

Disrupting Gender Identity Through Narrative Texts

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DISRUPTING GENDER INEQUALITY THROUGH NARRATIVE TEXTS IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

Sri Nurhidayah

STKIP Bina Insan Mandiri, Jl. Raya Menganti Kramat, Jajartunggal, Wiyung, Surabaya

nurhidayah@stkipbim.ac.id

Abstract: English textbook is used in teaching and learning extensively in Indonesian education. It contains narratives text to distribute cultural values, but pitifully, the traditional narrative texts depict gender inequality. Gender is defined by culture and inequality between masculinity and femininity—the binary confines calamity to the subordinate gender. The binary seems to restraint femineity as the sub-ordinate gender. Discussing gender will not be sufficiently virtuous without disrupting gender inequality. Thus, this research was conducted to encluse that there are still many stories or traditional narrative texts containing gender inequality in English textbooks. It is assumed as a silent missile in today's education. The data are the English narrative texts in the English textbook for Eleventh Grade Senior High School published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan / Kemendikbud) in 2017. The data were collected by reading and quoting. Using gender equality perspective, interpretative approach, and content analysis as the technique of analysis, the result shows that the traditional narrative texts that are used unconsciously represent gender inequality. It is assumed to demoralize gender equality, and it is upsetting. It can cause sexual violence and affect children's lives in the future. Thus, the traditional narrative texts in English textbooks published by Kemendikbud convey gender inequality, in contrast to gender equity.

Keywords: gender equality, narrative texts, English textbook

INTRODUCTION

Gender issues have been developed a lot in our country, Indonesia. Many writers and researchers have discussed gender issues from many years ago to this moment. Of course, this development allows us in all aspects of human culture to follow and open our eyes to long-rooted gender inequality. Many researchers try to uncover the injustice of gender, and few are still questioning the term gender. Butler (2004) said gender is a man-made cultural formation consisting of two binary oppositions, masculine and feminine. Gender itself is defined by sex. In other words, sex determines a person's gender. Nevertheless, we return to the initial definition that gender has a masculine and feminine dichotomy. It is the gender that formed the opposition of the two sexes in which the vagina (female sexual organ) determines the feminine gender and thus penis (male sexual organ) constructs the masculine gender.

Gender definition will not be fixed yet as long as it is not a thing but performativity. Gender is fluid (Butler, 2011a). From this notion, it can be drawn that humans must be seen as human regardless of what gender and sex one has. The traditional feminist perspective gives the idea

that our culture shapes one's gender from birth. When the baby has a vagina, it must be feminine. When the baby has a penis, it must be masculine. Then, the heterosexual matrix becomes rampant and rooting in society.

Learning and teaching about gender in schools may not be fully achieved if the teacher does not understand gender. It is pivotal. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Cultural Education has released English textbooks containing stories or narrative texts comprising cultural values, and the purpose is, of course, for good learning. Unfortunately, some of the stories might represent gender inequality.

Narrative text can be a weapon that silently drowns. Narrative text can display a message or ideology with a very clever disguise. It is where literary texts can be very dangerous. The importance of narrative text, especially for language teaching and learning, cannot be overstated. Students automatically follow the plot when they comprehend narrative components such as character, theme, conflict, place, and others. They are led to the meaning of the stories. Understanding literary works need some aspects that improve higher-level thinking and analyzing abilities at this phase (Sejnost & Thiese, 2014).

The challenge is that frequently narrative texts in language education textbooks still have cultural issues, such as women's depiction in narrative texts being narrated in lesser status, roles, and other things than men. Gender inequality is a term used in cultural studies to describe this phenomenon. Of course, this might have an indirect effect on students' comprehension. Women are implicitly represented in uneven gender prejudice regarding gender representation. As is well known, Textbook contents are tightly linked to broader educational and societal situations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several previous studies have been conducted concerning this study. The first study was conducted by Curaming & Curaming (2020), entitled "Gender (In)equality in English Textbooks in the Philippines: A Critical Discourse Analysis." This study uses Discourse Analysis in conducting the research. The result shows an alignment of men over women, reflecting the gender gap, especially in the economic and political fields.

