



# Linguistic Landscape and Gender Discrimination: A Study on Gender Biasness in School Curriculum

Sana Hashmi

Advance Central for Women's Studies, AMU, Aligarh

&

Mehvish Mohsin

Department of Linguistics, AMU, Aligarh

## Abstract

*Gender discrimination is one of the serious issues in today's world. The predominant literature on the subject of gender has succeeded in portraying women as the target of such types of discrimination. It can be seen everywhere in the society be it public or private sphere. In fact, school is one of the important agents of gender socialization which plays a significant role in shaping the gender roles of school children. Thus, the practice and promotion of gender discrimination in school curriculum and textbooks through projection of gender biased roles and professions both in the public and private spheres have severe consequences in the society at large. It negatively encourages both girls and boys to take up the stereotypical positions constructed for them by these teaching aids. In this context, the study critically examines and analyzes the pictures and the language shown in the posters and charts that have been used in schools as one of the important teaching aids for centuries. The posters, charts and the other teaching materials both in Hindi and English medium were selected and reviewed for the study. Identifying gender biased language, gender stereotyping and construction of gender roles are central to the study. The study observes that still the existing new teaching aids are showing gender inequalities. Thus, the study suggests that a gender inclusive curriculum is the need of present era in order to shape and promote positive gender socialization, which advocates gender equality.*

**Keywords:** Linguistic landscape, Gender discrimination, Gender equality, Textbooks and curriculum.

## 1. Introduction

*“Sign, sign, everywhere a sign*

*Blockin' out the scenery, breakin' my mind*

*Do this, don't do that, can't you read the sign?”*

“Signs” the five man electrical band (1971)

The linguistic landscape is around us all the time, it is an attention to language. We can see language signs on the streets, in the countryside, in hospitals, at schools, in indoor markets, in the offices of governments, on moving buses etc. These words and images displayed and exposed in public spaces are the center of attention in the rapidly growing area referred to as ‘Linguistic Landscape’ (Shohamy and Gorter, 2009). Visual images are always treated as a kind of decoration and indeed they are. It has been proven that the text that have only written material and no pictures or diagrams seem to be boring in comparison to those having attractive pictures and the use of eye catching sceneries with fine use of colours. That is the reason why the posters and the textbooks of the schools children are always attractive and colourful. These teaching aids are the powerful tools that are used as means through which children learn their culture and heritage. According to Dorothy Smith, textbooks are the essential medium of power that shapes the ways in which children think about the society as well as about themselves (Smith, 1987). Textbooks and the posters constitutes significant component of the school curriculum. School is the social institution of learning; it shapes the thought process and plays a significant role in gender socialization by reinforcing the traditional values and norms of the society through various teaching learning practices.

Modern teaching aids are introducing day by day to flourish the teaching process. But the pictures lying on the walls of the schools have always been an integral part of learning process. These are being used from the last many centuries and are going to be used for many more. These pictures and sceneries seem to be attractive and captive and leave a long lasting impression on the young minds. Indeed, these pictures help the teachers and parents to educate their children in a perfect manner but many times we find that some kind of hidden messages are also transferring to the young minds of the learners through these pictures, the way these pictures are design and the way these are using the portrayal of women. Young children are bombarded daily with language and images that influence their formation of gender roles (Narahara, 1998). The portrayal of women in these pictures as well as in the pictures that are there in textbooks plays a significant role in the social construct of gender. Sadker and Zittleman asserts that students spend as much as 80 to 90 percent of classroom time using textbooks as well as teachers take a majority of their decisions based on the textbooks (Sadker and Zittleman, 2007).

