Consciousness of 'Political Correctness' in Gender Matters:
Gender Asymmetry in *Kernel Lessons Plus* and
Modern English for Communication

Introduction

There has been awareness of gender asymmetry in some texts including those in ELT materials. Many studies indicate similar results that the representation of males in the texts outnumbers the females (Peterson & Lach, 1990; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; Wharton, 2005). Males are also likely to be described as positive, active, and competent, whilst females are likely to be described as negative, passive and incompetent.

This paper, in compliance to augmenting awareness of gender asymmetry, attempts to discuss gender representations in ELT textbooks. I will look at the representations of females and males from their participant roles within both the clause and the sentence. Two ELT textbooks were chosen in order to see how females and males were portrayed in the early era of language awareness. In addressing this matter, this essay firstly deals with the discussion of political correctness in gender matters, secondly with the choice of text and of analytical approach, and finally with the analysis of corpus.

The consciousness of 'political correctness' in gender matters

The awareness of the sexism of language began in the 1960s and 1970s (Peterson & Lach, 1990; Goddard & Patterson, 2000; Cameron, 2005). A number of researchers focused their studies on the language in which women were often excluded and marginalized. Studies, which critically analyze language, are endeavours to change attitudes and raise awareness of discrimination (Goddard & Patterson, 2000). Since discrimination is a product of human intervention, it can therefore be changed through human intervention (Fairclough et. al, 2004), one of which is through critical language awareness.

There have been language reforms towards a universal and neutral language. To criticize aspects of this reform, the term 'political correctness' has been frequently used (Goddard and Patterson, 2000). The consciousness of political correctness in gender matters has contributed to some revisions of sexist words such as firefighter for fireman, police officer for policemen, chair person for chairman, and house manager for house wife.

Choice of Text

As mentioned above, I examined two ELT textbooks published within two different cultures in the 1970s. One is *Kernel Lessons Plus* (Europe/Western) and the other is *Modern English for Communication* (Malaysia/Eastern); both were intended for upper level students. There are several reasons for this choice.

The presentation of two cultures is to compare how different and/or similar they are in their representation of the female role. My assumption is that eastern culture took a more preserved and traditional view, where roles of females were more likely to be domestic, whilst in western culture, females would tend to have more opportunities to exist in public context. Therefore, I am expecting the texts from western societies to be more conscious of political correctness in gender matters than those from eastern societies.

To have more equal representations between the two textbooks, due to different organizations of the materials, I mainly focused on texts relating to occupations. The topic related to occupation is worth investigating since it may highlight gender discrepancies. Goddard & Patterson (2000) point this out by saying that certain titles within some occupational settings are actually gendered terms, for example, midwife, waitress/waiter, fireman, repairman, etc Goddard & Patterson (2000).

Due to word limitation of this paper, I chose six job-related texts from *Kernel Lessons Plus* (*KLP*) and nine texts from *Modern English for Communication* (*MEC*). The total word count for *KLP* and *MEC* is 1001, which is approximately 500 words per book.

All these texts provide information to enable the students to complete the tasks that follow. In *KLP,* all texts are accompanied by illustrations which help readers recognize the sex of the participants mentioned in the texts. On the other hand, there are no illustrations accompanying the texts in *MEC.* To recognize participants' sex is through the use of pronouns; where pronouns are not present, I used my own knowledge as an Indonesian who shares cultural aspects with Malaysian society. The term "Encik", for example, is used to refer to adult male.

Since none of the texts have a title, I have introduced them by their names or jobs and, for *KLP,* by their illustration as well. Of six texts in *KLP,* there are two texts whose main characters are female. In *MEC*, there is only one out of the nine texts whose main character is female.

Table 1. Titles in *KLP*

Text no.	Titles	Illustrations
1	David Nelson	A man standing near a camera in a TV studio
2	Linda Blake	A woman sitting on the desk facing a type writer
3	Robert Wilson	A man in suit sitting on his desk talking to a woman
4	A pop star	A man with a proud face
5	A nurse	A woman in a nurse's uniform
6	Barry Wood	A man with depressed look holding a crying baby in one arm and a milk bottle in the other

Table 2. Titles in *MEC*

Text No.	Titles	Gender
1	Ali	Male
2	Pritam	Male
3	Dave	Male
4	Sam Abraham	Male
5	Encik Malik & Encik Zainal	Male
6	Aminah	Female
7	Ram	Male
8	Kok Leong	Male
9	Ali's job	Male

Choice of Analytical Approach

As this study aims to examine how political correctness in gender matters is reflected in ELT materials, Critical Discourse Analysis is used as the umbrella term for the analytical tool. Coulthard & Coulthard (1996) argue that Critical Discourse Analysis helps investigate, reveal, and clarify how power and discriminatory value are inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic system. The analysis is designed to extract the ideology and representation from within the text. Fowler (1996) has also affirmed that all representation is mediated and shaped by the value-systems reflected in the language use. In short, language is a medium to see the reflection of power relations of the society in which the language functions. What to be signified and what to be unvoiced is greatly influenced by the society's values. In the present study, the language analyzed had been influenced by the social context in 1970s and by two different cultures—Western and Eastern.

