

Critical Discourse Analysis of Gender Conceptions in Preparatory Tigrigna Language Textbooks

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore conceptions of gender in the language use of reading texts in preparatory school Tigrigna textbooks prepared in 2016. With its focus on textual interpretation, thus, this study is qualitative in its approach. This approach enables the researchers to explore the texts used in the textbooks in terms of characters' action, position, relation, traits, views, voices and gender roles from critical discourse perspective. Critical discourse, as a perspective, focuses on exploring language uses to see the implicit and explicit gender structures of dominations, practices of discrimination and power (ab)use. Additionally, critical discourse analysis examines extra-linguistic elements such as the gender of the authors that go into the meaning construction of the texts. Based on the analysis and interpretation of the texts, the majority of the reading texts present repressive conceptions of gender. The exceptions from these constrictive notions embedded in the texts are two instances of destabilized gender roles and one instance of androgyny in grade 12 Tigrigna textbook. As such, the texts, inadvertently, position feminine and masculine traits in a tendentious way that comply with the patriarchal mindset and subsequent gender-based violence. To mitigate this psychosocial predicament, the study recommends that the students' textbooks be improved to represent human potentialities by transcending the traditional dichotomy of femininity and masculinity. To this end, the inclusion of balanced gender views and female and male writers may help to reduce the problems in gender stereotypes in the textbooks.

Keywords: Critical discourse, Gender, Femininity, Masculinity, Stereotype, Textbooks, Tigrigna

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Introduction

Education plays a significant role in Ethiopia as it does in any other country. As pointed out by the Ministry of Education(2009), education has played a great role in providing students with knowledge, attitude and skills that can help to further their study, get involved in the workforce in community, explore their potential and play their role in the country's development activities. Furthermore, it has indicated that education can help students to "be members of a well-balanced, productive, responsible and accountable society, which will adapt to change while retaining its cultural diversity and identity" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4).

To efficiently meet expected outcomes and help individuals attain a holistic growth, schools need to give quality and relevant education. In this regard, the MDG Report goal 3(UN, 2012) and SDG goal 5 (UN, 2018) stated that the equality of gender contributes to women and men in enhancing their capacity in education. Meeting this goal is believed to put the landscape for achieving all other goals.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) (2015/16-2019/20, p. 209) has considered the views stated in the MGD Report. It has indicated that realizing the equality of gender through the creation of suitable environment and empowerment for female students at all levels of education will be part of the plan. In the same vein, as stated by the Ministry of Education (2009), gender equality, as one of the overarching issues, should be promoted in the syllabi.

Schools provide tools to proactively engage students in their studies, share knowledge, and improve their experiences and skills. In so doing, schools can promote good teaching - learning environment that enhances reading and interdependent learning culture.

School textbooks are important resources for students to make independent and group reading; they can use them as a roadmap for achieving the expected, knowledge, attitude and skills. The design of their content, the language use, the selection of the reading materials in the textbook play a great role in shaping students to build the expected competence aligned with the syllabus and informed with national policies such as gender. In relation to this, UNESCO (2017, p.9) indicates the role textbooks can play as follows:

Textbooks are instrumental in the process of raising awareness about others' beliefs and fostering understanding of, and respect for, the diversity of beliefs present in societies and the world at large. Textbooks can help to combat prejudice, present pluralism as an asset, and encourage mutual understandings based on respect for the right to express one's beliefs. They contribute to promoting tolerance, critical thinking in the face of divisive stereotyping and discrimination, and the independence of individual choice.

Consequently, schools should work to build students' capacity through teachers' engagement, students' involvement and provision of high-quality textbooks that can implement the expectations of the curriculums. In so doing, schools are believed to consider the social landscape of students that puts appropriate learning environment in place: learning together that can ensure respectability and gender equity and equality, sharing knowledge, building skills and experiences through the guide of quality textbooks.

However, school textbooks may not be aligned with gender policies; they may use reading texts which host gender biases, misrepresenting males and females and positioning them in patriarchal hierarchy. Despite the fact that textbooks could host such negative views, there has not been a research on Tigrigna textbooks with reference to gender. So, the study has examined the reading texts in Tigrigna textbooks to see if there are gender biases. In this light, the study has tries to address the following research questions:

1. Are femininity and masculinity rendered visible in the reading texts?
2. Are there any stereotypical representations of gender in the texts?
3. Are there gender representations that destabilize essentialist notions of gender?
4. Do the texts contain androgynous conceptions of gender?

