Research Article

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Language, Ideology, and Bias: A Sociolinguistic Examination of English Textbooks in Punjab

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Abstract: *This study explores the presence of linguistic and ideological biases in English textbooks prescribed by the Punjab Textbook Board through a sociolinguistic lens. Educational materials play a pivotal role in shaping learners' worldview and social identity, yet they often reflect dominant ideologies that perpetuate inequalities. This research critically examines how language is employed to construct, normalize, or marginalize particular social roles, values, and perspectives in these textbooks. Drawing on the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the approaches of Fairclough and van Dijk, the study investigates the interplay between language, power, and ideology in textbook discourse. A qualitative content analysis has been done on selected textbooks from primary to secondary levels, focusing on lexical choices, thematic representation, syntactic structures, and discursive strategies. The findings revealed an implicit pattern of bias related to social class, occupational roles, cultural norms, and national identity, which contribute to the reproduction of existing social hierarchies. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and balanced language in educational materials and recommends a review of curriculum design through the lens of linguistic equity and social justice.*

Key Words: Ideology, Gender Bias, Curriculum, Thematic Representation

Introduction

Language is a powerful tool of communication. It is not a neutral medium, but it reflects, constructs, and shapes ideologies and social beliefs. While analyzing it in educational contexts, specifically in textbooks, language functions as a carrier of social and cultural norms. It plays a pivotal role in constructing ideologies and social identities.

Gender is not a biological one, but it is actually a social and cultural phenomenon. Textbooks play an integral and imperative role is in children in shaping up gender related views and attitudes. This research paper focuses on gender depiction in the English textbooks. The paper explores that there is biased attitude in textbooks towards gender. The paper investigates that language plays an important role in constructing gender attitudes through textbooks at primary level. This research argues that textbooks are influential in constructing gender perception in contemporary society.

Textbooks are often taken and perceived as an objective source of knowledge, yet they can also act as carriers for distributing dominant ideologies. The analysis finds that the textbooks reinforce existing social hierarchies. Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural society. Here education is taken not merely a means of literacy but also it is considered a strong and valid mechanism of social control. In this way the analysis of these textbooks is especially significant.

Textbooks are very important in understanding of social roles and norms, including gender. In contexts like Pakistan, where education is often standardized by state institutions, textbooks reflect and perpetuate

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dominant ideologies. The Punjab Textbook Board (PTB), a major textbook-producing body, significantly influences what children learn about gender roles through its English language curriculum. This paper undertakes a sociolinguistic examination of English textbooks published by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB). The paper focuses to expose the ideological biases embedded within these textbooks. The paper is drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is taken as the theoretical and methodological framework. The research paper investigates the linguistic choices in textbooks. It also reflects the power relations in a society. The research concerns particularly with class, culture and identity. The paper identifies the patterns of inclusion and exclusion. It explores how ideologies are represented through language in educational texts.

Statement of Problem

Despite the Government has introduced many educational reforms in educational policies still it is observed that there are biased narratives in public school system. Textbooks reflect to privilege some groups while they are marginalizing others. These biases are presented through the use of language, cultural practices and gender roles. The high professions are associated with males while lower professions are attached with females. Although much research explored gender or religious bias but a broader sociolinguistic perspective particularly about the investigation of language and ideology has overlooked. This paper addresses this gap. It analyzes the linguistic patterns and construction of social realities in PTB English textbooks. It also reveals how seemingly neutral texts may serve ideological functions.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the linguistic features in PTB English textbooks that reflects ideological bias.
2. To identify patterns of representation and marginalization in textbook discourse.
3. To investigate how educational language constructs social identities and relations.

Research Questions

1. How is language used to construct social identities and roles in English textbooks published by the Punjab Textbook Board?
2. What ideological assumptions are embedded in the discourse of these textbooks?
3. How do lexical choices, themes, and representations reflect or perpetuate social bias?

