



IMAGES MATTER: A SEMIOLOGICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF GENDER POSITIONING IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH-LEARNING SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS

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Abstract: A semiological content analysis of gender positioning in two English-learning software programs (*Tell Me More* and *English at Home*) demonstrates the usefulness of this approach for investigating semiotic resources which situate gender unfairly in visual discourse. Dimensions identified in Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979) were mapped onto the image categories developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* (2006) to form the following resources: active participant, gaze direction, visual techniques, modality, and body display. The results showed that males appeared as active, competent, dominant, and powerful. Females appeared as reactive, objects of the male gaze, intimate, subordinate, and powerless even in modern technology-based media. Accordingly, this study discusses the translatability of Goffman's content analysis.

Keywords: Gender, Image, English Teaching Software, Social Semiotics, Goffman, Ideology.

Özet: İki İngilizce öğrenimi yazılımındaki (*Tell Me More* ve *English at Home*) cinsiyet konumlandırmasının gösterebilimsel bir içerik çözümlemesi, görsel söylemde cinsiyeti adaletsiz bir şekilde yerleştiren göstergesel kaynakları incelemek için bu yaklaşımın kullanılabilirliğini göstermektedir. Geoffman'ın *Gender Advertisements* (1979) isimli kitabında tanımlanan boyutlar Kress ve van Leeuwen tarafından *Reading Images* (2006) isimli kitaplarında geliştirilen imge kategorilerine şu kaynakları biçimlendirmek için eşlendi: aktif katılım, bakış yönü, görsel teknikler, tarz ve vücut görüntüsü. Sonuçlar göstermektedir ki erkekler aktif, yetenekli, baskın ve güçlü olarak görünmektedirler. Kadınlar ise modern teknoloji temelli medyada bile tepkili, erkek bakışlarının hedefi, samimi, önemsiz ve güçsüz olarak görünmektedirler. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışma Goffman'ın içerik çözümlemesinin çevrilebilirliğini ele almaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Cinsiyet, İmge, İngiliz Dili Öğretimi Yazılımı, Sosyal Gösterebilim, Goffman, İdeoloji.

Introduction

Today, so much of people's time is spent working with some type of software and on the internet. Self-study educational software packages especially language-learning packages have captured the attention of many users around the globe including Iran. The potential audience of such packages is very wide. Therefore, the explicit and implicit ideologies conveyed by educational software packs are of great importance.

It has been acknowledged that language-learning tools for teaching English have concomitantly taught secondary information – gender roles and social values (Gershuny, 1977). This secondary information may also misrepresent reality and undermine the possibilities for greater gender equality in English-learning materials for sexism exists in both its apparent and hidden forms in educational media. As Renner (1997) suggests, the materials used within an EFL setting are not just tools by which English is taught and learnt. The cultural content is also present and can, itself, carry messages from the patriarchal capitalist society in which the materials have been produced.

The increasing use of computer technology is exposing people to a variety of new media sources (Sheldon, 2004). The widespread use of CD-ROMs, at a time when new media are

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being defined, makes them significant (Smith, 1999). Foreign language software programs as semiotic textual entities that are designed with principles provide a second reading to Bakhtin's statement on the multiplicity of voices in discourse: "Language is not a neutral medium; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. The word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... but rather it exists in other people's mouth, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). Obviously, the intervention of media scholars in general and ESL/EFL researchers in particular is seriously needed in the development of multimedia texts before it is too late. Smith (1999, p. 3) states that:

My hope is that by engaging in criticism of current multimedia texts, media scholars can help define the future of these new media. Academic media studies tend to wait until long after a medium has become widely accepted before it gives the medium close critical attention [...]. By neglecting to provide detailed criticism of new media texts, scholars pass up the opportunity to shape the future of media.

There is a shift of focus from textual content to visual presentation in ESL/EFL materials. In the 1970s the texts went technicolor, says Prodromou (1988). And Giaschi (2000, p. 34) puts it, "A revolution has taken place in the ESL industry". Imagery combined with texts make learners more likely to think about language processes. English-learning tools such as multimedia interactive software like non-interactive tools make a huge use of colorful and lively visuals to enhance the learning processes of students and make the task appear authentic.

The increasingly prevailing and paramount images used in English-learning software applications available on the online and offline ESL/EFL market may advertently or inadvertently make use of gender-stereotyped images (illustrations, photographs, pictures) and, as a result, convey a particular positioning of gender reality. This can contribute to the development of sexist attitudes at a subconscious level (Low & Sherrard, 1999). Some users may assume that images are guiltless and objective slices of reality, thus giving them authority and allure (Barthes, 1977). By exploring how females and males are situated in pedagogical software, possible gender imbalances transmitted by images can be spotted and articulated.

