

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 5 May 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Dealing with Gender Bias inside Bangladeshi Classrooms An Overview of Teachers' Perspectives

Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.

Abstract

In this paper, the author investigates to what extent the English language teachers in different private universities in Bangladesh are aware of gender bias, how it influences their teaching and how they react and respond to it. To find answers to these questions, a questionnaire was used to be completed by teachers from different private universities in Bangladesh. Question papers designed by a few teachers were studied, some classes were observed and a few teachers were interviewed.

The findings are discussed in the paper and, consequently, some suggestions are also made. The findings show that the Bangladeshi private university teachers are not much aware of gender bias; more initiatives should be taken to make them cognizant of it.

Key Words: Gender Bias, non-sexist language, gender inclusive language.

1.0 Introduction

We all carry cultural images of men and women. Did we ever notice if the way we talk depends on the listener's gender or on the speaker's gender? These are very simple questions to ask and answer, but when it comes to the question of teaching a language in class, these simple questions turn out to be momentous.

Kernberger (1990) points out that “transmitting cultural values and definitions of reality is integral with language teaching.” Language is one of the most powerful components of a culture. The social practices, values, norms are reflected through languages.

A lot has been done in the field of gender bias in language teaching in the recent years. Yet Sunderland (2000) holds the view that “Research into gender and language education is still less self-reflexive and self-critical than it should be.” In Bangladesh, reasonably, there is still a lot to do in this field. The language teachers need to be more concerned about their practices in classrooms.

Focus of this paper

This paper aims at finding out how this critical issue influences classroom teaching as Grayson (2006) points out, “actions, instructional practice and interactions between teacher and students, and between students and students, need to be examined.” This paper tries to find out how far the English language teachers in different private universities in Bangladesh are aware of gender bias and how they react and respond to issues related to gender bias. To find out the answers, a questionnaire was used, a few question papers were studied, some teachers were interviewed, and a few classes were observed. The findings are discussed in the paper and a few suggestions are made at the end.

2.0 Background

“Until 1980, Ivy League schools like Columbia University would not even admit women,” Sadker (1999). This is a fact astounding enough to find out how we the private university teachers of English language are gender biased in teaching. Without any hesitation, I admit that I myself was never aware of gender bias in classroom practices, until I started reading about it in articles online. Immediately it proved to be an area to explore. The more I learned about it, the more I started asking questions to myself about how I am gender biased in my language classes.

Though not intentionally, I realized, unconsciously I am very much gender biased. I started observing myself and wanted to know how people respond to this critical issue. Gradually many unknown doors were opened and I learned that there are things to know, to be aware of and to make other teachers aware of. Consequently I write this paper but not from a feminist perspective.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 5 May 2011

Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.

Dealing with Gender Bias inside Bangladeshi Classrooms - An Overview of Teachers' Perspectives

While I was exploring this issue, the title of an article by Christie (n.d.) “Recognizing (Almost) Invisible Gender Bias in Teacher-Student Interactions,” or I should say, the very word “invisible” caught my attention. As I went on reading this article and many more on the same topic, I realized that this “invisibility” is the most significant characteristic of gender bias, the one which is most treacherous also. Therefore, we should first unmask gender bias in our classroom practices.

3.0 What is gender bias?

A basic question that comes to mind in the beginning is: what is nonsexist language? According to Kernberger (1990), “Nonsexist language can be defined as that which does not show prejudice on the basis of gender or that which does not suggest traditional stereotypes of appropriateness by gender.” Socially we have accepted that man dominates the world and Kernberger goes on to observe, “To purport to a class learning English as a second language that when the gender of someone being referred to is unknown, they should use the masculine, is an assertion of male precedence in our value system.”

Sunderland (2000) holds the view that “gender bias is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.” She continues that it is so wide ranging, it spreads into every corner of the language classroom. She goes on to say that people have “two outdated, theoretically unsophisticated concepts of gender:

- (a) that gender is a simple masculine/feminine binary opposition; and
- (b) that gender is something ‘determined’ in a one-way process for or on the individual by a range of experiences.”

