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## Depiction of Gender in American Headway Series

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### Abstract

A great number of researchers interested in designing and producing EFL/ESL materials believe that gender roles and representations can motivate students while learning a foreign language such as English. This comes while some scholars believe that gender representations can hinder the learning process. Ever since the day EFL/ESL experts have determined the significance of gender in EFL/ESL textbooks, a number of studies have been conducted to uncover the prejudices and biases inserted in EFL materials. Linked to previous research articles and studies, the present study aims to investigate how social gender identity is defined through adjectives and photos used in American Headway 5 published by Oxford University Press in 2016. To obtain the objective of the study, the common adjectives used in the conversation section of the American Headway 5 have been detected and counted. Then they were presented in related tables utilizing frequencies. Additionally, the photos all extracted from the book have been tested against gender biases and prejudices. The findings of the study reveal that American Headway 5 attempts to demonstrate both men and women equally, albeit some instances of biases have been detected in the pictures. The findings of the current research can be used by materials developers, syllabus designers as well as EFL/ESL practitioners.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Gender bias, Stereotypes, World English, ESL, EFL*

### Introduction

Learning a foreign language specifically English has attracted the attention of a large number of people including students belonging to different age groups. According to Richards (2001), English language teaching (ELT henceforth) textbooks play pivotal roles in English language

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learning and teaching because they are the main sources of input for pupils and also they have long been considered central to teachers as ELT researchers and practitioners regard textbooks as “a source of knowledge that teachers rely on to prepare and deliver lessons” (Zhang, 2017, p.78).

Among different factors important to teachers and learners while learning English as an international language gender has been an emerging issue which can demonstrate ultimately “how teacher and students establish social commitments to teaching and learning practice,” (Emilia, Moecharam & Syifa, 2017, p.206).

In other words, as Sunderland (1992) posited gender can maneuver in different levels linked to political, sociolinguistic, and educational contexts. There have been a large number of research studies carried out on topics covering gender issues in education such as the portrayal of gender in learning materials set to be used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Evans & Davies, 2000; Toçi & Aliu, 2013; Yasin et al., 2012). Regarding the mentioned points, special attention has been given to the content of EFL textbooks used for teaching English in various institutes and schools.

Among different issues regarded as vital by scholars and practitioners while analyzing EFL textbooks, gender biases and representations are said to be the main concepts. In other words, although a large number of studies have been conducted on genders bias, still gender stereotypes and biases persist (Eslami, Sonnenburg, Ko, Hasan, & Tong, 2015). According to Romera (2015), “educational institutions model gender identities construct the idea of what it means to be male or female” (p. 206).

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), gender inequality that begins with schooling and can be depicted in teaching materials is important to be considered “for a future society” (as cited in Soleimani, Rahimi&Sadeghi2015). In a report published by UNESCO (2011), gender stereotype is defined as “simplistic generalizations about the gender attributes and the roles of individual and/or groups and about differences among them. Stereotype can be positive or negative but they rarely communicate accurate information about others.”

In a seminal paper, Xiong, He and Li (2017, p.79) conducted a study on “English textbooks used in primary schools in Guangzhou, a metropolitan city in South China with a population of more than ten million”, concluding that “stereotypes and imbalanced representation of genders and gender social roles” are paramount in the textbooks.

Moreover, Lee and Collins (2008) explored gender representation in textbooks taught to EFL students in Hong Kong and concluded that stereotyped images of women can be seen in the books. Likewise, Nofal and Qawar (2015) carried out a study on Action Pack 10 and they examined the depiction of men and women. They concluded that overrepresentation of male characters in the book is the main drawback of the mentioned textbooks.

A number of researchers also conducted gender-driven studies on EFL/ESL textbooks taught in different parts of Iran. For example, Iranian High School Textbooks have been tested against gender representation with that of New Interchange Series in a study conducted by Nazeri (2010). According to Nazeri (2010), sexism can be seen in both of the books. By

utilizing a similar methodology, Esmaili (2011) started a research and compared American Headway Series (the old version) with Iranian High School Textbooks. According to Eslamili (2011) gender stereotypes are paramount in the textbooks.

Moreover, Hall (2014) used a systematic qualitative and quantitative approach for exploring EFL textbooks taught in Iranian schools. According to the results found in the study, the books are not gender-balanced. However, no one has so far investigated the depiction of men and women in American Headway 5 in Iran as it was first published in 2016.

Connected to other studies concentrating on gender representation, the current study is aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. Are there any differences in the adjectives used by authors of American Headway 5 for feminine and masculine characters?
2. Is there any difference between the number of male and female characters depicted in the photos and pictures in American Headway 5?