In the current study, a semiological content analysis was carried out on two sets of award-winning software for learning English. Dimensions identified in Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979) and relevant visual content analytic research were conjoined with the image categories developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* (2006), aiming to demonstrate the resourcefulness of combining these approaches to initiate an analysis of gender positioning in educational media.

It is worth mentioning that as Goffman's (1979) content analysis has been applied by researchers investigating gender representation mainly in advertisements, this research discusses the translatability of Goffman's analysis. That is, to see whether and how Goffman's insightful analysis can be used as a resource for investigating gender representation in pedagogical materials. Consequently, this study provides an answer for those who ill-understood *Gender Advertisements* (1979).

Erving Goffman's album-sized book is a visual sociology classic which represents a praiseworthy instance of an empirical study which treats photographic materials as data (Smith, 1996). The aim of the book is to throw light on how advertising functions to display

notions of gender roles through visuals. Goffman (1979) assumes that the best way to understand the male-female relationship is to compare it to the parent-child relationship in which men take on the roles of parents while women behave as children. He distinguishes six dimensions in *Gender Advertisements* (1979) by means of which this symbolic infantilization and subordination can be classified:

Relative size: There is a tendency to represent women shorter or smaller than men. According to Goffman (1979), in social interaction between the sexes, biological dimorphism underlies the probability that the male's usual superiority of status over the female will be expressible in his greater girth and height.

The feminine touch: The way women lightly touch or caress objects as opposed with men who are generally pictured as grasping and manipulating objects. Self-touching falls into this dimension as well.

Function ranking: Women usually have a secondary role while men have a primary role when they are portrayed in a collaborative task. That is, men portrayed in executive roles give instructions and women receive the instructions. Women are more pictured as receiving help from men. There is an exception in Goffman's book: a man will mainly represent as unreal, child-like and ludicrous, if he is involved in a traditionally feminine activity.

The family: Family portrayals reveal gender roles. Women are more shown akin to their daughters than men are to their sons. The father of the family (or in his absence, a son) is portrayed standing at a slight distance from the other members of family to express protectiveness by means of distance.

The ritualization of subordination: Women are likely to be physically subordinated to men by head or body canting postures, childlike guises, lying or sitting postures, and offering smiles which may function as ritualistic mollifiers. Women are displayed in clowning and costume-like characters while men are portrayed in formal guises (Belknap & Leonard, 1991). Besides, males are presented as physically taking care of females and protecting them by extending a proprietary arm towards them, holding their hands, and making use of the basic asymmetric tie-sign that is commonly used in Western societies.

Licensed withdrawal: Women are usually pictured as withdrawing from the scene around them. The withdrawal can be signaled in several ways, including retreating behind objects and animals, covering the face with hands or objects, snuggling into others, and talking over the phone. Certain types of gaze, too, withdraw women from the scene like a middle distance gaze that is common in both real life situations and advertisements.

Social semiotics provides researchers with practical tools for studying visual texts systematically. It is a branch of the field of semiotics that aims to explain meaning making as a social practice. Its origin goes back to a synthesis of structuralist semiotics and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (Aiello, 2006). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) consider the grammars of written and visual communication throughout their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. Just as the grammar of language describes how words combine in texts, so visual grammar delineates the ways in which

depicted elements join together in visual statements of greater or lesser intricacy and extension. Three major metafunctions of visual semiosis are discussed in *Reading Images* (2006):

1. The representational metafunction concerns the representation of interaction and relationship between the people, places, and things shown in images. Objects within images are shown to interact via the use of vectors (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

According to systemic-functional linguistics, language represents and constructs our perception of reality in the form of ‘goings-on’ – happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being, and becoming – which incorporate several categories of participants like actors, goals, receivers, and sensors (Halliday, 1985). Following this model, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) refer to the existence of two main categories of processes, of which the represented participants in the images come to participate. Narrative processes serve to present represented participants as doing something to or for each other. These processes, in fact, take an interest in transactions and reactions of the participants. Participants are linked to one another or to processes with vectors (lines of energy and direction), such as eye-lines, bodies, limbs, or gestures indicating a line force in a particular direction. Conceptual processes, on the other hand, show participants in a general, stable, and timeless fashion. They deal with the visual representation of non-active or interactive participants (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

2. The interpersonal metafunction is the interaction between the viewer and represented participants that is structured by factors, such as the gaze of participants, the distance of participants, and the angle from which viewers as interactive participants see represented participants.

The gaze of represented participants in the image forms and structures the interaction between the viewer and represented participants. If the depicted participants do not look at the viewer, they are, as if it were, offered to the gaze of viewers. If they look directly at the viewer, they are making demands. Vectors, or lines of direction, connect the viewer and participant on a formal and imaginary level (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

“The choice of distance can suggest different relations between represented participants and viewers”, argue Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 124). In this dimension, they refer to the work of Edward T. Hall on proxemics: the psychology of people’s use of space. The close shot creates a kind of intimacy between the viewer and depicted participants. But, the long shot creates impersonality. The medium shot is more social and objective.

