

The Representation of Social Actors in Iraqi EFL Textbooks: Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

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Abstract
SFL has been accepted as a linguistic theory primarily in the educational domain where it provides a useful tool for textbook analysis. The study aimed to apply the model of SFL, as suggested by Halliday (1985), to analyze the portrayal of social actors in a specific textbook called "English for Iraq 6th preparatory Book." Data was analyzed based on the transitivity patterns of process categories and pronoun usage.. The results indicated that the narrative-heavy units, such as Health, Law, and Tourism, used material processes together with first-person pronouns to create an engaging story. The instructional units, Law and Learning, used second-person address and verbal processes to give clear guidance. Business and professional units featured personal testimonials with high "I" usage, while technical content minimized personal pronouns in favor of objective language focused on processes and phenomena. The above analysis gave a lot of insight into the development of curriculum and design of material. By knowing how the structure of language naturally fits the purposes of content, developers can make more effective and engaging materials for learning language.

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1. Introduction

EFL textbooks, as teaching aids that facilitate the learning of the English language, have also been instrumental in the formation of worldviews and cross-cultural understandings (Derakhshan, 2024; Zhang *et al*., 2024) [16, 69]. In Iraq, where the learning of English has gained added importance in the postwar and post-social-change eras, these textbooks have been used to inculcate values and modes of thought. The manners in which different individuals and groups are represented in these books have direct implications upon the self-concept of students, their perceptions of others, and the roles they play within their communities and the world at large. As Iraq attempts to reform and internationalize its education system, it is imperative to critically appraise these EFL textbooks to ascertain the messages and ideas they are transmitting to students.

Presenting people and groups in educational materials is one of the new research areas in language studies and critical analysis (Guna & Darong, 2023) [25]. Social actors, as Rashidi & Ghaedsharafi (2024) [53] Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) refers to the social perspective of language and the ways in which it can be implemented to make meaning (Wang & Ma, 2024; Matthiessen & Yousefi, 2022) [42, 66]. This approach considers language as a means of realizing not only grammatical systems but above all social attitudes toward and interpretations of the world around us (Sujatna & Kuswoyo, 2023) [61]. Textbook analysts who apply SFL will be able to uncover how 'content' is actually realized through wordings, sentence structures, and organization that present different individuals and groups in society.

However, few studies have looked into the systemic functional perspective of how social actors are treated in EFL textbooks. In the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), various grammatical structures can be used to represent social actors, such as nouns, pronouns, and verb phrases (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) [29]. Therefore, in this study, the analysis of
social actors in EFL textbooks will be framed within an SFL analysis. The study at hand will deal explicitly with the depiction of social actors in the textbooks and its probable influences over the self-image and image of others that students may form. In this way, it can help fill the gap regarding the representation of social actors in EFL textbooks and their probable impacts on the learners' language learning in Iraq. Therefore, the study will address the following question: how are social actors represented in Iraqi EFL textbooks? This will be explored within the SFL framework, centering on transitivity patterns and the use of pronouns.

Transitivity is a basic grammatical concept in Systemic Functional Linguistics which studies the realization of verbs and processes in clauses. It concerns the number and type of participants involved in a process, whether human, inanimate, or abstract. The concept of transitivity greatly aids the understanding of how meaning is constructed within a clause, which is a reflection of the interaction between the system of language and its context of use. Furthermore, the transitivity system is a three-component one in terms of the process, the participants, and the circumstances involved, through which transitivity can be analyzed.

As the type of action or event expressed by the verb, the process is the most important factor in the transitivity system. In SFL, processes are divided into three primary categories, material, mental, and relational. Material processes are what the verb focuses on.
on things that people do and basically refer to things that can be seen. Things of the mind, thinking or workings of the mind, refer to things inside people's heads. The relational process is concerned with a state of being or relation

The study of representations of individuals in Iraqi EFL textbooks holds more than mere academic significance. In the wake of years of war and political turmoil, the education system in Iraq has undergone a massive reformation, and thus, it now requires efficient and culturally fitting teaching materials. These EFL textbooks are for intermediate students who are in high school and are developing their critical thinking. The manners in which these textbooks represent different individuals and groups can greatly influence the self-perception and understanding of the social relationships of the students. Since these students are going to be professionals and are going to take over various responsibilities within Iraq and the rest of the world, the ideas that are inculcated in their textbooks may affect the manner in which they will interact with different communities.

This study adds to the increasing research that utilizes SFL approaches to the analysis of educational materials, primarily in countries where English is acquired as a foreign language and not as a second language (Martin, 2024) [41]. Many studies have investigated the representation of people in EFL materials from various cultural perspectives; however, the case of Iraq is unique due to its intricate political history and cultural diversity. Therefore, this paper will be of paramount importance to curriculum developers, textbook writers, teachers, and educational authorities in charge of teaching English in Iraq. An analysis of the present representation of people in existing materials can facilitate the construction of future textbooks that demonstrate a more balanced and inclusive representation of various social realities. The findings may also be useful for teacher training programs since they can contribute to raising the awareness levels of educators with respect to the hidden messages that may be present in their teaching materials and providing them with strategies for remedying any issues or limitations existing within their classrooms.

