

## Gender Representation in Hong Kong English Textbooks

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### 1. The Status of Women in Hong Kong

「我哋有一個好漂亮嘅黨魁，咁民主黨就有。」

‘We have a very beautiful party leader, and the Democratic Party doesn’t.’ (*Morning Newsworld*, Radio Television Hong Kong 1, 20 March 2006)

Although this remark by Professor Joseph Yu-shek Cheng, the secretary-general of the newly formed Civic Party in Hong Kong, about the differences between the new party and the Democratic Party, was undoubtedly uttered in jest, it nevertheless reflects an attitude – one which Professor Cheng shares with many in the community – that a woman’s physical appearance is more important than her ability or talents. It is not difficult to find evidence that gender-stereotyping of this type is alive and well in Hong Kong. Witness the continuing popularity of such Chinese sayings as 女子無才便是德<sup>1</sup> *nei5 zi2 mou4 coi4 bin6 si6 dak1* (A virtuous woman is one without talents) and 女為悅己者容 *nei5 wai4 jyut6 gei2 ze2 jung4* (The girl

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<sup>1</sup> Cantonese romanizations in this paper follow the Jyutping system promoted by the Linguistic Society of Hong Kong (鄧思穎, 2002). Tones are represented at the end of the syllable as follows: 1 – high level, 2 – high rising, 3 – mid level, 4 – low falling, 5 – low rising, and 6 – low level.

who pleases one will be acceptable to him). Or witness the common belief in Hong Kong that families with only female and no male descendants are in danger of 'dying out'. Hand in hand with such attitudes goes the traditionally unequal educational treatment of females and males in Hong Kong. Before 1978, when free and compulsory 9-year education was first introduced, young girls were more educationally disadvantaged than boys. According to the 2001 Population Census, 12% of Hong Kong females had never received schooling, while the corresponding figure for males was only 4.6% (Census and Statistics Department, 2002). Consider finally the unequal treatment of women in the workplace: in the early 1960s women officers in the civil service were paid one quarter less than their male counterparts for doing the same job and pregnant women were dismissed by their employers (Chan, 2000).

Pleasingly, the status of women in Hong Kong has improved in the last two decades, with likely factors being the influence of the Western feminist movement, economic development, and improvements in education. The contributions of women to economic, social and political developments have increased. According to the Census and Statistics Department (2002), the participation rate of women in the labour force increased from 49.5% in 1991 to 51.6% in 2001. In 2001 the school attendance rate of females was higher than that of males in the age group of 12-18 and

women made up more than half the number of students (51.6%) studying in tertiary institutions, indicating that these days females have the same opportunities to receive education as males. The Hong Kong government has also taken the initiative of introducing gender equity. The Equal Opportunities Commission was established in 1996 with the aim of promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination through the enactment of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance. The Women's Commission was set up in 2001 as a central mechanism to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong. It plays a strategic role in advising the government on policies and initiatives which are of concern to women. Public education and promotional activities have also been organized to raise public awareness of and gender sensitivity to women-related issues, as well as to address the problem of gender stereotyping. For example, the guiding principles for quality textbooks adopted by the Education and Manpower Bureau (2004) include the stipulation that: 'The content and illustrations do not carry any form of discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, race, religion, culture and disability etc., nor do they suggest exclusion.'

## 2. Sexism in Textbooks

Against the backdrop of changes in the status of females we wished to investigate the representation of gender roles in Hong Kong textbooks. Previous studies of school textbooks in various countries have shown that female participants are outnumbered by male and perform a more limited range of roles, mainly in the domestic and nurturing domains (e.g. Cincotta, 1978; Porreca, 1984; Gupta and Lee, 1990; Law and Chan, 2004). Early studies of the depiction of gender roles in Hong Kong textbooks in the 1980s include the investigation conducted by Yau-Lai and Luk (1988) on Chinese History and Social studies in junior secondary textbooks, which reveals that Chinese History was presented to students as an almost exclusively male enterprise while the Social Studies textbooks had more than twice as many male roles as female ones. In another study of gender roles as defined in Social Studies, Chinese Language, and Health Education, Au (1992) found that earlier textbooks discriminated against women by reinforcing stereotyped views of male and female roles and abilities. Both written texts and visual illustrations were dominated by the presence of males. For example, Au found that the sex ratio of the characters appearing in the textbooks was 1.9 : 1 while the ratio of the general population was 1.038 : 1 in 1991. Women were mainly depicted working in the home, engaged in household chores or in traditional women's work – as teachers, nurses, models or

clerks, while men participated in 'active' pursuits outside the home, as in the workplace, in sports and recreational activities. Similar findings were reported in a study commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission (2000) which focused on the nature and extent of stereotyping in printed educational materials, including textbooks and examination papers. Female characters appeared less often than male characters both in the visual mode and the written mode, the ratio of male to female being approximately 6 : 4. Furthermore, there was a general avoidance of generic nouns such as *humankind* and *police* (with preference given to the male-marked terms *mankind* and *policemen*). Similarly, the generic pronoun *he* seemed to be regularly used to refer to a number of professions, such as *president*, *sportsperson*, *farmer* and *thief*.