The language of these texts was analyzed from clause-level perspectives. For this purpose, I have used the systemic functional concept of transitivity, with its categories of process and participants (see Eggins, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; and Bloor & Bloor, 2004). The term 'process' refers to the part of the clause that is realized by the verbal group.

There are six choices of process in transitivity: material (verbs of doing); mental (verbs of thinking, perceiving, and feeling); relational (verbs of being: identifying, attributing); behavioral (verbs of behaving); verbal (verbs of saying or speaking); and existential. Process types involved in this study are material, mental, relational, and verbal.

The term 'participants' refers to the nominal groups, within a clause, involved in the process. Roles such as Actor, Goal, Range, Recipient are involved in material process; Senser and Phenomenon are in mental process; Carrier, Attribute, Identified, Identifier are in relational process; Sayer and Verbiage are in Verbal process.

Classification of Participant Roles According to gender

In the present study, gender categories to nominal groups are assigned referring to animate entities and all inanimate entities related to them. Therefore, there are only two categories: female and male. Take for example the following clause taken from *KLP* text no. 5 Nurse.

> I like my job
>
> Senser   Pr: Mental   phenomenon

The Senser referring to the first person pronoun in that clause is assigned as female because the illustration helps identify who the "I" is. The phenomenon refers to an inanimate entity "job". As it relates to the Senser, which is indicated by a possessive pronoun "my", I consider this nominal group as a female participant.

Yet, a different assignment is given in a case of text 6 (*KLP).*

> His wife is a computer programmer
>
> Identified   Pr: relational   Identifier

The identified is a nominal group consisting of possessive pronoun, 'his', which refers to a male and a noun 'wife' which carries meaning of an animate female. I categorize 'his wife' as female by looking at the head of

the group. This phenomenon is worth noting because the female participant here is described by her marital status. This agrees with what Goddard and Patterson (2000) denote that women are often described by their relationship to men.

Though the identifier 'a computer programmer' is non-gendered, it is assigned as female because it identifies the Subject of the clause. I also assume that the writer is conscious that this job is applicable for men and women. If not, the writer might say 'a female computer programmer' instead.

Assigning gender categories in these texts is a delicate matter, especially when the participants are non-gendered. Take a look at the following clause from text 1 in *MEC.*

A student	is going to be named	Child Hero.
Identified	Pr: Relational	Identifier

There is no reference whether 'a student' is female or male; but based on my analysis on the Identifier, I assign this as a male participant. "Child Hero", the Identifier, carries a meaning which in the present day may refer to both sexes. In this case, I have decided to assign this as a male participant for several reasons.

1. definition

Webster's New World Dictionary (1990: 277)

Hero: any person, esp. man, admired for courage, nobility, etc.

2. context of time

Since this book was published in 1970s when gender awareness has just begun, I consider that 'hero' refers to man. This is also strengthened by the fact that there is a term for female hero, i.e. heroine.

All in all, the frequency for female and male participants of each textbook can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. The frequency of female and male participants

Textbooks	Female	Male
KLP	35	41
MEC	8	48
Total	43	89

Analysis and Discussion of Gender and Transitivity

Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) transitivity is employed to reveal the participants and processes of each text. This paper presents the analysis of texts from both textbooks. In general, it is evident that females are not represented equally in either of the textbooks (see Table 3). The main events are realized through Material, Mental, Relational, and Verbal. They concern with doing, sensing, being, and saying. Full analysis of each text can be accessed in Appendix 1 and 2.

Transitivity in *KLP*

From the analysis, it is revealed that in almost all processes, despite the small difference in frequency, the roles of male participants outnumber the females. Of a total of 76 participant roles, 41 are realized by males and 35 by females (see Table 4).

Table 4. Transitivity in *KLP*

Process Type	Participant role	Female	Male
Material	Actor	9	12
	Goal	3	2
	Recipient	-	1
Mental	Senser	8	15
	Phenomenon	3	-
Relational	Carrier	3	3
	Attribute	-	-
	Identified	5	5
	Identifier	3	2
Verbal	Sayer	1	1
	Receiver	-	-

Except in the Relational process, females are more highly represented as Identifier. It is also notable that females are often denoted as Phenomenon, whilst males are never denoted as such. Due to females being realized less as the Senser than males, and more as Phenomenon, means that females become represented as passive. Through this process they become the objects of males. In text 3, for instance, Robert Wilson is the one who decides to hire applicants. One of the applicants is Linda Blake who has no experience before but he decides to hire her because he likes her.