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to see if there are tendentious gender views in reading texts used in Tigrigna textbooks. The study specifically examined the reading texts in the textbooks in terms of gender visibility; gender stereotypes; destabilized gender roles, and androgynous conceptions of gender

Significance of the Study

The study is believed to give teachers and students insights about gender views that are imbedded in the language used in the textbooks. It can also contribute to researchers and students of gender studies in terms of exploring language as area of investigation to improve the existing practices of education. Furthermore, it can give bureau of education, textbook writers, curriculum designers and editors ideas and better understanding which can be used as a basis for revision of textbooks in ways that can rectify contentious gender depictions.

Scope of the Study

This study aimed at exploring gender views in preparatory (Grades 11 and 12) Tigrigna textbooks based on textual analysis. It focused on the interpretation of reading texts, the language uses and meanings that are considered gendered. However, in the interest of time and space, linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects of texts such as grammar, dialogue, and visual texts such as pictures, and illustrations have not been considered for this study.

CDA as Theoretical Framework

This study has investigated how language uses in preparatory Tigrigna textbooks constructed females and males from gender perspective. In order to interpret the textbooks, it has employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a perspective. CDA, as defined by Wodak (2001), is an approach which focuses on examining language uses to see the implicit and explicit structure of relations that show domination, discriminatory practices, and power (ab)use. As Wodak (2001) further explains, CDA considers that social inequality is a point of investigation and that it is conveyed and indicated through the legitimacy of language use or discourse. She indicates the relevance of the concepts of “ideology, power, hierarchy and gender” for interpreting and demystifying texts or discourses (Wodak, 2001, p.3).

Similarly, as pointed out by van Dijk (2001), CDA, which takes the side of the dominated in a positive light, is a viewpoint on examining social issues which include the construction and perpetuation of power abuse and domination through the role of discourses. Besides, CDA takes into consideration “at least some of the detailed structures, strategies and functions of text and talk, including grammatical, pragmatic, interactional, stylistic, rhetorical, semiotic, narrative or similar forms of verbal and paraverbal organization of communicative events” (Dijk, 2001, P. 97).

As critical discourse analysis gives a prominent place to language use in context, the study embraces, as part of CDA, a poststructuralist approach to see femininities and masculinities and gender stereotypes positioned the textbooks. In contrast to essentialist notions of gender as a dichotomized identity marker based on biological features, both old and contemporary thoughts conceptualize femininity and masculinity as complementary potentialities within the human psyche. Although this has been most evident in post-structuralism (Lorraine,1989), its roots can be traced as far back as Taoism.

Taoism is an ancient eastern philosophical tradition that conceptualizes humanity/ in terms of the cosmic forces of Yin and Yang. The Yin, designating the feminine energy, and the Yung, designating the masculine, are conceived of as complementary attributes within the same person (Capra, 1991).

These complementary psychological tendencies are dynamic modes of consciousness anyone can access irrespective of their biological identity. Within this conception of human subjectivity, a biologically male person may display feminine attributes and vice versa. These two modes of being have also been neurologically described relative to our right (feminine) and left (masculine) hemispheres of the brain (Taylor, 2006).

Intuitiveness, cooperativeness, submissiveness, togetherness and nurturance are regarded as feminine traits of the human mind; while rationality, competitiveness, assertiveness, otherness and aggression are regarded as that of the masculine (Capra, 1991). The feminine mode of consciousness based as it is on “moment(s) of connectedness”, transcends the linguistic realm which is founded on differentiations (Lorrain, 1989, p. 6). As such, femininity defies the post-structuralist tendency of conceptualizing the self as entirely made from language (Lorrain, 1989).

Unfortunately, we live in a world where this dynamic image of human nature is distorted. While our masculine attributes are usually privileged, those of the feminine are marginalized (Lorrain, 1989). This skewed display of human behavior has resulted in a world that is predominantly characterized by aggression (Capra, 1991).

