



Gender Representation in Moroccan EFL Textbooks' Conversations: A Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

By employing two analytical methods, this study investigates gender representation in the conversations of an EFL textbook currently used in Moroccan secondary schools. First, a quantitative content analysis studies the following four criteria: (1) dialogue initiation, (2) turn-taking, (3) the number of words used, and (4) the number of participants. Second, a qualitative content analysis of all the textbook conversations is carried out by examining males' and females' topics of the talks, their active/passive roles, their high/low status, and gender differences in language use. Although the results indicated a minor numeric difference favouring males, the qualitative analysis proved an obvious stereotypical depiction of female participants in conversations' topics by connecting them with household chores' issues and assigning them traditional gender roles. Furthermore, gender differences in language use were discovered, which confirms the results of prominent figures in the area, such as Lakoff (1975), Spender (1980), and Tannen (1991). The paper ends with a conclusion and some recommendations aiming at supporting textbooks free of sexist attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender and language, as an academic field of research, has tried to uncover the negative portrayals and assessments of women's speech, which has been considered distinct from men's speech. As early as 1975, with the emergence of feminist linguistics and the effect of feminism on the discipline, Lakoff began her investigation into gender differences in language use (Sunderland, 2006). She argues that women use more polite forms, tag questions, hedges, and intensifiers. They also over-apologise and make more requests. According to Lakoff, this deficit approach to women's speech reflects their social inferiority (Lakoff, 1975). Five years after Lakoff's work, Spender (1980) looked at sexism in the English language and gender inequalities in language use. Recognized for her male dominance approach, Spender provided further information by concentrating on how men choose the topic of mixed-sex conversations, interrupt the debate, and silence women. She added that women's ideas are disregarded, and their contributions are undervalued.

In an attempt to positively evaluate women's talk, advocates of the cultural difference approach insisted that gender differences in language use result from different speech cultures

(Sunderland, 2006). According to Tannen, rapport-talk is linked with women to establish relationships and connections in personal situations, whereas report-talk is connected with males in public settings outside the home (Tannen, 1991). For her, "*the comfort of home*" (p.41) means being free from talking for men, but a great urge to talk for women as a setting where they may communicate freely (Tannen, 2003).

In summary, theorists and researchers concluded that there are differences between men's and women's speech. These differences offer ascent to conventional female portrayals that promote gender ideologies, which, in turn, support gender imbalances that sustain male dominance and female subordination (Talbot, 2003). As a result, researching gender representation in conversations is critical to recognise these biases and increase awareness about the importance of supporting textbooks free of sexist attitudes. However, before examining sexism in an EFL Moroccan textbook, it is necessary to consider what the literature review says about the topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Notably, gender representation in EFL textbooks has a long history. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, numerous scholars have examined how males and females are depicted in textbooks. Hartman & Judd (1978) and Porreca (1984) investigated the portrayal of women in ESL textbook texts and images. The findings demonstrated that women were less visible in images and were associated with stereotyped roles in language patterns. Poulou (1997) examined gender representation in textbook dialogues, concentrating on the number of male and female words, initiating and final utterances, and language functions. She came to the conclusion that sexism existed in all of the sectors investigated.

Recently, many studies have investigated gender representation in EFL textbooks' illustrations and reading texts (Agni et al., 2020; Al-saleem, 2011; Amini & Birjandi, 2012). The study results show that female characters are underrepresented in drawings and are depicted with stereotypical occupations and roles. They also unveil sexist language and male firstness in the reading texts. Other studies further include dialogues in their investigation (Abiky, 2019; Ansary & Babaii, 2003; Hall, 2014; Hamdan & Jalabneh, 2009; Pontiaka, 2018; Yaghoubi-notash & Nariman-jahan, 2012). Abiky (2019) found that most dialogues were male-male while mixed-gender conversations were almost absent.

Similarly, Ansary & Babaii (2003) discovered a focus on male-oriented topics in most analysed dialogues. Hall (2014) concluded in a comparative research with Ansary and Babaii that, while male dominance in conversations' themes has decreased from 64 percent to 47 percent, there is still an imbalance in representation. In addition, Hamdan & Jalabneh (2009) revealed that males take 89% of the dialogue turns, control the talk, and interrupt conversations. Conversely, the studies of Yaghoubi-notash & Nariman-jahan (2012) and Pontiaka (2018) found a fair representation regarding the number of words and the frequency of dialogue initiation. They also found no gender differences in the speech of males and females, and gender-neutral pronouns were evident.