### **3. The Present Study**

The focus of the present study is how changes in the status of women are reflected in Hong Kong textbooks. There are several reasons why we have chosen to analyse English language textbooks. Firstly, as Frasher and Walker (1972), and Peterson and Lach (1990) have argued, gender portrayal in textbooks reflects social values and behaviour. Secondly, given that students are frequently required to assimilate the materials of their textbooks in detail, they have the potential to

influence the development of students' gender-based attitudes at an impressionable age. The third reason is that ESL books in particular form an important part of the curriculum in Hong Kong, insofar as English is a compulsory subject in secondary schools and students have to spend about 4-5 hours on English lessons every week. Much of the ESL curriculum in Hong Kong involves patterned structures and mechanical drills which, if based on gender-typed material, may well contribute to the development of sexist attitudes at a subconscious level.

This paper aims to determine whether there have been changes in the nature of gender representation in Hong Kong secondary English textbooks over the past decade. Specifically, answers to the following questions will be sought:

1. What is the ratio of all female to male characters in the selected textbooks?
2. To what extent are women/men portrayed in professional settings in both visual and verbal texts?
3. To what extent are men/women depicted in domestic roles in both visual and verbal texts?
4. How are males and females addressed by others?
5. What are the semantic roles of females/males in the texts?
6. What generic constructions are used?

7. What is the frequency with which females precede males when both are included in a single phrase, and vice versa?

### **3.1 Methodology**

Twenty English language textbooks were selected from the lists of textbooks recommended for use by the Education and Manpower Bureau and the former Education Department in Hong Kong, their contents having been deemed acceptable in terms of coverage, content, sequence, exercises, language, illustration and format. Ten of the books studied, referred to as ‘recent textbooks’, were published in the last five years<sup>2</sup> and all were in use at the time of the study, while the other ten, referred to as ‘earlier textbooks’, were published in the late 1980s or early 1990s and were no longer in use. Half of the books were for senior forms and the other half for junior forms (as noted in the Appendix). Three chapters from each book were randomly selected for content and linguistic analysis.<sup>3</sup>

Since this project is still in progress, our discussion in this paper is based on the findings of the analysis of three recent textbooks (*Progress 5, English 2000: Book 5*

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<sup>2</sup> The only exception is *English 2000*, which was published in 1997.

<sup>3</sup> A research assistant was trained to do the quantitative analysis. To ensure reliability, a random 10 percent sample of all the textbooks was checked by the Principal Investigator, and they were cross-checked by the Co-investigator.

and *New English Treasure 1B*) and three earlier textbooks (*English: A Modern Course 1*, *English: A Modern Course 5* and *New Integrated English 1*).

## **3.2 Findings**

### **3.2.1 Female and Male Characters**

One of the most widely examined manifestations of sexism is omission. When females do not appear as often as males, the implicit message is that women are not as important as men, or that their accomplishments are not as worthwhile to mention as men's. According to census and bi-census statistics, before 1997 the number of males in Hong Kong consistently surpassed that of females. However, since 1997, the demographic pattern has changed: there are now more females than males in Hong Kong. The sex ratio was 960 males per 1,000 females in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2002: 37). Is this demographic change reflected in recent textbooks? To find out the answer, we counted the number of mentions of male and female characters, and the number of different roles males and females perform in the texts. The findings are presented in Table 1.



Table 1 Characters and Frequency

	Characters		Frequency	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Modern Course 1</i>	106 (54.1%)	88 (44.9%)	328 (52.9%)	292 (47.1%)
<i>Modern Course 5</i>	105 (57.7%)	77 (42.3%)	304 (62.7%)	181 (37.3%)
<i>Integrated English 1</i>	55 (54.5%)	46 (45.5%)	242 (50.5%)	237 (49.5%)
<b>Total</b>	265 (55.8%)	211 (44.2%)	874 (55.2%)	710 (44.8%)
<i>Progress 5</i>	76 (58.9%)	53 (41.1%)	265 (56.0%)	208 (44.0%)
<i>English 2000 5</i>	44 (51.8%)	41 (48.2%)	82 (52.2%)	75 (47.8%)
<i>English Treasure 1B</i>	35 (46.1%)	41 (53.9%)	195 (46.2%)	227 (53.8%)
<b>Total</b>	155 (53.4%)	135 (46.6%)	542 (51.5%)	510 (48.5%)