The second study was conducted by Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) entitled "Gender Representation in Instructional Materials: A Study of Iranian English Language Textbooks and Teachers' Voices." Using manual and computational analyses, the researchers found men's

domination over women in domestic and public spheres where the writer perpetuates Islamic male domination.

The third study was conducted by Orfan (2021) entitled “High school English textbooks promote gender inequality in Afghanistan.” Using mixed content analysis, the result of the study reveals that males are present before women in the text, and women are not represented considerably in the text. Furthermore, women play a restricted role in the social world, whereas men play the larger part. Thus, the English textbooks encourage and perpetuate gender inequity in Afghanistan.

METHOD

This research is qualitative because it analyzes narrative texts in a textbook related to cultural phenomena. Literary work may not be separated from the representation of cultural context (P. Alasutari et al., 2012). It is described as a depiction of phenomena. This research was conducted using the interpretative approach and gender perspective to support the argumentation. The discussion of this research is about the cultural phenomena of gender equality in the pedagogical field. In this case, it is an English textbook published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan / Kemendikbud*).

The data are narrative texts in the form of quotations (sentences, phrases, words, and dialogues) generated from an English textbook for eleventh-grade senior high school published by Kemendikbud in 2017. The four narrative texts are (1) *The Enchanted Fish*, (2) *Vanity and Pride*, (3) *Letter to God*, and (4) *The Last Leaf*. Reading in-depth, taking notes, and quoting are the techniques in collecting the data. The data were analyzed through content analysis. The procedures included proposing the problem, data display, analysis, critical interpretation, and conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As is well known, textbook content is strongly linked to broader educational and societal settings (Yang, 2011). Teaching language can be related to teaching culture. Therefore, narrative writings included in textbooks serve various purposes, including attracting students' attention to the content, teaching moral values, and so on. It is the relationship between education and social context. In each literary work, there is always a hidden meaning or message. It can be found in a series of narrative pieces written with a specific goal or particular

intention. In other words, the author's message or aim, which is an ideology to be transmitted, is carried through the narrative story. This ideology is then instinctively or unconsciously read and written implicitly. The message or intention is not registered distinctly but hidden behind the texts.

The Enchanted Fish is the first narrative text found in the textbook. The story narrates a husband and his wife who live pitifully in a small hut near the sea. Living in poverty makes the wife dream of wealth and supremacy. Her greed leads her into peril. "There once was a fisherman who lived with his wife in a small hut close by the seaside." (Bashir, 2017). Exposing a gender issue, the woman is typically addressed after the husband in this narrative text. Of course, this narrative text reveals gender portrayal that lowers the status of women. It is clear from the sequence that there is a hierarchy of gender binary. As a result, the man is depicted as the dominating sex, while the woman is the second. A male is the family leader and is always mentioned before a woman.

In the sentence "The fisherman used to go fishing every day" (Bashir, 2017), the issue comes to the man described as a worker, whereas the woman is described as a housewife who only does the domestic chores. Of course, it symbolizes gender disparity in terms of social standing. Generally speaking, men and women are portrayed in various ways. Men are frequently seen to be in higher positions than women. Men's activities are valued more than women's activities. Gender is not born but developed due to the patriarchal system's empowerment (Cook, 2007). Gender, from this perspective, explains injustice preconceptions.

Living in a poor and miserable condition, the wife is longing for prosperity, "We are poor and I am so miserable. You should have asked for a nice cozy cottage. Now go back and ask the fish that we want a snug little cottage", said his wife" (Bashir, 2017). She asks to have a cozy little cottage to satisfy her needs. His husband fulfills her wish and goes to the fish for her demand. Fortunately, her wish becomes true. The snug little cottage comes to real. She and her husband live in the place she was longing for. The story seems predictably nuanced for the poor begging for the wealthy.

