

Analyzing Gender Representations in a Multimodal Reading Task from the *Cutting Edge*

Advanced EFL Textbook

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Undergraduate thesis for the Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages with Emphasis in English

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Master's Degree in Language Didactics

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Faculty of Human Sciences

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Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages with Emphasis in English

Bucaramanga

2025

Dedication

To my parents, who, with unconditional love, have guided and encouraged me to pursue all my aspirations.

To my sister, who has given me comfort and companionship at just the right moments. I hope to make you proud.

To my beloved Valentina, thank you for the chance to work by your side. I admire and learn from you daily.

Andrea Natalia Ariza Diaz

To my mother, my role model and the best example of resilience. Thank you for your unconditional support always.

To my father, I admire your strength. Thank you for being so loving with everyone around you.

My dearest Andrea, thank you for walking this and many other countless paths with me.

Valentina María Ortiz Daza

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank God for the countless blessings that have shaped our lives, as well as for guiding us through this journey and providing us with strength and wisdom.

We would also like to thank our incredible director, Jessica Marcela Velandia Santamaría, for being our biggest supporter and for believing in us even when we didn't. Thank you for your guidance, companionship, and dedication, which matched ours every step of the way. We found not only an exceptional teacher but also a truly remarkable human being. We will forever be grateful.

To our alma mater, Universidad Industrial de Santander, for letting us grow and flourish in our career and provided us with the tools to become more humane, conscious, and resilient women. We will proudly carry the indelible mark that the public university has impressed upon us.

To every single professor who shared their knowledge with us in both school and university: thank you for being a part of our formation process and for helping us find our place in the paths of life, academia, and pedagogy.

To our beloved families, thank you for believing in us and encouraging us on every step. We hope to make you proud because you are our greatest motivation and our reason to work hard.

Lastly, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to our partners and friends. Your unwavering patience and constant support deepen our love and appreciation for you with each passing day.

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Resumen

Título: Analyzing Gender Representations in a Multimodal Reading Task from the *Cutting Edge Advanced* EFL Textbook *

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Palabras Clave: Actividades de lectura, Análisis del Discurso Multimodal, Estereotipos de Género, Roles de Género

Descripción: Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar críticamente las representaciones de género presentes en una actividad de lectura del libro de texto *Cutting Edge Advanced* a través de un análisis del discurso multimodal. Esta es una investigación documental de corte cualitativa, que siguió la técnica de análisis del discurso multimodal para el análisis de datos. Se seleccionaron dos páginas con ejercicios de prelectura, durante la lectura y poslectura. Cada sección de la actividad fue analizada utilizando el proceso de “Cuatro Pasos para Realizar un Análisis Multimodal” de José Aldemar Álvarez-Valencia en 2016. Los resultados mostraron cómo en las actividades se evidencian diversos elementos que tienen un carácter sexista y estigmatizante. Asimismo, continúan promoviendo estereotipos que refuerzan los roles de género en la sociedad y que pueden tener influencia en las ideas de los estudiantes que utilizan este libro como guía en su formación

* Trabajo de Grado

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docente. Además, estas actividades son insuficientes para promover el pensamiento crítico, lo que limita la capacidad de los estudiantes para analizar y cuestionar estos estereotipos arraigados.

Abstract

Title: Análisis de Representaciones de Género en una Actividad de Lectura Multimodal del Libro de Texto *Cutting Edge Advanced* *

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Key Words: Gender Roles, Gender Stereotypes, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Reading Activities

Description: This study aimed to critically examine the representations of gender within a reading task from the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook from a multimodal nature of language. The method selected for this study was qualitative documentary research that followed the multimodal discourse analysis technique for data analysis. Two pages were selected organized into pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading exercises. Each section was analyzed using the "Four-Step Process to Conduct a Multimodal Analysis" framework developed by José Aldemar Álvarez-Valencia (2016). The findings revealed that the reading task includes elements with sexist and stigmatizing implications, perpetuating stereotypes socially assigned roles for men and women.

* Degree Work

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This portrayal not only reflects a gender-biased perspective but may also shape the views of students who rely on this textbook during their pre-service teaching training, particularly concerning socially relevant topics. Furthermore, the analyzed exercises fall short to promote critical thinking, limiting students' ability to discuss and question these ingrained stereotypes.

Introduction

The Universidad Industrial de Santander (UIS) has expressed in various documents and spaces its position as a public university in Colombia that supports and promotes visibility and positioning on gender issues. Just as they expressed in the Agreement 022 of 2018, "...the UIS decides to strengthen gender equity and equal opportunities without distinction of sex, gender identity or sexual orientation" (p. 1). The School of Languages, like the rest of the schools within the university, is required to follow and implement these same policies, ensuring alignment with institutional commitments to inclusivity and equity. However, their efforts have not yet extended to examining how the textbooks used in the English subjects of the *Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés* program, as well as the approaches taken by teachers, address gender issues in the classroom or whether they are included among the topics covered in the curriculum.

Based on our experience as students of *Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés*, we have observed on the part of the educators of the English subjects (Pre-Intermediate, Intermediate, Intermediate-High, Advanced I, Advanced II), a low mention or incorporation of discussions regarding inclusion and gender in their classes. Due to the era we are currently living in, teachers' doings must change in order to include activities where students can understand,

analyze, and reflect on the reality that surrounds them (Benavides, 2017). Addressing topics as such, require a certain level of responsibility and expertise due to the fact that it impacts the lives of the learners and what is said about this, together with fostering critical thinking, can spark contributory discussions. Therefore, neglecting to address important issues such as inclusion and gender sensitivity in our curriculum means that we are not fully exploring diverse cultures and perspectives in language education. Agreeing with what Lastra, Durán and Acosta (2018) said, teachers are no longer observers of the realities but need to look for strategies to generate agency on themselves and those whom they teach.

According to Hvorecky and Korenova (2023), textbooks are tools that transfer knowledge into students' minds, requiring relevant topics and structured guidance through various levels of thinking to be effective. The importance of textbooks relies upon its impact on people's exposure to the target language offering well-structured and contextualized language materials that serve as language models and build language skills, while also providing opportunities for practice and reinforcement outside of class. From these insights, the following research question emerges: To what extent does a reading task in a multimodal text address gender stereotypes, portray the female role, and influence the readers' perspectives on gender?