In Morocco, some scholars have dealt with gender representation in EFL textbooks (Benattabou, 2020; Bouzid, 2019; Jaafari, 2016; Mechouat, 2017). Male and female characters engaged in different communication strategies, and females took fewer turns than males and were assigned to more minor professional positions, according to Jaafari (2016). Similarly, Mechouat (2017) revealed that women were more associated with domestic household roles and trivial activities such as shopping. Bouzid (2019) noticed a biased representation of appearance, firstness, and professions in texts, conversations, activities, and pictures. In a content study, Benattabou (2020) discovered the low visibility of female characters in drawings and associated them with traditional occupations and roles.

In conclusion, the literature review suggests a gender misrepresentation favouring males over females in textbooks' texts, illustrations, exercises, and dialogues. However, it was observed that previous research has focused chiefly on gender portrayal in visuals and reading texts, with just a few studies delving into gender representation in conversations. Indeed, the existing accounts even analyse conversations, but adopting both quantitative and qualitative content analytical methods has not been extensively carried out. In this respect, the present research aimed to fill such missing gaps and tried to determine if the current findings confirm what is suggested in most literature. For this purpose, the following questions were addressed:

1. To what extent are males and females visible in *Visa to the World's* conversations?
2. What are the roles ascribed to each gender in these conversations?
3. Are there any gender differences in language use?

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

Accordingly, the current study randomly investigated one EFL Common Core textbook formally approved and endorsed by the Ministry of National Education, Preschool, and Sports. It is entitled "*Visa to the World*," published first in 2005 and is still utilised in Moroccan public secondary schools.

3.2. Procedures of Analysis

The analysis of *Visa to the World's* conversations began with a quantitative content analysis of all the mixed-sex conversations (see the appendix) to explore how the two genders are represented based on the following four criteria: dialogue initiation, turn-taking, the number of words used by males and females, and the number of participants in conversations. The study's next step included a qualitative content analysis of all the textbook dialogues (mixed-sex and same-sex conversations) regarding the following four questions: What is the topic of the conversation? Who is active, and who is passive in the conversation? Who has status in the conversation? Are there any gender differences in language use?

4. Results and Discussion: Quantitative Content Analysis

The analysis of mixed-sex conversations regarding dialogue initiation and closing is reflected in table (1):

Table (1): Male/Female Initiation and Closing in Conversations

Number/percentage	Females		Males	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Dialogue Initiation	6	67%	3	33%
Dialogue Closing	3	33%	6	67%

Table (1) shows that females initiate conversations more than males, with a rate of 67 percent compared to 33 percent. On the other hand, male characters are more likely to end discussions than female characters at the same rate. One aspect that cannot be overlooked is that, contrary to previous studies and the literature review, female characters initiate dialogues more frequently than male characters.

The textbook includes six dialogues where female characters start the talk. In the first one (p.21), the conversation turns around a sports magazine between a female character and a male character; Maria opens the discussion and provides the information. Therefore, a precise deconstruction of traditional female roles is observed since the female character is the informant while the male character is the recipient. As a result, this conversation is a typical

example of female leadership in initiating the talk, deciding the conversation's topic and leading it by answering the male character's questions.

Turning to the second conversation (p.69), the female character Jane starts and closes the talk. Upon reading and analysing the conversation, one can observe that the female character is playing an active role. In contrast, the male character Bob feels terrible, and Jane is doing her best to offer help. This conversation, indeed, shows a female character in a leading position. In addition, another female character initiates the third conversation (p.91). However, unlike the first two conversations, this holds the stereotype that female characters have no knowledge about scientists. In the conversation, though the female character starts the talk, she becomes a recipient who is provided with information about the female scientist Marie Curie. We also find that the female character asks many questions while the male character Chris plays the role of the knowledgeable character by answering all her questions. Similarly, the analysis of the fourth conversation (p.91) initiated by a female character reveals female passivity and stereotyping where the female character, in all her turns, asks questions about scientific inventions while the male character provides answers. This feature of asking questions on the parts of female characters while male characters provide answers is also reflected in the fifth (p.97) and the sixth (p.103) conversations.

