

How an English book illustrates gender role in this era: A critical review.

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Abstract

Language is a tool to express feeling, idea, and share information. Language reflections the speakers who have many things in common such as tradition, background, values and customs, then they have their own culture in communication among them. Thus, it can be said that they have their own standard for leveling the social class, sexual orientation, language home, and gender roles in the society. Since language is a part of culture so learners need to be aware of values in the society. For instance, learners, speakers of the language itself or whoever interest to the language need to see the roles of male and female in the professional and daily life which has been shifted from unpopular profession for female workers to favored career. It cannot be ignored that in the reality, several English guidebooks for students still contain unresponsive gender pictures as media to introduce English material. Women are profiled as nurses, housekeepers, nannies, and other unpopular positions while man are figured as directors, CEO, pilots, doctors, and other most-wanted careers. In fact, the roles of women and men have been shifted and they have equal position now in professional life. This situation turned teachers and lecturers to be more creative in designing innovative material. Thus, teachers need to integrate not only such important points as good English material but also knowledge of gender into students' materials. Therefore, learners and the society get and apply the knowledge and start appreciating each other, both men and women.

Keywords: Teaching, social life, gender

1. Introduction

This article is based on a preliminary observation of a research on an English book in a Junior High school. It sets out to explore a particular set of connections, between English material on one hand and gender on the other. Each of these terms encompasses what is really an intertwined connection between them. However, before we do anything else, therefore, it is important to try and gets as clear as possible what it is that we will be discussing under gender and culture, then teaching language and gender.

Gender, social life and Culture

Culture is a way of life. Culture might also be defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time. We tend to perceive reality within the context of our own culture. Our cultural shapes our worldview. Cultures are more than traditional dress, home language, sacred ceremonies and food customs. It is possible for Cultural groups share religious belief, sex orientation, ethnicity, or nationality, and gender job description and language.

Since gender is a part of it, people usually stereotype things based on the gender. It is true that the way men and women speak is different in term of sound and intonation (Kompasiana,

2011). In addition, it is also correct that the differences can be seen in the body language, style, and language taboo which are produced by men and women. For instance, in Zulu, Africa, it is forbidden for a daughter in law to mention her father in law's name. She would be killed if she got caught mentioning his name (Kompasiana, 2009). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a taboo word for women. In contrast, it is not a taboo word for men.

Indonesia consists of 17.506 islands, 746 languages, and 1.128 tribes. It can be claimed that Indonesia is multicultural country, which enrich the national heritage and strengthen the identity of Indonesian as well. The uniqueness of Indonesia is priceless treasures that unite people in diversity (Tri Floriasti, 2012). The diversities keep identical tradition within tribes that have their own concepts of gender. For instance, in Javanese language, wife is identically profiled as “konco wingking”, meaning behind the scene-living companion. It can be defined as maid as well. Wives are positioned as socially second-class citizens who are assigned to be able to “Manak, Masak, Macak” – “giving birth, cooking meal, getting dress up” appropriately.

Wives duties cover all aspect of life starting from giving healthy children as a proof that they are fertile women who deserve to be kept. Husband might use this fertile aspect as a possible reason to find others. You are what you cook can be used as a mirror in reflecting the cooking-skills of wives. A common assumption in Indonesia, if you want to attract men's attention, starts it from his appetite for tasty food. Therefore, the value of women can be measured from their cooking-skills and the taste of the food. It is also interpreted that women should be able to serve and satisfy men not only in the bedroom but also in the other psychical needs such as meal so that men can continue their life and manage their job and other social activities. Moreover, wives have to be able to act and dress up impressively to entertain and comfort their husbands so that they feel homey, relaxed and play as good listeners to cheer them up. At the end, husbands will feel proud of their wives and fortunate of what they got. However to reach that kind of soft feeling, women might spend sometimes and sacrifice their needs for socializing and spending a quality time for themselves. Women are patterned as highly skillful companions who act in accordance with their husbands' words and do not take the front shows over their husbands. Whether it is worth or not it depends on the women who are socially shaped by the culture.