The horizontal angle is whether the viewer sees people from the side or front. The vertical angle is whether the viewer sees people from below, above, or at eye-level. Horizontal and vertical angles represent two aspects of represented social relation between the viewer and people in the image: involvement and power.

Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) analysis of modality, or the socially conventionalized realism or credibility of images, can also be taken as an aspect of the interpersonal metafunction (Bell & Milic, 2002). Color, representational detail, depth, tonal shades, etc., might be evaluated in order to define the degree of modality of visual images. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 252) explain that:

Each of these dimensions can be seen as a scale, running from the absence of any rendition of detail to maximal representation of detail, or from the absence of any rendition of depth to maximally deep perspective. And on each of these scales there is a point that represents the way the given pictorial dimension is used in what could be called standard naturalism. To the degree that the use of a dimension is reduced, it becomes, at least in one respect, more abstract, 'less than real'. To the degree that it is amplified, it becomes 'more than real' [...] and an attempt to come as close as possible to a representation that involves all the senses.

3. The textual metafunction deals with the way in which the first two metafunctions come together into a meaningful significant whole. It relates the representational and interpersonal meanings of the visual image to each other through three interrelated systems: information value, salience, and framing.

The placement of elements in relation to each other offers information values. Depicted elements perceived by the viewer on the left side of the images may be considered as old information, whereas those on the right side are to be decoded as new. Elements on the top can be interpreted as ideal or the promise an image makes. The lower section focuses more on the factual and real. One can define salience as how the portrayed elements are made to ask for the attention and retention. "The presence or absence of framing devices (realized by elements which create dividing lines, or by actual frame lines) disconnects or connects elements of the image" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 177).

Research Questions

The essential research question and the sub-questions, which arose from the prior research and theory through a critical standpoint, are as follows:

How is gender positioned in the images included in contemporary English-learning software applications?

1. Who is active in the image?
2. Where is the gaze directed?
3. What is the role of visual techniques in positioning gender?
4. How does the image signify its status as naturalistic?
5. What does the clothing communicate?

Corpus

The corpus contained two sets of contemporary English-learning software designed for self-instruction. The selection of them can be justified through more than the researcher's personal tastes and interests.

Tell Me More is the most award-winning solution on the market. Its courses are available in several languages. It is the winner of the Gold Mom's Choice Award in Educational Software for its three specific programs: English, Spanish, and French Homeschool Editions. Moreover, it is "TopTenREVIEWS Gold Award" ESL software. The package includes five DVD-ROMs that cover five levels of learning. The DVD-ROM devoted to business English was excluded from the analysis due to the study's main area of focus: general English. The ESL *Tell Me More* addresses four skills critical to language learning. The selection of it was largely based on two reasons. First, it appears that *Tell Me More* is one of the world's leading software

programs for foreign language learning – especially English. Second, the software makes extensive use of images for teaching English – and this is in line with the central purpose of this research.

English at Home contains two CD-ROMs written and developed by Susan Marandi and Sepideh Marandi. It won silver at the first Roshd Multimedia Software Festival in Iran. The package has been designed just for Iranians who want to learn American English. Then, it seeks to cater to all learning needs of Iranian language learners. The dialogues and exercises that are normally cultural in nature familiarize learner with both formal and informal English. This software program makes good use of commissioned illustrations for teaching conversation. Two Iranian graphic artists have illustrated the pictures for *English at Home*.

The Analytical Path

Johnsen (1993) indicates there does not exist a general consensus on the evaluation criteria for teaching materials. Hence, researchers have to choose appropriate methods for analysis from a variety of different possibilities. The methods can be quantitative, qualitative or both, and the researchers can use different approaches, pay attention to different details, and choose to concentrate on only texts, only images, or both, and analyze one material or one hundred. So, there is a possibility that researchers may tailor the methods to suit their purpose, Johnsen (1993) further asserts.

The analytical framework was primarily based upon a content analysis of explicitly semiotic variables. “Semiotic analysis has the advantage of enabling a richer analysis of texts by focusing on the objective formal relationships, which to some degree account for differences in what, and how, images mean” (Bell & Milic, 2002, pp. 203-204). To conduct a content analysis is to try to describe salient aspects of how a group of texts (in this case, images or visual texts) represent some kinds of people, processes, events, and/or interrelationships between or amongst these (Bell, 2001). A content analysis can be both qualitative and quantitative. Its purpose is to get the research data to a form that is easier to perceive and, thus, help in drawing conclusions (Piironen, 2004).