On the other hand, the wife's wish will not achieve accomplishment. Living in a cozy little cottage is not enough. She wants to be an emperor who rules and has power. Then, the husband comes to the fish, asking it to make his wife an emperor. "What would she have now?" said the fish. "Ah!" said the fisherman, "she wants to be an emperor." "Go home," said the fish; "She is an emperor already." (Bashir, 2017). Generally speaking, people read the story and imagine that the wife is greedy. Her longing will not be complete. She will always lack in everything. Thus, it indicates that woman is represented as greed human than man.

To be an emperor is not adequate. She wants to be the lord of everything, the lord of the sun and the moon. "I am truly ashamed of my wife's greed, but I can't do anything. She wants to be Lord of the sun and the moon" (Bashir, 2017). Living in a cozy cottage and being a powerful emperor is not satisfying the wife. Her greed will not be contented. As the man brings her wish to the fish, the fish grants her wished greed. She desires to be Lord of the sun and the moon. Gender stereotypes may be defined as a broad opinion about distinct traits of men and women at this moment. Gender stereotypes are defined as "socially accepted ideas that specific traits may be assigned to individuals depending on their membership in the female or male categories" (Lips, 2003). Women are stereotyped based on the features of gender stereotypes. They have been known, but they are helpless. These reasons explain why women are perceived as emotional, have lower educational attainment, have fewer physically tough jobs, and have poor representation.

Vanity and Pride is the second narrative text found in the textbook. The story narrates a woman who lives in complicated situational or dramatic irony. Madame Loisel was born a beautiful woman, yet she was married to a clerk who had little money. They cannot afford any jewelry or diamond. When her husband got an invitation to a party, Matilda Loisel thought joining a party without a single piece of jewelry would be a shame. She urges to have jewelry to complete her look since being a beautiful woman is not enough without a single piece of jewelry. Unfortunately, she does not have one.

Woman representation in the narration gives the idea that she is a greedy woman. Being beautiful is not enough without a single piece of jewelry. The jewelry beautifies the look of a woman. It must be contemplated that the patriarchal system is rooting in our lives and shackle woman direct or indirectly. What happened to beauty? The question comes to mind when beauty is defined and tribute to a woman. Must a woman have a beautiful look both physically and mentally? When a woman is attributed to be beautiful, the notion unconsciously traps women in rampant situations (Gottschall et al., 2008). This jeopardy comes to those who do not have beauty. Women will afford to have it in all ways to gain the attribution of the most beautiful woman in the world. Then, the problem arises when the quality of women cannot meet the requirements. The patriarchal system requires that a woman must have beauty. A woman with beauty will gain attraction and be desirable to a man. The idea drags a woman to a lesser status than a man.

The story narrates that Matilda, the main character, does not meet the requirement of beauty. Joining a party without a single piece of jewelry will make her feel pity. The narration can be found in the quotation, "You just don't understand! It's so annoying! I don't have a

single piece of jewelry to wear with my gown.” (Bashir, 2017). She is not rich and cannot afford a single piece of jewelry to complete the look of her gown. Thus, she does not belong to a beautiful woman, and she is ashamed of it. The problems come up when her desire is always in lack. Her passion drags her into greediness. Longing for the jewelry makes her do anything. She urges her husband how to get the jewelry. Then, her husband advises her to borrow the jewelry from her friend, Madame Forestier. Quickly, Matilda gets the diamond necklace from her friend. She looks adorable and gorgeous at the party. Matilda successfully gains all the attention at the party. She is in the spotlight, an attractive and outrageous woman above all women at the party. The happiness is then destroyed when the diamond necklace is gone.