Significance of the Study

Textbooks are actually powerful social messages and these messages are conveyed which subconsciously play very important role in constructing the behavior. Unfortunately, since decades, the messages conveyed through these textbooks are really being ignored. This research is significant for educators. It is very helpful for curriculum developers, and it is also beneficial for linguists and policymakers. The study encourages evaluating the textbooks critically. It also exposes that ideologies are embedded in subtle ways. The paper suggests that there should be linguistic and social equity in our education system. Extra vigilance is required for the transmission of knowledge for the young impressionable minds. This research paper tends to examine textbooks to find out and analyze the biased representation of gender in textbooks. The research highlights that textbooks content should encourage diversity and discourage stereotypical representations. The findings suggest the future curriculum reforms and also recommend that textbook content should cope with democratic values and multicultural realities. Moreover, this paper contributes to the growing body of sociolinguistic research on language, ideology, and education.

Literature Review

This section comprises of two sub-sections one is related to research previously done on the similar topic under this investigation and second one is based on theoretical framework.

Related Research

In sociolinguistics, the intersection of language and ideology in education has been investigated. In critical discourse studies, Scholars argue that in educational texts, language is not used in neutral way. It transmits "values, beliefs, and social norms" (Fairclough, 1989; Apple, 2004). "Textbooks are specifically powerful

tools because they reproduce ideologies and promote dominant worldviews under the guise of objectivity" (van Dijk, 2006; Luke, 1995).

In the contemporary society, the biased representation of gender in textbooks has been analyzed by different researchers. Here are the most recent studies about the textbooks analysis.

Rahman (2002) analyzed the Islamic identity and ideological construction through curricular narratives. Sunderland (2000) and Blumberg, (2008) explores that in educational texts, males are often presented as dominant and active while females are often presented as passive and domestic. In the Pakistani context, Mirza (2004) and Naseem (2008) investigated that textbooks generally portray the patriarchal values as by women are presented in limited, passive and traditional roles. However, there are a few studies that applied a feminist lens like FCDA to analyze PTB English textbooks, which this study aims to address.

Ali and Kazemian (2015) investigated through van Dijk's socio-cognitive model. They analyzed and explored that particular national ideologies are reinforced through these textbooks. Naseem and Ghani (2015) explored the representation of strong gender stereotypes in Pakistani textbooks at higher level. However, this research are focused particularly on gender and religious discourse and the sociolinguistics perspective is ignored, and they also overlooked the construction of ideology and linguistic structures encoded in the discourse.

Awan and Khan (2020) uncovered the sociopolitical biases by using Fairclough model in secondary school textbooks. This research is related but its particular focus is on isolated discourse features. Through this study, The researchers analyzed 4th and 5th grade ESL textbooks and revealed the gender-biased portrayals with women depicted in stereotypical roles and underrepresented compared to men.

Fatima et al. (2023) investigated Gender Discrimination in English Textbooks of Public Schools. The study was focused on the analysis of Grade 6 English textbooks and highlighted significant disparities with males dominating various aspects and females often portrayed in passive, stereotypical roles. Kazmi & Ali (2023) done another investigation having the title "Gender Representation and Stereotyping in EFL Textbooks: A Critical Discourse Analysis". Findings revealed that EFL textbooks at the secondary school level, show gender imbalance with males overrepresented and females depicted in stereotypical, marginalized roles.

Salma and Qayyum (2022) done an androcentric analysis of gender-stereo types in Pakistani Language Textbooks. However, the main focus of the study was to analyze language textbooks at the matriculation level, revealing male dominance and the naturalization of androcentric by selecting male authors.

Although there is increasing global attention to gender-sensitive education still there remains a significant lack of scholarly investigation into role of language in gender bias representation in Pakistani school curriculum, particularly in English language textbooks published by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB). While prior studies have generally highlighted gender inequality in education in South Asia, few have specifically examined how linguistic choices and discourse strategies within PTB English textbooks contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and patriarchal ideologies.