The study at hand is designed to explore the representation of social actors within the Iraqi EFL textbook in terms of SFL, more specifically sentence pattern and the use of pronouns since they are salient features through which language creates social meaning. It attempts to reveal the covert ideological structures that may condition the students' perception of the social relations and cultural values by uncovering the ways in which different roles of people as agents, patients, or beneficiaries of actions are framed and how pronouns establish inclusions or exclusions of individuals. Thus, the research will, hopefully, enhance the process of evaluating and developing EFL textbooks in Iraq by drawing attention to materials that facilitate effective language learning and positive social development..

2. Research Questions

The current study intends to answer the following questions:

- What are the transitivity pattern distributions representing social actors in English for Iraq 6th preparatory students' book?
- What are the pronouns usages patterns representing social actors in English for Iraq 6th preparatory students' book?

3. Literature Review

There have been changes in the research on EFL textbooks over the last ten years. Derakhshan (2024) [16] and Zhang *et al*. (2024) [69] are among the many who have contributed to this shift. According to recent research, EFL textbooks function on two levels: they help students learn the target language and guide their perceptions of the world, other cultures, and their own identities. Modern research on language education has shifted from purely linguistic analysis to critical analysis of how educational materials frame and foster particular conceptions of society by representing the people and cultural groups of the world

They found that although there are now more female characters in the books, a deeper analysis reveals that they continue to promote traditional gender roles and women are assigned far less agency than men. Their research shows that female characters are often depicted as those who need help rather than those who take action, especially in work and leadership situations. Earlier studies by Ansary and Babaii (2003) [5] considered sexism in Iranian EFL textbooks and showed that the materials presented unfair and unjustified depictions of women to the students. In a different study, Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010) [58] critically analyzed the New Interchange textbook series and found that although women were portrayed as more important and confident, there were still considerable disparities in the manner in which professional roles were represented. In their analysis of Top Notch textbooks, Karimaghai and Bagherzade Kasmani (2013) [34] once more showed that female characters were less successful than their male counterparts, thus

proving the existence of gender-based inequalities in educational materials.

Richards (2001) [56] built on the foundational work of modern scholars who had already identified textbooks as crucial sources of language input and practice and highlighted their function as teaching guides. In the critical discourse analysis framework, modern scholars use tools for the classification of social actor representation, evaluative language features and process analysis. Since then, digital tools have also enabled comparative studies across different textbooks and tracking changes over time, offering insights into how ideological frameworks in educational materials evolve. Ahmed and Narcy-combes (2011) [1] noted the function of textbooks as teaching guides. The work later developed a more critical viewpoint on discourse within which modern scholars work. Building on Richards (2001) [56], modern scholars have identified textbooks as crucial sources of language input and practice, and highlighted their function as teaching guides. To these more recent researchers, modern scholars added elements of van Leeuwen's (1996) classification of social actor representation and evaluative language features and process analysis.

Fairclough (1989, 1995) [19, 20] has shown how language works as social action, with texts as sites for the maintenance of social and political control. Van Dijk (2006, 2008) [63, 64] has stressed that critical discourse analysis focuses more on the abuse of social power, control, and dominance and how these are legitimized or de-legitimized through text and talk in social and political processes. As pointed out by Hutchinson and Torres (1994) [31], since textbooks are virtually omnipresent in the teaching of the English language, their critical scrutiny is of paramount importance in understanding their broader social impact. Most textbooks still maintain the same professional stereotypes that reflect past inequalities rather than present workplace realities, thereby undermining the effort to promote diversity and inclusion in various occupational fields. Amal Saleh, Sajjadi, and Yarmohammadi (2006) [3] had earlier shown that women were frequently ignored in EFL materials, with noticeable differences in the activities assigned to men and women; women, most of the time, were associated with conventional domestic duties and nurturing roles.

Rezeq (2022) [54] revealed that there are contradictions between textbook content and English proficiency standards; thus, students have minimal opportunities to enhance their communication skills. In a similar study, Jamalipour and Farahani (2015) [33] found that although updated EFL textbooks enriched the vocabulary and reading skills of learners in Iran, they did not provide sufficient opportunities for the development of oral communication and critical analysis. Pan and Zhu (2022) [51] have argued for the importance of taking into consideration the linguistic background of students when designing EFL materials; culturally sensitive approaches would benefit both language acquisition and cultural awareness.