Justification

The present study addresses gender issues, such as gender stereotypes, in a reading exercise from the textbook *Cutting Edge Advanced*, used in Advanced English classes from the Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés degree, and the significance of approaching these issues in EFL classes. This topic is of utmost relevance due to the current growth on the importance of an inclusive education and the need to address gender inequalities in the

educational system. In the words of Gray (2013), gender and sexuality issues are progressively being researched and discussed in ways that commercial ELT cannot continue to ignore. From an academic perspective, there has been significant growth in the attention given to gender issues and stereotypes in education, particularly regarding their impact on student development. Analyzing gender representation in textbooks is crucial because it enhances students' sensitivity and understanding of diverse gender roles in society (Shallaita et al., 2021). This analysis not only fosters critical thinking but also encourages inclusive attitudes, helping students navigate and challenge stereotypes they encounter both in and out of the classroom.

Likewise, there is a substantial number of studies examining various textbooks, both local and international, used in schools and with children. However, the research on textbooks for university-level education and pre-service teachers is significantly limited in Colombia and Latin America. As Benavides (2017) points out, these educational materials have the potential to present a more accurate depiction of society's occupational composition. Understanding this gap is crucial, as it can inform the preparation of future educators and enhance their awareness of gender representation in the materials they will use in their teaching careers. Moreover, gender representation in EFL materials affects the educational experiences of pre-service teachers and plays a crucial role in shaping gender identities while perpetuating gender-based power structures in society.

Considering the above, the present study intends to contribute to the awareness of gender topics and to promote critical reflection on these issues by analyzing the gender representations and stereotypes in an EFL textbook used in the *Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés* program

at UIS, more specifically, a reading task. Hence, promote critical reflection on the role of education in these issues and to contribute towards a more inclusive and equitable education.

1.Objectives

1.1 General objective

To critically analyze the gender representations and constructions present in a reading task in the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook using a multimodal discourse analysis.

1.2 Specific objectives

1. To explore how pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities stimulate students' critical discussions on gender stereotypes.
2. To discuss the potential impact of gender portrayals in an EFL reading task on students' perceptions, drawing on existing literature on gender.

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Gender

The term gender has been conceptualized by numerous authors and from various perspectives. From Humm's (1989) view, gender is "a culturally-shaped group of attributes and behaviors given to the female or the male" (p. 84). This conceptualization provides important information concerning the historical, cultural and situational contexts that explore the definition

of womanhood and manhood, the idea of masculinity and femininity constructed by society, the dynamics between individuals of different genders and the variations in their relative power dynamics and political standings (Ferree et al, 1998). Contrarily, Butler (2015) presents gender as a performance, since it denotes that gender is constructed by repeated behaviors shaped by societal and cultural norms. Nevertheless, Butler's perspective encourages us to understand gender as a dynamic and ever-evolving aspect of our identities, which is capable of defying the limitations imposed by societal expectations; while Humm's definition remains rooted in a binary, archaic and heterosexist gender perspective on gender identities and their expressions. In general, gender conceptualization often falls on Eurocentrism or Anglocentrism perspectives, meaning the conventional ones taken from white and wealthy-class points of view, which provokes a lack of representativeness of LGBTIQ+ identities. As Castañeda-Peña (2021) emphasized: "This heteronormative vision conveys an ideology that is harmful to language teachers and students who do not see themselves as identified or represented in the heterosexual school discourse" (pp. 160-162). This concept holds imperative significance in the study we aim to undertake, owing to the necessity of comprehending its inference in our society through the inclusion of gender-related topics in EFL classroom textbooks and recognizing that gender is frequently constituted and reconstituted, not fixed. Moreover, it is crucial to move beyond heteronormative ideas and begin contextualizing and incorporating diverse and inclusive gender perspectives that allow all individuals, without exception, to feel represented.

2.1.2 Gender identity

Identity includes two concepts according to Gentry and Campbell (2002):

First, is *self-concept*: The set of beliefs one has about oneself. This includes beliefs about one's attributes (e.g., tall, intelligent), roles and goals (e.g., occupation one wants to have when grown), interests, values, and beliefs (e.g., religious, political). Second, is *self-esteem*, which involves evaluating how one feels about one's self-concept (p. 15).

Throughout the years, plenty of authors such as Deubelbeiss (2010), Benavides (2017), Gray (2013), and Koutsoupaki (2022) have asserted that providing students with agency to develop, construct and portray their identities signifies creating a more inclusive and critical learning environment. For example, Benavides (2016) states that “in the EFL context, the aspects of gender, identity, and culture play an important role when learning, communicating, and interacting in a foreign language” (p.13). Accordingly, considering that the concept of gender has evolved, it is key to give students the space to feel at ease to develop their identities, offering them support and assistance from their school community, putting aside criticism and ridicule. This facilitates the process of learning, understanding, and acknowledging others, as it is proven that even in schools and textbooks, representation falls short in addressing issues related to sexual diversity, language usage, visibility, the LGBTQ+ community, and the elimination of gender barriers. Such as Koutsoupaki (2022) mentioned, students possess a limited understanding of issues concerning representation and the inclusivity or lack thereof, in language. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) also highlighted how in our society exists a unitary idea of a woman that is viewed under the colonial, Western and hegemonic viewpoint, excluding female minorities and depriving women of agency. They disputed this idea by proposing the “Decolonial Feminism”, that constitutes an insurgent praxis to fight against the coloniality of gender, challenging and disrupting the dominant narrative of white feminism by advocating for insurgent perspectives, alternative

viewpoints, and ideas centered around decolonization †† (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This idea arose to be transversal and to provide opportunities to join together afro-descendants, indigenous, mestiza, poor and LGBTIQ women to question the heteropatriarchal norms that command our society.

Finally, even though we can already observe how educational spaces demonstrate “traces of rebellion against this heteronormative matrix and there are teaching materials that challenge the binary representation” (Castañeda, 2021, p. 162), it is important to emphasize the urgent need to continue the transformation of the classrooms into spaces where all diversities and minorities are represented. This is necessary in order to continue promoting visibility in the educational realm (in materials, curriculum topics, and discourse) for those who are not recognized and represented as they should be: women, LGBTIQ+ community and gender fluid individuals. As a result of realizing the importance of designing classes and utilizing materials with a gender-focused approach, which has already proven to be highly beneficial for both students and teachers, individuals can acknowledge contemporary social issues, form personal opinions, and become more tolerant of diverse realities (Benavides, 2017).