Most existing research on curriculum bias in Pakistan tends to be quantitative or descriptive, focusing on surface-level content analysis, such as counting male vs. female characters. However, there is limited application of critical frameworks like Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) that reveal the ideological underpinnings of gender bias embedded in both text and visuals. Additionally, much of the research overlooks how implicit language structures, narrative framing, and lexical choices shape students' perceptions of gender roles.

This paper seeks to fill this gap. It adopts a more integrated CDA framework. It is grounded on sociolinguistic principles. It also explores the ideological and representational biases in English textbooks from Punjab.

The research paper discusses each of these principles for the clear connection to the aims and research questions of currant research. Lazar highlights that feminist CDA is comprises of feminist analytical resistance, "gender" as ideological construction and power relations. Simply, the objectives of feminist

CDA are to show the complex, delicate, and sometimes not so delicate, ways in which gender is taken for granted, power relations are produced frequently. (Lazar, 2007, p. 142)

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, as formulated by Lazar (2005), combines principles of critical discourse analysis with feminist theory to reveal how gendered power relations are constructed and sustained through language. FCDA scrutinizes both micro-level linguistic features (e.g., lexical choices, syntactic structures) and macro-level discourses (e.g., ideology, power) that influence social practices. It emphasizes how texts normalize gender inequality by making dominant ideologies appear natural and unproblematic. This framework is especially useful for analyzing how textbooks, as ideological tools, communicate and reinforce gender norms.

Research Methodology

This section is about the overall methodology and research procedure for the conduction of current research. The section also includes paradigm of research, delimitations, and population, sampling and sampling techniques. Data and data analysis has also been discussed in this section.

Nature of the Research

This research falls in qualitative paradigm of research as it has explored and finds out the gender bias in textbooks. It has brought to light how language of textbooks at primary level plays an important role in gender bias. Language is a powerful tool used for communication among human beings and besides a medium of communication it is also used in constructing and rooting of gender ideologies. This research highlights the development of gender ideologies and the process of socialization in young students through language used in the textbooks at primary level.

Qualitative research is a way of conducting and conceiving of research in an exploratory way. Numbers are analyzed in numerical way in quantitative research. Analysis of numbers is done mathematically in this type of research. On the other hand, analysis of the world is done through the researcher lens in qualitative research.

1. Qualitative research includes interview records and field notes, and its nature is descriptive.
2. Analysis is inductive in qualitative research and the questions and focus are not prearranged but change as the data are collected.
3. Natural settings are selected to collect data, in schools, in playgrounds and in other places teachers and students are get involved and try to conduct surveys, interviews o in a conversational style.
4. A qualitative researcher does not reduce data, and advanced statistical procedures are not employed to reduce numbers. Instead, frequency counts are used by qualitative researcher during data analysis and other simple quantitative procedures, but the most part of the reports are conceptual and descriptive.
5. To understand basic process socially is the goal of qualitative researcher. In the form of updating concepts and in developing insights.
6. View of the world is grasped from the point of view of the participants.

Delimitations

This study has been delimited to English Textbooks at primary. By keeping this issue in mind this research has been delimited to those English Textbooks of primary level.

The choices and boundaries made and set by the researcher during conducting the research are delimitations. Actually, these delimitations are the boundaries and markers that a researcher has to set for the proper conduction of the research. This is the specific area in which the researcher has to remain until the completion of the research.

Source of Data

This data is based upon English Textbooks of Punjab Text board.

Analysis of Data

Discourse analysis is done generally by an application that is CDA. It is generally said that methods which

are used in discourse studies may be used in CDA research. CDA is not specified to analyze the text, but it relates systematically to structures of the context socio-politically .CDA has been used in many discourses, it investigates the rhetoric of different political speeches, it further explores the form of speeches and its impressions on audiences. All these three layers are inter-related dimensions of discourse.

1. Object is verbal and visual analysis.
2. The object is to receive and produce by means of this process by human subjects.
3. Socio-historical conditions are governing this process.

So, these dimensions require descriptive, interpretative and explanatory analysis.