I	like	her
Senser	Pr: mental	phenomenon

There is then a contrast in the reasons for Robert Wilson offering David Nelson a job. From text 1, we find out that David Nelson is actually working for other company. It implies that David Nelson is very well-known for his quality because other company would also like to hire him.

I	offered	David Nelson	a job	last week
Actor	Pr: material	Recipient	Goal	Circumstance

From these two examples, I can draw a conclusion that females become employed for their likeability, when males are employed on the basis of their capabilities. Robert Wilson himself is a representation of a competent man. His position as a program director in television is higher than David and Linda. If political correctness in gender matters was observed here, this position might be realized through a female character. In this point, I strongly agree with what Coulthard & Coulthard (1996) have argued that critical discourse analysis can point out that something could actually have been represented other way, with a very different significance.

Another example which may support my conclusion occurs in text 4 (Pop Star).

I	like	all those young girls screaming …
Senser	Pr: Mental	phenomenon

Here, the Senser enjoys being adored by females. In this case the male pop star has more power than the fans that are all female.

Remarkable phenomenon also occurs in texts 2 and 5 whose main characters are female. The clause count for texts 2 and 5 is 12 and 18 respectively, but the frequency of Linda as the Actor is four and of the nurse is only one. It is evident that males are represented more as the doers than the females are.

Table 5 The frequency of main character as the Actor

Text No.	Clause Count	Actor
1	12	6
2	12	4
3	9	2
4	15	2
5	18	1
6	19	2

Nevertheless, in text 6 which talks about Barry Wood, the frequency of the female participant (his wife) being realized as the Actor is more than that of Barry Wood. Of 19 clauses, Barry Wood being realized as Actor only constitutes three, while his wife constitutes 5. This count includes the pronoun 'we' which I decide to refer to both sexes. His wife is described as someone who is competent in her job. Yet, as the illustration suggests and the frequency of his being the Senser indicates, the representation of a competent woman is less desirable. This text seems to implicitly show that being competent at work means disaster for the woman's household.

Transitivity in *MEC*

This book contains stark gender asymmetry. Of a total of 55 gendered participant roles, 47 are realized by males and only 8 by females. In most events, females are not represented at all. This emphasizes the insignificance of the female voice.

Table 6 Transitivity in *MEC*

Process Type	Participant role	Female	Male
Material	Actor	4	11
	Goal	2	6
	Recipient	-	2
Mental	Senser	-	3
	Phenomenon	-	2
Relational	Carrier	-	2
	Attribute	-	-
	Identified	1	8
	Identifier	1	8
Verbal	Sayer	-	3
	Receiver	-	3

The fact that Actor is realized by 11 male participants and only 4 females indicates that males are represented as being more active and capable of 'doing'. Males as 'being' are also recognized more than females. It means that males are the 'holder' of the identity (Eggins, 1994). Some identities clearly related to male are chairman and fisherman. Some higher-level positions are also realized by male such as chairman, manager, and editor.

Females, on the other hand, are represented as having less identity. In terms of job, females were likely to be acknowledged as merely 'housewives' (or house managers?). Subsequently, some job positions are mostly occupied by males.

Yet, there is a job assigned to Aminah (text 6) which is widely appreciated—i.e. a dietician. She is represented as the Actor who is competent enough of 'doing' her job. Yet, the job strongly relates to female qualities i.e. taking care of the family's healthy food. Predictably, the text reveals that the Recipient of her action is also female participant (a group of housewives).

Similarities and Differences of the Representation of Females in *KLP* and *MEC*

Though *KLP* and *MEC* are two ELT textbooks from different cultures, they both represent a contrast count of female and male participants. This finding is not surprising as those textbooks were published in the 1970s when political correctness in gender was not well established. Nonetheless, *KLP* represents females better than those in *MEC*. The voice of females in *MEC* is more likely to be silenced.

Table 7. Participant Roles of Female in *KLP* and *MEC*

Process Type	Participant Roles	*KLP*	*MEC*
Material	Actor	9	4
	Goal	3	2
	Recipient	-	-
Mental	Senser	8	-
	Phenomenon	3	-
Relational	Carrier	3	-
	Attribute	-	-
	Identified	5	1
	Identifier	3	1
Verbal	Sayer	1	-
	Receiver	-	-

Females in *KLP* are portrayed as being more active than those in *MEC.* It can be seen from their roles as the doer of an action. In the events of 'thinking' and 'perceiving', females in *MEC* are not portrayed at all while in *KLP* they still have some voices. It is apparent that females in *MEC* are not given opportunities to put forward their thinking and feeling. Freedom of expressing ideas has become male dominated.