Picture representation serves as an important medium where the social realities are created from a certain aspect, through the knowledge and values that are included and excluded in accordance with the patriarchal norms. These pictures are shown to strengthen the traditional values regarding gender roles where we find men as active, outgoing, adventurous and bread winners while women as weak, passive, docile and housewife roles that need to be protected and taken care of by the able men. The World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995 Platform for Action, Chapter 4, Section B, paraa.69-79, in particular paragraph 74) says that “curricula and teaching materials remain gender biased to a large degree, and are rarely sensitive to the specific needs of girls and women. This reinforces traditional female and male roles that deny women opportunities for full and equal partnership in society. Lack of gender awareness by educators at all levels strengthens existing inequalities between males and females by reinforcing discriminatory tendencies and undermining girls, self-esteem” (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, Promoting Gender Equality in Text Books: A Methodological Guide, 2009). Initially the issue of gender bias in school textbooks was investigated in 1970s/1980s by Western Second Wave feminists using ‘content analysis approach’ (Weitzman, Deborah, Elizabeth and Catherina, 1972). The main focus in content analysis approach involves ‘the qualification of images and activities: it was to see how many men/boys were there in relation to women/girls, what roles they were portrayal in and terminology used to speak about males and females’ (Skelton, 2006).

## **2. Benefits for Using Posters as a Teaching Aid**

- Words that are linked to the pictures help students to grasp and remember new concepts.
- Posters are fantastic, independent learning aid.
- Posters are more than decoration, they provide valuable information.
- Student who can visualize, respond better in the classroom.
- About one third of all students in an average class learn through visualization.
- Posters help to keep students engage which assists in students, educational growth.

## **3. Objectives**

This paper has been written keeping the following objectives in mind-

- To examine the pictures and quotations, that are being used in school curricula, from a gender perspectives.
- To show how gender inequalities are being constructed in these pictures.
- To represent that how these teaching aids are transferring a gender biased message to the young minds.

## **4. Methodology**

The researched places for the present study are various schools in Uttar Pradesh region. When we are talking about ‘Methodology’, Linguistic landscape relies on photography and visual analysis. The

core data for the present study was collected through photography. There is no denying the fact that the recent developments in the field of digital camera technology make the study of the linguistic landscape possible at a relatively low cost of course, photography exists already over 150 years but it was very expensive to take large quantities of colour pictures until just few years back. But with the advancement of technology to store those pictures is no longer a problem with low cost storage devices.

The researchers took a total of 120 pictures of every visible poster in the school premises and examined them from linguistic as well as from gender perspectives. In addition the language used in the textbooks as well as the posters lying on the walls in school premises was analyzed from gender perspectives. And the researchers came across the interesting results.

## **5. Findings**

During their survey the researcher came across the interesting results. The most striking findings of the study are presented below:-

### **5.1. Depiction of Gender Biased Language**

During the data collection process the researchers found that the language of these posters favours a particular gender over another. The data was collected from the English medium school of Uttar Pradesh district. So, the researchers found that in case of English the preference is given to masculine over feminine [see figures 1, 2, 3 and 4]

Whenever a singular referent is required and we are not aware with the gender of the person we are talking about, we use masculine pronouns (he, his, him, and himself). According to a survey done by Esen in 2007, the number of gender specific pronouns counted was considerably higher than the number of those referring to females.

Similarly, while analyzing the language of textbooks, Pasco found that “HE” occurs three times more than “SHE” in school textbooks (Sunderland, 1994).

### **5.2. Depiction of Gender Biased Jobs/ Professions**

In these schools the researcher found that there is gender segregation in the job, associated to men and women. Professions like doctor, police, postman, headmaster etc are presented by masculine characters, whereas the job of nurse or teacher is exclusively represented by feminine characters. The following pictures depicted that some jobs are appropriate for one sex while some of others [see figures 5, 6 and 7].

The male figure are seen outside the house performing professional tasks at a place to which we can call a workplace. While the female figure is portrayal doing indoor tasks, doing something with child, doing domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes etc. Always a male figure is displayed in the role of a manager or a decision maker and not a female.

There is a poem named “Everybody Has a Duty” it says “*mum cooks the meals, I taste it, dad goes to work and I play games all day*”. The poem delivers a message that has a great conflict. It directly and clearly reflects the gender bias labor distribution.