A feminist CDA viewpoint is obviously interdisciplinary in nature most probably. It contributes to critical language on one hand, while on the other hand, for the investigation of gender issues in women studies. FCDA (Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis) is a sub-category of CDA which deals with current social issues and discrimination between male and female strata of a society. It deals with social issue of females regarding gender inequalities, injustice and inferior supposed roles for them specifically. Most of the societies in the world are patriarchal or male dominating. FCDA deals with the social issues of female in the society. It highlights the injustice and inequalities done to females in a society. Main concern of FCDA is to highlight the inequalities towards female with special reference to language. Language is a primary and basic tool. It is responsible for inculcating gender ideologies and identities between male and female socially. Van Dijk's Key Ideas in CDA:

1. **Discourse as Social Practice:** Discourse is often influenced by power relations and social structures and is part of larger social practices.
2. **Ideology in Discourse:** Language is a carrier of ideologies, and it is a key vehicle for the reproduction.
3. **Cognitive Processes:** Discourse is the cognitive process of individual and groups and is shaped by social forces.
4. **Discourse Structures:** The analysis of discourse uncovers the ideological and power related meanings. It also involves the examination of the structures of the text (macro, micro, and superstructures).
5. **Context:** Understanding the social context in which discourse is produced and consumed sis essential for a complete analysis.

Analytical tools include:

▶ Lexical categorization (e.g., word frequency, connotation)
▶ Representation analysis (who is shown doing what, and how)
▶ Inclusion/exclusion strategies (who is visible/invisible)
▶ Ideological square (van Dijk): emphasizing positive self-representation and negative representation of the "other"

Ethical Considerations

As this study involves published textbooks and not human participants, ethical concerns are minimal. However, the researcher remains committed to objectivity, transparency, and academic integrity throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

This section comprises critical discourse analysis of selected English textbooks published by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB). The research paper uses the Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. The research aims to explore the use of language, how the language conceptualizes, construct and naturalize the social biases. The analysis is organized under the following themes.

Textual Analysis (Fairclough's First Dimension)
Gender Roles in Fairytales and Traditional Narratives

English Language textbooks of primary level have analyzed for this research paper. There are some stories in these books, like "Once, there was a beautiful girl......prince charming rescued her", "A beautiful sleeping

princess…..a prince came and broke the spell", "There was a pretty maiden……One day, a prince fell in love with her". Young Children like to read these types of fairytales in their childhood. Certain defined roles are assigned to males and females in these tales. Some specific traits associated are associated with males and females. As the children read these stories, boys are considered as brave and strong. They feel that they have enough ability to help out anyone in trouble. They feel themselves that they are brave and strong and eventually they can rule the world. As they grow up and come across other books with same concepts especially the textbooks which are taught to them in their schools. There is another example in 4th class textbook: the lesson starts with the description of a female character Ayesha. She is an educated and careful woman. (Unit 3: English 4 by PTB).

PTB books are taught in the government sector schools in Punjab. From the above examples, it reflects that textbooks are depicting almost gender bias material. "As a matter of fact, books play an important role in the transmission of culture from one generation to the other" (Gooden & Gooden; Singh).

Gendered Representation in Character Traits and Activities

Textbooks help young readers to formulate their concepts about gender. Mostly, the writers of these books assign the passive roles to female characters. Analysis of these fairytales explores that women are always helpless; they need someone to rescue them. These traditional repeated stories always prefer the males as heroes and courageous. Feminism talks about that there should be gender equality in schools, so, textbooks play very important role in this matter.

Textbooks are prepared in the way that, intentionally or unintentionally, they teach gender roles to young learners and exclusively behaviors. Society teaches the boys and girls what is correct for them.

Lexical and Linguistic Stereotyping

The analysis of the textbooks proves that in many textbooks, males are presented as leaders. The leading jobs are also associated with males as compared to females. The research paper reveals that problem solving skills are associated with men while women are associated with minor households' activities. The lexicons are uses frequently in the textbooks that reflect the traditional social roles. For example: In a Grade 6 English textbooks in reading passage, adjectives like *"obedient," "dutiful,"* and *"modest"* are used frequently. Ideal children are described by using these adjectives are used to describe the morality of ideal children. These terms reinforce moral and dominant codes.