The average number of female character types has increased in recent textbooks: the total number of female characters to the total number of male characters is at the ratio of 1 : 1.26 for earlier textbooks and 1 : 1.15 for recent textbooks. Similarly, a comparison of the average ratio of female to male mentions for the earlier and recent books indicates a more even spread nowadays, with the ratio for the former being 1 : 1.23, and for the latter being 1 : 1.06. Nevertheless, Table 1 also shows that five out of the six books examined had a higher number of male mentions. The only exception is

the contemporary textbook *New English Treasure 1B*, which includes more female mentions. At first blush, this might suggest that some textbook writers have become more aware of sexist issues. However, when the content of each unit was closely examined, it was found that the ratio of males and females was not evenly distributed in the texts. For example, in Unit 7 of *New English Treasure 1B*, which is about crimes, there are 104 male tokens but only 38 female. While males are robbers, police officers and Junior Police Call members who help catch the robbers, females play minor roles in fighting crimes (e.g. calling for help). By contrast, in Unit 9 of the same book, which is about friendship, a total of 134 female occurrences and 43 male occurrences were recorded. This suggests that gender stereotyping is still deeply rooted in some textbook writers' minds: it is men who assume the more physical roles involved in committing and fighting crimes, while women are allocated quieter, more experiential roles to play.

### **3.2.2 Female and Male Social and Domestic Roles**

A mere increase in the number of female mentions in textbooks will not change people's sexist attitudes if the traditional stereotypes still prevail. The present study, therefore, also examined the different roles, both social and domestic, played by women and men in the texts. Following Law and Chan (2004), we divided the social

roles into five major categories: male-monopolized (performed by men only), male-dominated (largely performed by men), female-monopolized (performed by women only), female-dominated (largely performed by women), and gender-shared (performed by men and women equally).

Table 2 Social roles

Social roles	Earlier textbooks	Recent textbooks
Male-monopolized social roles	24	28
Male-dominated social roles	5	2
Female monopolized social roles	18	19
Female-dominated social roles	2	4
Gender shared social roles	3	7

Table 2 indicates that males have a wider range of social roles in the male-monopolized category in both earlier and recent textbooks: 24 and 28 respectively. The corresponding figures for female-monopolized category are 18 and 19. These findings suggest that women play a more limited range of social roles than men in Hong Kong English language textbooks. A further examination suggests the perpetuation of traditional stereotypes of women and men. For example, women

occupy such positions as secretary, receptionist, fashion designer, counselor, maid and typist, although there are occasional portrayals of women as doctor, dentist and manager. Likewise, men tend to occupy such traditionally 'male' roles, ranging from the lower ranking roles of criminal, driver, construction worker, security guard and postman, to the higher ranking roles of manager, accountant, psychologist and professor. In the textbooks men enjoy a more varied range of occupations than women, serving as breadwinners for their families, while women are far more likely to be housewives engaged in domestic duties, as revealed in the following sentences from an exercise on articles in *English: A Modern Course 1* (p. 7):

- *Mr Lam is \_\_\_\_\_ assistant manager.*
- *Mr Brown works for \_\_\_\_\_ import firm.*
- *Mrs Lee is \_\_\_\_\_ housewife. She spends \_\_\_\_\_ hour \_\_\_\_\_ day in the health club to keep fit.*

While both women and men are depicted as playing such traditional roles as mother and father, wife and husband, sister and brother, and daughter and son (see Table 3), it is only women who engage in domestic chores such as cleaning and cooking; men are never homemakers.

Table 3 Domestic roles

Earlier textbooks				Recent textbooks			
Domestic roles	Male	Domestic roles	Female	Domestic roles	Male	Domestic roles	Female
Father	17	Mother	17	Father	7	Mother	9
Husband	5	Wife	4				
Son	8	Daughter	6	Son	0	Daughter	3
Brother	20	Sister	19	Brother	9	Sister	10
Uncle	6	Aunt	2	Uncle	0	Aunt	1
Nephew	1	Niece	2				
Grandfather	1	Grandmother	1	Grandfather	0	Grandmother	2
Grandson	1			Grandson	0	Granddaughter	1
Great grandson	1						
		Housewife	2				
				Cousin	1		

### 3.2.3 Female and Male Semantic Roles

A clause-level analysis of the language used in the texts was undertaken, based on the Systemic-Functional concept of transitivity, with its primary semantic categories of ‘participant’ and ‘process’ (Lock, 1996; Halliday, 2004). Participants

(the people and things involved in the situation) are expressed grammatically by nouns and noun phrases. Processes (the actions and states in which the participants engage) are expressed by verbs and verb phrases. In this study, we recognize five classes of processes: material, verbal, relational, mental and existential. The participants are the actor, patient, recipient and beneficiary for material processes, the sayer and addressee for verbal processes, the value and variable for relational processes (with the more specific possessor and possessed for possessive relationships), the experiencer and phenomenon for mental processes, and the existent for existential processes.