But in reality, gender bias is not as simple as we consider it to be. Chapman (2002) points out that “the socialization of gender within our schools assures that girls are made aware that they are unequal to boys” and this leads to gender bias in classroom practices also. And on the other hand, “sexism is reinforced by the use of sexist language,” Kernberger (1990).

3.1 Forms of gender bias

Gender bias can come in different shapes in the classrooms:

1. Giving more attention to males, and making them the focus of the lecture, asking more questions to boys and taking answers more from them than from the girls.
2. Giving better grades to males.
3. Using sexist language in class lectures, question papers, etc.
4. Giving more and more examples of achievements of males in classrooms.
5. Understanding or relating problems, schoolwork and exercises to boys' lives only (Davidson 2002).

6. Stereotypical treatment of boys and girls, such as socializing girls towards a feminine ideal, praising them for being neat, quiet, and calm, whereas, encouraging boys to think independently, to be active and to speak up (Chapman, 2002).
7. Choosing materials written in gender exclusive language.
8. Choosing materials written by male authors only.

Chapman (2002) says that “gender bias is also taught implicitly through the resources chosen for classroom use.” She points out that the use of texts which ‘omit contributions of women and tokenize the experiences of women,’ or stereotype gender roles, further add to the existing gender bias in school curriculum. She adds that “clearly the socialization of gender roles and the use of gender bias hidden in curriculum lead to an inequitable education for boys and girls.”

4.0 Why should we be aware of gender bias?

Case Study-1

The father of a family died. It was time to perform the rituals that are performed forty days after a person’s death. The eldest daughter was supposed to visit her child abroad, which was pre-scheduled and there were multiple reasons why she should go there at that time. On the other hand, the eldest son was supposed to be in his workplace. All said that the daughter should be at home for the rituals, she should not go abroad and the son should be in his workplace. When one of the four daughters of the family said it was not right that the daughter should be there only because she was a daughter (woman), the other two sisters and the other family members said that this daughter was talking unusual and stupid.

This is a very simple case of gender bias in our society; we experience different kinds of gender bias of which we are not even aware. As Grayson (2006) points out, “language is a component of the society; gender bias exists in the society, so it does in language teaching atmospheres. It is almost inherent.”

Case Study -2

In one of my question papers for English Reading Skills, I used an interview of an American which was a real interview. The gender of the person was not mentioned anywhere in the interview. The students - irrespective of female and male - while answering the questions, referred to the interviewee as ‘he.’ I found it interesting as only one student referred to the interviewee as ‘she.’ And in reality it was the interview of one of my female students taken by my friend.

Case Study-3

While proctoring an exam, once I asked my students “Is there anybody who didn’t sign his name?” Instantly I realized that I asked a question that was gender biased. To my shame I discovered that the person who missed to sign the exam script happened to be a girl! It was not done deliberately, it came so spontaneously that it made me realize how “naturally” gender biased we are. It is so much ingrained in our society, in our mind that it has become invisible, we have accepted it as natural.

On several occasions I have seen myself being gender biased, now I can recognize these, previously I was not able to. The same thing happens to many of us. But the question burning in my mind is, what will I tell my students, if any of them questions these practices? Maybe we are lucky or unlucky that our students also seem unaware of the issue of gender bias and it is so much embedded in our culture that they are unable to identify these. But can we think that we are safe and can we keep silence? The answer, I think is we should not and in reality we cannot do that.

Why should we study the issue?

One may ask, why should we be more conscious and should study the issue? We may take the issue of gender bias in language teaching as very trivial. But Sadker (1999) confirms that it is not simple at all. He said that when in the beginning he and Myra started their research on gender bias, they thought they would document the bias, if any and they would find some solutions. They thought that people with education and knowledge would like to change, but eventually they discovered that it was not so simple. Is it so easy to get out of our beliefs, our tendency to conform to social and cultural norms? We should be concerned about gender bias as language “is also the effective weapon of destruction. There are times when people use the language to validate whatever prejudices they may harbor” (Gender Bias in Language, 2008).