To effect the unfolding of a world of peace and growth, thus, our masculinity needs to be tempered with our femininity. This implicates that a dynamic equilibrium has to be maintained between these two modes of being (Shoshana, 2002; Taylor, 2006). Put differently, one has to maintain a balance while moving from one attribute to the other in different settings. Such an understanding calls for a conception of humanity subjectivity that transcends traditional gender polarities/categories

Androgyny can fulfill this call. Androgyny is the state of being able to access both gender categories to suit different situations (Rothstein, 2015). This mental flexibility implicates that a woman, for instance, might display nurturance and submissiveness in one instance and aggression and assertiveness in another. It should be noted, here, that androgyny, unlike hermaphroditism and homosexuality (which have physical and pathological implications), is a psychological realization of feminine and masculine potentialities with implications of completeness and wellbeing (Rothstein, 2015, p. 2, 23, 81). This state of completeness “provides individuals access to the highest aspirations and greatest strengths by allowing them access to the full range of human qualities” (Rothstein, 2015, p. 27). It is, thus, an empowering and liberating experience available to all human beings regardless of their biological differences.

Although, numerous researches have been conducted that aimed at rectifying gender inequality and thereby abating oppression and aggression in our world, no significant development seems to have been observed on the ground. This especially seems to be true of developing countries. Since schools are ideal spaces where (mis)conceptions of gender are inculcated, this paper aims to explore how gender is portrayed in preparatory Tigrigna textbooks of grades 11 and 12.

Research Methodology

This study investigated if there were tendentious gender views in the textbooks; it has taken the objectives outlined above into account. Accordingly, in this section, methods and procedures of the study, and data analysis are discussed in detail.

Sampling Technique

Preparatory students are adolescents in their late teenage. This age group is, both biologically and psychologically, sensitive to gender issues. Exposing these students to distorted gender conceptions at this critical time is, thus, likely to have a detrimental effect on their future life. With this point in mind, the textbooks of grades 11 and 12 were selected. All reading texts were considered while exploring the gender conceptions embedded in the texts. Based on this, textual events that depict gender conceptions were purposively included.

Method of the Study

To begin with, this study has employed qualitative method, for it aims at exploring textual interpretation of data. In light of this, the study has taken this as a means to see the construction of gender in the textbooks from critical discourse perspectives, conducting textual analysis. In this regard, all preparatory school (Grades 11 and 12) Tigrigna textbooks have been considered for the study. The reading texts from both the textbooks have been included for interpretation. Extracts were selected from these reading texts on the basis of the following four conceptual categories: femininity rendered invisible, stereotypical gender portrayals, destabilized gender roles and androgynous gender depictions. In addition, discourses along with brief description of their contents were included as part of the interpretation on the basis of the aforementioned categories. For referencing, titles and page numbers of these discourses were provided. On the basis of the selected extracts and textual descriptions, the textbooks have been analyzed and interpreted from critical discourse perspective. In that manner, conceptual categories of gender were examined as they manifest themselves in the language used in the texts.

Procedures of Data Analysis

The study has employed textual approach of qualitative data analysis technique. In this regard, all the reading texts in the textbooks were closely read to identify relevant extracts and concise descriptions of texts for analysis. These discursal instances were selected on the basis of conceptual categories that illustrate gender conceptions embedded in the texts. The extracts, which were translated from Tigrigna into English, and concise descriptions of texts were then discussed under the aforementioned conceptual categories. An attempt was finally made to

present the interpretation of the extracts and concise descriptions of texts in a coherent discussion of the phenomena under study.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The 11th and 12th grade Tigrigna students' textbooks prepared in 2016 were analyzed under four thematic categories: 1) Femininity Rendered Invisible, 2) Gender Stereotypic Roles, 3) Destabilized Gender Roles, and 4) Androgynous Conception of Gender.

Femininity Rendered Invisible

In the textbooks under analysis, femininity is rendered invisible in basically two ways: 1) by portraying generic nouns in masculine terms, and 2) by representing gender neutral noun from male perspective. The text contains numerous instances of this phenomenon. Some of the analysis that portray the category described above are presented here below:

Language use can be sexist if it takes one group as a norm to describe another one. One of the manifestations of sexist language is the use of generic nouns for a specific group and to describe other groups in terms of this specific group. Following is interpretation of texts taken from grade 11(G11) and grade 12(G12) Tigrigna textbooks.

The first reading passage in grade 11 is about language and writing (G11: pp. 2-6). In this reading passage, there are generic nouns such as *person(s)*, *generation*, *intellectuals* and *people*. The generic noun *person* in the phrase “ወዲ ሰብ” (the *child of a person*) takes male sex marker although the context indicates that the word represents all people. In the same vein, the text uses the phrase “ተተካኢ ወለድ” (*next generation*) to describe both females and males. In addition, the generic noun *people* in the phrase “ጥንታዊያን ሰባት” (*ancient people*) is also written from a male norm. The verb “ይጥቀምሉ” (were using) in the phrase “ጥንታዊያን ሰባት... ይጥቀምሉ ነይሮም።” (*ancient people were using it*) indicates the word is employed from male perspective (the feminine rendering in Tigrinya would be ይጥቀማሉ ነይረን).