Matilda spends ten years in labor to pay for the diamond necklace. She becomes so worn and old. Matilda is no longer beautiful. She changes because she endures *ten hard years of manual labor, scrubbing floors and taking a laundry* as stated in the quotation, “It was your necklace, or rather my desire to be elegant, that caused this.” (Bashir, 2017). The desire makes her deplorable condition of life, a life of losing her beauty. It is caused by her greed to be elegant. Unfortunately, the situation is an irony. The replacement is contrary to the diamond necklace. The necklace is fake, but Matilda replaces the necklace with the genuine one in the extended payment as stated in the quotation, “Mine was a fake; the replacement should have cost you nothing more than 500 francs. Oh, my poor, poor, dear Matilda.” (Bashir, 2017).

The longing for higher class life and the desire to turn into greed makes Matilda’s life worst. She does not like wearing an old gown. She desires to buy a new one. Her husband gives her money to buy, and finally, she gets the new one. Furthermore, she does not satisfy with the new gown. She feels humiliated among wealthy people at the party. She urges a single piece of jewelry, and she gets the piece from her friend. Her friend lends her the diamond necklace. At the party, Matilda becomes an outrageous and joyful woman. Because of her greed, she loses her beautiful life working as a laborer for ten years earning money to replace the diamond necklace, which is fake in fact. From this, Matilda’s life turns into an unfortunate situation. She is beautiful and has a new gown, but she is not satisfied. From the narration explained above, it can be said that woman here is represented as greedy sophisticated desires to be honored among high-class society. The term ‘greed’ refers to a negative image of a woman.

The third narrative text in the textbook is *Letter to God*. The text tells the story of a farmer family, a father, a mother, and two sons. The family’s life depends on the agricultural products they cultivate every day. However, bad luck happened to the family. The long-awaited harvest and abundant yields do not fruit. The expected rain has never come. To produce a bountiful harvest requires rain that has not wet their crops for a long time. Unfortunately, it is not rain

that came, but hail storms that damaged their crops. In the end, they failed, the crops were damaged. “You know, woman, now we are finally going to get some rain.” (Bashir, 2017). The narration depicts an image of a housewife who is called a ‘woman.’ The term ‘woman’ can be meant as negative imaging to woman. The farmer called his wife, not by her name, but a gender stereotyping to discrete woman.

The negative stereotyping again comes up when the farmer works in the field, cultivating the crops to live. On the other hand, the woman works at home doing household chores. “His wife, who was busy preparing food, replied: “Yes, God willing.” (Bashir, 2017). From the social and cultural perspective, a woman is like a weak human. A woman works at home, cooking, nursing the baby, washing the dishes, and doing other house chores. On the contrary, man is seen as a powerful human who works outside the house, doing something rough and tougher than a woman. Generally speaking, this is not equal. Women are treated and attributed as fragile humans.

The term ‘mother’ can be defined as a female parent of a child and a woman who performs a role in delivering a baby, nursing a baby, and related to the activity in her child caring. Therefore, the term ‘father’ can be defined as a male parent of the child and a man who performs a role in social parental obligations and rights in parenting a child. Woman destiny occupies in physical characteristic in the opposite to man. Women’s characteristics role attributed to menstrual blood, delivering a child, and breastfeeding. A child is carried through the woman’s womb, and it is identically as the relationship of mother and child. The child is taken care of by a mother, not a father. Father cannot give breast milk because only the mother can give breastfeeding. It goes without saying that a father cannot give birth. The roles attribute to a mother who does the domestic chores inversely to a father. Then the term ‘mother’ can be defined as ‘(m)other,’ the other from ordinate gender and sex (Chodorow, 2021).

Furthermore, Gender inequality is implicitly presented in the narrative of the mention of order in the family. A statement in the story of the Hail Storm says, “Rancho and his wife worried to death,” and his wife is stated after Rancho, the peasant family’s leader, as the breadwinner. In other words, the existence of a mother is preceded by the presence of a father. It is clear from the sequence of mentioning that there is a hierarchy of gender binary. As a result, the man is depicted as the dominating sex, while the woman is the second. A woman is also depicted as a human being who is constantly vulnerable and has to be safeguarded. In contrast to man, a man is always shown as powerful and independent. It shows that a man is more dominant than a woman.