Powerful and active roles are assigned to male character (e.g., doctors, teachers, leaders) while females characters are portrayed in passive or domestic roles (e.g., mothers, caregivers). There is an example in Grade 5 English textbook. There is a chapter about professions. Here are ten males' professions while females are only shown as teachers. This highlights gender imbalance

Lexical choices in these books reinforce stereotypes like boys are described as "strong" and "brave". While, girls are often labeled as "obedient" and "helpful." Action Verbs are associated with males include (e.g., run, build, lead), while, on the other hand females are shown as passive (e.g., serve, clean, wait).

Visual Representation and Gendered Imagery

Dominate dialogues in stories are associated with boys and male characters. They are presented more likely as problem solver. Female characters are presented as typically silent and play supporting roles. This pattern contributes to the perception that men are problem-solvers and leaders. Images in the textbooks show men in public and professional settings, while women are often pictured indoors. Some images depict women engaging in physical activities and reinforce the idea that the public sphere belongs to men.

Representation of National Heroes and Exclusion of Women

Analysis of class five English textbook explores that the Characters are represented in biased way. There is a lesson of *"Our Heroes". This lesson presents* Allama Iqbal, Quaid-e-Azam, Tipu Sultan as national heroes. All the figures presented are male. Female contributors like Fatima Jinnah are excluded, reinforcing androcentric views of heroism. There is another lesson which shows the gendered activities and Roles. Lesson title is *"Helping at Home"*, Boy character: "Ali plays cricket. "Girl character: "Ayesha helps her

mother in the kitchen." Analysis proves that boys are shown in public roles; on other hand girls are limited to domestic works. It reinforces the traditional gender roles.

Reinforcement of Traditional Domestic Roles

The lesson *"Doctor and Patient" presents male as* qualified surgeon. While the female as an assistant nurse as female, "She is assisting the doctor." Occupational stereotyping positions males in authoritative roles and females as subordinate ones.

Gendered Ideologies in Poetry and Moral Lessons

Another example is from *Class 5. Unit title is "school life".* Boys are presented as participating actively in class and sports while girls are shown sitting passively and doing household works like cleaning. This shows the indication of imbalance gender. There is a *Poem "The Brave Soldier". The poem* emphasizes male as courageous and brave. The Analysis reveals that the association of patriotism and bravery is with masculinity.

Application of van Dijk's Ideological Square

Van Dijk's framework is very helpful in understanding the constructed concept of "us" and "them". Our self is presented in positive way. For example, "we respect our values and tradition", "our country has great heroes". On the other hand, "others" are presented in negative way. For example, "they caused conflicts during partition", "others culture is harmful". Nationalistic ideology is reinforced by this binary distinction.

Lexical selection shoes the embedded ideological biasness through the repeated dominant themes and passive structure of grammar. Occupational representation reinforces the social hierarchies as historical figures are glorified while invisible and marginalized groups are neglected. In favor of moralistic outcome, critical thinking in children is discouraged. Religious and nationalist ideologies dominate the narrative.

Language as a Carrier of Ideology

The analysis revealed that the English textbooks subtly promote the specific views and saturated with ideologically charged language. Social hierarchy, nationalism and morality is also promoted. Fairclough's (1989, 2010) is that educational discourse is a site of ideological struggle where dominant meanings are constructed and legitimized. The frequent use of moralistic and prescriptive language (e.g., "dutiful," "obedient," "patriotic") positions learners to internalize uncritical respect for authority and tradition.

Representation and Power

The analysis also shows a clear representation and imbalance of professions and social groups. Some professions s like teachers, soldiers and doctors were glorified, while roles that are associated with marginalized groups were represented negatively. Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power is also reflected as language serves to legitimize the status of certain social positions and delegitimize others.

