greater number of directive functions. Men are the ones who make decisions, while women are more passive, waiting for a man to help them.

In another dialogue, two students are talking about their lecturers and say that the professor of biology (male) is famous for his books, while the professor of history (female) is friendly, patient and has a good sense of humour. While the male professor is recognised for his professional achievements, the female one is described in terms of her character and attitude towards other people, therefore diminishing her professional position. Furthermore, the female professor teaches history, while the male one teaches biology, a subject stereotypically associated with men.

In dialogues where people are shopping (for food, for clothes, for shoes), only women appear, thus reinforcing the stereotypical view of women as shopping lovers. Moreover, when food is concerned, women are depicted as the only person in the family in charge of grocery-shopping duties.

In another dialogue, a couple is talking and the boyfriend suggests different places to go and things to do; but his girlfriend says she is busy and cannot go out with him, so he replies that she never has time for him and that he should find another girlfriend. I think this is quite offensive and depicts women as objects that can be easily replaced with better ones. In another dialogue a woman asks for a pasta-maker as a Christmas gift, so that she can make a lot of pasta for her and her partner. This, once again, reinforces an image of women as the only ones in charge of the family eating needs. It is interesting to notice that, in the dialogues analysed, men are never involved in cooking or grocery shopping at all.

Another stereotypical image of women can be found in a dialogue where two people are talking about a couple they met at a party the night before. The couple consists of a rich businessman and an ex-actress. The idea of many good looking women marrying rich businessmen for their money is still quite a strong cliché in Italy. This image denigrates women. It makes them look weak and in need of a man who can support them economically or, on the other hand, as cynical social climbers who cannot make it on their own and need a man to help them.

Among these negative or at least stereotypical portrayals of women, I also found something quite reassuring. In a dialogue, a female character is said to be very good at playing football, a rather non-stereotypical activity of a woman.

I realise that my qualitative analysis is not exhaustive, since I have underlined only what I perceive to be the main problems in terms of gender stereotypes. A more detailed qualitative content and linguistic analysis might reveal more subtle gender biases or, on the contrary, a more balanced gender representation.

Summary of Analyses

Overall, the dialogues analysed present quite a large number of problems regarding gender biases. Men talk more and they also have more turns, even though there is a small difference in the number of female and male characters and the distribution of professional roles is balanced. Men start dialogues most of the times. Men perform more directive, informational and phatic language functions, while women perform more expressive ones. The qualitative analysis shows that women sometimes are depicted in stereotypical roles or in demeaning ways.

Recent studies have showed that EFL textbooks have recently improved in terms of gender biases and stereotyped images of females (Jones et al., 1997; Lee & Collins, 2006), particularly if compared with textbooks published twenty or thirty years ago. Therefore, despite the lack of comparable studies of gender representation in textbooks of , an educated guess suggests that the textbook analysed may present fewer problems in terms of gender biases than Italian language textbooks published in the 1970s or in

the 1980s. Furthermore, my correspondence with Professor Dini has highlighted that the publishing house made an attempt to balance the gender distribution in dialogues.

Pedagogical Implications

The analysis of the dialogues shows manifestations of sexism against women, stereotypical portraits of female characters, and more male visibility in terms of words spoken and language functions performed. Once we recognise gender biases in a textbook, it is also important to understand whether these play a role in the learning process.

Some studies claim that biases and gender imbalances in textbooks may have serious consequences. They may integrate sex biases in learners' value systems, particularly when learners are children or teenagers (Porreca, 1984). They may impede the accomplishment of some language functions when they are mostly performed by males (Poulou, 1997). They may diminish females' opportunities to practice the language in playing the roles of dialogue participants (Poulou). When men usually initiate/finish mixed-sex dialogues, females get less practice in initiating/finishing conversations (Sunderland, 1994). Mannheim (1994) shows that some learners are sensitive to sexism and biases in EFL material, and that demeaning and stereotypical representation of women may alienate female students. The authors of *On Balance* suggest that women may learn less if they are represented in demeaning ways.

A lot has been said about how teachers could deal with biased textbooks in class; teachers could reverse sex roles that are sex biased, and students could rewrite sexist dialogues trying to distribute equally the amount and kind of speech between males and females (Poulou, 1997). Sano, Iida and Hardy (2001) suggest that teachers could give students blind readings of the texts. If the students can tell the gender of the speakers, they can use it as an opportunity to discuss the issue of gender. Hartman and Judd (1978) suggest that when teachers come across gender biases, they could raise the issue of sexist language and gender biases in class, thus adding an element of controversy that could also stimulate the students' interest and therefore their learning process.