Table 4 Semantic roles

	Earlier textbooks		Recent textbooks	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Actor	322	276	249	148
Patient	77	69	70	54
Recipient	29	23	15	23
Beneficiary	4	5	2	11
Value	142	102	63	63
Variable	4	8	9	7
Possessor	24	20	15	26
Possessed	5	5	8	8
Sayer	65	38	53	50
Addressee	32	23	13	17
Existent	10	9	3	9
Experiencer	92	67	35	44
Phenomenon	6	12	8	11

The most frequent semantic role in these texts is actor (e.g. *He is doing a project*). Of 1,487 instances of human roles, in the earlier texts 598 are actors (or 40.2%). The corresponding figures for recent texts are 1,014 and 397 (39.2%). The other three most frequent roles are value (e.g. *She is young*), patient (e.g. *She lost her handbag; I kicked him*) and experiencer (e.g. *She thought we were wrong*). A close examination of various semantic roles reveals subtle gender stereotyping.

A simple count of the numbers of male and female participants in these texts reveals an asymmetry. Of a total of 598 actors in earlier textbooks, 322 are males and 276 are females. The average ratio of female to male actors is 1 : 1.17. The asymmetry is more serious in recent texts. Of a total of 397 actors, 249 are males and 148 are females, and the average ratio of female to male actors is 1 : 1.68. This asymmetry is fairly surprising given that the recent texts postdate the upsurge of concern about gender equality in Hong Kong in the late 1990s.

Apart from the imbalance in the frequency of instances of the actor role, gender inequity is further reflected in the fact that material processes associated with male participants reveal their more active roles in sports and other energetic activities (e.g. driving, climbing) and in the workplace, while the material processes engaged in by female participants tend to be associated with 'menial' domestic duties such as

cleaning, washing, looking after the family, doing shopping and helping others. This gender stereotyping is especially marked in earlier texts such as *English: A Modern Course*. The following examples show how female and male actors are depicted differently:

- *Mrs Wong went to meet her daughter's teacher (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 43)*
- *Fred always drives very fast (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 50)*
- *Paul plays football every Sunday (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 52)*
- *Having parked his car, Mr Chan got out ... (English: A Modern Course 5, p. 105)*
- *She buys new clothes every season (Integrated English 1, p. 25)*
- *Anna helps with my homework (New English Treasure 1B, p. 68)*

The gender stereotyping in the textbooks reviewed is often quite subtle. For example, the writers of *English: A Modern Course 5* include an exercise in which students are asked to write about a girl and boy involved in the activity of reading. Interestingly, what the girl is reading is a TV magazine, while the boy is reading the classified advertisements to find a good job (p. 103).

We also noted a semantic role shift from the earlier to the recent books: males are often experiencers in the earlier books, females in the recent books. This shift is



more sharply marked in the area of volition, where males outnumber females by more than three to one, the reverse applies in the recent textbooks (see Table 5).

Table 5 Types of mental processes

	Earlier Textbooks		Recent Textbooks	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Perception	13	11	6	4
Affection	35	31	14	12
Cognition	19	17	11	14
Volition	25	8	4	14
Total	92	67	35	44

We also observed a difference in the types of phenomena that males and females respond to in the textbooks: while males like beer, detective stories, and space films, females like beautiful clothes and pets, fear the dark and being attacked, and care about others' feelings. The following examples illustrate these differences.