Some Studies on Gender Bias

Christie (n.d.) made a study on gender biases and gender stereotypes within an elementary school context. Her analysis of the data showed that gender biases are more invisible and more difficult to eliminate than expected. She was a feminist, and though her classroom was firmly grounded in feminist pedagogy, to her surprise, she discovered that gender bias was almost impossible to eliminate. She calls bias “a double-edged sword” and says that “the beguiling nature of this pervasive beast renders it invisible.” She concludes by saying that “because I was in the perceived position of power (teacher), my unequal treatment of boys and girls perpetuated and validated the reality of gender bias in the classroom.”

Gibbs (quoted in Davidson. 2002)) says that gender bias and inequality “promote hostility, alienation, poor school performance, failure and despair,” whereas Redfern (n.d.) observes that

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

253

11 : 5 May 2011

Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.

Dealing with Gender Bias inside Bangladeshi Classrooms - An Overview of Teachers' Perspectives

“gender fair language minimizes unnecessary concern about gender in your subject matter, allowing both you and your reader to focus on what people do rather than on which sex they happen to be.” Wolfe (n.d.) says that “there is a growing body of research indicating that teachers provide variable access to academic discourse on the basis of gender.” She quotes Ong (1981) who has argued that traditional classroom structures are designed to prefer male learning styles. Boys are given expanded access to classroom language and are allowed to fulfill different roles in the classrooms (Ong quoted in Wolfe, n.d.).

Victor Forrester of Hong Kong Institute of Education (Forrester, 1997) writes a report describing a failed attempt at gender-bias reform among two groups of teacher-trainers of EFL and other subjects in Hong Kong Government Schools. Interestingly, he observes, “their classroom observations indicate that urban Asian classroom interactions are gender-biased and that females appear to be both the object and the main perpetrators of such bias.” Importantly, he says that gender bias is dynamic, not passive. This is why we should be more conscious about gender bias.

Forrester (1997) records an interesting finding, “there is a high consistency in female lecturer’s classroom interactions being gender-biased against their own gender.” This is a truth which seems ironical. The trainees in the study said that they “teach trainees, not gender.” But their gender perception and classroom behavior were clearly at a variance. Forrester observes that “no trainee wished to challenge the background to their community of practice, nor wished to be seen as questioning the gatekeepers to a position as a certificated Hong Kong school teacher.” He concludes that “gender bias reform falters, when recipients perceive it as an emotional rather than a practical concern.”

5.0 Methodology

I used a questionnaire consisting of eleven questions on gender bias and how it is dealt with in the classrooms and sent it to different private universities. Twenty-six English language teachers from different private universities responded. Eighty-one percent of them were in the age group of 25-35, 12% were of the age group of 36-45 and 4% were in the age group of 46-55 and another 4% were of the age group of 56-65. Two of the teachers had Ph.D.s, one had an M.Phil. and the rest of the 23 teachers had M.A. degrees. 73% of the respondents were female and 27% were male.

I also observed 7 classes by 4 different teachers. The duration of the classes was 90 minutes each and the students were all undergraduate students. The classes were on the courses “Remedial English” and “English Reading Skills and Public Speaking, English Writing Skills and Communication and Phonetics and Phonology.” I studied 12 question papers prepared by 7 teachers.

I also interviewed five teachers; the interview was informal and intimate. I gave a small piece of writing which was gender exclusive to six teachers and asked them to rewrite it in gender inclusive language.