In this reading passage, names of countries such as Egypt and China except Mesopotamia are mentioned as matriarchal figure; this practice of animacy seems to suggest that nations take, according to the patriarchal train of thought, the role of the mother figure, for they are believed to have the quality of caring. Still all other gender-neutral nouns (language, specific places, writing, picture, symbol etc), are referred in masculine terms.

Furthermore, the passage entitled *Center for Heritage* (G11: pp.20 -23) gives details of heritages in Axum. This passage consists of generic nouns such as *researchers*, *foreigners*, *Sabians*, *intellectuals*, *people*, *elephants*, *generation*, *English*, *Italian researchers*, which are written, referring masculine terms. The passage also consists of things which do not have sex such as

researches and researching, archeological study of Ethiopia, attitude, headbands, potter, cents which are made from gold, silver and copper that are gendered male.

Along the same line, a passage entitled *Dialogue* (G11: pp.35-37) explains the essence of dialogue in relation to other creative works such as novel, short story. Besides, it details about dialogue, author and audience. The text consists of generic nouns such as *horse cart, persons, author, lord, slave, teacher, student* and *people*. All these generic nouns are referred in masculine terms, associating creativity with masculine roles and qualities. The absence of females from the details given can impact school students to have wrong gender assumptions or roles that can further imply negativity and discriminatory choices.

Furthermore, a passage entitled *Debate* (G11: pp.40-42) gives points to be considered while debating. This passage takes similar perspective. It employs generic nouns such as persons, society, person and audience repeatedly. But it does not embrace both sexes in the description. All the generic nouns take masculine characteristics. On the same subject, the passage *Plot and Conflict* (G11: pp.48 -50) consists of generic nouns such as *person, author, characters, owners of history, intellectuals* and *readers*. These generic nouns, in the same fashion, are referred to in masculine terms. In addition, paragraphs under the title, *Techniques of Developing a paragraph* have gender bias; among the five paragraphs (G11: pp.55-58), the third and the fourth are about Tigrigna and culture. The fifth paragraph is about impression about Rome. The author describes the beauty, and the development of the city, and impressive sights of the lights along the road. Both paragraphs, third and fourth, describe inanimate objects from male view point. The fifth one has one generic noun, that is person, and one gender-neutral noun, road; both the generic noun and the inanimate object are described from male view point.

In the same manner, females are rendered invisible and absent in the rest of the reading passages entitled *Flavor of Language* (G11:pp.63-65), *The Features of Poetry* (G11: pp.76-77), *Ras Alula* (G11:pp.89-92), *Oral Heritage* (G11: pp.103-106), and *Araya's Development* (G11: pp.115-117). All the generic nouns used in these passages are referred to in masculine terms, signifying that females are invisible, absent, silent and represented in masculine terms.

Similarly, many generic nouns in grade 12 Tigrigna students' textbook have been found out to represent the masculine domain. In the reading text entitled “ነቕጥታ” (*Criticism*), generic nouns are gendered in plural masculine terms. The words “ገለጹም” (some of them), “የንብቡ” (they read), “ይገቡብኛ” (*they perform*) (G12: p. 34), are indicative of this representation. Similarly, in the reading passage “ቋንቋታት ኢትዮጵያ” (*Languages in Ethiopia*), the speakers of the Semitic and Kushitic languages, which doubtlessly include both sexes, are addressed with plural masculine markers: “መብዛሕትኦም” (*most of them*), “ስለዝተሰደዱን” (*because they had migrated*) (G12: p. 2-3), “ጥንታዊ መሰረቶም” (*their ancient origin*) (G12: p. 2).

The reading passage entitled “ምሽት ምሽት መርዳ” (*Wedding Every Night*) is a fictional narration of the oppression during Emperor Haile Slassie’s regime. The generic noun in the text, i.e., the people of Ethiopia, is written from male perspective throughout the text (G.12: page 45-47). Femininity is also denied visibility in the same manner in the reading text “በዛፀባ ስነ-ፅሁፍ” where the state of using creative art, expressing lives, and the author (G.12: p.69-70) are gendered male.