- *Paul's grandfather loves to smoke. He likes beer too (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 40)*
- *She likes beautiful clothes (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 15)*
- *Helen likes pets (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 15)*
- *She enjoys shopping very much (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 54)*
- *She is afraid of going home alone after midnight (English: A Modern Course 5, p. 39)*

- *She is afraid of being attacked (English: A Modern Course 5, p. 39)*
- *I know he likes detective stories more than anything else (English: A Modern Course 5, p. 40)*
- *David likes films about space, but Peter prefers films about monsters (Integrated English 1, p. 117)*
- *Megan did not want to hurt Maree's feelings (New English Treasure 1B, p. 83)*

Male and female characters also differ in what they possess: while males tend to own computers and cars, women are more likely to be in possession of cooking utensils:

- *Mr Lee doesn't have a personal computer but he has a sports car (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 9)*
- *Mrs Lee doesn't have a mixer but she has a microwave oven (English: A Modern Course 1, p. 9)*

### **3.2.4 Masculine Generic Constructions**

A common manifestation of sexism in language is the 'generic' use of the masculine nouns (e.g. *man, policeman*) and masculine pronouns (e.g. *him, he*) when they refer to people in general or when the sex of the referent is unknown. Feminists

nowadays oppose this use because (1) it is confusing to people whether the forms include both males and females or whether they refer to males only, and (2) studies have shown that people rarely conceptualise females when masculine 'generics' are used. For example, Crawford and English (1984) report a study in which subjects studied an essay – one version written with masculine generic constructions and the other with gender-neutral terms - for eight minutes, and then took a recall and recognition test 48 hours later. Crawford and English found that males had higher recall scores with the masculine generic constructions and females had higher scores with the gender-neutral terms, a finding which suggests the likelihood of a negative impact on females' learning when masculine generic constructions are used in teaching materials.

Masculine generics were generally avoided in the textbooks. One strategy adopted by writers is the use of paired pronoun expressions such as *he/she*, *him/her*, *his/her*, and *s/he*. This strategy is commonly used in the recent textbooks: a total of 52 instances were found in the recent textbooks, whereas only six tokens were found in the earlier texts. The following are some examples found in the textbooks reviewed:

- ... one should always identify *the caller* at the door before admitting *him/her*

(*English: A Modern Course 5*, p. 37)

- Like painting, music and dance can be understood by *anyone*, no matter what language *he or she* speaks (*English: A Modern Course 5*, p. 71)
- Ask *your partner* if *s/he* has ever done the following things (*Integrated English 1*, p. 74)
- Thank *the subscriber* for *his/her* help (*Progress 5*, p. 16)
- A computer '*hacker*' is a person who spends *his or her* free time ... (*English 2000*, p. 8)
- *My best friend's* name is ... *He/she* is ... (*New English Treasure 1B*, p. 87)

Despite the fact that generic *they* has been attacked by various commentators (e.g. Fowler, 1965: 404; Partridge, 1965: 37; Burchfield, 1981: 27) as 'incorrect', 'careless', 'ambiguous', 'senseless' and 'unacceptable' for flouting the rules of number agreement, it is being increasingly used as an alternative strategy, as in *Everyone should respect their parents*. Aitchison (1991: 117) perceives the use of generic *they* as a change in favour of 'a fair and democratic language'. Many modern usage handbook writers acknowledge the use of generic *they* both as an anaphoric pronoun (as in tag questions) and also as a determiner in informal English (e.g. Swan, 1995; Biber et al., 1999).

In the present study, the two recent textbooks, *Progress 5* and *New English Treasure 1B*, included a total of five instances of generic *they*. Some examples are presented below:

- If *one of your kids* is dying of cancer and there's an expensive clinic in California which can cure *them* ... (*Progress 5*, p. 5)
- *No one* has found my CD, have *they*? (*Progress 5*, p. 96)
- We would like *everybody* to bring *their* own food (*New English Treasure 1B*, p. 32)

The writer of *Progress 5* openly endorses generic *they*, instructing students to use it in question tags with an indefinite pronoun as the antecedent (p. 96):

When the subject in the main clause is the pronoun *anyone/anybody*, *everybody/everyone*, *no one/nobody*, *somebody/someone*, *none* or *neither*, we use the pronoun *they* in the question tag.

Despite the fact that textbook writers generally avoided sexist practices in their teaching materials, pseudo-generic *he* was occasionally found (5 occurrences in earlier textbooks and 3 in the more recent textbook *English 2000*), as in the following:

- *Someone* has come to see your manager. Complete the conversation you have with *him* by using the words on the left (*English: A Modern Course 1*, p. 80)
- *Your friend* has written an article for the school magazine. Help *him* to rewrite the article ...(*English: A Modern Course 5*, p. 106)
- *A friend* is going to paint *his* bedroom. Tell *him* what *he* needs to do and explain what *he* needs the things for (*Integrated English 1*, p. 128)
- Write a letter to *your Principal*, ... You need to convince *him* that more Intranet access will benefit the school (*English 2000*, p. 18)

In addition to pronoun choice, a concern of this study was whether the textbook writers used gender-neutral lexical terms. In recent years, numerous guidelines for gender-neutral language have been written, including *Non-discriminatory Language* (Pauwels, 1991) and *The Handbook of Language and Gender* (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003). All include recommendations for gender neutralization; that is, the avoidance of pseudo-generics such as *-man* compounds (e.g. *spokesman*, *salesman*, *foreman*) and of marked forms (e.g. *female brain surgeons*), and the use of symmetric phrases such as *female and male journalists*, and *cameraman/camerawoman*.