This contradiction has sparked much interest in developing culturally sensitive standards for the evaluation of textbooks, which can identify subtle cultural biases, while promoting authentic content for the development of intercultural communicative competence. There is such a difference between the two, and people are looking for the middle ground. the major medium of knowledge dissemination and also their potential for values, behavior, and skills transference over generations. Research by Amalsaleh (2004) [4] using van Leeuwen's critical discourse analysis framework revealed different representations of social participants in Iranian textbooks; women were depicted as home-bound with limited occupational horizons, and middle-class urban men were stereotyped as perfect standards.

Studies on textbook effectiveness, such as those on alignment with learning objectives and curriculum goals (Chan, 2013) [9]..

4. Methodology

This study applied the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as presented by Halliday (1985) to analyze the language and contents of the Iraqi EFL Textbook (English for Iraq 6th preparatory book). The SFL analysis was carried out to see how the textbook taught English to EFL students in Iraq in terms of learning goals and communication purposes through the organization of texts, genre elements, and linguistic choices. Resources could be effective in teaching and learning, curriculum development could be guided, and the experience of language teaching and learning could be enhanced. This involves the analysis of the social actors and roles represented in the textbook. Additionally, the researcher considered the social actors represented in the textbook in terms of transitivity and pronoun patterns SFL concepts. Thus, the transitivity analysis may give a picture of how different social actors are portrayed in the texts. To support this, pronoun analysis looks at the pronouns used in the texts to determine who is acting or being acted upon, thus revealing the social actor of the textbooks..

5. Results

Analyzing the eight textbook units through SFL patterns yielded the following results:

Material processes (action-focused language)

Rewritten Text:

The use of action-oriented language patterns was high in all eight units, ranging between 45-70 times per unit, with an average of about 55 times. The units which dealt with aspects of legal enforcement and commercial activities recorded the highest numbers (70 occurrences), which is appropriate for the dynamic nature of these sectors. Examples include "Police officers direct traffic" (Unit 2), "We produce shirts and leather" (Unit 4), and "we use natural resources" (Unit 8).

Relational Processes (Being, having, Identifying)

Relational processes set up states and characteristics, occurring 35-60 times a unit, with the profession-centered and commercial units (Units 3, 4, and 6) presenting the highest concentrations (55-60 occurrences).

Mental Processes (Thinking, Feeling, Perceiving)

The language that expressed thoughts, emotions, and perceptions appeared moderate across units, ranging from 25-50 occurrences. Commercial This reveals that personal stories and choice-making scenarios heavily rely on psychological language to engage learners emotionally and intellectually.

Verbal processes (Speaking, Communication)

Communication language varied widely among the units, from 8-30 instances, with the law enforcement, career, and financial units (Units 2, 3, and 6).

Existential processes (Existence, Occurrence)

The least frequent occurrences were in all units, which ranged between 6-18 instances of language patterns that simply acknowledge existence or occurrence.

Personal Reference Patterns

The analysis of personal reference words reveals significant trends in the linguistic positioning and portrayal of persons. The first-person "I" was most frequently noted in business and finance units, highlighting individual experiences and stories in the professional world...

Gender Patterns through Reference Analysis

The distribution of gender-specific references reveals disparities in the representation of the two genders across all the units.. This trend indicates that women are systematically underrepresented in the linguistic framing of professional, technical, and educational scenarios, with their visibility mainly confined to career-discussion sections.