What is more, gender neutral nouns have been found out male focused. In the reading text “ምውርራስ ቃላት (ቋንቋ)” (*Borrowing Words*), the Tigrigna language is described in masculine terms. In the statement “ቋንቋ ትግርኛ...በዙላት ቃላት ኣለውዎ።” (*The Tigrigna language has rich vocabulary*) (G12: p. 16-17) the word “ኣለውዎ” (literally meaning, he has) is gendered male.

Although the reading text entitled “ጥዕና” (*Health*) is primarily concerned with child and maternal health, the feminine side of human nature is simply regarded as only a passive recipient of the care that can be provided by the masculine. The active agent in the reading text, the Family Planning and Health Bureau of Tigrai, is portrayed from male perspective (G.12: p147-148) while the health centers, which are under the aforementioned bureau, are gendered feminine (G.12: p147-148)

In another reading text entitled ነቕፌታ (*Criticism*), gender neutral nouns such as the nature, importance and types of reading are discussed from male perspective (G.12: p. 34-38). Similarly, in the reading passage “ኣጊር መብርሂ ፈተሻ መጻሕፍቲ” (*A Brief Note on Book Reviewing*) the gender neutral subject of the text, i.e., “ዳህሳስ መፅሓፍ” (*book reviewing*) is rendered in masculine terms throughout the text.

Still more instances of rendering the feminine invisible can also be found in the reading texts “መዋቕር ቋንቋ” (*Linguistic Structure*) (G.12: p.49), “ፍልጦን ኣጠቓቕማን ቃላት” (*Diction*) (G. 12: p. 78-79), “ከይድታት ኣተገባብራ ምርምር” (*The Processes of Conducting a Research*) (G.12: p. 90-93) *Qine*, (G.12: p.123-125). All these textual instances from the reading texts, thus, clearly show that femininity is rendered invisible in both textbooks.

Stereotypic Roles

Gender stereotype is conventional conceptions of gender roles as rigidly ascribed to female or male. Under this categorization, females are usually considered to be intuitive, cooperative, submissive, and caring. Males, on the other hand, are regarded rational, competitive, assertive, and aggressive.

In grade 11 Tigrigna textbook, in a passage entitled *Language and Writing* (p. 4), there are examples taken to illustrate how *people* use pictures and writing. All the verbs used in this text

show that the word *people* is written from male perspective; this implies that going for hunting and using spears for battlefield, and reading the pictures are males' domain.

Next to the comprehension questions of the reading passage, *Language and Writing*, there are 8 paragraphs (G11: pp.11-12). These paragraphs are included so that students can identify the techniques of developing a paragraph. The first paragraph talks about *Adey Atsede's* (a woman) modern house. It describes that the house has a wide bed room in which the mother with her daughter sleep, that the floor of the house is decorated by carpet, and that all walls are decorated with colorful traditional utensils made by Adey Atsede in her youth. The presence of Adey Atsede with her daughter is in line with the domestic setting. Roles are described in the manner of patriarchal setting, implying the domestic domain is for women. This patriarchal mind can be further illustrated in the second paragraph.

The second paragraph is about farmers in the country. It describes that the farmers use traditional tools that are believed to expose the land for soil degradation, and loss of minerals, which can further plague periodic drought. It is indicated that this can decrease productivity. These farmers who are referred in masculine terms are taken to be responsible for the cause.

The third paragraph is about preparing food in modern way. The paragraph indicates that this can spell a good relief for women. The idea that using modern cookery can make domestic work easy, efficient and safe is obvious. Yet, the paragraph takes women for granted to be positioned in the domestic sphere.

The seventh paragraph (paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 do not show roles and their analysis is included as part of the generic nouns) signifies a school as source of knowledge. The text sees a school as an analogy of a market where a man, without extra fatigue, buys everything he wants. Here, the school is referred to as female, playing the role of facilitation. Yet, the knowledge giver and the receiver, that is, the teacher and the student are males, indicating the absence of women from the knowledge domain.

The eighth paragraph describes youth war fighting during the Derg regime. It explains that the youth has to pass a lot of steps to join TPLF such as interest, age, physical strength, number of brothers and sisters in one's family. Although it is evident that there have been brave female warriors who gave their life to fight battles across TPLF time, the paragraph considers only the generic youth which is referred in terms of males' perspective.