2.1.3 Gender in EFL materials

Having discussed the role of gender identity in education, we now turn to how these concepts are reflected in the EFL materials used in classrooms and their influence on the educational community, particularly on students and their formation of ideas and perspectives. As

†† Decolonization is “interpreted to be both a calculated process of military engagement and diplomatic negotiation between the two contending parties: colonial and anticolonial.” (Betts, 2012).

it is stated by Gray (2000), textbooks transmit the ideologies of those that commissioned, wrote, or published them; therefore, they are not labeled as ‘neutral’. The above indicates that textbooks have the opportunity to present and highlight globally relevant topics that enable students to form their individual opinions on the subject matter. This idea is supported by Koutsoupaki (2022), who emphasizes that “as places of learning but also social environments, schools’ impact on learners’ attitudes, and, even, identities. It is undeniable, and this is to a large extent due to the influence of textbooks on students’ way of thinking.” (p.1). Additionally, based on different studies (Babaii, 2021; Hall, 1997; Koutsoupaki, 2022), textbooks became agents in the process of creating and developing students’ identities, where images, texts or the use of language becomes regulatory through shaping social practices. As Shallaita et al. (2021) state, “a biased representation of female and male in a textbook can lead to students’ sense of what is normal for women and men in society. It also helps them to not restrict their social, behavioral, and linguistic roles” (p. 420). Common findings from 17 studies compiled by Nuñez Pardo (2020) confirm that sexism continues to flourish in English textbooks, as they present stereotypical views of each gender and do not integrate the diversity of life experiences of students from multicultural backgrounds and rather present stereotypes, invisibilities and unrealities. Due to that, it is important to analyze how gender representation and stereotype themes are portrayed in these materials and its influence on students’ personal and social life. Oviedo Gomez (2024) further argues that traditional EFL textbooks tend to present conventional stereotypes related to gender, race, social class, and ability, thereby maintaining traditional identity markers and overlooking diverse perspectives.

The present study aims to contribute to the concepts of gender and gender identity in their roles in education, particularly in EFL materials. This, in order to expand this field of study and reach conclusions that support or refute this generality observed in EFL textbooks.

2.2 Literature Review

This literature review addresses various studies that have contributed to understanding gender visibility and representations in EFL textbooks and supplementary materials, shedding light on persistent challenges and the need for more inclusive pedagogical resources.

2.2.1 Gender visibility in EFL materials

Studies from different parts of the world (Shallaita et al, 2021; Castañeda-Peña, 2021; Selvi & Kocaman, 2021) have shown persistent gender bias and continuous stereotyping in EFL textbooks and study materials; these findings underscore the need to address gender bias and promote inclusion in educational materials. For instance, Shallaita et al (2021) conducted a study in Indonesia where they analyzed how ELT textbooks accommodate gender in their contents. The results of this study showed inequalities in terms of visibility, such as more favorable visibility for men than for women. Also, the authors mentioned that gender bias in textbooks can be presented in multiple ways such as through the use of language that belittles members of one sex or the other and fosters the use of the masculine pronouns over the feminine ones.

Researchers around the globe such as Castañeda-Peña (2021), Shallaita et al. (2021), and Selvi and Kocaman (2021) have found some bias when it comes to the mention of gender in learning materials. As it is the case of Selvi and Kocaman (2021), in their research they found a

notion of heteronormativity^{‡‡} as a running thread through the materials they revised. Likewise, LGBTQ+ characters were neither present in any of the handouts nor mentioned, suggesting a heterosexual prevalence as a norm. Nevertheless, some researchers have noted some changes in gender representation in EFL materials. For example, a study by Castañeda-Peña (2021) notes a shift away from strict heteronormative frameworks, with some textbooks moving beyond binary gender representations. However, it seems that the more globally textbooks are used, the less likely they are to change in the future (Pakuła et al., 2015). While some studies highlight progress in gender representation and visibility, others argue that stereotypes persist in English language teaching materials, as discussed below.

2.2.2 Gender stereotypes

Several studies (Porreca, 1984; De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2022) highlighted the prevalence of gender stereotypes in educational materials, including ESL and elementary education textbooks. The common findings of these studies go from highlighting the perpetuation of stereotypical gender roles in the materials to how efforts towards gender equality are hindered today.

Porreca (1984) conducted a study where she examined the problem of sexism in ESL materials, focusing on 15 of the most used ESL textbooks. In the study she came to the conclusion that women are far less visible when it comes to occupational roles. She also observed that even

^{‡‡} Heteronormativity is a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality” (Robinson, 2016, p. 1).

though females represented, at the time of the study, more than half the population of the United States, they are mentioned only half as frequently as men in texts and illustrations.

In addition, De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina (2022) also held a study in which the authors did a discourse analysis on eight textbooks from the Spanish Transition to democracy (1975-1982) and the second decade of the current century. However, the aim of this study was different, focused on knowing whether the efforts to promote equal opportunities in Spain were reflected in patterns of gender representation in elementary education textbooks.

Other authors, such as Castañeda-Peña (2021), Selvi and Kocaman (2021) and Shallaita et al. (2021), agree that there is typically a stereotyped way of representing the occupations of women and men in educational materials. These studies highlight that textbooks, ESL and EFL materials often continue to perpetuate traditional roles for men and women, portraying them in conventional and often limiting occupational roles (Castañeda-Peña, 2021). As a clear example, Shallaita et al. (2021) mentioned in their study how specific occupations and jobs are still referenced to a determined sex, indicating that men are supposedly superior in several fields, and women just did not have equal opportunities as them. Similarly, Selvi and Kocaman (2021) argue that these educational resources fail to reflect the diversity and complexity of modern occupational structures. They concluded that "the materials could, indeed, draw a more realistic picture of the true occupational composition of the society" (p. 128), suggesting a need for a significant overhaul in how gender roles are presented to provide a more accurate and inclusive depiction of the workforce.

3.Methodology

3.1 Type of research

Given the need to interpret complex interactions and meanings, this research adopts a qualitative approach, since, as stated by Nuñez and Téllez (2021), it seeks to explore cultural and social phenomena in different contexts, situations and circumstances. In line with the aims of qualitative research, this study seeks to provide a critical understanding of individual perceptions and perspectives on gender representation as presented in the selected activities within the book under analysis.