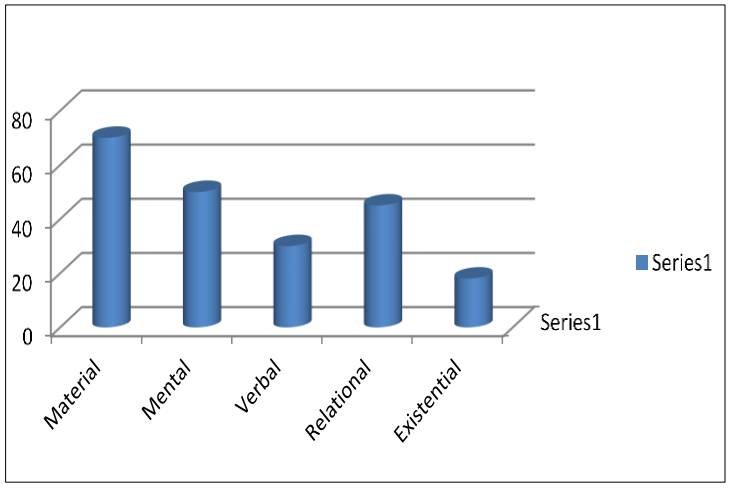


Fig 1: Transitivity Pattern across the Units of the Textbook

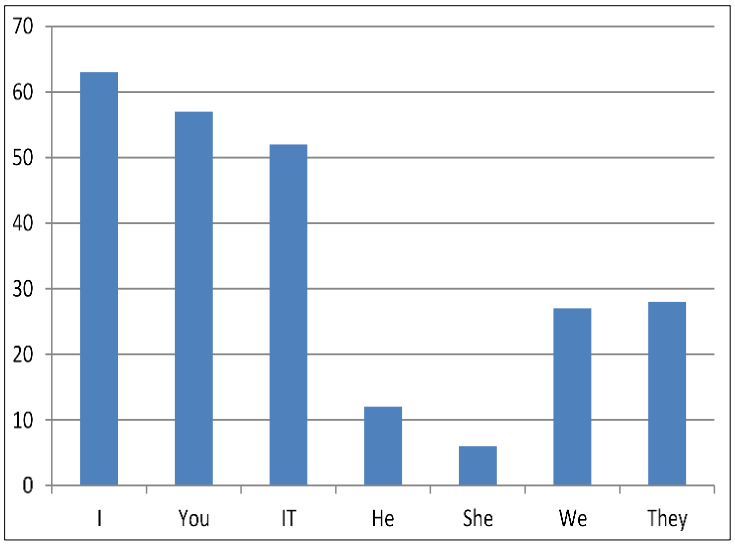


Fig 2: Average Distribution of Pronouns Used across all Units of the Textbook

6. Discussion

The frequent use of action-based language structures throughout the textbooks is in line with recent findings on modern English textbooks that emphasize hands-on activities for the improvement of language learning. It goes further to show that certain groups of people are consistently portrayed as active participants, while others are shown in passive roles. Business professionals and law enforcement officers are typically presented as decision-makers and change agents, while other social groups are usually depicted in less influential positions. The substantial presence of descriptive language in career-focused sections differs from the previous research that viewed such sections as purely informational. This passage describes value judgments through the very descriptive passages about professions.

This is clear underrepresentation, confirming earlier research at roughly half the rate of men and, therefore, in line with gender bias in English teaching materials. Women are mainly found in discussions on careers; they have no place in the technical and scientific contexts. This seems to suggest a persistent exclusion of women from the professional fields, contrary to claims that newer textbooks have improved female representation. The study also found that women characters had less opportunity to express deep thoughts and feelings, as men characters did, revealing some gender bias beyond simple occupation stereotyping.

Language analysis gives mixed results on cultural diversity. Use of language focused on individuals in the business context would promote Western values of personal responsibility and independence. However, moderate use of collective language would indicate some recognition of community-oriented cultural values. The way in which "we" and "they" are used creates insider and outsider groups, potentially reinforcing cultural hierarchies, while building exclusive professional communities that marginalize other social groups — if other social groups are to be found at all.

The analysis reveals complex patterns in the presentation of professions. Business professionals are typically portrayed as

active agents, while service workers are cast in more passive roles. Some professions are given wide opportunities for the expression of emotions and communication, while others confine them to very narrow roles. Thus, law enforcement, career counseling, and banking professionals are most often portrayed speaking and communicating, while environmental professionals have little voice in the materials; this creates systematic marginalization of certain professional fields.

The book shows good educational design by using the same language patterns as the learning objectives. However, the same features that help in learning a language also create social hierarchies, raising issues of social consciousness in textbook development. The material's difficulty allows students to address high-level social issues while learning English, thus arguing for the inclusion of critical thinking about social representation as part of language education.

The results back the use of critical analysis in textbook evaluation with the learning effectiveness retained. The high language structures prove that advanced English textbooks can do their job in teaching the language while involving the students in high-level social discussions. In this sense, teacher training programs should give the faculty the ability to detect and correct representational biases in the materials through analytical means. Such a fusion of linguistic analysis with social consciousness can indeed be termed a leap in English language education as it meets not only the goals of learning a language but also the vast social development aims.

7. Conclusion

The above study has presented important findings on the pedagogic role of language and the social construction of meaning in the portrayal of individuals and social groups in Iraqi English textbooks. An analysis of grammar patterns and pronoun use in eight chapters shows that although the books use complex language structures that can facilitate effective learning among students, they also perpetuate unfair biases in the representation of different social groups, particularly with regard to gender roles, status in occupation, and who has the right to speak with authority.

These findings have major implications for curriculum planners, writers of textbooks, and teachers within the post-war educational system of Iraq. The advanced level of language analysis proves that advanced English materials can engage students in complex social discussions while also being effective as teaching tools, thus pointing to the possibility of creating more inclusive and socially conscious educational resources. Such systematic patterns brought out through specialized analysis serve as strong evidence to include critical awareness training both in teacher preparation programs and the review of textbooks.

This study further proves that language education cannot be divorced from the development of social consciousness, more so in post-conflict societies in which educational materials are crucial in the reformation of society and the formation of identity...

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