Woman character in the narrative text is represented in gender issues, particularly in gender inequality. The textbook contains stories, which are written in English. The attitude is formed by the language. It is well recognized that language reflects men's social power, whereas language reflects women's lack of power in social relationships. In English, the term man means human, 'He' means to God, and the last name of a family means man, among other things, as quoted in "Always remember we have God. I am sure he will help us." (Bashir, 2017). A woman is referred to as a secretary. A youngster is referred to as a sales promotion, and so on. It demonstrates that woman has a lesser status than man.

The fourth narrative text in the textbook is *The Last Leaf*, a short story written by famous writer O. Henry. The main characters in the story are artists. Sue and Johnsy as women are discharged and diminished by the men in the narrative. The doctor who diagnoses Johnsy's pneumonia asserts that art is not even worth thinking for a woman, as stated in the quotation "Painting!" said the doctor. "That won't help her!" (Bashir, 2017). Johnsy is a woman who has pneumonia and counts her last days by comparing the last ivy leaves falling. She will be getting better when she paints the Bay of Naples. As a man who has negative imaging of a woman, the doctor claims that painting is not fit for a woman and cannot help her heal her pneumonia. The notion then degrades that woman is debilitated.

Furthermore, the most provocative point is that the short story gives the idea of lesbianism. Of course, it does not fit the aim of the Indonesian education curriculum. It should not give to school students and should not be included in the textbook. It can be claimed from the relationship between Sue and Johnsy. Two women live in a studio apartment in an old building in Greenwich Village. Their relationship challenges the unaccepted notion of LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, and Intersex). Their behavior is confronted in wider society. They are not married but living together, sharing home life, and taking care of each other. They share romantic intimacy and relationship. Sue calls Johnsy with numerous terms of endearment 'dear,' 'darling,' as stated in the quotations. "What is it, dear?" asked Sue. "Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece." (Bashir, 2017). The intimate relationship is more apparent when Sue says to Johnsy that she does not want Johnsy to die. Johnsy must survive. Sue cannot live alone without Johnsy. Sue will be very depressed, then she says, "Dear, dear!" said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?" (Bashir, 2017). Once again, the relationship intimacy drawn in the story, Sue takes care of Johnsy. She cooks for Johnsy. She will always love by her side.

The narration does not give us an apparent meaning, but two women live together in an apartment caring for each other rather than bearing a child or marrying a man. Thus, it can be

said that they are dealing with a romantic relationship where they spend all their time together, afraid to be separated by death. The relationship, of course, does not fit Indonesian culture. The women here are represented as immoral and confronting the sexual deviation of the heterosexual matrix. The heterosexual matrix refers to a woman and a man only (Judith Butler, 2011b). There is another relationship outside the heterosexual matrix, meaning they commit to homosexuality in the apparent term 'lesbian.' Thus, the representation negatively images women and places them in a lower status.

CONCLUSION

The narrative texts in the textbook narrate gender inequality. The woman is represented negatively, such as greedy, ambitious, and weak. Furthermore, women are domesticated in a lower sphere than men have. Gender inequality is implicitly expressed and employed in the narrative texts of the textbook. Suppose a textbook is for students, and students learn things from it either directly or indirectly. In that case, it is unfortunately too risky to nail gender inequality in students' set of the ideological foundation of thinking about the gap between man and woman. In a long-term predictive effect, it has the potential risk to induce sexual assault and have long-term consequences for children's lives. As a result, the traditional narrative texts in the English textbook for XI grades of Senior High School issued by Kemendikbud convey gender inequality, conversely with the goal of gender parity.

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