This qualitative study was conducted under the principles of Documentary Research method (hereafter DR), whose aim is to “read and give sense to written information that was originally composed with a different intention (other than to be interpreted), since documents bring to life the human phenomena that are being studied.” (Gómez, 2011 and Prior, 2003 as cited in Granados-Beltrán et al., 2021, p.57). The main goal of DR is to provide new insights and outcomes from document analysis that can create a contrast from the initial intention of them.

3.2 Sampling

To ensure a proper interpretation and analysis, we selected one reading task^{§§}, located in pages 80 and 81, from Unit 8 in the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook (2014 edition) authored by Sarah Cunningham. This textbook was selected based on its advanced level of proficiency, designed for students at CEFR level C1. Its high level of linguistic complexity provides an ideal context for analyzing whether addressing significant and socially relevant topics, such as gender

^{§§} By one reading task we refer to all the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities that compose pages 80 and 81 of the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook.

dynamics, involves more sophisticated discussions and critical analysis than those found at lower proficiency levels in the same series. Furthermore, this textbook includes discussion exercises, which we sought to examine to determine whether they demonstrate the level of analytical rigor expected of pre-service teachers, given the importance of gender dynamics in contemporary social structures. Finally, we consider that the advanced level of proficiency enables students to be involved in discussions and construct arguments of greater depth and calibre.

The chosen task includes pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading exercises designed to engage students with compound phrases in the context of a gender-focused reading. This structured approach aims to facilitate critical engagement with gender dynamics. Additionally, the selection of this reading task was made using purposeful sampling, which involves identifying and choosing information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015)—specifically, multimodal elements and themes that pertain to gender representation, such as linguistic and visual mode. This broader focus allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how gender dynamics are embedded in various forms of representation.

3.3 Data Analysis

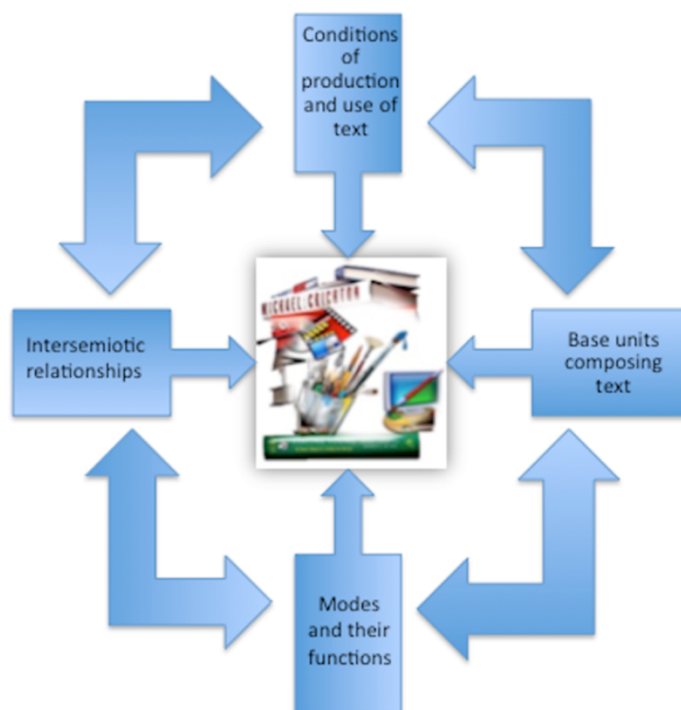
For data analysis, this study employs the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) technique, which deals with the design, production and distribution of multimodal resources in social contexts (van Leeuwen, 2008) as a means to carry out an analysis on how gender issues are addressed in one reading task of the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook. The importance of analyzing a multimodal text falls in the conception stated by Gunther Kress (2009) that explains how the normal state of human communication is multimodal, considering that texts do not exist with writing alone, they usually include images, colors and more components that materialize the real

message a text wants to convey. As we analyzed this specific reading task, we examined how this multimodal text presents gender perspectives and gender stereotypes. When analyzing different social phenomena, discourse in this case, it is possible to look for the invisible causes that determine them, associated with background regularities.

To undertake this analysis, we decided to adapt the “Four-Step Process to Conduct a Multimodal Analysis” developed by Álvarez-Valencia in 2016 (see Figure 1). The author provides a thorough and comprehensive explanation of how to conduct a multimodal analysis using these four steps, as himself stated: “The purpose is to illustrate the steps that I propose to examine multimodal texts as a way to raise awareness of the multimodal nature of texts and communication in general” (p. 102). These steps were chosen because of the ease to provide “understanding of the ways meaning is made by recognizing the structure of texts and the possible meanings that they construct.” (Alvarez-Valencia, 2016, p. 102). Furthermore, researchers such as Bermudez (2019) and Castro (2022) have previously used these steps in their research achieving results that demonstrate the rigor and effectiveness of this approach for detailed analysis of discourse starting from general conditions to specific elements. The four steps to understand the nature of a textbook as a multimodal element are based on, first, identifying the conditions of production and use of the text to be studied, then identifying the base units^{***} that make up that text, followed by identifying the modes of communication and ending with an analysis of the meanings of the text itself.

Figure 1

^{***} Bateman (2008, as cited in Álvarez-Valencia, 2016) defines a base unit as “everything which can be seen on each page of an analyzed document” (p. 110).

Steps in Multimodal Analysis

Note. This figure was taken from the article *Meaning Making and Communication in the Multimodal Age: Ideas for Language Teachers* by Álvarez-Valencia, 2016.

The following analysis is the result of a well-thought-out and carefully considered process whose intention is providing a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. However, the interpretations presented in the following study are supported by various authors who have previously discussed these topics. Additionally, it is important to clarify that in order to keep this study as clear as possible, only those base units that directly contribute to the objective of the study will be analyzed. Those that are not essential for the main purpose of this study will not be taken into consideration.