To summarise the discussion about dialogue initiation and closing, female characters are presented more initiating the conversations, but they are not leading the talk. Male characters close the conversations (67%) more than female characters (33%) is a typical example to illustrate the point. Furthermore, female characters are more portrayed in passive roles as recipients of information on different issues.

Following the quantitative content analysis, turn-taking is the second criterion for investigating mixed-sex conversations. As a result, counting how many times the two genders take turns reveals that they have the same number, as shown in table (2):

Table (2): Turn-taking in Mixed-sex Conversations

Females		Males		
Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Turn-taking	54	50%	54	50%

The table demonstrates that males and females take the same number of turns 54 times, resulting in 50 percent for each. Therefore, unlike the literature review, the analysis shows no under-representation of female characters in turn-taking.

The number of words used by males and females is another fascinating area of research for analysing gender bias in a textbook on mixed-sex conversations. As a consequence, we arrive at the following results in table (3) by counting the number of words uttered by each gender:

Table (3): The Number of Words uttered by each Gender in Conversations

Females		Males		
Number/percentage	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Number of Words	457	44%	570	56%

The above figures illustrate a minor difference in the number of words uttered by males and females. Male characters utter 570 words, accounting for 56% of all the words produced,

compared to 457 words used by female characters, accounting for 44%. Even though the difference is insignificant, males are represented more visibly in conversations.

The number of characters in mixed-sex talks is another significant predictor of gender representation in conversations. The number of male and female characters in conversations is counted to determine who is more visible. The results are shown in table (4):

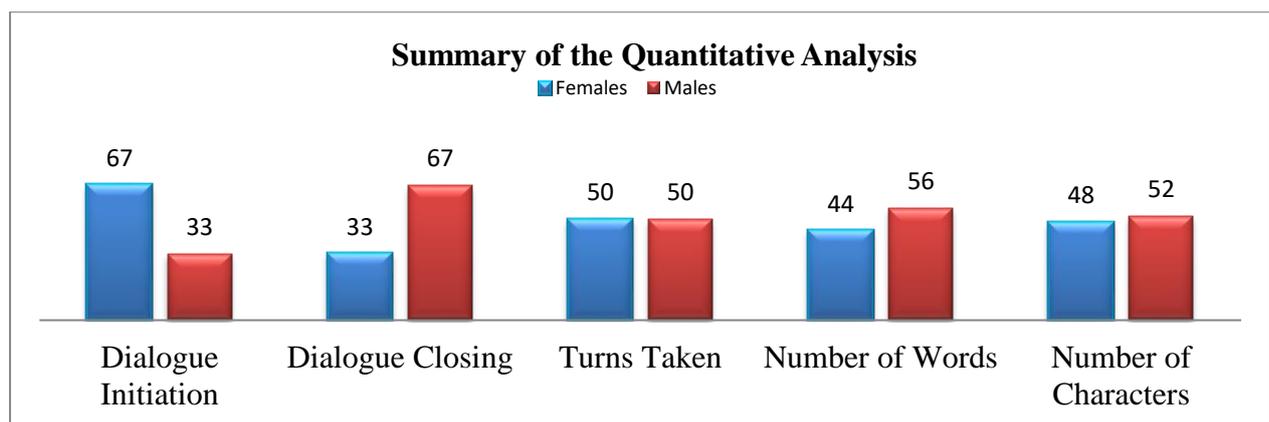
Table (4): Male/Female Characters in Conversations

Females		Males		
Number/percentage	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Number of Characters	16	48%	17	52%

Based on table (4), whereas male characters account for 52 percent (17 characters) of the total number of characters, female characters account for 48 percent (16 characters). As a result, there is a slight increase in male visibility.

