GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS: WHY MATERIALS MATTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Obwohl schon viel über kommerzielle Materialien gesagt und geschrieben wurde, ist unser Verständnis sehr begrenzt, wenn es um lokal produzierte (hauseigene, nicht-kommerzielle) Materialien geht, die oft verwendet werden, um bestehende veröffentlichte Materialien zu ersetzen oder zu ergänzen. In diesem Beitrag geben wir einen Überblick über die Literatur zur Darstellung von Geschlecht und Sexualität in kommerziellen Lehrmitteln und unsere Überlegungen zu lokal produzierten Unterrichtsmaterialien, die in einem Englisch-Intensivprogramm an einer Universität in der Türkei mit Englisch als Unterrichtsmedium (EMI) verwendet werden. Wir unterstreichen die Bedeutung von Materialien für die Handlungsfähigkeit von Lehrkräften bei der Schaffung eines sicheren und inklusiven Klassenzimmers und bei der Bekämpfung von systematischer Unterdrückung, Diskriminierung und Ungerechtigkeit im und ausserhalb des Klassenzimmers.

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Introduction

Instructional materials used in the language classroom undoubtedly have a profound impact on the language learning-teaching process as they constitute the basis of instruction (Richards, 2001). Language teaching materials can refer to "anything that can be used to facilitate the learning of a language, including course books, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites and mobile phone interactions" (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 143). However, facilitation of learning is not the only reason why materials are prominent as they are also cultural artefacts (Gray, 2013) and provide a glimpse into how teachers and institutions perceive the world, how they choose to represent this reality to their students, and how values and attitudes are conveyed through the use of language. As such, materials in the English language classroom open up a window into a space of negotiation of multiple identities, such as linguistic, racial, gender, and sexual, among others (Waller, Wethers, & de Costa, 2017). Through materials, teachers

can "endorse and reproduce (...) existing power relations, particularly with regard to race, gender and sexual orientation" (Gray, 2013, p. 3).

The fact that language teaching materials constitute a space of identity representation and negotiation has prompted many researchers to investigate how these identities are represented in said materials. To this end, much research has been done in Anglo-American contexts from a gender and sexuality perspective, especially on coursebooks (Sunderland, 2000a). However, two contexts where there is dearth of research stand out, namely non-Anglo-American contexts and locally-produced materials, i.e. handouts that are produced and used within an institution or by teachers.

Representations of Gender in ELT Materials

Omission and Stereotypes

A brief look into research thus far is revealing in terms of how gender is represented in English Language Teaching

(ELT) materials around the world. As mentioned above, most research at the intersection of gender and ELT materials focuses on coursebooks and uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to measure gender bias. In quantitative terms, *omission* is a common category looked at. Not surprisingly, research from around the world as well as from Turkey suggest that women are less visible than men (Amare, 2007; Lee & Collins, 2009; Syarifuddin, 2014; Aydınoğlu, 2014; Bulut & Arıkan, 2015), though there has been some research to the contrary (Lee & Collins, 2008; Syarifuddin, 2014; Demir & Yavuz, 2017). The general findings of a relative quantitative asymmetry are reinforced qualitatively in the *stereotypes* category. Coursebooks that have been investigated seem to represent a view of the world in which women are emotional, interested in fashion, their appearance and decoration, and are relegated housework and child-rearing duties. Men's representation is reinforced through stereotypes of interest in sports, being strong and being inclined to take part in criminal activities. Research does report improvement in that at times, women are depicted as superheroes, pilots and scientists or as active individuals (Aydınoğlu, 2014; Bağ & Bayyurt, 2016; Demir & Yavuz, 2017).

The situation is not much different in the context of locally-produced materials. In a recent study (Selvi & Kocaman, 2020), we aimed to contribute to literature on how representations of gender and sexualities manifest themselves in an understudied context, i.e. materials (henceforth handouts) that are produced and used locally at an Intensive English Program at an English Medium Instruction (EMI) university in Turkey. These handouts (n=198) are used in the program as supplemental materials to the coursebooks, covering listening, writing and reading skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. In addition to quantitative analysis, whereby we could track the proportional (in)visibility of women and/or LGBTQ+ individuals, the study made use of qualitative content analysis of the handouts to document the extent to which such (in)visibility is reproduced or problematized. We found that both women and men are represented in a biased manner. Women are, nonetheless, disproportionately represented in quantitative terms, with men outnumbering them in all handouts

(1: 1.4). In addition to being less visible than men, women are more frequently represented in a stereotypical light when compared to men (1: 1.8), and these stereotypes are rarely debunked through positive, alternative representations of being and becoming. A closer look at what stereotypes are reinforced reveals that women are often depicted as caregivers and homemakers, feel helpless and are victims in different situations and are obsessed with their appearance (e.g. "When her camera fell and broke down, Jane started to cry."). Men, on the other hand are interested in illegal activities, are often authoritative, and physically strong (e.g. "Mark denied that he had hit his sister."). Interestingly, some of these stereotypes complement each other, i.e. women are helpless, and men are strong, creating a complete picture.