In the events of 'being', females in *KLP* outnumber those in MEC. In *KLP,* females are described to have varieties of job which are not only 'domestic-female related'. In contrast, the only female in *MEC* is described to have a job which constitutes female qualities.

Females in these two texts are represented as being competent but at the same time they are also regarded as either less desirable, or restricted from being more competent than males. In the case of being a nurse (text 5, *KLP*) or a dietician (text 5, *MEC*), no negative impression is implied through the text. This is because their occupations have strong feminine qualities and they are unlikely to compete or exceed the males' competence. As for a computer programmer which tends to require more sophisticated skill and ability, the female character receives complaints from the male. Many times, the male participant realizes this through mental processes by regretting and wishing that the female will realize that a woman's job is to stay at home and look after the children.

I	wish	she would stay at home and look after the children
Senser	Pr: Mental	Phenomenon

That	's	a woman's job
Identified	Pr: relational	Identifier

From the discussion above, we can see that, though the two textbooks were published in the same era, different sociocultural background has indeed contributed to differences in female representations. In most events, females in *MEC* do not have voice as they do in *KLP*. This may reflect what was occurring in that particular society. At that time, I believe, women in East Asia were more excluded than those in Europe and their voice in public context was more silenced.

In relation to pedagogical implication, gender asymmetry contained in the texts may impede the success of learning. These texts are supposed to guide students to complete their tasks. In the present textbooks, for example, the texts give the students situations in which they have to play roles as one of the characters mentioned in the texts. In most situations the main characters are male and this may result in confusion or awkwardness when female students are not appropriately accommodated. Therefore

equal numbers of female and male participants in the texts should be encouraged.

The construction of the idea that some jobs are mainly male-related may discourage female students and cause them to subconsciously assume that these jobs are not meant for females. The consciousness of the use of 'political correct' terms is, therefore, preferable. Take for example, the use of chairperson for chairman, house manager for house wives, etc. Of course, this is not an easy thing to do. There are cases in which some neutral terms may not have yet been incorporated into language such as fisherman. Even when introduced, the term might seem to be exaggerated and considered as politically correct but not actually operative. This then challenges the process of making a language less sexist.

Conclusion

From the findings, it is revealed that both ELT textbooks from different cultures were not conscious enough of 'political correctness' in gender matters. The number of female-male participants was unequal. Some males were described as being more active and competent whilst females being more passive and less competent than males. In some cases, females were also represented as being less desirable. However, texts within Western culture represent females better than those within Eastern culture. These findings agree with my assumption put forward earlier.

Though we are now thirty years ahead, this study hopes to provide a small reminder that gender asymmetry does exist and varies across cultures. The present finding, from data in the 1970s, can also be used as a gauge to measure progression of the use of language within educational material.

Bibliography

Bloor, T. & M. Bloor. 2004. *The Functional Analysis of English*. London: Arnold.

Cameron, D. 2005. "Language, Gender, and Sexuality: Current Issues and New Directions", in *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 26(4): 482-502. Oxford University Press.

Coulthard, C. R. & M. Coulthard (eds). 1996. *Texts and Practices: Reading in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.

Chee, L.M. & A.S. Khim. 1976. *Modern English for Communication: book 4*. Kuala Lumpur: Pan Asian Publications.

Eggins, S. 1994. *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. London: Continuum.

Fairclough, N., & P. Graham, J. Lemke, R. Wodak. 2004. "Introduction", in *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 1 (1): 1-7. Routledge.

Fowler, R. 1996. "On Critical Linguistics", in Coulthard, C.R. & M. Coulthard (eds). *Texts and Practices: Reading in Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.

Goddard, A. & L.M. Patterson. 2000. *Language and Gender*. London: Routledge.

Halliday, M.A.K. & C. M. I. M. Matthiessen. 2004. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.

Kortenhaus, C. M. & J. Demarest. 1993. "Gender Role Stereotyping in Children's Literature: An Update", in *Sex Roles*, vol. 28 (3/4): 219-232.

Neufeldt, V. & A. N. Sparks (eds). 1990. *Webster's New World Dictionary*. Ohio: A Prentice Hall/McMillan Company.

O'Neill, R. 1972. *Kernel Lessons Plus: a post-intermediate course*. Longman.

Peterson, S. B. & Lach, M. A. 1990. "Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books: their prevalence and influence on cognitive and affective development", in *Gender and Education*, vol. 2 (2): 185-197.

Wharton, S. 2005. "Invisible Females, Incapable Males: Gender Construction in a Children's Reading Scheme", in *Language and Education*, vol. 19 (3): 238-251.