To summarise the quantitative section, the analysis of mixed-sex conversations shows some positive results for female representation. Still, it shows a male superiority in leading the talk and playing the informant role. The diagram below sums up the quantitative results:

Diagram (1): Summary of the Quantitative Analysis



Upon reading the above diagram, a general impression is the difference between male and female characters in the four criteria is insignificant. In dialogue initiation, female characters initiate more conversations than male characters and have an equal number of turns taken. In analysing dialogue closing, the number of words, and the number of characters, the findings show more male visibility though the difference is not very big.

1. Qualitative Content Analysis to Conversations in *Visa to the World*

So far, this paper has focused on quantitative content analysis of conversations; this part investigates all the textbook conversations qualitatively regarding the following four questions: what is the topic of the conversation? Who is active, and who is passive? Who has status? Are there any differences in language use between males and females in such conversations?

1.1 What is the topic of the conversation?

The results of the first question dealing with male-male conversations and female-female conversations are reflected in table (5):

Table (5): Male-Male and Female-Female Topics in the Conversations

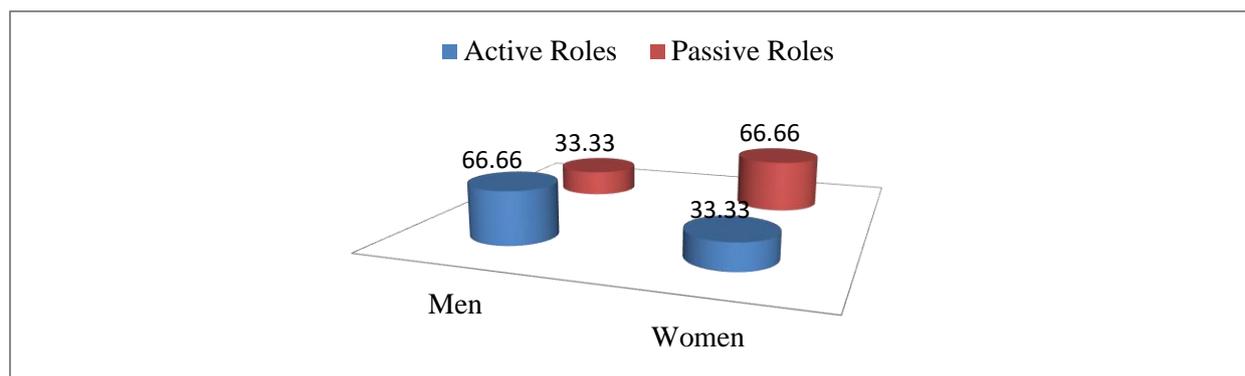
Male-Male Conversations	Female-Female Conversations
- Research on British cuisine (p.54)	- Introducing people to each other (p.14), (p.25)
- Tourism in Morocco (p.123)	- Cooking (p.42)
	- Shopping (p.51)
	- Family parties (p.65)
	- Inquiring about a person (p.73)
	- Office appointment (p.76)

From the table above, there are at least two points to highlight. First, it can be deduced that there are more female-female conversations than male ones. Seven of the nine same-sex conversations are for females, and only two belong to males. Second, there is a difference between the topics of the two genders. While male characters handle serious topics like tourism in Morocco or researching British cuisine, female characters stick to family issues such as family parties, cooking, and shopping.

1.2 Who is active, and who is passive in the conversation?

To answer the above question, the results in diagram (2) reveal that out of the nine conversations, six (66,66%) reinforce male superiority and female inferiority:

Diagram (2): Gender Roles in Visa to the World Conversations



As an illustration, the mixed-sex conversation on page 58 shows how male characters are given active roles. The male character in the conversation starts and concludes the discussion, and thus he is leading the talk. Similarly, the mixed-sex conversations (on pages 91, 94, 97,123) reinforce the binary oppositions between the two genders since all the male characters lead the conversations and talk about what is known to be masculine topics, including science and technology. On the other hand, female characters are also depicted in active positions, although to a lesser extent. In the second conversation of the textbook (p. 21), the female character Maria is given the active role as she is the informant. In contrast, the male character is merely a receptionist. Equally important, in the last mixed-sex conversation (p. 123) between John and Susan, the female character is the source of information and the one who leads the talk.