Procedure

Each software package was analyzed with a sole focus on 201 visual images from *Tell Me More* and 75 visual images from *English at Home*. During studying the content of visuals, word-based information given in the activities, reading passages, and audio clips were also used, when necessary, to make the analysis richer. Each of the five research sub-questions performed a specific function by covering well-defined variables. The semantically significant variables and the respective values in each that have been observed are as follows:

Explicitly, four values captured the actual role of each participant to interrogate active subjects for *Narrative presentation*. First, participants could be actors represented as doing something to another participant; second, participants could be goals or targets of another participant’s action; third, the participants could be behaviors performing a non-transitive action, such as smiling or running; and finally, the participants could be reacting to a model, object, or situation represented in the image (smiling at something or being surprised at something, for example).

Two kinds of *Gaze* (eye-direction) were coded: where the participants gaze at the viewer, and where the participants gaze away from the viewer.

There were three values for *Social distance (Visual techniques)*. First, close-up, the camera provides the magnified view of the represented males and females. Second, at the medium shot the participants and the space occupy equal areas in the frame, and third, at a long shot, the participants are shown from a public distance and there is a space around them showing the context in detail. Three levels were also distinguished for *Point of view (Visual techniques)*: frontal shot, profile shot, and rear shot of the represented participants.

Three values were identified for the dimension of *Modality*: high (images use differentiated saturated colors naturalistically, detailed background, and detailed representation of the participants), medium (images use less differentiated saturated colors or washed out colors, lightly sketched background, and less detailed representation of the participants), and low (images that are similar to drawings relying on limited range of colors and low degree of the articulation of detail).

Under *Body display* a rating was given to the apparent degree of clothing on males and females. This variable was differentiated into sparsely clothed (e.g., gym shorts, trunks, bikini), lightly clothed (shorts with T-shirt, knee-length skirt, and top), and fully clothed (trousers and shirt/T-shirt, business suit, long skirt, and headscarf).

Findings

Active participant: Who is Active in the Image?

Regarding the visual structure of representation, all of the images involved representation of narrative processes:

Men outnumbered women in *Tell Me More*. Furthermore, they were often the active subjects of the image. Women were more likely than men to ‘react’. Female participants were not so frequently shown in what Goffman (1979, p. 32) calls executive roles. In societies "when a man and a woman collaborate face-to-face in an undertaking, the man- it would seem- is likely to perform the executive role, providing only that one that can be fashioned". Berger (1972) believes one might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear.

Women were frequently shown as actors and reactors in *English at Home*. It must be noted that the separation of genders was fully obvious. The concurrent presence of two genders occurred more often in the images of family gathering at home and the workplace where men performed ‘executive’ roles (Appendix, Image 1). Women mostly tended to be ‘doers’ in images that separated genders (Image 2).

It is worth mentioning that where males were positioned as passive or reactive, the context or setting of the image ensured and endorsed their superior status (Image 3). Women usually tended to be actors when they were represented as providing service to others and/or doing chores around the house (Images 4 & 5).

Tables 1 & 2 Narrative role and gender of the represented participants (%)

	NARRATIVE (<i>Tell Me More</i>)				Total
	Actor	Goal	Behavior	Reactor	
Male	60 (40.0)	5 (3.3)	44 (29.4)	41 (27.3)	150 (100)
Female	37 (28.2)	6 (4.6)	40 (30.5)	48 (36.7)	131 (100)
Total	97 (34.6)	11 (3.9)	84 (29.9)	89 (31.6)	281 (100)

	NARRATIVE (<i>English at Home</i>)				Total
	Actor	Goal	Behavior	Reactor	
Male	24 (30.4)	1 (1.3)	16 (20.2)	38 (48.1)	79 (100)
Female	21 (28.8)	—	10 (13.7)	42 (57.5)	73 (100)
Total	45 (29.6)	1 (0.6)	26 (17.2)	80 (52.6)	152 (100)

Gaze Direction: Where is the Gaze Directed?

In *Tell Me More*, males more often than not did not look at the viewer, but it was by no means the case that they never did. When they did, they still stared at the viewer (Image 6). Dyer (1992, cited in Chandler, 1998) argues that men feel bound to avoid the femininity of being posed as the passive object of an active gaze. In the same software, represented females appeared to be psychologically withdrawn from the scene in the presence of a male with a monitoring look (Image 7). Images were found of women alone gazing directly into the camera. Their gaze was accompanied by appeasement behaviors like smiling and head-canting, indicating the ritualization of subordination (Images 8 & 9). Smile can function as a ritualistic mollifier and the offering of an inferior (Goffman, 1979). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state that participants may smile, in which case the viewer is asked to enter into a relation of social affinity with them. In social semiotic terms, women are more frequently depicted in image-acts which demand a relationship with the viewer and create a kind of rapport with them.

In *English at Home*, the depicted participants were objects of scrutiny since they did not look at the viewer directly (Image 10). The images offered “the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 119).