The present study found that pseudo-generics were in occasional use, even in the recent texts, to refer to people in general or to refer to females. For example, in *New*

*English Treasure 1B* the *-man* and *-master* compounds were used generically, as follows:

- *Policemen*, students and nurses all wear uniforms (p. 44)
- A witness can be someone like a school principal or *a policeman* (p. 93)
- Penny is *webmaster* of the school website (p. 73)

Nevertheless, it is pleasing to note that a number of the textbooks reviewed included gender-inclusive occupational terms such as *shop assistant*, *shopkeeper* and *sales assistant* (cf. *salesman* and *salesgirl*), *principal* (cf. *headmaster*), *athletes* and *sports star* (cf. *sportsman*), *film star* (cf. *actor* and *actress*). The recent texts also included some new gender-neutral compounds with *-officer* and *-person* as the base morpheme which were not found in the earlier texts: *police officer*, *spokesperson* and *chairperson*.

The traditional practice of using *men* and *man* generically to include both men and women has been largely abandoned nowadays. Only two instances of *men* used as generics were found in the earlier textbook *English: A Modern Course 5*:

- Inhumane – *men* must help each other and forgive (p. 48)
- This camera is considered indispensable for young *men* who love outdoor activities (p. 109)

Gender-unbiased words such as *people*, *humans* and *persons* are commonly used substitutes for generic *man*. Examples are as follows:

- ... to do all the things that *humans* take for granted (*English 2000*, p. 7)
- *Humans* need to sleep about eight hours each day (*New English Treasure 1B*, p. 99)
- ... *young people* are never content with what they have (*Progress 5*, p. 90)

Another strategy for avoiding gender-bias is the use of symmetric phrases that include both males and females. This method is commonly used in *English 2000*.

- Why are successful *sportsmen and sportswomen* a valuable asset to advertising?  
(*English: A Modern Course 5*, p. 100)
- Name of *waiter/waitress* (*English 2000*, p. 126)
- You are *Janet/John Wong* (*English 2000*, p. 26)
- *Mr/Ms Chairperson* (*English 2000*, p. 52)

The present study found that although generic *he* and *man* were occasionally used, it was encouraging to find that many contemporary textbook writers used different non-sexist writing strategies, including the alternative pronoun *he/she*,



*him/her*, etc., generic *they*, gender-neutral vocabulary and symmetric phrases to create gender equity.

### 3.2.5 Titles

There are some interesting differences between the recent and earlier books in the frequencies for the female titles *Mrs*, *Miss* and *Ms*. The traditional titles *Mrs* and *Miss* identify women in terms of their marital status, and hence their 'availability'. While the earlier texts have 19 instances of *Mrs* and six of *Miss*, the corresponding figures are four and one in the recent texts. The female title *Ms* was coined as a replacement for *Mrs* and *Miss* so that a female's marital status would not be revealed, as with *Mr* for males. However, this new title is not as widely used as *Mr*. Rather than operating as a replacement for *Mrs* and *Miss*, it generally serves as an additional title choice for females. In the early 1990s the title *Ms* was not popular in Hong Kong. Not surprisingly, it was absent from the earlier textbooks. However, in the recent textbooks there were three instances, indicating that it has become more widely accepted.

### 3.2.6 Order of Appearance

As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, it was argued that males should be mentioned before females: ‘let us kepe a natural order and set the man before the woman for manners Sake’ (Wilson, 1560: 189; cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 34), for ‘The Masculine gender is more worthy than the Feminine’ (Poole, 1646: 21; cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 34). This ordering, reflecting a widespread perception of male supremacy, has been conventionalized and not questioned until relatively recently.

In the present analysis, given two nouns paired for sex, females were occasionally mentioned first, apart from the phrase *ladies and gentlemen*, usually because of the female’s age and seniority in the family (e.g. *Maria and little Albert, a picture of Winnie and Paul*, with Winnie being the elder sister). This practice indicates the importance of order of appearance: those who are accorded more respect appear first. The finding in the present enquiry was that the masculine noun tends to come first (e.g. *Ben and Mary, Mr and Mrs So’s bedroom, successful sportsmen and sportswomen, brothers and sisters*). The male-first phenomenon was also found in form-filling – for titles *Mr* always came before *Mrs, Miss* and *Ms*; for sex *males* always came before *females* in the textbooks.

