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# Pedagogization of Children's Gender: Semiotic Means of Gender Construction in Russian First Grade Elementary School Textbooks

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***Abstract*—The article is devoted to representation of gender in learning materials and takes a linguistic approach to its exploring within the sphere of education. The aim of the article is to find out what means of gender construction are used in textbooks. It is reported that in the texts gender is created by either linguistic means or combination of linguistic means and semiotic codes of illustration. Implicit means of gender construction and means of gender neutralization are also identified. In conclusion it is stated that gender construction is connected with the age parameter.**

***Keywords—gender, gender construction, linguistic means, gender asymmetry, gender neutralization***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has introduced cardinal changes into existing paradigms of viewing human beings as well as social institutes, family relationships, value systems, communicative norms and rituals, and the concept of childhood in general, making the study of gender an important aspect of informing the new model of human identity. Early gender construction has become a commonplace in research literature. More and more curriculum experts began to use the perspective of gender ideology of textbooks, and school education in the textbook of child gender socialization produces the influence character by environment effects. According to M. Foucault, gender is constructed with the help of four discursive practices: 1) hysterization of women and medicalization of their bodies; 2) pedogogization of children's sex; 3) socialization of procreative behavior; 4) psychiatrization of perverse pleasure [1]. Goffman E. stated the impact of social institutes (such as family, school, church, etc.) on gender socialization and construction of gender models [2].

Gender socialization and construction means a kind of social construction that formed when the natural distinction of the male and the female were influenced and built by postnatal social culture and customs, and it is a process in which men and women are constantly separated and the differences between them are constantly artificially intensified and widened in the course of social changes. Since "pedagogization of children's sex" is one of the four discursive practices, used by society for shaping individuals' gender identity, pedagogical discourse is naturally seen as an important source of data on how gender identity is formed in the process of socialization.

Representation of gender in learning materials conveys an implicit message to students about attitudes towards culturally appropriate gender roles for men and women in society.

Whilst there has been a great deal of research of gender representation within the West, in the rapidly developing Russian gender studies, however, pedagogical discourse has not yet received much attention. In an attempt to address this gap, we decided to look at a representative sample of written pedagogical discourse (a complete set of conceptually connected first grade elementary school textbooks (five books), published in 2008, recommended by the Ministry of Science and Education, and widely used in Moscow schools up to 2019, with the view of identifying and describing its semiotic means of gender construction.

Among the great variety of gender approaches, we consider social construction as the most appropriate. According to this view, society and culture create gender roles, and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific sex. Moreover, gender is constructed through language and other semiotic means and can be explored through linguistic analysis. Gender s also considered as a process and result of social construction.

We take a linguistic approach to exploring gender representations within the textbooks. The aim of our study is to identify, describe and systematize semiotic means of gender construction in written learning materials.

## II. METHODS

Our study is based on social constructionist methodology and it linguistic methods of analyzing ways of creating gendered semantics in discourse. This approach provides reliable tools for arriving at significant knowledge about gender construction. We have used both standard and discourse methods to achieve this aim: comparison, content analysis, induction, systematic analysis of verb types or process (using a typology of "social action" such as

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developed by Halliday [3], looking at material, semiotic, perceptive, cognitive and affective verbs), linguistic analysis of masculine and feminine generics, multymodel text analysis, analysis of policode texts (which consist of verbal and visual forms). We have also studied how gender is constructed through inference caused by linguistic means.

For the purposes of analysis all the texts have been divided into two types: monocode (verbal) and policode (consisting of a verbal part and an illustration). In other words, monocode tasks are written texts, policode tasks are interaction between written texts and images.

To analyze monocode texts, we have:

1) selected utterances with subjects expressed by feminine or masculine nouns;

2) classified semantic areas which these nouns belong to;

3) analyzed verb predicate semantics and verb classification on the basis of M.A.K. Halliday's typology, taken further and adapted to Russian by E. S. Gritsenko [4],

4) analyzed the role of verb predicate semantics in gender construction.

We have found that the subjects are expressed by the following groups of nouns:

- anthroponyms (Masha, Ivanov, Neznayka);
- terms of relationship (mother, son);
- lexemes with the meaning "sex" and "age" (girl, boy);
- agentive lexemes (artist, writer).

The usage of these nouns displays a certain gender asymmetry, with the ratio of masculine nouns being higher than that of feminine nouns.

Actions of masculine subjects are described predominantly by predicates of material intentional process (e.g. run, jump etc.) of a fairly diverse nature. Thus masculine subjects are represented as active, mobile, dynamic, and sometimes aggressive (confirming the results of a previous study by A.V. Kirilina [5]). Actions of masculine subjects are also described by material unintentional predicates (e.g. found, dropped); mental verbs (e.g. think, know) tend to be used with masculine nouns more frequently as well.

Actions of feminine subjects are scarcely described.

In policode texts gender construction is achieved by linguistic means as well as through semiotic codes of illustration. Gender asymmetry is constructed through:

- verbal codes (the ratio of masculine nouns is higher, male authors dominate in quantity);
- nonverbal codes (the ratio of male illustrated in visuals is higher the female; their depicted activities are more diverse);
- interaction of verbal and nonverbal codes (depiction of gender stereotypes).

Gender stereotypes, identified in the texts, represent traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity, where femininity is associated primarily with motherhood, matrimony and housekeeping. Women's professional activities are given a lower priority and do not boast great diversity; women's personal qualities are also affected by traditional stereotypes, as women are portrayed as emotional, absent-minded, talkative, sympathetic etc. At the same time, professional activities of males are described with a wide range of examples. All this demonstrates deeply-rooted traditional views on gender division of labor.

## III. Results

We have identified the following means of gender construction:

a) constructing gender through feminine and masculine nouns, predicative relations and the semantics of verb predicates;

b) use of gender stereotypes;

c) use of non-verbal means;

d) inference;

e) neutralization of gender.

Implicit means of gender construction [2], identified in the sample, consist of correlation of verbal and nonverbal codes in policode texts [5]. Typically verbal codes use gender neutral lexemes (e.g. people, children), while nonverbal codes represent gender stereotypes. For instance, in the math textbook, when a task is completed by a male and a female student, the right or the more rational answer is invariably ascribed to the male. Societies have long imposed unhelpful gender stereotypes, differentiating between what is expected of boys and girls. The exclusion of girls starts at primary school level, when schoolchildren are shown images that perpetuate gender stereotypes and convey the message that science and technology are not for girls. This "traditional" representation of males and females may be partially due to the fact that much of the learning material is taken from Russian folklore as well as stories, written in the 19$^{th}$ century, and the content of the textbooks in general doesn't display much connection with modern life, being a reflection of outdated social patterns.

## IV. Conclusion

Nevertheless we have identified some means of gender neutralization, which include both verbal codes (usage of gender neutral lexemes, splitting, "parallel" usage of female and male subjects in sentences) and nonverbal codes (simultaneous representation of males and females, engaged in the same activities in illustrations; representations of gender neutral toys). This neutralization

of gender may be evidence of an attempt to reach a gender equality-representation, although the current study only scratches the surface of this important problem, and the issue definitely requires a much deeper and more extensive study.

Based on symbolic interaction sociology theory, education theory of symbolic interaction emphasize on intercourse "interaction" in the school practices. Not only confined to that, primary language teaching material is also assumed to bear the important task to guide children to form their gender and equality awareness. Gender consciousness has become a new conception and a new method in educational research, and teacher's gender education concept has significant effects on children's gender typing. Scientific gender education is full of significance for the male and female's future development and the building of a harmonious society.

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