Back to 690 AD when Emperor Kao-Tsung suffered a crippling stroke, Empress Wu from Tang dynasty took over the administrative duties of the court, a position equal to the emperor (Shan Sa, 2012). Although she run the court, still she had to cover her presence behind a thin curtain in order to keep her husband position as the emperor and respect the board. It can be said that no matter how powerful a woman is, she has to stay under her husband's shadow. It is a kind of invisible social and cultural rules that women are placed under men. The culture itself might punish a woman who is considered break this rule (Shan Sa, 2012).

Since men are socially positioned as elders and actors behind the cultural rules, this means that, once again, men are the brain and the soul of the culture, which play significant roles in shaping and ruling the community. For example, to show the marital status, a wife will add her husband's name behind hers, such as Tien Soeharto, and Ani Yudoyono (Djupriono, 1997). Society will take it as it is without questioning. It will be different if the names are Yudoyono Ani or Soeharto Tien. People might question it, because it is not the way to call men names. It will be odd if a woman name is used as given names. Empress Wu got rejection when she claimed and used her name as the new dynasty, Tang dynasty. Her husband name, Emperor Kao Tsung, was no longer used as dynasty's name (Shan Sa, 2012). It is because culture shapes the way of life the people who live within it. The culture, which is a product of the community itself, stands in the men side!

Teaching language and gender

Language is a part of culture. It cannot be denied that learning the language means learning the social culture of the language as well. The people who use the language have consensus about the language and the language usage; as a result they influence the expression in professional and daily life. Thus, speakers need to take culture, social life, social status, age, gender, and relationship into account in communication so that the balance and the harmony among the members will be fulfilled.

English language plays important roles in globalization era. It can be seen in industrial world, education, government, etc. English plays as a foreign language subject in junior high and senior high schools. English is taught through text, such as narrative, recount, procedure, etc, which contain certain expression in daily life, like: how are you, what are you doing? What is/ are your hobbies? Etc. The content is designed to fulfill students' needs in mastering the language skills. Since learning language means learning the culture as well, activities that represent the content of English subject are not only in the sentence level but also in the discourse level. Thus, students learn English through contextual text.

Since context is influenced by culture – values, customs, beliefs, attitudes, gender and situation, then the students were introduced with the social context of the text type being studied (Tri Floriasti, 2012). Automatically, the culture of their first language influences the material since it is matched with daily life.

The illustration of gender in the material is very local description as it adopts the regional standards. For instance, female are profiled as second-class workers and male are positioned in the front line human resources. The roles of male and female in the professional and daily life, which has been shifted from unpopular professions for female workers to favored careers. Women are profiled as nurses, housekeepers, nannies, and other unpopular positions while man are figured as directors, CEO, pilots, doctors, and other most-wanted careers. It cannot be ignored that in the reality, an English guidebook for students still contains unresponsive gender pictures as media to introduce English material (Kistono, 2005). It will be discussed further in the next section.

In fact, the roles of women and men have been shifted and they have equal position now in professional life in certain big cities, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, etc. Both men and women work in the same field, Gadjah Mada University produced 70 doctors, which consists of 33 male and 37 female in 2011 (Laporan Dekan FK UGM, 2011). The number of female doctors is growing up from time to time. The descriptions of their role that are displayed in the text or activities through pictures or dialogues need to see the real environment. It can be said that the information, which is given in the book, is not illustrated the amended path of the learners' societies. This situation turned teachers and lecturers to be more creative in designing innovative material without omitting local values. Thus, teachers need to integrate not only such important points as good English material but also knowledge of gender into students' materials. Therefore, learners and the society get and apply the knowledge and start appreciating each other, both men and women.

2. Discussion

It cannot be denied that the shifted role of men and women change the certain words. Students need to see this change in the language, for instance word chairman and chairwoman, or chairperson or chair that sounds more neutral because both men and women assign as leaders. Traditionally, people used to apply chairman to appoint the leader, but it changes since the leader is not always a man, therefore it is called chairwoman. If students do not know the person, it may be called as chairperson, to avoid upset feeling or inconvenience situation.