Tables 3 & 4 Gaze and gender of the represented participants (%)

	GAZE DIRECTION (<i>Tell Me More</i>)			Total
	At the viewer	Away from the viewer	No gaze	
Male	11 (7.3)	138 (92.0)	1 (0.7)	150 (100)
Female	29 (22.2)	100 (76.3)	2 (1.5)	131 (100)
Total	40 (14.3)	238 (84.7)	3 (1.0)	281 (100)

	GAZE DIRECTION (<i>English at Home</i>)			Total
	At the viewer	Away from the viewer	No gaze	
Male	—	79 (100)	—	79 (100)
Female	—	73 (100)	—	73 (100)
Total	—	152 (100)	—	152 (100)

Visual Techniques: What is the role of visual techniques in positioning gender?

Other dimensions to the interactive meaning of the images in the grammar of visual design are social distance and point of view. Visual techniques applied to indicate the framed distance of represented participants and point of view can greatly influence how an image is interpreted.

Although differences were small, females were more likely to be represented in medium and long shots and males in close-ups with high degree of facial prominence than females (Images 11, 12, 13, & 14). From the semiotic perspective, zooming into a close-up can enhance the perceived importance of a person (Chandler, 1998). When showing a male or female with a high status notably at a company or business office, close-ups were used. This may be due to ‘face-ism’. The term ‘face-ism’ was coined to express a tendency for photographs and drawings to underscore the faces of men and bodies of women (Chandler, 1998). Images of people with a high degree of facial prominence can elicit positive attributes. Males and females are, then, evaluated as “competent (intelligent, assertive, ambitious, etc.) and likeable if presented with a high (portrait) rather than a low (fully-body photograph) degree of facial prominence” (Schwarz & Kurz, 1989, p. 311). This face-ism bias intended to contribute to a perception of men as more powerful and prestigious than women in both packs.

Tables 5 & 6 Distance and gender of the represented participants (%)

	DISTANCE (<i>Tell Me More</i>)			
	Close-up	Medium shot	Long shot	Total
Male	24 (16.0)	57 (38.0)	69 (46.0)	150 (100)
Female	7 (5.3)	55 (42.0)	69 (52.7)	131 (100)
Total	31 (11.0)	112 (39.8)	138 (49.2)	281 (100)

	DISTANCE (<i>English at Home</i>)			
	Close-up	Medium shot	Long shot	Total
Male	11 (13.9)	32 (40.5)	36 (45.6)	79 (100)
Female	2 (2.8)	35 (47.9)	36 (49.3)	73 (100)
Total	13 (8.6)	67 (44.0)	72 (47.4)	152 (100)

Concerning the point of view variable, females more than males were portrayed from a frontal position (Images 15, 16, 17 & 18), indicating viewer identification and involvement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Nevertheless, Tagg (1988, cited in Chandler, 1998) states that ‘frontality’ is a code of social inferiority since historically the frontal portrait has been connected with the working class.

Based on Chandler (1998), in rear views we see the back of a depicted person. Female participants were depicted in rear shots and sparsely clothed in seascapes in *Tell Me More*. In pictures of the sea, exposed flesh invites sexual curiosity. Such images carry an implicit message with themselves: wish you were here (Chandler, 1998). These participants were represented to the viewer as objects of scrutiny as well due to absence of the gaze element. Berger (1972, p. 64) notes that:

The essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in a quite different way from men – not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the “ideal” spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him.

Further, the views from the back usually tend to be in mid-shots or close-ups of semi-naked bodies in seascapes (Chandler, 1998). But, rear views of females in seascapes were all in long-shots in which the viewer could see the semi-naked bodies of women in addition to the surrounding (Image 19).

Tables 7 & 8 Point of view and gender of the represented participants (%)

	POINT OF VIEW (<i>Tell Me More</i>)			Total
	Frontality	Profile	Rear	
Male	61 (40.7)	86 (57.3)	3 (2.0)	150 (100)
Female	71 (54.2)	52 (39.7)	8 (6.1)	131 (100)
Total	132 (46.9)	138 (49.2)	11 (3.9)	281 (100)

	POINT OF VIEW (<i>English at Home</i>)			Total
	Frontality	Profile	Rear	
Male	36 (45.6)	39 (49.4)	4 (5.0)	79 (100)
Female	44 (60.3)	29 (39.7)	—	73 (100)
Total	80 (52.7)	68 (44.7)	4 (2.6)	152 (100)

Modality: How does the image signify its status as naturalistic?

The images in *Tell Me More* appeared to be moving away from naturalistic modality (Images 20 & 21). Ineffable richness of the detail and analogical plenitude guarantee photographs' realism (Barthes, 1977; Machin, 2004). However, the images in this pack gave the impression that they had been designed rather than captured, given their de-contextualized background, generic setting, and unrealistic modality (Machin, 2004). Business was indexed by business suits or 'power suits', The Wall Street Journal and cellular phone, science by white coats, office work by a computer and telephone, construction by a hard hat, and so on in decontextualized and generic settings (Images 22 & 23). Props were usually used to indicate the settings, identities of participants, and the nature of the activities in terms of types only rather than individual identities (Machin, 2004). This is notably significant in relation to the positioning of women in pedagogical media. Women's actual power in addition to the reality of the world in which they exercise their power cannot be supported by such images. The realization of this support is important from both educational and sociological viewpoints.