6.0 Limitations

I agree with Cameron (1997) when she says that “Analysis is never done without preconceptions, we can never be absolutely non-selective in our observations and where the object of observation and analysis has to do with gender it is extra-ordinarily difficult to subdue certain expectations.” It is difficult to say with how much sincerity the respondents answered my questionnaire. Again it is not always possible to understand with what ideas and thoughts the teachers set the question papers and used the materials. More time was needed actually for the study I made. Moreover, due to time constraints I could not observe many classes. It is very difficult to comment on teachers’ practices inside the classroom just after observing a few classes.

7.0 Findings

The issue of gender bias is really confusing. When I was doing my survey, I found that there were teachers who thought that gender means gender in grammar, i.e., masculine and feminine gender. It gives an idea about how much the teachers know about the issue.

7.1 Findings from the Questionnaire

The respondents were asked eleven questions related to their knowledge and practices of gender bias in classrooms. Fifty-four percent of teachers said that they studied fairly enough about gender bias in their academic course of studies, 23% said they did not study enough, 8% said they studied well enough and 19% said that they never studied about gender bias in their academic course of studies. It shows that there are quite a huge number of teachers who never studied about gender bias in language or had not studied enough about the gender bias issues.

About 42% of teachers said that they are fairly enough aware of gender bias in language teaching, 31% said that they are not aware enough of the issues of gender bias, 19% said that they are aware well enough. Two teachers comprising 8% said that they are not at all aware of gender bias in language teaching. It seems the teachers need to give conscious effort to be aware of gender bias in language teaching to avoid problems related to it.

Around 42% of teachers said that they never give more attention to a particular gender. Another 42% said that they sometimes give more attention to a particular gender, while nearly 16% said that they often give more attention to a particular gender. It shows that 58% of teachers confess that they sometimes give more importance to a particular gender, which is harmful for the teaching learning atmosphere and cannot be neglected at all.

Seventy-seven percent of teachers said that they never faced any problem related to gender bias in their classrooms whereas 23% said they faced problems. In answering the question how they solved those problems one teacher said that he is often biased to male students and his female students complain that he is biased towards boys in grading. To solve this problem he tries to make his grading unbiased. Another teacher said he solves the problem through counseling and motivation. A female teacher said the similar thing; she solves the problems through open discussion with the students. A teacher said in her class the students themselves were biased against each other, so she called them and had a lively discussion to make them understand that minimizing these gaps can accelerate learning. One of the teachers said she tried to make her students understand the consequences and the psychological effects of gender bias. Another teacher said that her female students are reluctant to participate in class discussions, but she didn't mention how she solves the problem.

Around 69% percent of teachers said that they try to make their class lectures and class notes free of gender bias; 23% said they sometimes try to do so and 8% said that they never try to make those free of gender bias which, no doubt is not expected.

Around 38% of teachers said that they sometimes keep the possibility of getting gender biased in their mind while choosing texts and course materials. 35% teachers said that they never think of gender bias while choosing texts and materials. 15% said that they rarely think of gender bias while choosing texts and materials and only 12% said that they always keep the issues of gender bias in mind while choosing texts and materials.

Highest 54% teachers said that they always try to make their students aware of gender bias in their classes while 27% said that they sometimes try to do so. 12% teachers said that they rarely try to make students aware of the issues of gender bias. 4% said that they never try to make the students aware of gender bias.

Eighty one percent teachers said that they always try to make their questions free of gender bias, 15% said they sometimes try to do so and 4% said that they never try to do so.

Fifty four percent teachers strongly agreed that language should be free of any kind of bias, 46% agreed to that.

Highest 58% teachers strongly agreed that they should be more aware of gender bias, 38% said that they agree to this and 4% said they disagree.

7.2 Findings from the Study of Question papers

I studied twelve question papers prepared by seven teachers. Six of the question papers were of the course “English Reading Skills,” four of “Business Communication,” one of “Writing for Arts and Social Sciences” and one of “English Writing Skills.”

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

256

11 : 5 May 2011

Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.