Problems in English book


Teachers need to be aware of the change of words that have to do with gender. Based on preliminary observation, it was found in English Book for SMP that a police officer is a man, thus it is called a policeman (Kistono, 2005). It is possible that students do not know about policewoman or police officer. It is like what happened to Ivan who never hears the word police officer. He didn't know that the word policeman was for male police officer. In addition, he also gave response to his friend story that his sister works in Police Department. Ivan said, "wow, she is a policeman", then Ivan got correction that she was a police officer (Nur Mukminatun, 2010).


What happened to Ivan can happen to other students. Students did not get that kind of words before. It can be assumed that it is possible that Ivan never hear that word from his teachers. It is also can be commented that students never get exposure with responsive gender knowledge from the material, teachers, and other sources.


It can be seen from one of the English book that policeman is always profiled as young man. Picture 1 Listening part displays a picture of a policeman (Task 1). Thus, it is normal that students over generalize policewoman as policeman.


Listening


Task 1 Are you familiar with the kinds of jobs shown by the pictures below? Your teacher will mention them. Listen to him/her and write them in your task book.


1. 
policeman

2. 
secretary

3. 
singer

4. 
postman




5. 
driver




6. 
teacher




Students need to acquire knowledge relationship between languages and gender so that students can avoid overgeneralization of words both in written and spoken English. Therefore, designing material which response to gender plays as an important step to enrich students' knowledge. Next, media is other important thing that need to be set up as clear as possible in describing the role of gender which still accommodates the local culture, because students cultural background cannot be put aside while learning second or foreign languages. Students will compare what they learn with their culture. Therefore, combining, adding and inserting abilities will give extra help for teachers in preparing knowledge and information for students.


Displaying the appropriate and suitable contextual text and pictures as media will not only provide students with the comprehension of language and gender, but also scrub off the classical concept of men and women' duties in daily life. The Taylor family old illustrates it precisely. It can be seen from picture 2 below. It is one of the tasks from an English book for SMP. Task 8 describes individual duty of husband and wife in which Mrs. Taylor has to cook in the kitchen while Mr. Taylor reading newspaper. It can be commented that woman takes the responsibility to cook, might clean the kitchen after cooking and wash the dishes. Meanwhile, man takes reading activity then eating food. Woman is profiled as a person who takes care of all the family members from their cloth to the food. Picture 3 explains housewife workload.


Task 8 The paragraph below has some missing words. The words are substituted by the pictures. Rewrite the paragraph by putting in the missing words.

It's  . The Taylor family is  . Mrs. Taylor is in the  .

She  and Mr. Taylor is in the  . He is  . Janice is

playing  in the  . Dennis is in the  with a

friend, Freddy. They are playing  , and Monica, Frida, and Addie are

 happily.

Women are personified as nurse and secretary. In addition, they wear cooking cloth while men wear tie. This concept explains the domination men over women in daily life. However, nowadays, the situations change, so this concept need to be printed in the English book and explained to the students so that they understand what to say and how language change.



Another unequal profession was given to the student through picture 4 below that men were pictured as doctor and owner of Taxi Company while women were illustrated as nurse in picture 5. In section 2, reading part- task 1. A doctor was a man and a nurse was a woman. The message behind the picture is very crucial for students. The pictures inform them that men are identical with pilot, doctor, boss, and manager who have significant position as decision makers in daily or professional life.

Task 5 Make sentences according to the following pictures. Use present or past forms as shown in No.1.

Past Event

Present Event

1.

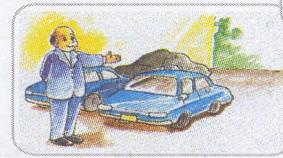
I was a journalist at the Jawa Post.



I'm a journalist at the Jakarta Post now.



2.



I'm the owner of a taxi company now.

3.



I was a student at a medical faculty.