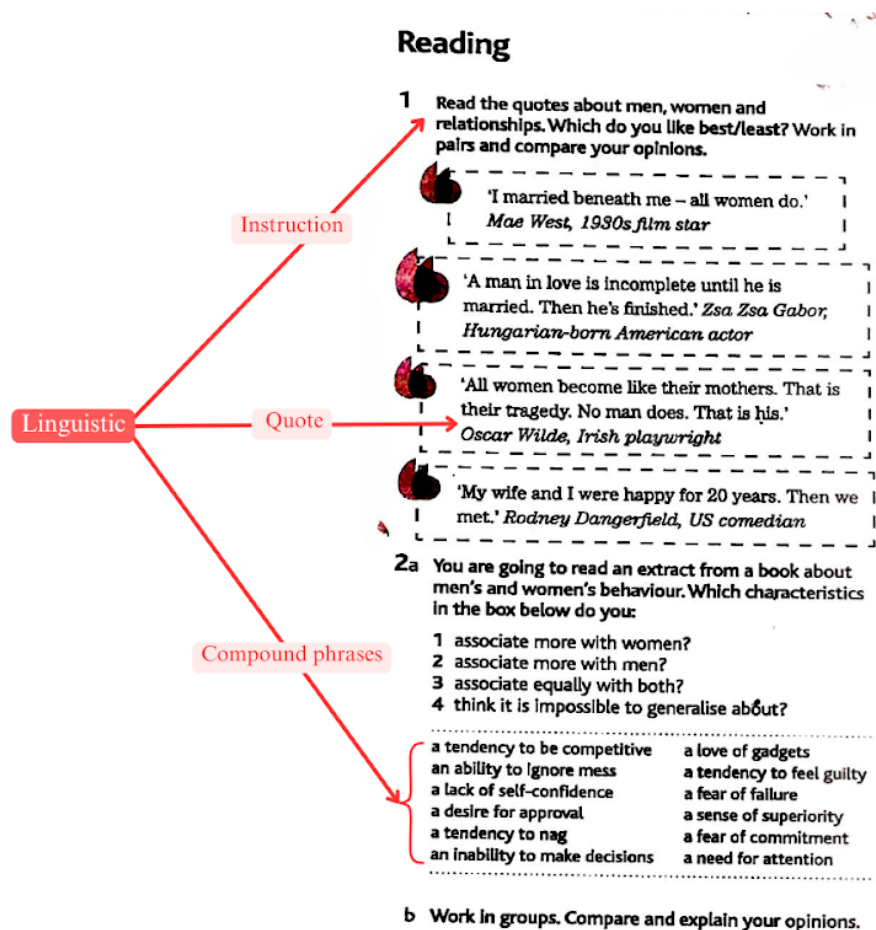
4.Results

4.1 Pre-Reading Strategies for a Gender-Focused Analysis

In accordance with Alvarez-Valencia's guidelines, it is crucial to, as a first step, establish the conditions of use of the pre-reading exercises. Regarding this, pre-reading activities can be defined as "enabling activities, which provide early readers with comprehensive and necessary background to organize activities and to comprehend materials to be read" (Silinskas et al., 2012; Kim & Quinn, 2013, as cited in Osei et al., 2016, p.36). With this in mind, the pre-reading activities proposed in this reading task lend a hand to probe the preconceptions that the reader might have regarding gender stereotypes and common reactions from men and women.

After defining the conditions of use, we proceed with the second step: the identification of the base units that compose the pre-reading activities. Figure 2 displays the base units that structure this pre-reading task, guiding the reader and supporting comprehension by illustrating how they work together to convey the exercise's message.

Figure 2

Base units in the pre-reading exercises

Note. Own elaboration diagram of the base units presented in the pre-reading exercises.

As can be seen in table 1, three fundamental base units that provide us with information about gender representation were identified in the pre-reading exercises. These units allow us to understand the structure and function of the activities. Exercise 1 presents quotes to help the reader reflect on stereotypes and gender dynamics, while promoting discussion regarding the topic that will be covered in the whole exercise. In the same path, exercise 2, divided into parts 2a and 2b,

introduces vocabulary from Unit 8, *Characteristics and Behavior*, where students explore compound phrases related to gendered characteristics and behaviors. Each exercise has a distinct focus: one promotes individual reflection, while the other encourages sharing opinions.

The third step consists of determining the modes of communication and their meaning-making functions. In this section, the predominant mode is the linguistic one, and it can be seen in three different moments (see Table 1). At the first moment, the instruction of exercise 1 is provided in order to tell the reader what should be done. As part of the same activity, four quotes are presented, and the aim is to reflect on gender stereotypes and dynamics by proposing an activity in pairs in which each reader has to give their opinion about them. Likewise, the function of the compound phrases present in exercise 2b is also to make the reader think about gender dynamics since it introduces certain characteristics that the reader has to associate with one gender or both. These characteristics will also be useful when reading the text.

Table 1

Base units and modes of communication in the pre-reading exercises

Base Unit	Mode	Function
Instruction	Linguistic	Tell what should be done in the activity
Quotes	Linguistic	Reflect on gender stereotypes and dynamics
Compound phrases	Linguistic	Reflect on gender stereotypes and dynamics

The fourth step is to establish an intersemiotic relationship between the modes of communication that were just described. For the purpose of this study, we will be following M. A. K. Halliday's metafunctions of language first presented in 1975: The ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function.

The first function is the ideational which represents the relationship between the speaker and the real world surrounding them, while determining the way they see the world (Halliday, 1975; as cited in Becker, n.d.). As it has been previously mentioned, pre-reading activities aim to spark interest and provoke thought, with the first exercise being the clear example. This exercise (see Figure 3) presents quotes that may be controversial and attract the receiver into reading the text and doing the subsequent activities. In this exercise, the instruction calls the readers to express ideas and opinions regarding men and women in relation to four famous quotes by renowned names. This activity has an impact on the reader's mindset because throughout history, "famous quotes have been a source of inspiration, motivation, and wisdom for centuries. They are often used to convey complex ideas in a simple yet powerful way." (FasterCapital, n. d.). These quotes denote some stereotypical and sexist ideas about men and women, especially regarding marriage and relationships. In fact, they can influence and modify the readers' opinions. Finally, it is important to note that three of the quotes were said by men and one by a woman; the quotes that share stereotypical ideas about women were said by men and the one that places women above men was said by a woman. At the same time, the former addresses issues that have historically been related to women's desires and fantasies from a sexist, male point of view, which relies on cryptic and dubious generalizations that reproduce unpleasant stereotypes and opinions regarding women and relationships. Bearing in mind that textbooks play a facilitating role in the construction


and development of students' identity, the gender representation or lack thereof they present must be taken into consideration (Babaii, 2021; Hall, 1997; Koutsoupaki, 2022). Therefore, the reproduction of sexist quotes and opinions is highly dangerous considering “all forms of sexism have negative effects on how women are perceived and treated by others as well as on women themselves” (Doyle & Barreto, 2023, p. 98).


Figure 3


Exercise 1 of the pre-reading section


Reading

1 Read the quotes about men, women and relationships. Which do you like best/least? Work in pairs and compare your opinions.