Dealing with Gender Bias inside Bangladeshi Classrooms - An Overview of Teachers' Perspectives

In the six question papers of “English Reading Skills” 21 reading passages were used. In one of the question papers, the teacher (a female) used four passages, three of which were written by male authors and in one of the passages the name of the writer was not mentioned. In most of the passages, the characters were mostly males and also the authors were mostly males. In the six question papers, surprisingly I didn’t see any passage used that was written by a female author; though I must mention that there were a few passages where the name of the authors were not mentioned. The passages talked about famous people like, Robert Louis Stevenson, Barack Obama, Benjamin Franklin, Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Alva Edison, and Roberto Clemente. Surprisingly there were no passages on any famous female personality except a small passage of less than six lines on the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo.

In one question paper, there was a short passage which was severely gender biased. It started like this, “A student working for his first degree at a university is called undergraduate.” The passage went on with the use of only ‘he’ while talking about university students.

In one of the question papers of “Business Communication” a case study had been used; here are a few lines from it (Italics added by the author):

The Japanese think it is sensible, as well as polite for *a person* to be discreet until *he* is sure that a business acquaintance will keep sensitive information confidential. An American who boasts “I’m my own *man*” can expect to find *his* Japanese hosts anxiously counting the chopsticks after a business lunch. As the Japanese see it, individualists are anti-social.

In one of the question papers, a male name was used for the Senior Marketing Director of a company. In another, a case study was used where all the characters were male.

In the question paper for “English Writing Skills,” the pronoun ‘he’ was used for the students and teachers of a university. The obvious question that comes to mind reading this passage is that are all the teachers and students in a university male?

In the question paper of “Writing for Arts and Social Sciences” a song by Sir Elton John, a poem by Maulana Rumi, and a newspaper article by a male writer were used. The teacher could have considered a piece of writing by a female writer. This teacher used he/she in the question paper where needed.

The study shows that the teachers should be more careful while preparing the question papers so that they can avoid using gender biased language. They should choose materials that are gender inclusive; for the courses like “English Reading Skills” they should choose passages written by female authors also and there should be a practice of bringing famous female personalities in their question papers to encourage female students and to make the male students also realize

that women are equally important. The teachers should recognize female achievements and should also make the students recognize them.

7.3 Findings from the passage to be made gender inclusive

Six teachers were given a piece of writing and were requested to make it gender inclusive. One of them could not find anything wrong with the passage. She thought there was no problem in using 'he' in the second line of the passage though the first line did not specify any gender. Three of the teachers made the passage gender inclusive by using 'he/she,' one used both 'he/she' and plurals. Only one teacher used only plurals to make it gender inclusive. Interestingly he wrote his opinion at the bottom of the page; he said that in that particular passage "male perspective is more advantageous --- I mean the IMAGE displayed in this write-up should stay masculine in nature." He said it would be a torture for the readers to make it gender-inclusive.

It seems there is a natural tendency among our teachers of using he/she whenever they want to use gender inclusive language. But Redfern (n.d.) holds the view that "replacing every *he* with *he or she* attracts even more attention to gender and defeats your purpose." Using 'he/she' is one way of making English language gender inclusive, but sometimes it is better to use plurals and where necessary to replace a few words. In this particular piece of writing, it seems better to use plurals to make it gender inclusive. As for the advantage of using male perspective, it is true that there are people who believe that using male perspective is advantageous. That is why they use sexist language.

7.4 Findings from the Interview

A teacher during the interview told me that she was teaching memo writing to her students, when she did activities on memo writing and writing letters, for the addressee of the memo or letter, for example Manager or MD, she never thought of a female. It was always a portrait of a man that came to her mind. Several teachers confirmed me that they never refer to a female in such cases. Another teacher said, his experience showed that irrespective of male or female students, all think that the person to whom they are writing letters, memos or whenever it comes to positions or establishments, students think of only men. This teacher said that if the students were doing some exercise where they were supposed to write names of people they wrote eight male names out of ten. He said he gave conscious effort to make his lecture gender inclusive and he acknowledged that if he does not remain conscious, his language gets gender biased.