English at Home was full with cartoon type images in contrast with *Tell Me More* that depended on photographs. The images did not convey a sense of realism and naturalistic modality by, for instance, suffering from lack of maximally diversified color range and fully detailed background (Images 24 & 25). Naturally, learners may be more inclined to identify with the people in photographs than with the characters in cartoon-type images.

Tables 9 & 10 Modality and gender of the represented participants (%)

	MODALITY (<i>Tell Me More</i>)			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Male	—	89 (59.3)	61 (40.7)	150 (100)
Female	—	83 (63.4)	48 (36.6)	131 (100)
Total	—	172 (61.2)	109 (38.8)	281 (100)

	MODALITY (<i>English at Home</i>)			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Male	79 (100)	---	---	79 (100)
Female	73 (100)	---	---	73 (100)
Total	152 (100)	---	---	152 (100)

Body Display: What does the Clothing Communicate?

Kang (1997) adds a body display category to Goffman’s six categories in her paper for high degree of nudity and body-revealing clothes are important ways of stereotyping and suppressing women. Over and above, Reichert (2003) regards body-revealing clothes as one type of sexual information. Sexual information is defined as any representation that portrays or implies sexual interest, behavior, or motivation (Harris, 1994, cited in Reichert, 2003).

There was a great difference in how males and females appeared in *Tell Me More* from the sartorial point of view. Men were usually presented in three basic modes: casual, professional, and power-dressed. Women, on the other hand, appeared in a variety of modes. In many images especially the ones on leisure, women were shown as wearing clothes that revealed parts of their body (Images 26 & 27). These images situate women as objects to be observed. Berger (1972) maintains that this dichotomy exists in art throughout Western history: men are depicted as the subject of envy; women are depicted as objects to be desired and possessed.

Images in *English at Home* represented women as being fully clothed. Some female participants appeared with long-sleeve shirts and pants (Image 28). Nevertheless, their clothes were not tight and provocative. One of the most important norms in Islam is observing the hijab. *English at Home* software transferred this behavioral model to its users. Although the participants were supposedly from the United States, the pack observed this identity norm. Overall, *English at Home* was free from one type of sexual information that was an integral part of *Tell Me More*.

Tables 11 & 12 Body display and gender of the represented participants (%)

	BODY DISPLAY (<i>Tell Me More</i>)			Total
	Sparsely clothed	Lightly clothed	Fully clothed	
Male	8 (5.4)	11 (7.3)	131 (87.3)	150 (100)
Female	12 (9.2)	30 (22.9)	89 (67.9)	131 (100)
Total	20 (7.1)	41 (14.6)	220 (78.3)	281 (100)

	BODY DISPLAY (<i>English at Home</i>)			Total
	Sparsely clothed	Lightly clothed	Fully clothed	
Male	6 (7.6)	2 (2.5)	71 (89.9)	79 (100)
Female	---	---	73 (100)	73 (100)
Total	6 (3.9)	2 (1.3)	144 (94.8)	152 (100)

To carry out the analysis, the researcher classified images according to the defined values on specific variables. Reliability was demonstrated by assessing the correlation between judgments of the same sample of relevant items made by the researcher and a trained coder. Phi coefficient of ($\phi=.997$) showed a high agreement between the coders.

Discussion

The semiological content analysis was based on active participant, gaze direction, social distance, point of view, image modality, and body display. Findings showed that females appeared as reactive, subordinate, intimate, objects of the gaze, and powerless; males as active, competent, dominant, and powerful. Berger (1972) points out that traditionally, men and women have different types of social presence. Men are measured by the degree of power they offer. The power may be in any number of forms, for example moral, physical, economic etc.

It seems that there is an international conspiracy to further diminish the position of women (Gupta & Lee, 1989). This research demonstrates that even top-rated and prize-winning English-learning packages developed in two different contexts convey a special vision of and/or positioning of gender reality. “The use of images in ESL texts to communicate a particular culture and a particular "commonsense" about the world has grown exponentially since the 1970s” (Giaschi, 2000, p. 41), a trend that still continues and needs to be addressed for creating pedagogically sound materials.

Essentially, visual discourse analysis is ideology analysis since “ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs, and movies” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 17). The concept of ideology is closely related to power and dominance. According to Fairclough (1995), in today’s developed capitalist countries power is mainly exercised through consent and ideology rather than through coercion and physical force. This results in the enhanced role of discourse in the exercise of power. Furthermore, whereas some of the conditions of mind control result from the situation and are largely contextual, some are discursive: certain forms of discourse, certain structures and meanings of a language are more influential on recipients’ minds than others (van Dijk, 2001).