Now, _____

It is stated before that the number of female doctors are growing and it is bigger than male's doctors in 2011. However, the old concept that doctor is a male and nurse must be a woman is not suitable with the real number of doctors in Yogyakarta, who graduated from Gajah Mada University.

Section Two



Reading

Task 1 Read the following descriptions for each profession, then guess what profession it is.

1. This man works in a hospital. He cures sick people. (doctor)
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
6. This woman usually helps doctors to treat patients. (nurse)
7. His duty is to protect and to defend our country from enemies.
8. This man is skillful at making chairs and tables. (carpenter)
9. If you need your car or your motorcycle repaired, go to this man. (mechanic)
10. This man is skillful at cutting people's hair. (barber)

Solutions for the problems

There are three things that can be taken into account regarding this case: syllabus and responsive gender material, responsive gender classroom management, and teaching media.

- Curriculum, syllabus and responsive gender material

Teachers, lecturers and educators have responsibility in designing and developing curriculum, which is broke down into syllabus then applied material in the schools. The syllabus and the material should be matched not only with the national teaching aims but also the students who come from various sociocultural backgrounds. Teaching and learning reflect situation where the teaching learning takes place in certain sociocultural context (Lee, 1999).

Thus, at the end, it can be expected that the material in one area will be different from another as it consists of the local culture, which exists in the particular area. Such pictures which capture unequal position and role in professional and social life between men and women in big cities will not printed as teaching media in English book for junior and senior high schools. Finally, it will meet the updated situation that women no longer play as second-class citizen, and then students aware of appreciating and respecting both sides.

- Responsive gender classroom management

Classroom management is a way to manage, build and maintain situation, condition, discipline, and motivation of students in order to achieve the teaching and learning goals optimally. According to Brown (2001: 192) there are few things that need to be considered in managing classroom such as students' comfort, sitting arrangement and grouping system which set up to meet the students' needs, background, material and teaching and learning goals. Thus, male and female students can participate activities and teaching learning process equally and fairly as they get what they demand. If teachers find such uncomfortable situation as small group activity, which requires physical touch and contact, it is recommended to revise the activity. Teachers need to consider students cultural background for instance religious belief in certain classroom activities. Thus, female or male only can be seen as an option.

Other thing that need to be taken into account in managing and running the class is teachers' feeling, attitude, emotion when dealing with students who have different background from the teachers (Brown, 2001: 200). It is not easy to understand and always aware of different and foreign things but stay focus on what, who, where, when and how will help teachers in that situation. Teachers, with diverse cultural knowledge, will make sense of unexpected perspectives from their students, who come from various cultural backgrounds (Min Chou, 2007: 143).

I admit that some educators continue to assume that most of schools will continue to be monoculture societies for instance, most schools in Yogyakarta. Teachers, lecturers and educators need to see the connection between the connection between teacher education, school culture, and the social context of communities because they are the red line that student teachers need to catch. In order to meet the connection, student teachers should be immersed in cultural learning, for instance they should be exposed to various culture knowledge (Tri Floriasti, 2012).

- Teaching media

Teaching media plays important role in delivering messages behind such pictures and material that students need to acquire. Arief S Sadiman (2003: 6) says that media is a component in students environment to stimulate learning. Due to that role of media, teachers need to be careful in using pictures in the classroom. For instance three pictures above which

stereotypes female role in social and professional life. It can be said that media takes some parts in shaping young generation perception in dealing with the messages behind the pictures.

3. Conclusion

Material and media play important roles for shaping young generation with the concept of relationship between language and gender. It is very important that students comprehend that role of woman and men shifted in many level of economic level, professional life and social networking situation. Unequal description in professional and social life need to be revised because it may influence young generation that men have more important position as they have prestigious careers compare to women who stay in the kitchen cooking and ironing. It seems like women position are less important. Therefore, women are second-class citizens who follow what the society says for them.

Good and appropriate English material which responsive gender role is one of the answers to teach students how to appreciate and respect both men and women by using suitable word.

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