Another teacher said that gender bias comes from the social practices and it is so much ingrained in our own selves that it is not possible to make language free of gender bias unless the society and its practices change. We cannot make it happen by force. We need to change the society first. He said that he tries to use gender inclusive language in his classes, he gives conscious effort. He agreed that it is difficult to get out of this practice but not impossible and also agreed

that more than anyone else, English language teachers should always try to be gender bias free in their classroom practices.

Surprisingly one of the teachers I interviewed said that she sometimes does not make students aware of gender bias in language deliberately as she thinks that this will make them more conscious about gender discrimination leading them to practice gender discrimination more.

Now the question comes, what attitudes and practices do we term as gender bias and what not? One of my students while talking about his experience of gender bias told me that once it happened that a few male students went to a male teacher about some problem, the teacher said, he didn't have time; he didn't show much interest in helping them. Just as they were getting out of the room, a few female students came to the teacher, and the teacher with great enthusiasm talked to them for a long time. Can we call it gender bias? Or is it simply an attraction to the opposite gender? Again, there are teachers who do not talk to the opposite gender because they feel shy or sometimes, think that it is not right which is very much true in a Muslim country like Bangladesh.

7.5 Findings from the classroom observations

I observed 7 classes by 4 teachers, but I would like to continue this study in future to find out more about how far our teachers are aware of gender bias in their classroom practices. Based on five points I made the classroom observations:

- a) Teachers' interaction and eye-contact with the students.
- b) Ratio of the questions asked by teachers to male or female students.
- c) Ratio of taking questions from male and female students.
- d) Use of language, and
- e) The materials used.

In one of the classes (English Reading Skills and Public Speaking) the number of boys was 13 while the number of girls was 6. A worksheet was given to the students; it was a newspaper article by a female author. The teacher was moving around the class and she was going to the boys more than the girls to check out how they were doing.

In another class (Remedial English) there were 18 boys and 9 girls. Interestingly, most of the girls were sitting in a separate row where there were no boys. The boys were responding more than the girls. The teacher gave a lecture on subject verb agreement. To check out the students' understanding the teacher asked questions to them- he chose 8 boys and 3 girls to answer; the ratio was not equal considering the number of boys and girls. The examples were mostly male oriented. Examples came of Alfred Nobel, Sherlock Holmes and Mitnick. A few female names were used but not anyone famous came as an example.

I observed two classes of Phonetics and Phonology by the same teacher. There were 21 girls and 10 boys present in one of the two classes. Interestingly, the teacher had eye-contact predominantly with the boys and he asked most of the questions to the boys, though the girls seemed more enthusiastic in the class.

In the English Writing Skills and Communication class I observed, there were 20 students present, among them, five were girls. The teacher was using short paragraphs to teach Topic Sentences and Supporting Details. The teacher was using the pronoun 'he' to refer to the writer/s of the short paragraphs whose gender was/were unknown.

In another class of English Reading Skills and Public Speaking that I observed, there were 30 students present and among them, 16 were girls. The teacher while teaching 'skimming' used three readings texts. Interestingly, two of the texts were about achievements of girls and one was the story of a boy. After the class I asked the teacher, if she had made a conscious choice of the texts keeping gender issues in her mind. Her reply was 'no.' She was moving around the class, but stopping to the boys more often than to the girls.

It is visible that the English language teachers in Bangladesh are gender biased more or less, and no doubt, they are biased unconsciously and unintentionally. There are many reasons why teachers remain gender biased. The issue is so much implanted in the society, that it becomes difficult to recognize these reasons, and consequently becomes all the more difficult to give effort to get rid of them. Moreover, there are people who do not want to challenge the social norms. They want to go on with the society, the social stereotypes, and accepted values. Thus the issue of gender bias becomes dynamic. But it is time for our teachers to realize that we must not keep our eyes closed to this issue- there is no way left to do this. We should study more and more about the issue of gender bias and we should give conscious effort to get out of this.