In brief, in most mixed-sex conversations, male characters are given active roles by either starting and leading the talk or deciding the topic of the conversation and controlling it. More than that, male characters are represented as the source of information, especially in serious issues such as science (dialogues on pages 91, 94, and 103) or technology (p. 97), reinforcing the division of labour. However, female characters are also represented as informants of serious

issues, including sports (p. 21) or banking (p.115). Yet, still, they are under-represented, making only a percentage of 33,33% of active roles in contrast to 66,66% of passive roles.

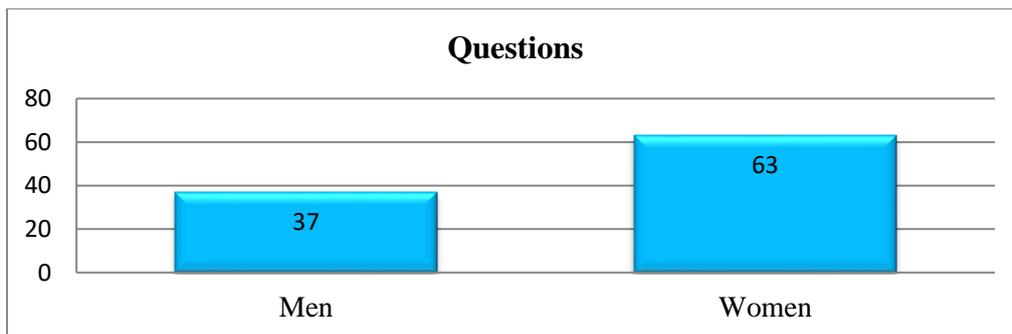
1.3 Who has status in the conversation?

The analysis of the mixed-sex conversations shows that males more than females are presented in high positions and status as more informants and knowledgeable, thus conveying a sort of authority and power. Again, the first dialogue of the textbook (p, 21) serves as a concrete example to show the power and authority of male characters. By initiating and closing the talk, the male character shows the linguistic hegemony of men over women. In a similar vein, to show how male characters are given higher status and intellectual power, dialogues on pages 91, 94, 97, and 103 all present male characters as leaders in providing female characters with information about scientists like Marie Curie or inventors like Percy Spencer.

1.4 Are there any differences in language use between males and females?

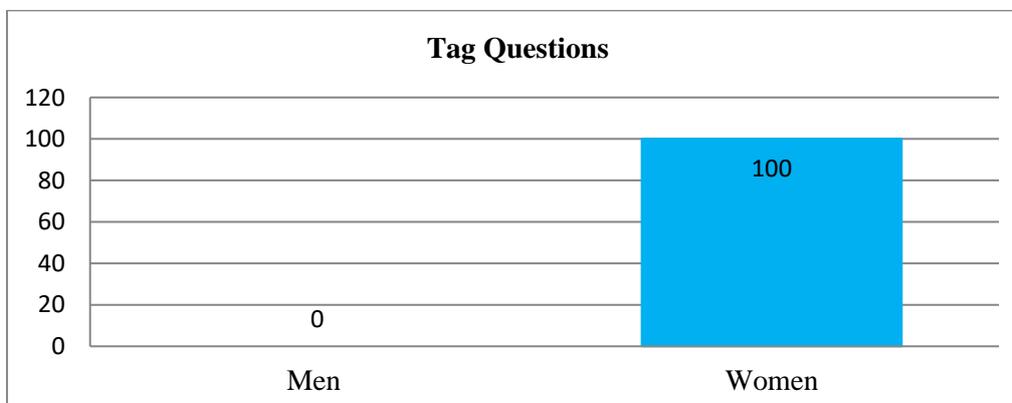
Question four seeks to consider whether or not the two genders use language differently in terms of the following criteria: questions, tag questions, hedges, intensifiers, minimal responses, and compliments. As illustrated in diagram (3), the total number of questions in the textbook is 59. Women ask 37 questions and thus have a percentage of 63 percent, whereas men ask 22 questions with a percentage of 37 percent.