Kress (2003, p. 1) argues, “The world told is a different world to the world shown”. Interpreting images critically is a must because all images, suggest Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 12), are “entirely in the realm of ideology”, where particular discourses are privileged, while others are downplayed or even silenced. Ideology is a significant aspect of establishing and maintaining power relations from the viewpoint of critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001).

Stepping back and seeing the whole picture created by the packages, a skewed view of gender emerges that is inconsistent with equality and equity as educational goals. In fact, the visual data in the corpus can be seen as sites of struggle for multiple discourses and ideologies. The stereotypical themes created by visual images can be treated as rhetorical devices that software producers and writers used in order to situate themselves, software users, and represented participants. When genders are portrayed as different and unequal, the depictions create and reinforce cognitive rubrics that narrow the range of roles women may play in society (Milburn, Carney, & Ramirez, 2001) and shortchange female learners by limiting their desires and expectations.

Basically, the practice and promotion of new forms of visual discourse that have the capacity to tackle with discursive practices which victimize learners is likely to be the only working solution. Davies (2004) believes that the current understandings of gender are constantly reconstituted through discursive practices. And many of the discursive practices are virtually incompatible with the goals of equity, as they structure dualistic maleness and femaleness that is mostly unrecognized by people.

The extent to which these discursive practices are developed and expressed seems not to be independent from the team of software producers, writers, commissioned photographers, and illustrators. Even if the producers are aiming at avoiding low positioning of females, their attempts can be subverted by choices made by the illustrators or the ones who locate and seek stock photographs. Matters reach a crisis when it becomes known that the world in these software packs very probably resembles the ideologically pre-structured limited world of the image bank categories, which are based on marketing categories, easy clichés, and limited visual vocabulary in relation to the representation of women (Machin, 2004).

Undermining gendered discursive practices, therefore, is a necessity since they function at a stereotypical level to determine the type of discourse which is produced (Mills, 1995). It has been argued repeatedly that ESL/EFL materials should embrace a changed view of women's role embodied in visual data and aim at challenging injustices (Laakkonen, 2007). By constructing new discursive practices, prevailing gender ideologies can be challenged and contested. "Seeing ideologies as always and necessarily in crisis" allows for such possibility, says Mills (1995, p. 9). People in the know must do their best to make a new vision of gender reality through multimedia texts instead of accepting the argument that educational media should reflect current reality and adopting a neutral stance. Davies (2004, pp. 130-131) emphasizes that

There are many beliefs, narratives, images, and metaphors located in everyday discursive practices that are not immediately recognizable as constituting inequitable practice. Even when they are recognized as such, it is often perceived as impossible to let go of them since the development of alternative discursive practices has not yet taken place.

Implications and Applications

The aim of this study is concerned with creating an awareness of gender positioning in two software applications. Learners must approach the task of learning English via software programs with an open mind while being aware of the undeniable truth that these tools can suffer from biases of different kinds. The result will be the expansion of critical visual awareness. The students, exposed to and made aware of sexist themes, will learn some other ways being and viewing the world (Filak, 2002). More importantly, they can be equipped with a resource for reconstructing discursive practices and power relations on a larger scale (Fairclough, 1995).

Seng (2003) writes that the gender factor has been glossed over or clouded in selecting materials for ELT classrooms. This study might be able to serve language instructors in their choice of teaching materials. "Language instructors can further pursue more gender sensitive and fair materials suitable for the development of learners as individual humans", according to Mineshima (2008, p. 16).

Material writers and software developers have to be enlightened in terms of gender sensitivity and must be further informed of the guidelines directed to them. The changing form of images

and the multiplicity of their sources allow material developers greater control over the images they utilize. It is incumbent on them to make sure they understand the impact of images and to use these self-representations responsibly and high-mindedly (Milburn et al., 2001).

They also must develop materials in such a way that these leaning tools “engage students in a ‘gender critique’ by encouraging critical questioning of biases in the facts and theories presented” (Hayibor & Peterat, 1995, p. 103). Educational materials should be designed to provide not only students but also instructors with the tools for critical meta-evaluation of their ideological contents rather than setting gender neutrality as the prime goal (Laakkonen, 2007).

Felten (2004) states that the teaching and learning of visual literacy should not be divorced from the teaching and learning of different academic disciplines. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) hope their work would be used to increase and expand the knowledge of visual literacy. The grammar of visual design can be a starting point for seeing but not looking at the visual images with a critical eye and developing reflective intelligence as a result. Perkins (1994) considers two kinds of intelligence essential to gain a complete perception of images: Experiential intelligence involves the contribution of intuitively applied prior experience to intelligent functioning. Reflective intelligence involves “the contribution of mindful self-management and strategic deployment of one’s intellectual resources to intelligent behavior” (Perkins, 1994, p. 29). The latter requires the viewer to go beyond the experiential experience and ponder over what is being viewed critically and minutely.