We must realize that "while educators cannot magically erase all gender inequities or resolve all of the problems created as traditional gender roles disintegrate, they can achieve significant results by making a conscious and concerted effort to not only avoid gender inequities in the classroom, but to actively encourage the reverse of such inequities" (Davidson 2002).

8.0 Things we teachers can do

Christie (n.d.) holds the view, "gender bias is difficult, but not impossible, to overcome." Our strong will and conscious effort can help us come out of this. After all "we qualify language. It is up to us to decide what we will allow to be used and made proper in the area of language" (Gender Bias in Language, 2006). We teachers can be aware of the following things to deal with gender bias in classrooms (c.f. Christie (n.d.), Redfern (n.d.):

1. Study and know more about gender bias and how it influences classroom practices in a language class.

2. See ourselves as a part of the problem and solution.
3. Increase our awareness of our interactions with students (we can video tape our own teaching) and
 - Categorize and count our interaction with boys and girls
 - Time our interactions with boys and girls
 - Look for stereotypical ways that we treat our students
 - Examine our expectations for males and females
4. Increase students' awareness.
5. Use students' ideas for creating gender inclusive classroom.
6. Ask students to locate gender inequalities in what they read, view, hear, say and write.
7. Choose gender inclusive texts, materials.
8. Give effort to make our question papers gender inclusive.
9. Make our class-lecture gender inclusive.
10. Discuss gender equity with our colleagues to know more about the problems, solutions, new practices, etc.
11. Write sentences without pronouns. We can try to avoid conditional structures, generally introduced by "if" or "when," which often require the use of pronouns.
12. Use gender-specific pronouns only to identify a specific gender or a specific person.
13. Use plural nouns and pronouns if they do not change the meaning of the sentence.
14. Use a first or second person perspective.
15. Use a double pronoun, i.e. s/he, he or she, him and her.
16. Use an article instead of a possessive pronoun as a modifier.
17. Use human, person, mortal and their variations: humankind, humanity, human beings, human race and people.
18. Use a more descriptive or inclusive compound word: workmen's= workers', man-sized= sizable, adult-sized, chairman= chair, chairperson, presider, convener.
19. Use passive voice.
20. Be aware of our voice, gestures, and body language and the attitudes that may convey gender bias. (Gender Inequities, n.d.)
21. Avoid perpetuating gender bias in our treatment of academic subjects, skills, daily living tasks, careers, colors, group names and so forth. (Gender Inequities, n.d.)

To avoid practicing gender bias in classrooms, Chapman (2002) suggests that "Beyond changing their own teaching behaviors, teachers should be aware of the gender bias imbedded in many educational materials and texts and need to take steps to combat this bias." And moreover, "it is important to observe the physical setting, curriculum, and instruction, and the interaction and behaviors that occur within the setting" (Grayson, 2006).

9.0 A few questions

One of my colleagues says that she gives more importance to girls in her language classes, she professed that she is biased towards girls. Are we supposed to do that? Now there comes a very

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

261

11 : 5 May 2011

Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.

Dealing with Gender Bias inside Bangladeshi Classrooms - An Overview of Teachers' Perspectives

crucial question- can we be biased towards either gender? The answer should be “no.” We want to promote a language that is free of any gender bias- any bias at all.

One of my interviewees said he thinks that English language sometimes loses creativity and spontaneity if we make it gender inclusive. But, which one is more important- to be gender biased in the name of creativity and spontaneity, or to be gender inclusive?

10.0 Conclusion

Language, the most prized and compelling means of communication, is not as innocent, impartial and undemanding as it seems to be. Thus, we have to be very watchful when we teach a language so that it does not create any controversy. It seems incorrect to restrict a language to a particular gender, be it men or be it women. It should be inclusive of all genders, should be equally expressive of all humans. It should not be another instrument for exploitation. The language one speaks reflects their identity; the language one uses for others also reflects that identity. At least it should be meant for a human, it should not be biased towards a gender.