Religious and national ideologies are dominant in the textbooks that reflects van Dijk's ideological square. According to VanDijk positive self-representation of the in-group (nation, religion, tradition) is contrasted with the omission or negative portrayal of the out-group (minorities, outsiders, dissenting voices). Oversimplified worldview reinforces through this hegemonic narrative.

Curriculum as Discourse Control

Discursive strategies and the textbooks' structure reflect the institutional discourse control. As Fairclough (1995) notes that socio-political contexts and power relations construct and shape the educational materials. In Pakistan, authorities closely observe the textbooks. National ideologies are represented through the textbooks. This raises concerns about the role of education in perpetuating dominant norms instead of encouraging critical engagement and social diversity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, patriarchal values are preserved and associated with gender in the textbooks. This research paper explores that the depiction of females is   prejudiced and gender bias in almost all English textbooks. Furthermore, this paper also highlighted the representation of men and women in different fields of life in textbooks. The paper suggests that women are mistreated in all grounds of life. This paper also found that majority of the authors of textbooks are males this research paper confirms that females are often depicted in passive roles. They lack decision power, courage of problem solving, while men are powerful and decisive. They are presented as hardworking and active. The paper concludes the discrimination in representation of male and female characters. This presentation of discrimination conceptualizes in young boys the sense of superiority. This paper also coveys the idea that our national curriculum has a strong tendency towards biased depiction of gender. It also reveals that the gendered images are portrayed in textbook which tend to highlight the phenomenon of gender bias prevailing in primary levels of textbooks.

The finding explores the gender bias in English textbooks. The paper highlights that PTB textbooks subtly promote traditional gender roles. The paper uses FCDA that reveals that seemingly neutral language and images carry ideological weight. The female representation and the repetitive representation in passive roles can influence students' perceptions of gender capabilities and appropriate behavior.

The invisibility of women in textbooks can limit the worldview of female students. They will normalize the male dominance and female subservience. These textbooks contribute to maintain gender inequality in broader society.

The paper also demonstrates that English textbooks by the Punjab Textbook Board exhibit significant gender bias in both text and imagery. Through the lens of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, the research highlights that educational materials contribute to the social construction of gender in patriarchal ways.

To sum up the paper, at primary level English textbooks, women are represented in submissive and subservient roles. They are trained and expected through these textbooks to be obedient and polite. They should be caring and loving. They should support the whole family. So, their roles are as caretakers and mothers. The princesses in the fairytales are waiting for a male to rescue them. Mostly the womanly characters are dependent on males. They wait for them for the accomplishment of their goals. In contrast, the textbooks present the males in active and dominant roles like fighters and explorers. In short, the boys are defined with strong and courageous adjectives. These adjectives segregate the boys and girls into two categories. In fact, this is the process of stereotyping. It formulates the frame for each gender. Boys appreciated as t independent while girls are encouraged to be compromising.   The textbooks show that the contemporary society gives different value to two different genders. The textbooks teach the girls should behave in more civilized way. Reading materials have deep impacts on the psyche of children.

Recommendations include to revise textbook content and to ensure balanced representation of genders. Curriculum designers should be trained. The textbook writers should focus on gender-sensitive content. They should further incorporate stories and examples that challenge traditional gender roles. Female educators and gender experts should involve in curriculum designing.

Future research may explore the impact of such biases on students' attitudes and career aspirations or compare textbooks across provinces to assess regional differences in gender portrayal.

 To sum up this paper examined the English textbooks published by the Punjab Textbook Board and found through the use of language bias ideologies have constructed. Sociolinguistic lens and the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis has used and found that:

Ideologically loaded language has used in the textbooks to construct idealized social roles. Selective lexicons, passive voice, and occupational ideologies represent the discursive strategies. Marginalized groups, non-traditional professions have neglected. Broader societal power relations are reflected through these patterns, and they reproduce the social inequalities in educational discourse.

Ultimately, the textbooks function not just as tools for language instruction but also as agents of ideological reproduction, shaping how young learners perceive society.

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