### **5.3 Depiction of Gender Biased Sports**

It was also analyzed that when we are dealing with different sports certain spaces are reserved for certain gender. Sports like cricket, hockey, chess, swimming etc are allotted to the male characters and female are shown as unable to do these activities [see figures 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12]. In words of Liddle- “in contests involving strengths, speed and reactive ability, women are nowhere near as good as men” (Rod Liddle, 2012).

Similarly,

“so, Kuper baited me: ‘the top women can not take on the top men’. He continued by making assertions like: women are slower than men; women are weaker than men”- Jennifer Doyle (speaking with sports writer Simon Kuper), reported on her blog (The sport spectacle, 2014).

The analysis reveals the fact that particular gender is used to particular sport represent. Gender segregation is there in the field of sports also.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present scenario we are expecting gender integration almost everywhere at workplace, in social spaces and the others. But it is just the expectations because we find gender segregation in every sphere of life whether it’s a matter of profession, sports or anything else. There is an urgent need of gender inclusion in the society. A sense of gender equality should be developed from the very first stage i.e. the home itself and also the schools. The teaching materials should be reviewed from the gender point of view.

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## Figures:

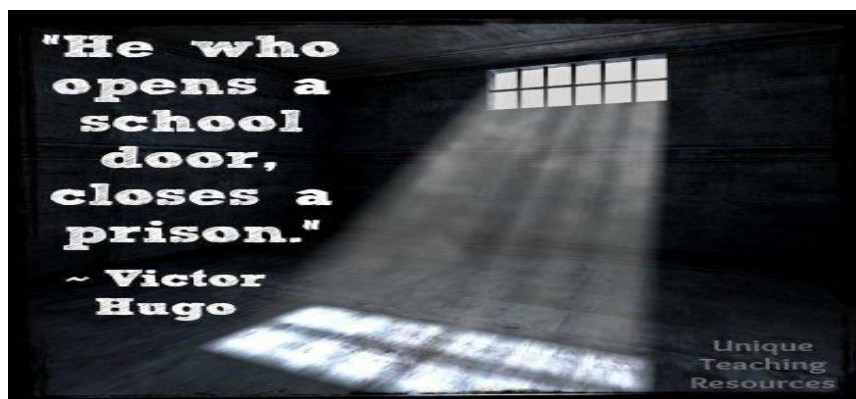


Figure-1.



Figure-2.



Figure-3.

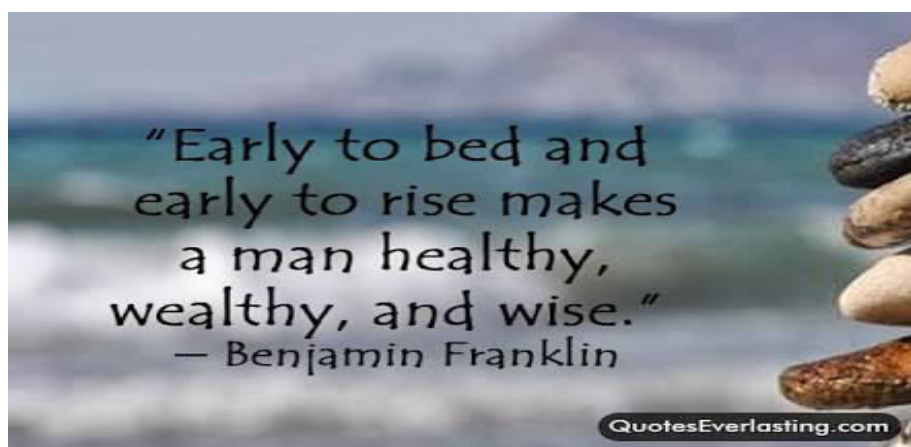


Figure-4.



Figure-5.



Figure-6.



Figure-7.



Figure-8.



Figure-9.



Figure-10.



Figure-11.



Figure-12.