As indicated in Table 6, all the textbooks reviewed, whether they are earlier or recent, evidence a much higher tendency for males to be mentioned first. The average ratio of female to male firstness for earlier books was 1 : 2.2, while that for recent books was 1 : 23.5. The much higher frequency of male firstness in recent books is attributable to the use of alternative pronouns to include both males and females, such as *he or she, he/she, his or her, his/her*, etc. This finding indicates an interesting phenomenon: while recent textbook writers are more conscious about including females in their language, they often ignore the importance of mixing the order of mention in order to reverse the second-place status of women. Pauwels (1991: 57) states, ‘When describing a couple (woman and man), treat both partners as equals. If mentioning women and men together, do not always list the man first; try instead to alternate the order in which men and women are described’.

Table 6 Order of appearance

	Male first	Female first
<i>English: A Modern Course 1</i>	13	4
<i>English: A Modern Course 5</i>	6	1
<i>Integrated English 1</i>	16	11
<b>Total</b>	35	16

<i>Progress 5</i>	30	0
<i>English 2000 5</i>	36	3
<i>New English Treasure 1B</i>	28	1
<b>Total</b>	94	4

Another point that is worth noting is that, as for titles, women are more often presented in terms of their relation to men, than men are to women. For example, in *a Japanese boy, Takashi, and his girlfriend Midi* (*Progress 5*, p. 97), not only is Midi referred to second but also her identity is known only because of the Japanese boy, Takashi.

### 3.2.7 Pictorial Representation of Males and Females

Table 7 shows that in our earlier textbook sample of 186 pictures, the number of pictures presenting male characters only is 72 (38.7%), while that with female characters only is 57 (30.6%). The number of pictures with more male characters (15 or 8.1%) also outnumbers that with more female characters (7 or 3.8%). In the 169 pictures in the recent textbook sample, the number of male-only pictures is 82 (48.5%) and that of female-only pictures is 48 (28.4%). Meanwhile, the number of pictures with more male characters (11 or 6.5%) also outnumbers that with more

female characters (4 or 2.4%). Given the significantly uneven proportion of males to females in the textbook pictures, it is obvious that females have been under-represented in the secondary English language textbooks in Hong Kong over the last ten years.

Table 7 Pictorial representation of males and females

	Male only	More males	Female only	More females	Equal share	Not identifiable	Total
<i>Modern Course 1</i>	31	8	27	2	21	0	89
<i>Modern Course 5</i>	17	4	11	2	1	1	36
<i>Integrated 1</i>	24	3	19	3	10	2	61
<b>Total</b>	72	15	57	7	32	3	186
<i>Progress 5</i>	25	1	18	1	11	0	56
<i>English 2000</i>	9	7	2	2	2	5	27
<i>New English Treasure 1B</i>	48	3	28	1	4	2	86
<b>Total</b>	82	11	48	4	17	7	169

There is a traditional Chinese saying: ‘Men should go outside and women should stay at home’, implying that while men should take up the role of breadwinner, women should be in charge of the family. One may wonder whether this kind of traditional belief is reinforced in the English language textbooks reviewed. Table 8 shows the kinds of activities the main characters are engaged in (shared main characters were excluded).

Table 8 Earlier textbooks: activities

Kinds of activities	<i>Modern Course 1</i>		<i>Modern Course 5</i>		<i>Integrated English 1</i>		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Doing housework	0	4	2	1	1	3	3	8
Working	6	3	7	2	8	7	21	12
Studying / at school	0	2	2	0	1	0	3	2
Playing	7	3	1	3	6	1	14	7
Relaxing	0	3	0	0	1	1	1	4
Engaging in social activities	8	1	5	0	1	1	14	2
Engaging in personal / family activities	14	10	3	7	7	7	24	24
Others	4	3	1	0	2	2	7	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>64</b>

Table 9 Recent textbooks: activities

Kinds of activities	<i>Progress 5</i>		<i>English 2000</i>		<i>New English Treasure 1B</i>		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Doing housework	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Working	20	7	5	0	1	1	26	8
Studying / at school	0	1	1	0	1	4	2	5
Playing	0	3	1	0	17	5	18	8
Relaxing	0	3	0	0	4	1	4	4
Engaging in social activities	0	1	0	1	6	8	6	10
Engaging in personal / family activities	0	0	9	2	5	3	14	5
Others	6	4	0	0	17	7	23	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>52</b>