Against the above details, and the traditional gender structure, the passage *Debate* (G11: pp.40-42) brings an illustration that males who do not want to enter debate can bring an excuse by way of saying "Let me prepare you tea and dish wash". Others would say, "My head is aching". All these excuses are taken to be signs of weaknesses on the side of debaters who do not want to

proceed in the debate. In this regard, preparing tea and dishwashing are not used in the text as signs that domestic spaces are for both sexes, rather, they are used a tool of othering issues from current context.

In a similar vein, the first and the second paragraphs under the title, *Techniques of Developing a paragraph* (G11: pp.11-12) describe inanimate objects, males' and females' character traits and carry tendentious gender views. The first paragraph gives a description of a young man's adornment (which is traditionally considered as feminine domain). Yet, its details about his style of hair, his strong physique and his style of wearing a flashing dagger comply with the gender stereotypic views.

In juxtaposition, the second paragraph is about a nun, who was walking along the road which was made during the time of Italian invasion. The nun, calling the name of St Mary, describes that the road was heavily mud-coated and that it would be difficult for a truck to go through. In this text, the road was described in masculine terms and the truck in feminine terms. The text seems to give the one that causes challenge (the road) a masculine feature and the one that has to face the challenge (the truck) a feminine quality.

The reading passages entitled *Ras Alula* (G11: pp.89-92) and *Araya's Development* (G11: pp.115-117) are the two stories which give the exploits of two role models in the textbook. The story about Ras Alula gives an account of Ras Alula that he is the most renowned hero in Ethiopian history. Ras Alula can serve a positive role model and can inspire school children to appreciate and have a love of their country. In this story, women are included but for the role of giving supportive view that Ras Alula was sociable. This is evident in the narrative where these women let a little kid carry *gofla* (a traditional utensil to carry food) and were going to *Menewe*, a place where Alula grew up. Along the way, they met Ras Alula playing with his mates. Ras Alula asked them where they were going, letting the kid carry the *gofla*. One of the women replied (with a sense of humor) that they were going to Ras Alula. Alula replied, "Let it be!" The presence of these women is only to support the view that Ras Alula had a sense of humor.

Similarly, the passage about *Araya's Development* gives a meaningful gesture about Araya as a role model. It gives details that Araya's commitment to his community is exemplary, that he has been actively involved in serving the people in *Tigrai* and reaching out their needs. The text explains that he had a great sense of balance about the view of females and males and that he had a great concern about mothers' health and education, and empowering women in general. It pointed out that he opened a special school, named *Kallamino*, and has been a cause for many to be professionals.

Although these two stories could give positive role models and inspire school students, the textbook is made to have tendentious gender views. Female role models who can equally inspire

school children are not included. The invisibility or absence of female role models from the textbook can cause school children to miss the opportunity of gaining experiences, knowledge and commitments from these female role models.

The textbook, in addition to reading passages and stories, has included poems for students to practice reading comprehension skills. The poems included are “ዘይዕገት ፈረስ” (*A Horse That cannot be harnessed*) (G11:p.65-66), “ንብዓት ስንቃ” (*Tear is Her Provision*) (G11: p.66), “ፍቅር ቁልዕነት” (*Love of childhood*) (G11: p.78), “ጣዕምት” (*Snack*) (G11: p. 78) “ሎሚውን አለና” (*We are Still Alive*) (G11: p.79) “እናምትካ ምንባር” (*Living Dead*) (p.82), “ንተስፋ አፍቂረ” (*love for hope*) (G11: p.83), and an oral poem without title(G11: p.104-105).

The first poem, *A Horse That cannot be harnessed*, metaphorically describes the process of thought in a person’s mind. Metaphorically, the thought is made a powerful horse; it gives details that thought comes time and again, that it takes one to a wider scope, and that it is unstoppable, biting and challenging. Yet, this powerful horse is referred in masculine terms.

The second poem, *Tear is Her Provision*, is about a woman whose tears, as stated in the poem, is her provision. The woman is described in terms of collection of body parts rather than a whole person in the first four lines of the poem. Focusing on the individual parts of her body, the poem defines her leg as a male cross-legged runner, her knee as a trembling figure, her face wrinkled, her lip dry, her engine (as part of her body) rusted away. However, in the rest of the lines, it shifts from the fragmentary view and goes on describing her as whole person but still as irrational one who does not figure out the differences between heaven and hell, and as one who is rigid and does not accommodate for the sake of love but sheds tears in regret. All in all, the poem severely ridicules her personality and concludes that she is a failure.