### **Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions posed in the study, the researchers used a qualitative approach for analyzing both genders linguistically and visually in the mentioned book.

#### *Procedure*

As mentioned earlier, the authors of the present article combined social semiotic approach and content analysis to find answers to the question of the study. To put it simply, the researchers scanned the conversations imbedded in each unit of the book. Afterwards, the authors counted the most frequent adjectives in regard to describing both genders. Additionally, all the photos and pictures in the book have been checked and counted by the researchers in order to find out whether gender role stereotypes can be seen in the book or not. According to American Headway (2017, p.1): *American Headway is the course you can always trust.*

Its proven methodology - focus on grammar, clear vocabulary syllabus, integrated skills work - gives you lessons that really work in class.

With the new Second Edition you get fully-revised material, the completely new Advanced level, and an exciting new generation of digital support - the online Teacher Resource Center, Test Generator CD-ROMs, and more.

The authors of the book assert that the book used a well-adjusted methodology. According to Liz and John Soars, the Headway is full of grammatical issues as well as a wide variety of tasks focusing on four language skills i.e., Reading, Speaking, Listening and Writing.

Moreover, everyday expressions used in English has a core place in the book. Additionally, a bank of online resources has been developed for teachers teaching the book in an attempt to pave the way for the teachers in designing tests. The book is also said to be able to prepare students for the TOEFL iBT and other standardized tests. The above mentioned statements can

prove that the authors of the book think that the new edition is complete and can meet the needs of students interested in studying English (American Headway, 2017).

### Results and Discussion

In an attempt to find an answer for the first research question of the study (i.e., Are there any differences in the adjectives used by authors of American Headway 5 for feminine and masculine characters?), all the conversation sections of American Headway have been scanned and the most frequent adjectives utilized for describing both genders have been singled out.

Based on the extracted information from the book, the number of adjectives utilized for both genders i.e., men and women are approximately the same (See Table 1). Also, it is noteworthy to say that the majority of the adjectives are related to personality while some other adjectives paramount in the conversation have been linked to physical appearance of the characters. A number of adjectives known as negative personality adjectives such as rude and saucy have been used in the text. Additionally, positive adjectives such as glad and young were also employed by the authors of the book for both men and women depicted in this section of the book. Besides, the word thoughtful was used for both men and women in different pages of the book.

Table 1. Adjectives used in the conversation sections of American Headway 5

Male	Female	Both
Glad	Young	Proud
Saucy	Lucky	Rude
Tired	Tired	Loud
	Surprised	Thoughtful

Furthermore, the photos embedded in the textbook and the number of men and women shown in them have been tallied, counted and shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of analysis related to photos of American Headway 5

Total number of photos	Photos showing male characters	Photos showing female characters
353	148	102

According to the Table, the total number of photos and pictures used in the textbook is 353, out of which 148 have been related to men and just 102 of the photos have been linked to women. In other words, the number of photos describing men is higher than the number of women used in the photos. This means that the book is not gender-balanced in terms of the photos showing both genders. Moreover, 103 of the photos have not been related to either men or women and they have covered photos of nature, cars, flowers, buildings, monuments and animals.

After counting the number of photos in the textbook, every photo was rescanned by the researchers of the study in an attempt to see different gender roles. According to this part's analysis, men and women have been shown while doing different jobs. In other words, men

are not breadwinner of the family and women are not regarded as caregivers. This comes while in most cases women are linked to certain job stereotypes such as nurses and not medical doctors (Hall, 2014). In American Headway 5, the authors wrote a unit about gender stereotypes (i.e., Unit 8). Throughout the books photos related to women pilots and women footballers can also be seen. Additionally, a photo is related to bringing up children in which both genders can be perceived. Moreover on page 93, a photo is describing first women getting the vote. Still in another example, in a photo showing a motto "If you get plenty of exercise, it will make you feel great" Soars & Soars (2016, p.31), one can see both genders. Also on page 52, one can see a photo depicting a man and a woman while painting. Besides, on page 43, three photos of football fans showing both genders can be realized.

The findings of the current study depict that American Headway 5 is a gender-balanced textbook when analyzing content of the photos and pictures of the book. However, in terms of the number of photos, one can say that men are used more than women. Based on Tables 1 and 2, adjectives used to describe both genders in the conversation section of the book do not follow the same rule. In other words, stereotypical images of men and women have not been used in the book when analyzing the adjectives. The findings of the current study can be beneficial to materials developers, teachers and practitioners as well as policy makers working in EFL contexts. Finally, according to Table 1 there is no meaningful differences in the used adjectives in the textbooks. This comes while the total number of photos related to male characters is much higher than the total number of female characters.

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