As regards the dialogues in *In Giro per l'Italia*, I am quite familiar with them, not only because I analysed them, but also because I taught Italian using this textbook. In my experience as a teacher, I have to admit that I did not notice many of the gender biases I later discovered in my analysis. I think it can be quite difficult noticing that male characters speak more or that they have more turns, unless the difference with female characters is very evident and consistent throughout the book. In the dialogues analysed, men utter more words and have more turns. The natural result is that, if teachers do not recognize this discrepancy, and make male students read male roles and female students read female roles, females get fewer opportunities to practice. Furthermore professional roles are equally distributed between men and women, so that at a superficial level it is quite difficult to spot problems, particularly for a non-expert eye. As I said before, it is not easy to spot the imbalance between the number of words spoken by females and by men, but when teachers realise the problem does exist, a good way to solve it could be asking students to swap their roles, so that all students read all roles and speak the same amount of words, and get the same opportunity to practice different functions. In the presence of gender biases, I think it is very important to raise the issue and ask students what they think about this and how these issues are dealt with in their country.

Recent research (Sunderland, 2000) has underlined that it is very difficult to prove that gender biases may affect language learning. The effect on learning of any text is impossible to predict, since different readers may take different meanings from the same text. Furthermore, there can be different reactions to gender biases in textbooks, since some learners could be indifferent to them, some others could reject them, and some others could enjoy them. Therefore looking at the text itself may not be enough, since we cannot predict how the text will be used by both teachers and students. Looking at the text itself and predicting the consequences that it will have on students also means taking for granted that all teachers will use the same text in the same way: religiously following the textbook rubrics and the teacher's guide. Only an empirical research on teacher treatment of gendered texts can tell what the teachers' actual use of a textbook is and, therefore, how gendered texts are treated in class. A recent empirical study (Sunderland et al., 2001), suggests that teacher behaviour in relation to textbook texts

cannot be predicted from the textbook itself. Some teachers can endorse gendered texts through explicit positive comments through an uncritical treatment of such texts. Other teachers can subvert gendered texts confronting them explicitly or simply omitting them. Still other teachers can also subvert texts with balanced gender representation by ridiculing some of the ideas in the texts.

Therefore, the pedagogical implication of a gender-biased text—and in particular of the dialogues analysed—can be understood more clearly with more empirical research on the actual treatment of the text by teachers. Students' behaviour towards a text, or students' talk around a text, could be another important aspect to investigate in order to fully understand the impact of gender biases in a textbook.

Conclusions

The answers to most of the research questions posed in the study reveal problems in terms of gender representation. Male characters speak more, both in terms of number of words and frequency. They tend to start most dialogues. They perform most of directive, informational and phatic language functions. Female characters perform more expressive language functions and end more dialogues. Concerning male and female visibility, we see more hope for equality. Admittedly, there are slightly more male characters, though in my opinion, the difference here is too small to be relevant; yet occupational roles are equally distributed among men and women. It is surprising that a balanced character and role distribution does not correspond to a more balanced distribution of words and language functions among male and female roles. The analysis thus shows that the dialogues analysed present some problems in terms of gender biases. The distribution of language functions depicts women (and men) in quite stereotypical ways. The large use of expressive language functions by women reinforces the stereotypical image of women as emotional, fragile creatures, easily moved and frightened, while the functions performed by men depict them as active, more assertive, decision-taking, and well-informed.

The debate over the ideal situation in terms of gender representation in textbooks is still open. Some think it should mirror academic findings on women and men's speech. Others think it should not. Much research has shown that in mixed-sex

conversation men speak more, while women provide a lot of conversational support in terms of back-channelling. I think that mirroring these findings could limit the amount of speaking and language functions practice for females, and thus, it would not be advisable from a pedagogical point of view. As Jones et al. (1997) state:

Rather than uncritically mirror gender differences in language use, it is surely fairer if textbook dialogues provide comparable models and thus comparable speaking opportunities, and in addition inform students of empirically established gender differences. (p.483).

As I said before, mirroring research findings *could* limit the amount of practice for females, but, in fact, whether gender imbalance in dialogues can limit the amount of practice for girls depends mostly on how teachers use the dialogues. Recent research (Sunderland et al., 2001) has shown that teacher behaviour towards textbook texts (also called teacher talk) cannot be predicted from the textbook itself. Gender biased texts can be endorsed or subverted by teachers in different ways, as gendered-balanced texts can be. This shows that it is not possible to predict the pedagogical implications of a gender-biased text unless we observe how the text is actually used in class. Therefore, with regard to the dialogue analyses, it is very difficult to predict the effects gender biases might have on the students' learning process. However this should not provide authors and publishing houses with an excuse for not considering sexist language and biased gender representation an important issue. Achieving gender fairness in textbooks should still be the way forward, regardless of teachers' use of texts. In addition, teacher training in the treatment of gender-biased texts could be a step towards a progressive and gender-balanced use of textbooks, so that even the most sexist and biased text could be subverted and used in a constructive way.

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