The third and the fourth poems, entitled *Love of Childhood and Snack* respectively, are about love. *Love of Childhood* reflects on the practice of children in learning the role of adults in terms of love and marriage. However, it describes the practice from male perspective. The *Snack* comments the current love affairs against the practice in the past. It appreciates the past but comments the current love affair for it does not last and becomes like a snack. This poem is also written in terms of male view point.

Furthermore, the poem *We are Still Alive* is about a state of instability within the self. The persona reflects that he had no inner peace, that he was self-divided, and that he was struggling with his conscience. This poem, in the same manner, indicates that the persona and the conscience as a conflicting force are male. *Living Dead* defines a character trait of a failed person. Focusing on commenting on and referring the person in masculine terms, it reflects that such a person lacks self-respect, becomes untrustworthy, loses his honor and is among the dead. *Love for Hope* is about a person who reflects about the pain of unmet love. The persona

condemns a woman that she is inhuman, and that she does not understand love and that he wastes his time waiting for her response. The last poem does not have a title. It is an oral poem in which a woman mourns the death of her husband. She reflects her deep sorrow at the loss of her husband, describing his exploits that he was a man of great strength, that he was lord and that he was with a great grace and affluence. Yet, she indicates that poverty (revealed from female perspective) is overtaking and that she does not have the strength to struggle.

Parallel to the above analysis, it is found out that females are unrepresented in authorship. The textbooks do not deliver texts which consider gender equity and equality in terms of authorship as well. Females are largely marginalized and invisible not only in relation to the reading texts but also to authorship. All the poems and the reading passages are taken or adapted from male authors. Still, the exclusion goes to textbook preparation; women are excluded from textbook writers, editors, and evaluators. All are male. Their misrepresentation or exclusion can send a wrong message to school children that females are incompetent. Still, school children miss all the experiences, skills and knowledge they could have got from females.

The traditional conceptions and assignments of gender roles to female or male is also evident in grade 12 Tigrigna students' textbook. The following examples show the restrictive generalization made in the textbook. In the reading text “ቋንቋታት ኢትዮጵያ” (*languages in Ethiopia*), a place of significant historical importance, the central red sea and the peninsula of Abay, is gendered male (G.12: p.2). The geez language which is described as having rich literary heritage is similarly gendered male (G.12: p.2).

The deeds of the fighter in the Ethiopian civil war (1975-1991) is described as “ማዕበል” (storm) (G12: p.64). This stereotypical image has the assumption that power is a masculine characteristic. In “ቆይታ ደኅን” (The Poor Man's Date), a short story about a young man's unrequited date with a girl that serves local drinks in her mam's bar, the female character is placed in the domestic sphere, helping her mom. This text also portrays the female character in the story as a sex object while the male protagonist is depicted as bread winner (G.12: p. 68).

Providing care and nurturance is usually considered to be a feminine trait. Although nurturance is a positive and very important human characteristics, the fact that it is traditionally restricted to the female domain may influence females from exercising opposite character traits such as combativeness that may be important to curb unhealthy personal or social behaviors. In light of this, although the fact that the reading text entitled “ጥዕና” (G.12: p.148) has gendered health centers feminine evokes the positive character trait of nurturance, it could also be limiting females from displaying opposite character traits that could be important in maintaining balance and order.

Destabilized Gender Roles

Notwithstanding stereotypical gender roles, life contains instances where individuals do not conform to socially defined gender roles. In such instances, females prove to be rational, assertive and even aggressive while males become emotional, submissive and caring. This phenomenon proves that traditionally polarized gender roles can be destabilized. The grade 12 student textbook contains very few instances of this human reality.

In the reading text “ምሽት ምሽት መርዓ” (Wedding Every Night) the novel under discussion is portrayed from feminine perspective: “ካብቶም ቅድሚ ኣብዮት ዝተሓተሙ ብርክት ዝበሉ ገስገስቲ መጻሕፍቲ ልቢ-ወለዳት ሓንቲ እያ።” (She, referring the novel, is one of the progressive novels published prior to the revolution G12: (G12: p. 45). This reading text describes the novel as “progressive” and as playing a very important role in the 1960s revolution. It is, hence, depicted as having an important place in the struggle to overthrow the monarch. Further consolidating this statement, the novel is described as a “bullet aimed at the forehead of the reactionary regime (G12: p.45). In both these instances, the state of being combative, which is traditionally in the male domain, is gendered feminine, hence gender roles are destabilized.