Diagram (3): Gender and the Use of Questions in Visa to the World



Similarly, examining tag questions indicates that women are more likely to employ tag questions than men. In all of the mixed-sex talks, five tag questions are all asked by female characters, as shown in diagram (4):

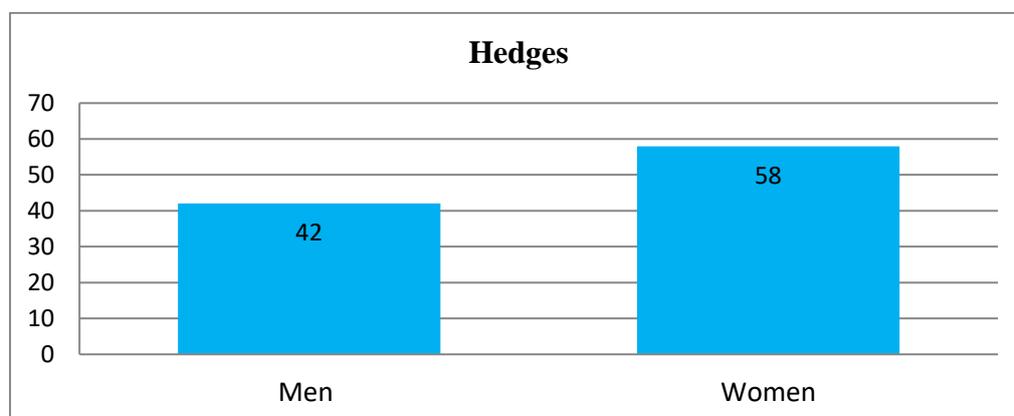
Diagram (4): Gender and the Use of Tag Questions in Visa to the World



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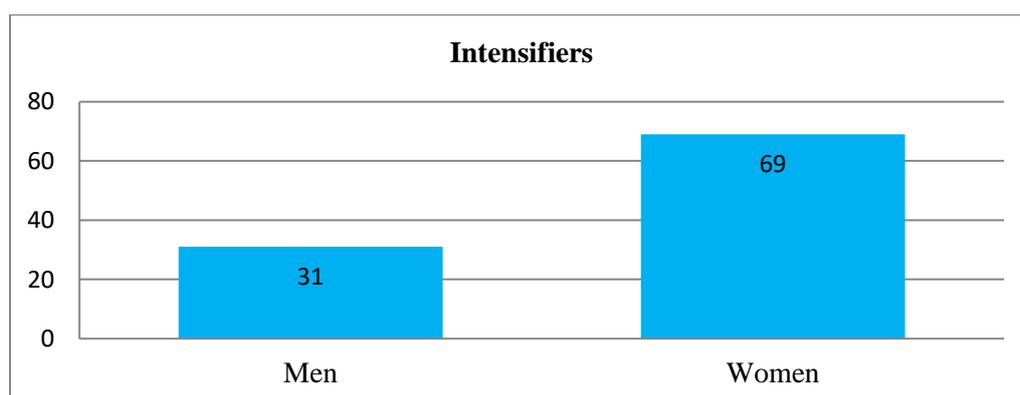
The third aspect to investigate gender differences in language use is the use of hedges. In all the textbook conversations, 43 hedges are found, constituting (58%) for women and (42%) for men, as the diagram (5) shows:

Diagram (5): Gender and the Use of Hedges in Visa to the World



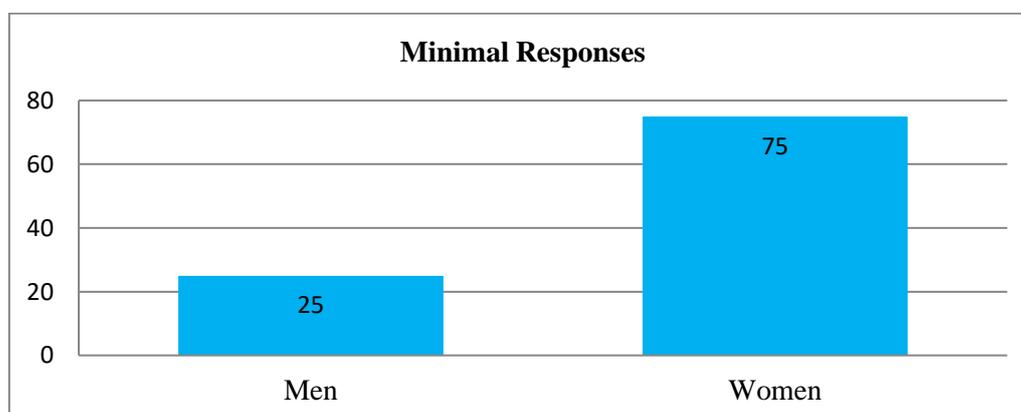
Additionally, intensifiers are another criterion to manifest gender differences in language. As shown in the diagram below, women use 69 percent of intensifiers while men use 31 percent:

Diagram (6): Gender and the Use of Intensifiers in Visa to the World



Minimal responses and compliments are two more areas of study to show how the two genders use language differently. On the one hand, 8 minimal responses are found, 6 (75 %) of them are used by women, while 2 (25 %) are used by men, as illustrated in diagram (7):

Diagram (7): Gender and the Use of Minimal Responses in Visa to the World



On the other hand, there are only three examples of compliments on pages 51, 94, and 97. While in the first dialogue, the female character receives a compliment on the color of her clothes, in the two other dialogues, the two male characters receive compliments on their professional skills as being knowledgeable of scientific inventions (dialogue, p. 94) or as being professional website-maker (dialogue, p.97).

As proven above, it is hard to escape the conclusion that there are differences in language use between men and women in *Visa to the World's* conversations. These differences are found in questions, tag questions, hedges, intensifiers, minimal responses, and compliments. These differences, as a result, confirm what early sociolinguists asserted. In the words of Lakoff, Language mirrors social inequalities. That is, men hold social power, which is reflected in conversations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In closing, the representation of gender in *Visa to the World* conversations came to important conclusions. First, though female characters are given the initiative to start the conversations, males tend to lead and close the talk. Male characters are also more visible as they use more words than females. The analysis also goes hand in hand with past research and early sociolinguists as women use more questions, tag questions, hedges, intensifiers, and minimal responses. Accordingly, boosting the awareness of textbook designers about the issue of producing free-biased materials is one of the most effective ways to dissolve the phenomena. Teachers should also be encouraged to combat sexist representation in the classroom and inspire students to question gender norms. Gender issues should be addressed not only in the classroom but also in the media.

Equally remarkable, even though the current study reached vital conclusions, it has some limitations. First, more textbooks should be studied to define the issue clearly. Second, the investigation should include other angles such as illustrations, reading texts, and exercises. Furthermore, continued studies would have the opportunity to go deeper into the impact of stereotyping on the psychology of students, particularly female students. Thus, gender, language, and education are broad subjects with immense possibilities for researchers to examine.

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Appendix:

Sources of Conversations for the Analysis

Conversation	Type	Characters	Page and Unit
Dialogue 1	Female-female conversation	Pamela and Maria	Unit 1, p.14
Dialogue 2	Mixed-sex conversation	Liz and Maria	Unit 1, p.18
Dialogue 3	Mixed-sex conversation	Liz and Maria	Unit 1, p. 21
Dialogue 4	Female-female conversation	Maria and Lola	Unit 2, p. 25
Dialogue 5	Female-female conversation	Susan and Maria	Unit 3, p.42
Dialogue 6	Female-female conversation	Mary and Kate	Unit 4, p. 51
Dialogue 7	Male-male conversation	Omar and a Salesperson	Unit 5, p. 54
Dialogue 8	Mixed-sex conversation	Alan and Mary	Unit 5, p.62
Dialogue 9	Female-female conversation	Cynthia and Janice	Unit 5, p.65
Dialogue 10	Mixed-sex conversation	Jane and Bob	Unit 6, p. 69
Dialogue 11	Mixed-sex conversation	Jane and Bob	Unit 6, p. 73
Dialogue 12	Female-female conversation	Mary and a receptionist	Unit 6, p. 76
Dialogue 13	Mixed-sex conversation	Steve and Chris	Unit 8, p. 91
Dialogue 14	Mixed-sex conversation	Peter and John	Unit 8, p.94
Dialogue 15	Mixed-sex conversation	Melissa and Jane	Unit 8, p. 97
Dialogue 16	Mixed-sex conversation	Sandi and David	Unit 9, p.103
Dialogue 17	Mixed-sex conversation	John and Susan	Unit 10, p.115
Dialogue 18	Male-male conversation	Ali and Sam	Unit 10, p. 123

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