 'I married beneath me – all women do.'
Mae West, 1930s film star

 'A man in love is incomplete until he is married. Then he's finished.' *Zsa Zsa Gabor, Hungarian-born American actor*

 'All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That is his.'
Oscar Wilde, Irish playwright

 'My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.'
Rodney Dangerfield, US comedian

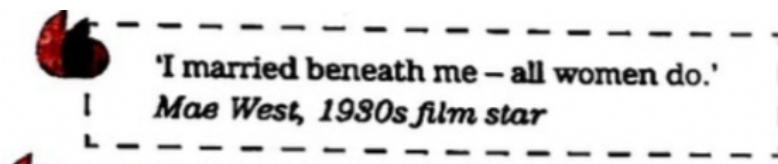
Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

In line with the aforementioned, the quotes presented in the pre-reading activity reflect on perspectives on relationships, marriage, and gender roles. For instance, Mae West's quote (see Figure 4) is a very direct take on traditional gender roles in relationships implying that women are

superior to men and the societal expectations of women in marriage. This follows the stereotype that women tend to “settle” or marry below their worth, challenging traditional power structures in relationships.

Figure 4

First quote from the exercise 1 of the pre-reading section

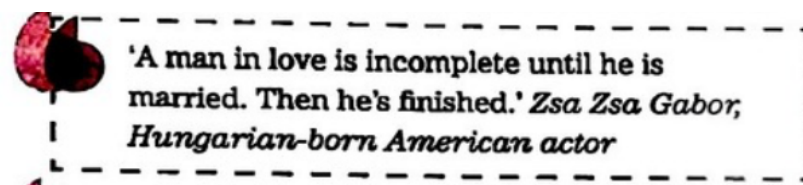


Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

Zsa Zsa Gabor’s quote (see Figure 5) critiques marriage, suggesting that being married (most likely to a woman) drains a man's individuality. The author most likely meant with this quote that the reader ought to reflect on a cynical view of marriage from the viewpoint of a man, where instead of fulfilling, it limits them. With this, the reader might be encouraged to reflect on marriage, by questioning whether it is this idealized version of love or if it sometimes smothers the people involved.

Figure 5

Second quote from the exercise 1 of the pre-reading section

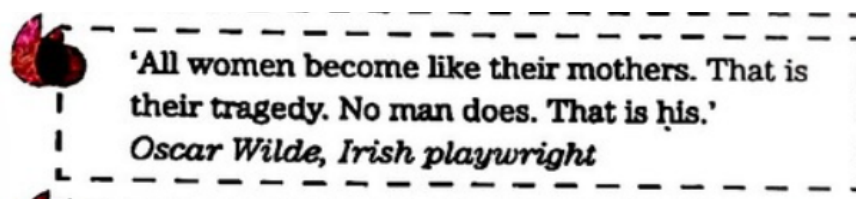


Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

The possible purpose of Oscar Wilde's quote (see Figure 6) can be for the reader to explore family dynamics and how women inherit personal traits from their parents, but especially from their mothers. It may also encourage a deep consideration of societal gender expectations, since in society, women are expected to fulfill a specific role and have this "maternal instinct".

Figure 6

Third quote from the exercise 1 of the pre-reading section

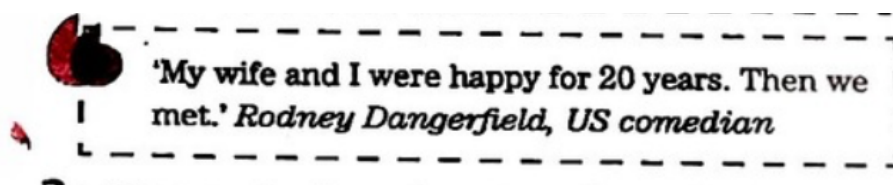


Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

Rodney Dangerfield's quote (see Figure 7) suggests with an ironic tone that marriage can be ideal as long as the two people don't know each other in depth. Again, the purpose can be reflecting on these ideals of love that society has preconceived. In this one, there is no gender bias that impacts one gender more than the other but is more of an analysis on both sides of a relationship.

Figure 7

Fourth quote from the exercise 1 of the pre-reading section



Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

At this point, after analyzing the relationship between the quotes with the speaker and the real world, we ask ourselves: What does the author intend the reader to do with the information presented in the quotes? Before answering this question, we ought to know about Halliday's interpersonal function. The interpersonal function works interactively and serves to express the different social roles including the roles that each person assumes in communication (Halliday, 1975, as cited in Becker, n.d.). By analyzing this, we can infer that the author possibly wants the reader to analyze the given quotes in this pre-reading section; and by placing them within easy reach, the reader can read them and develop their opinion about them. Moreover, the author likely wanted the reader to form an opinion from the quotes and consider gender characteristics that divide opinions and challenge stereotypes. With these exercises, the reader can be prepared for the topics that the main reading will cover and the upcoming activities.

Following Halliday's ideas, the textual function allows establishing cohesive relationships between the parts of a text and their adaptation to the situation in which it occurs. In this exercise, the textual metafunction is cohesive with what the exercise is asking since it aligns correctly with the goal of the exercise, which is promoting discussion and comparing viewpoints through the given quotes.

In exercise 2a, the reader is asked, before reading the text, to associate certain sentences with men and women's "usual" behaviors. Since they have not yet read the text, they have to rely on their previous knowledge and real-world experiences. The author seeks to have the reader use these preconceptions he has about the world to answer the questions (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Exercise 2a and 2b from the pre-reading section

2a You are going to read an extract from a book about men's and women's behaviour. Which characteristics in the box below do you:

- 1 associate more with women?**
- 2 associate more with men?**
- 3 associate equally with both?**
- 4 think it is impossible to generalise about?**

Linguistic	}	a tendency to be competitive	a love of gadgets
		an ability to ignore mess	a tendency to feel guilty
		a lack of self-confidence	a fear of failure
		a desire for approval	a sense of superiority
		a tendency to nag	a fear of commitment
		an inability to make decisions	a need for attention

b Work in groups. Compare and explain your opinions.

Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

From this exercise on, the linguistic part of the unit, which deals precisely with characteristics and behaviors, allows the reader to easily access new vocabulary that will be useful to talk about preconceptions regarding gender stereotypes and provide the reader the opportunity to reflect on their opinions about how men and women should act. These linguistic aspects are intertwined with the 'Patterns to notice' in page 81 of the book (see Figure 9) that include the

grammatical structure of compound phrases. This helps the reader to keep the engagement with gender stereotypes and reflect on how men and women are portrayed in society while using grammatical structures according to their English level.