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Occupational Visibility

Distribution of men and women across various occupational domains has also been investigated, and previous research points out that besides being less frequently portrayed to hold jobs (Aydınoğlu, 2014; Bağ & Bayyurt, 2016; Bulut & Arıkan, 2015; Demir & Yavuz, 2017), women also often hold lower-ranking jobs such as secretary or nurse whereas higher-ranking jobs such as doctor or president are almost exclusively for men (Amare, 2007; Lee & Collins, 2008; Porreca, 1984). As in the case of omission and stereotypes, outliers exist (Pakuła et al., 2015; Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Aydınoğlu, 2014).

In the case of locally-produced materials, we found that men are quantitatively more visible than women in all occupational domains except for family (1: 1.5), and those that had the highest difference in the number of women and men represented were the fields of engineering and sciences (1: 0.2), law and order (1: 0.2), and illegal activities (1: 0.04). Additionally, what stood out from the data was that men's participation in the work life is much more multidimension-

al and varied compared to women. For instance, where women's occupations in the sciences were confined to anthropologist, astronaut, scientist, and sociologist, men were architects, computer software designers, inventors, mathematicians, and social psychologists in addition to everything that women were (Selvi & Kocaman, 2020).

Linguistic Sexism

Bias can also come in linguistic forms, an area not missed by researchers. Under the term *linguistic sexism*, which refers to gender bias manifested in the language (Amare, 2007), researchers report bias in order of mention (e.g., he/she vs. she/he), as well as the use of generic constructs (e.g., mankind). In addition to such uses being restricted to only a few instances (Syarifuddin, 2014), researchers also report a growing trend in splitting pronouns (e.g. s/he) (Lee & Collins, 2009; Pakuła et al., 2015). Other items in

this category concern titles, labels, and names to highlight linguistically feminized words (e.g., hostess, Mrs.) (Amare, 2007; Lee & Collins, 2008; Syarifuddin, 2014). Studies indicate that ELT materials tend to use the male pronouns and nouns first in cases of pairing (e.g., he or she, boys and girls) with the exception of the fixed phrase 'ladies and gentlemen' (Lee & Collins, 2009; Porreca, 1984). There seems to be a slow but steady trend in decreasing the use of generic pronouns, and singular 'they' is suggested as the next step in avoiding linguistic sexism (Lee & Collins, 2009). Our results indicate that generic constructs are still being used, and that in paired pronouns, men are mentioned first in the majority of the cases (Selvi & Kocaman, 2020). Though change in this regard will take time, the findings from previous research can be summarized in a number of principles to guide material writers in using inclusive language, as shown in Table 1.

Principles	Practices	
	Instead of this...	Consider using this...
Whenever possible, use gender-neutral words when making generic references instead of stereotypes, false generics, man-compounds, feminine suffixes	Man, mankind	People, humanity, human beings
	Steward, stewardess	Flight attendant
	Guys (men and women)	All
	Female doctor, male nurse	Doctor, nurse, healthcare professional
	Miss, Mrs.	Ms.
	Mr. and Mrs. Smith	Jane and John Smith
	Girlfriend/husband	Partner / significant other
Whenever possible, use plural forms to omit the masculine reference words	**An employee** knows that **he** should keep **his** ID badge with **him** at all times.	**Employees** should keep their ID badges with **them** at all times.
Whenever possible, use they/their to refer back to singular nouns ("Singular they")	**Each participant** must present **his** ID badge.	**Each participant** must present **their** ID badge.
Use slashes [/] judiciously when writing both forms of words		Keeping an ID badge creates a heavy burden on her/him.
Neutralize		

Table 1: Suggestions for inclusive language

Representations of Sexualities in ELT Materials

The much-deserved recognition and visibility of LGBTQ+ issues in educational contexts and beyond meant that the multisexual composition of the classrooms also needed to be recognized, i.e. that neither the student population nor the teaching staff is composed of heterosexual or cisgender individuals only. This multiplicity is particularly important in gaining a complete picture of how gender is represented in ELT materials since "gender cannot properly be explored without looking at sexuality" (Pakuła et al., 2015, p. 95).

Queer inquiry, i.e. "turning our attention to sexual matters ... within everyday patterns of thinking, speaking, learning, and working ... [and] highlighting straight, lesbian, bisexual, and gay perspectives, along with the paradoxes of producing such categorizations" (Nelson, 2006, p. 7), prompted researcher to look into representations of sexuality in the language classroom as well as ELT materials (e.g. Gray, 2013; Nelson, 2006; Paiz, 2017). The findings of this line of research tell us that clearly identified LGBTQ+ individuals are systematically omitted and made invisible and that heteronormativity permeates ELT materials, especially coursebooks, mostly due to commercial motives (Goldstein, 2015; Gray, 2013; Merse, 2015; Pakuła et al., 2015). In the case of Turkey, where there is a long-standing LGBTQ+ movement, research into the English language classroom from an LGBTQ+ perspective is limited, if not non-existent.