A similar instance can also be observed in “ብዕላማ ምውሳኔ” (Purpose-driven Decision). In this text, a short reading passage about student discipline is presented as feminine (G12: p.131). Although the writing that is being gendered is feminine and this indicates the bias of relegating what is lowly to the feminine, the fact that it is engaged in imparting knowledge, which is mostly a realm reserved to male, however, indicates the disruption of the usual gender roles.

Androgynous Conception of Gender

Androgyny is an instance in human experience whereby an individual or a person displays both feminine and masculine character traits in different settings (Rothstein, 2015). The grade 12 Tigrigna students’ textbook under study contains only one instance of this reality. There are no such occurrences in grade 11 Tigrigna textbook.

In the reading text entitled “ስነ-ፅሑፋዊ ስራሕቲ (ትንተና)” (Literary works (Analysis)), the mother of the freedom fighter is depicted as capable of displaying both character traits in different setting. While she exhibits nurturance towards her child, she is ferocious toward whoever intends to harm her child. The metaphor “ሓራስ ነብሪ”, meaning a nursing tiger, is used to describe the androgynous instance. The text elaborates that “the mother of the freedom fighter is made more courageous with all the blows that may be inflicted upon her; she is never discouraged(G12: p. 58) and that she fights to the very last drop of her blood with whoever intends to harm her child) (G12: p. 58).

Discussions

Textbooks, as clearly indicated in the Ethiopian Curriculum framework (Ministry of Education, 2009), should serve shaping students to have positive and balanced gender views. Yet, with the exception of two reading texts that reflect destabilized gender views, and only one instance of an androgynous conception of gender in the grade 12 Tigrigna students' textbook, all the remaining reading texts included in both grades have tendentious gender views.

In almost all of the reading texts, femininity is rendered invisible, thus suppressed and restricted. Whenever it is given visibility, femininity is portrayed as a negative or undesirable character trait or is assigned to play subservient roles. Males are rendered as knowledge givers, knowledge receivers, fighters, bread winners, strong and fit for battle field, and hunting. Yet, females are portrayed as a country and a school that care and give services. Besides, the reading texts positioned females undertaking activities such as cooking, preparing tea and dishwashing. They are depicted as weak and dependent. In the same vein, studies conducted in Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi school textbooks (Islam and Asadullah, 2018) have also confirmed that females are depicted in inferior status in terms of occupation and character traits. Similarly, Lee and Collins (2010), who made a comparative study of gender representation of Australian and Hong Kong English language textbooks, have found out stereotypical gender representations. Yet, the study has indicated that there are improvements in using gender neutral generic nouns and pronouns in the Australian English language textbooks.

In grade 11 Tigrigna students' textbook, there are only two stories which give positive role models. Of these, the role models are male. Female role models who can equally inspire students are not included. Such imbalanced engagement has also been observed in a study conducted on science education resources by Kerkhoven, et al (2016). This study explored and found out a significant disparity in visual representation of gender in online science education resources. This invisibility from the textbook can affect students to have negative image for females.

Parallel to the above point is the contribution of reading texts for the textbooks and textbook authorship. In both textbooks, it is found out that females are unrepresented. They are marginalized and invisible not only in relation to the contribution of the reading texts but also to authorship. All the poems and the reading passages are taken or adapted from male authors. Still, the exclusion goes to textbook preparation; females are excluded from textbook writers, editors, and evaluators. This misrepresentation or exclusion can send a wrong message to students that females are incompetent. Still, students miss all the experiences, skills and knowledge they could have got from females.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be stated that the students' textbook presents constrictive conceptions of gender. One such conception is evidently depicted in the form of stereotypical gender roles via generic nouns used in terms of masculine traits. Additionally, in many of the extracts from the reading texts, femininity is invisible in both textbooks. Two instances of destabilized gender roles and one instance of androgyny are exceptionally found in grade 12 Tigrigna textbook; these instances witness to the existence of non-constrictive notions embedded in the texts. As such, the textbooks predominantly position feminine and masculine traits in a tendentious way which can perpetuate gender stereotypes and comply with the patriarchal gender-based inequalities and violence.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusion of the study, it is recommended that students' textbook writers should revise the textbooks in a way that advocates the gender views stipulated by the national curriculum framework and realize the fullness of human potentialities that are traditionally dichotomized as feminine and masculine. To this effect, the inclusion of reading texts based on balanced gender views or adopting reading texts to meet positive gender views may help to improve the representations of both sexes.

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