As we can see from Tables 8 and 9, the pictures reinforce traditionally gendered roles: there are more females than males engaging in various kinds of household chores (8 vs 3 for earlier books, and 1 vs 0 for recent books). Although there are three pictures showing men doing housework, two of them reflect gender stereotypes – one shows a man making a mess while cooking, and the other a man washing his car. On the other hand, there are more male characters performing non-household activities, such as at work and at play. Despite the fact that in modern Hong Kong most females enter the workforce upon graduation from university, and the female labour force participation rate for the age group 25-34 increased from 66.8% in 1991 to 76.9% in 2001 (Census and Statistics Department, 2002), this is not reflected in contemporary texts. The ratio of pictures showing women at work is lower in the recent textbooks. The average ratios of females at work to males at work are 1 : 1.75 for the earlier books and 1 : 3.25 for the recent books. Meanwhile, male characters are portrayed as more active and sporty than female. The number of pictures showing male characters at play is about twice the number for female characters in both the earlier and recent books.

#### 4. Conclusion

A recent interview with English language publishers conducted by members of the Equal Opportunities Commission (2000) found that there was a high level of awareness of the importance of avoiding stereotyping in textbook materials, especially in relation to matters of gender representation. The present study suggests that such awareness is translating into practice: compared with their former counterparts, many textbook writers nowadays use various strategies to avoid biased or stereotypical treatment of the two sexes – the use of gender-inclusive terms, alternative pronouns such as *he or she*, symmetrical phrases to include both males and females, and the representation of women in a wider range of activities and careers beyond stereotypical images. However, there is still much room for improvement. Women are still commonly associated with housework and the home, and men with paid work outside; women are weak, and men are strong; women are more passive, and men are more active; women are less frequently mentioned than males in both the written and visual modes.

As a postscript we would like to suggest that a formal code of practice for editors in relation to issues of gender equity should be developed for Hong Kong, with guidelines for the use of inclusive language and fair treatment of the sexes. These might include recommendations on accurate descriptions of contemporary practices



and equal visibility for female and male characters with a wider range of occupational roles and personal traits.

## Appendix

### Earlier Textbooks

Junior forms:

Barnes, J., Mackay, R. and Byron, S. (1994). *Impact 1*. Hong Kong: Macmillan.

Christie, H., Yuen, K. S. and Nancarrow, C. (1994). *English: A modern course 1*.

Hong Kong: Aristo.

Etherton, A. R. B. (1986). *Creative English for secondary schools 1*. Hong Kong:

Ling Kee.

Howe, D. H. and Kirkpatrick, T. A. and D. L. (1986). *Access today 1*. Hong Kong:

Oxford University Press.

Method, K. and Tadman, J. (1990). *New integrated English 1*. Hong Kong:

Longman.

Senior forms:

Barnes, J., Mackay, R. and Byron, S. (1994). *Impact 5*. Hong Kong: Macmillan.

Christie, H. and Yuen, K. S. (1994). *English: A modern course 5*. Hong Kong: Aristo.

Etherton, A. R. B. (1986). *Creative English for secondary schools 5*. Hong Kong:

Ling Kee.

Howe, D. H. and Kirkpatrick, T. A. and D. L. (1986). *Access today 5*. Hong Kong:  
Oxford University Press.

Method, K., Tadman, J. and Lam, J. (1990). *New integrated English 5*. Hong Kong:  
Longman.

### **Recent Textbooks**

Junior forms:

Li, P. L., Leetch, P. and Burns, G. J. (2001). *Real English 1A*. Hong Kong:  
Macmillan.

Nancarrow, C., Thomas, G. and Yuen, K. S. (2004). *Living English 1A*. Hong Kong:  
Aristo.

Nelson, J. A., Chan, K. and Swan, A. (2004). *Longman express 1B*. Hong Kong:  
Longman.

Sampson, N. (2001). *New way to English 2A*. Hong Kong: Macmillan.

Williams, A. and Dawson, C. (2004). *New English treasure 1B*. Hong Kong: Oxford  
University Press.

Senior forms:

Kent, J. C. and Hodson, R. (2003). *Progress 5*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Kent, D. and Williams, N. (2006). *New progress 5*. Hong Kong: Oxford University

Press.

Nancarrow, C., Hsing, B. M. and Yuen, K. S. (2004). *Living English for the*

*certificate exam 4A*. Hong Kong: Aristo.

Sampson, N. (1997). *English 2000, book 5*. Hong Kong: Macmillan.

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鄧思穎 (Tang, S. W., et al.) (2002). 粵語拼音字表 (Yue yu pin yin zi biao). Hong Kong: The Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.