Erving Goffman turned to advertising to make evident how gender roles are inscribed in what appear to be natural expressions, situations, and poses (Goffman, 1979; Lemert & Branaman, 1997). In Smith’s (1996) opinion, Goffman’s approach to gender differentiation has been under-exploited. His analytical framework has the capacity of being extended. The categories are capable of capturing aspects of gender display in educational materials as was discovered. *Gender Advertisements* (1979) can sensitize education researchers, material developers, instructors, and learners to everyday forms of gender dominance and subordination and arm them with weapons to detect the occurrence of inappropriate gender positioning in visual discourse.

Suggestions for Further Research

In order to arrive at a better understanding of gender representation in English-learning software, researchers may want to look for other packages maybe the ones developed in other contexts with a different audience in mind.

An audience reception study might be done in order to understand thoroughly how language learners make meaning from visuals and react to materials reinforcing gender discrimination. Future research can also be undertaken to see learners’ individual differences when interpreting visuals.

Researchers should scrutinize the representation of age, social class, ethnic origin, family make-up, and race along with gender as major properties of visual materials in educational software that may influence discrimination and bias.

Further visual analyses can be performed on other forms of language-learning technology-based resources, such as Web pages and satellite TV programs. Differences in the images included in interactive systems then can be compared with those in non-interactive systems.

The number of women who choose careers in business is increasing. A thorough research can be carried out on Business English packages that have been developed for those who want to learn English specifically tailored to the needs of the workplace to see to what extent the physical appearance and role portrayal perpetuate traditional stereotypes of women and men.

Corpus

Marandi, S., & Marandi, S. *English At Home*. 2 CD Pack, Computer World, Iran.
Sioufi, N., Bravo Diaz, C., Didier, C., Berger, N., Albin, J., & Alsmeier, G. et al. *Tell Me More English Premium*. 5 DVD Pack, Auralog, U.S.A.

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APPENDIX

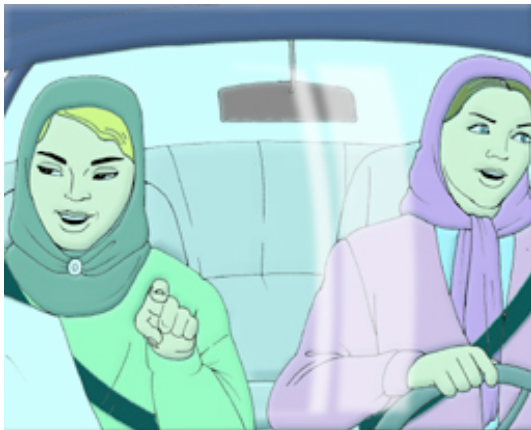
(Image 1)



(Image 4)



(Image 2)



(Image 5)



(Image 3)



(Image 6)



(Image 7)



(Image 10)



(Image 8)



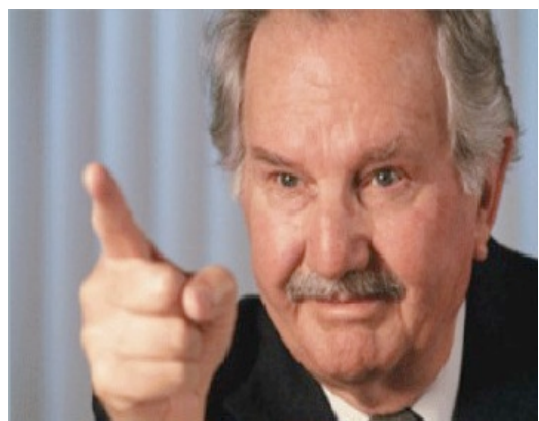
(Image 11)



(Image 9)



(Image 12)



(Image 13)



(Image 16)



(Image 14)



(Image 17)



(Image 15)



(Image 18)



(Image 19)



(Image 22)



(Image 20)



(Image 23)



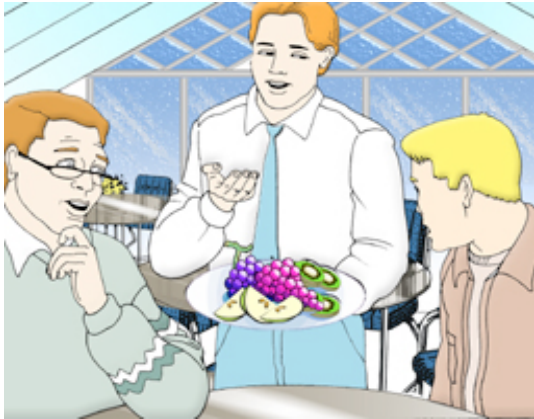
(Image 21)



(Image 24)



(Image 25)



(Image 27)



(Image 26)



(Image 28)