Figure 9

Patterns to notice

Live and let live | 08

PATTERNS TO NOTICE

Compound phrases: a lack of ..., a tendency to ..., etc.

1 Complex characteristics and feelings are often described by compound phrases. Find some more examples of patterns a and b in exercise 2a.

a noun + preposition + noun
*a fear of failure a lack of self-confidence
a need for attention a desire for approval*

b noun + infinitive
*a tendency to be competitive
an ability to ignore mess*

2 Notice that the first noun is often qualified by an adjective.
*a total lack of confidence
a strange ability to ignore mess
an enormous sense of superiority*

Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

4.2 Gendered Narratives in While-Reading Exercises

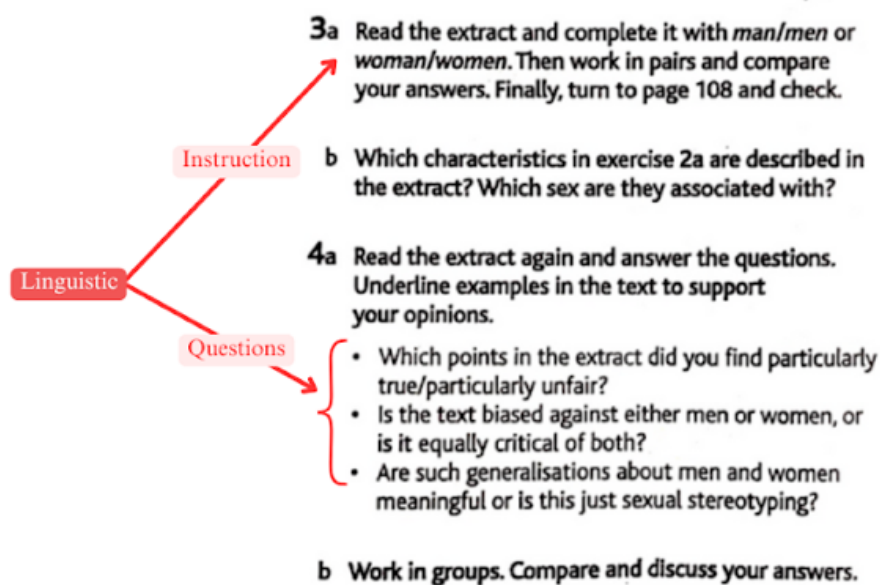
As with the previous section, it is crucial to first establish the conditions for using the while-reading exercises. Alyousef (2006) mentioned that “the aim of the while-reading process is to improve students' ability to address texts by developing their linguistic and schematic knowledge” (p. 69). In the pages that are being analyzed, exercises from 3a to 4b correspond to the while-

reading activities. The aim of the while-reading exercises in this task is to analyze and interpret content related to gender stereotypes, encouraging a deeper analysis of the text and requiring participants to support their opinions with evidence.

Once the conditions of use are defined, the next step involves identifying the base units that constitute the while-reading activities. These activities are supposed to be designed to guide the reader through the understanding of the text and get them focused on specific elements of it rather than just scanning it. Each activity works individually to deepen the understanding of the text and together to develop a full connection of the language and the themes. Figure 10 displays the base units that structure the while-reading task.

Figure 10

Base units in the while-reading exercises



Note. Own elaboration diagram of the base units presented in the while-reading exercises.

The following step is the modes of communication and their functions. The predominant mode for these base units is the linguistic mode of communication (see Table 2). In all of the exercises belonging to the while-reading section, the instructions serve as a means to let the reader know what they ought to do in every correspondent activity. This allows a smooth flow for the person doing the activities to go from one exercise to the next. Exercise 4a provides questions to allow a reflective moment regarding gender dynamics and biases that exist regarding gender.

Table 2

Base units and modes of communication in the while-reading exercises

Base Unit	Mode	Function
Instruction	Linguistic	Give directions on what should be done
Questions	Linguistic	Reflect on gender dynamics

The final step is identifying the intersemiotic relationships present in the while-reading exercises. The two predominant types are ideational and textual: the ideational meaning because the reader is provided with guidance on how to complete the activities, and the textual meaning since the information is organized clearly and concisely, reinforcing that language is the primary tool for conveying meaning in this context.

In order to get a better understanding of the while-reading exercises, a more detailed analysis about the main text will be conducted in the following section following the same Four-Step Process proposed by Álvarez-Valencia (2016). Regarding the first step, the identification of the conditions of use, the text “*A bluffer’s guide to men and women*” is the premise of this part of

the analysis. This is a reading extract in which different sections that talk about the behavior of men and women are presented.

Figure 11 displays the second step, the base units present in the text. The elements that form the base units in this text work together to create a structured, engaging, and visually accessible format for discussing stereotypes in a satirical way.

Figure 11

Base units on the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



Note. Own elaboration diagram of the base units presented on *A bluffer's guide to men and women* reading.

After analyzing this section of the page, the following question came to mind: What things catch your attention before starting to read a text? The answer, in the majority of the cases, is the title, or the images. In this case, due to the fondness, size and boldface of the letter, the title easily catches the readers' attention. "*A bluffer's guide to men and women*" being the chosen title for this extract suggests that the guide is a satire intended for giving tips to people who think they know and understand the complexities of men and women when, in reality, they do not.

The third step, identifying the modes of communication, as visible in Table 3, shows that the title being in boldface represents the linguistic mode since it catches the attention while helping to give the reader a clear understanding of what the text will talk about. It also serves as a visual mode since it helps the reader to place themselves in the structure of the text due to the size and location of it. Likewise, the highlighted subtitles (Approval, Conversation, A good cry, etc.) also help the easy navigation and location in the text. The fact that each subtitle is highlighted in black while the words are in white, creates a contrast that is appealing to the eye and helps to visually remember the key words chosen as subheadings.

Table 3

Base units and modes of communication in the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text

Base Unit	Mode	Function
Boldface (Title: A bluffer's guide...)	Linguistic/Visual	Navigation and access structure/ Emphasis on the main purpose of the text

Highlighted subtitles	Linguistic/Visual	Navigation and access structure/ Showcase of the sections that talk about gendered behaviours
Images	Visual	Aesthetic visual cohesion/ Emphasize three of the paragraphs' ideas presented in the reading
Blank spaces	Spatial	Provide opportunities for active learning

The fourth step is the establishment of intersemiotic relationships, where the textual metafunction at the level of the written text achieves coherence through the correct use of lexical organization and reference, effectively creating cohesion throughout the text.