=====

References

Cameron, D. (1997) Performing Gender Identity: Young men’s talk and the construction of heterosexual masculinity. In S. Johnson and U. H. Meinhof (Ed). *Language and Masculinity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Carclyn K. (1990). Just Say No to He/Men, Or Teaching Nonsexist Language in ESL the Classroom. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED317061.pdf>

Chapman A. (2002). Gender Bias in Education. Retrieved from <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/genderbias.html>

Christie, A. (n.d.). Recognizing (Almost) Invisible Gender Bias in Teacher-Student Interactions. Retrieved from <http://www.alicechristie.org/pubs/index.html>

Davidson, A.L. (2002). Gender Equity in the Classroom, Retrieved from http://www.essortment.com/all/genderequityin_rmnj.htm

Forrester, V. (1997). The Challenge of Gender Reform: A Case Study of Teacher Trainees in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching* Vol. 7. Retrieved from <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ajelt/vol7/rep2.htm>

Gender Bias in Language (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.planetpapers.com/Assets/1439.php>

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

262

11 : 5 May 2011

Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.

Dealing with Gender Bias inside Bangladeshi Classrooms - An Overview of Teachers’ Perspectives

Gender Bias in Language (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.paperarticles.com/2008/09/gender-bias-in-language.html>

Gender Inequities (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/math/ma1gendr.htm>

Grayson, K. (2006). Unmasking Gender Bias: Observing Hidden Dimensions that Affect Student Achievement. Retrieved from http://www.idra.org/IDRA_Newsletter/September_2006_Student_Success/Unmasking_Gender_Bias/

Redfern, J. R. (n.d.). Gender Fair Language. Retrieved from <http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/genderfair.html>

Sadker, D. (1999). Gender Equity: Still Knocking at the Classroom Door, *Educational Leadership Vol 56*. Retrieved from <http://www.sadker.org/PDF/GenderEquity.pdf>

Sunderland, J. (2000). Research into Gender in Language Education: Lingering Problems and New Directions. *The Language Teacher*, July 2000. Retrieved from <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/articles/2000/07/sunderland>

Wolfe, P. (n.d.). *Best Supporting Actress: Gender and Language Across Four Secondary ESL/Bilingual Classrooms*. Retrieved from <http://ns1.cic.ac.id/~simak/perpus2/jurnal/Pendidikan/Best%20Supporting%20Actres1.doc>

Appendix 1

The teachers who responded to the questionnaire are from the following Private Universities:

1. American International University-Bangladesh
2. ASA University
3. Daffodils International University
4. Ibais University
5. Presidency University
6. Stamford University
7. United International University

Appendix 2

Following is the passage that was given to the teachers to make gender inclusive (Available at <http://www.ricw.ri.gov/publications/GEH/lessons/371.htm>):

Three people, a lumberjack, an artist, and a tree surgeon, are examining a large tree in the forest. Since the tree itself is a complicated object, the number of particulars or facts about it that one could observe would be very great indeed. Which of these facts a particular observer will notice will be a matter of selection, a selection that is determined by his interests and purposes? A lumberjack might be interested in the best way to cut the tree down, cut it up, and transport it to the mill. His interest would then determine his principle of selection in observing and thinking about the tree. The artist might consider painting a picture of the tree, and his purpose would furnish his principle of selection. The tree surgeon's professional interest in the physical health of the tree might establish a principle of selection for him. If each man were now required to write an exhaustive, detailed report on everything he observed about the tree, the facts supplied by each would differ, for each would report those facts that his particular principle of selection led him to notice.

=====
Syeda Farzana Sultana, M.A.
Assistant Professor
Department of English
American International University- Bangladesh
205, 206 Sultanganj Road, Rayer Bazar,
Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh
farzana_hafsa@yahoo.com