In our study, the only research, to our knowledge, investigating representations of sexuality in ELT materials in Turkey, the findings echoed that of research into coursebooks. Materials were clearly biased in that they depict a heteronormative world. LGBTQ+ lives and experiences are non-existent in the materials, contributing to the institutionalized silencing of LGBTQ+ individuals and their experiences (Gray, 2013; Moore, 2016). We found that the materials analyzed in our study lack a queer perspective through such question as "Are you male or female?" or statements as "This company makes no distinction between the two sexes." These, coupled with lack of LGBTQ+ individuals, perpetuate the gender binary and ignore individuals who may identify differently to what a hetero and cisnormative understanding of gender dictates (e.g., intersex, trans, non-binary, among others). Heteronormativity is not only clear in the lack of LGBTQ+ characters but also in the vocabulary frequently used. Vocabulary of kinship and partnership is restricted to such words as *girlfriend* or *husband* and words such as *partner* or *significant other* are not used. As for the topics covered, issues of divorce and single parenting are rarely mentioned, if at all, which perpetuates the notion of the sacred nuclear family. Perhaps the most problematic of all is the pseudo-scientific mentions of sex differences. Differences between female and male brains, communication styles, food intake and even driving styles are often mentioned, essentializing woman and manhood to their biology and denying the fluid nature of gender and sexuality. A major takeaway from research on both gender and sexuality is that it is by focusing on how various identities are represented in language teaching materials that we get a picture of which identities are prioritized and how institutions and teachers decide to present them in the classroom. As Azimova and Johnston (2012) acknowledge, "representation always involves selection; that which is not selected becomes invisible" (p. 339).

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Conclusions and Implications

Taken together, research on how gender and sexualities are represented in coursebooks as well as locally-produced materials have several implications for material writers. First and foremost, as realistic as stereotypes might be, what makes them questionable lies not only in the perpetuation of a particular way of being, but also eliminating any alternatives. Stereotypical assumptions that contradict our experiences and perceptions present a narrow sense of the many

ways femininities and masculinities are experienced today, leaving little room for any alternative definitions, experiences, or realities. Secondly, what is expected from the materials is not the portrayal of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in such extreme and, at times, unattainable ways that they become the anomaly or the exception (i.e. tokenized), but that a healthy balance is struck with diverse representations in both the professional and the personal domains, such as extending beyond homemaking for women and criminal activities for men.

Creating instructional materials that embrace the diverse experiences of all identities or making use of locally-produced materials as institutional tools to incorporate sexual literacy into the curriculum are some strategies to achieve this goal.

Finally, in terms of representations of sexualities specifically, materials are an important gateway to promoting sexual literacy (Paiz, 2017; Sunderland, 2000b), and the ability "to communicate about sexual diversity matters, and with sexually diverse interlocutors" (Nelson, 2009, p. 206). Given the rigidity of published coursebooks, teacher-created materials especially stand out as useful tools to move beyond sexism and heteronormativity in the language classroom (Merse, 2015; Pakuła et al., 2015), particularly in contexts like Turkey, which is still dominated by oppressive policies. It is important to remember, however, that a gendered text does not necessarily yield to a gender-biased thinking in the minds of the students. Teachers have the choice and the power to rescue texts through critical reading, i.e. "talk around the text" (Sunderland, 2000b). One way to do so is to treat these gendered texts as queer teaching moments (Goldstein, 2015; Merse, 2015). Whereas a queer-inclusive approach would enable students of all sexualities to have a voice in the classroom (Merse, 2015), a lack of diversity in materials or classroom practices may, in different ways, hinder learning, classroom participation, and student motivation (Gray, 2013; Moore, 2016; Nelson, 2016; Paiz, 2017).

Yet in contexts like Turkey, where teachers might lack awareness, competence or agency to "talk around the text", materials become even more important tools in promoting equality. In the ongoing systematic oppression and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals as well as other marginalized identities, classrooms can and should be used as a safe space for students and teachers to perform their identities. In the context of Turkey, grassroot activists have long made a call for more inclusive curricula documenting the negative effects of discriminatory and excluding practices on LGBTQ+ individuals' learning (KAOS GL, 2010). Creating instructional materials that embrace the diverse experiences of all identities or making use of locally-produced materials as institutional tools to incorporate sexual literacy[1] into the curriculum are some strategies[1] to achieve this goal (Nelson, 2009).

More broadly, it is also important to recognize the critical role of teacher education in equipping pre-/in-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to tackle issues of gender and sexuality specifically, and social justice at large. There is growing evidence in pre-service teacher education contexts (e.g. Güney 2018) reporting an enthusiasm to learn about queer pedagogy. The collective research into representations of identities are a good reminder that teacher education programs need to devise ways to bring a wide variety of issues to teacher education curricula, especially those that relate to issues of social justice and equip their teachers-in-training to handle such issues in and beyond the classroom. Tackling heteronormativity, sexism and various manifestations of marginalization should be considered as a distributive process which requires the involvement of major actors in the teaching-learning process, from materials development units and school administrators to teachers and teacher educators.

1 For more ideas on inclusive practices in the language classroom, please see Paiz (2019), Lütge and Merse (2020), Merse (2015).

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