Moving to each of the exercises in the while-reading section, we start with exercise 3a, where students are instructed to carefully read and interact with the text, filling in blank spaces with the words "woman/women" or "man/men" whilst reading. Each paragraph of the text presents characteristics that can be associated with either men or women. The aim of this task is to encourage students to engage with the text more thoroughly and to think critically about gender roles as they complete the exercise. In addition, exercise 3b encourages the student to go back to activity 2a to reflect on characteristics and attitudes associated with men and women and how they are described in the reading.

For the purpose of this analysis, the answers to exercise 3a, which complete the text, will be based on the answer sheet given on page 108 of the same book (see Figure 12) to prevent the

analysis from being biased by our own opinions or those of the reader. We will go over in detail and examine the sections of the reading.

Figure 12

Answer sheet of the exercise 3a from the while-reading section

Unit 8: Reading		
Exercise 3a, page 80		
1 Women	11 women	21 women
2 men	12 women	22 men
3 men	13 men	23 Women
4 woman	14 woman	24 Men
5 man	15 Men	25 men
6 man	16 men	26 Women
7 women	17 women	27 men
8 man	18 men	28 men
9 woman	19 women	
10 men	20 Men	

Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 108.

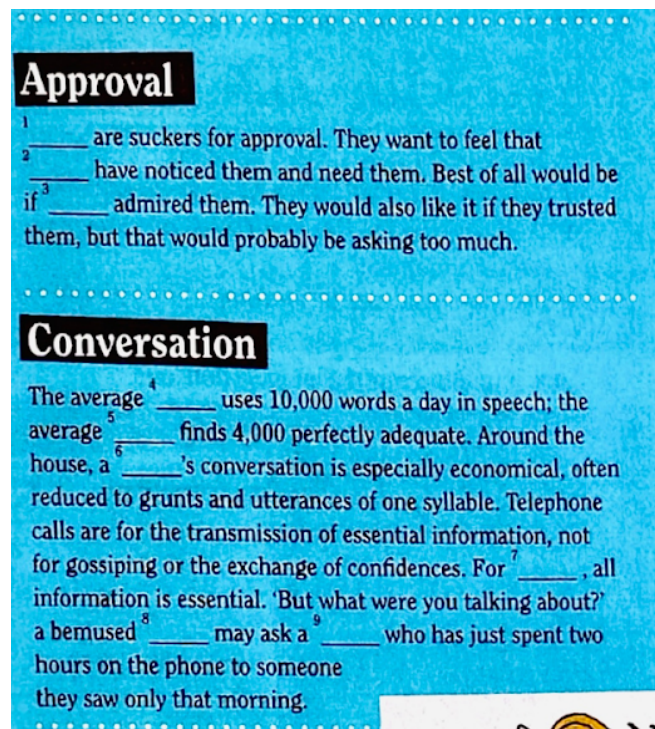
After reading all of the subheadings, all 9 subtitles remind us of ‘typical’ behaviors related to the female gender, which is clear evidence of those preconceptions that exist about attitudes that are characteristic of women.

The first two sections in the text are ‘Approval’ and ‘Conversation’ (see Figure 13). The “Approval” paragraph shows that the author uses rather informal and rude language, which makes the reader base conclusions from assumptions that are somewhat aggressive. Additionally, at first sight it makes us think that the paragraph is criticizing women, this idea is supported by the

“correct” answers proposed by the author, which reinforces the sexist and biased ideas that have been portrayed in the pre-reading exercises and that seconds the fact that “the majority of barriers for women’s advancement that were identified were consequences of gender stereotypes” (Hentschel et al., 2019, p. 2).

Figure 13

First two paragraphs from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

The paragraph “Conversation” at a first glance can lead to controversial opinions. It mentions that women are more talkative than men and says that male talk around the house is more

related to economics and is monosyllabic. This implies that female talk is not as important as economics seems to be even if they double the amount of words men use.

When the paragraph mentions that “Telephone calls are for the transmission of essential information, not for gossiping or the exchange of confidences”, it directly implies that the ones that tend to be gossipy are women and that telephonic conversations between them do not include any sort of important information but rather shallow talk. And this stereotype has been on since time immemorial, as mentioned by Coates (1986; as cited in James & Drakich, n.d.) “the idea that women discuss topics which are essentially trivial has probably contributed to the myth of women’s verbosity, since talk on trivial topics can more easily be labeled ‘too much’”. Also, the text is not keeping in mind several factors like who the woman is talking to, in what kind of setting the conversation occurs, the tone of the conversation and what they are talking about. This leads to the continuation of stereotyping without context.

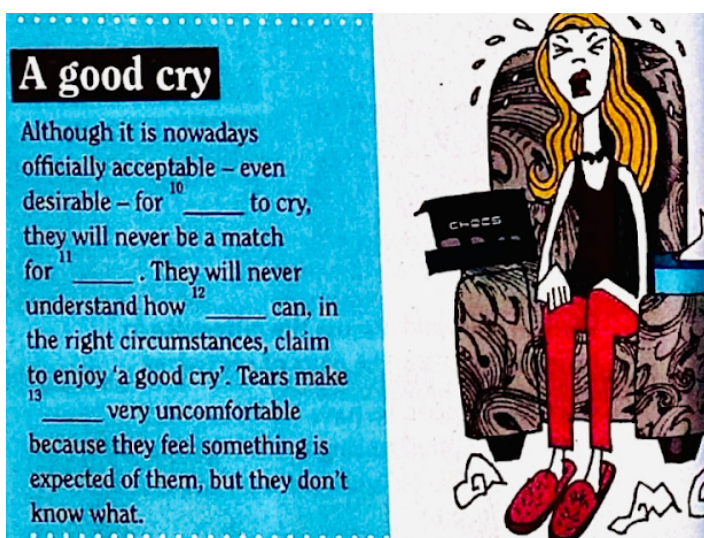
Images (visual mode) in this text fulfill a very important role, since they directly support what is being said in certain sections. They are placed strategically to represent some specific paragraphs and clear up even more what the text is trying to convey, while complementing the satiric tone of the reading.

As an example, in the section called ‘A good cry’ (as illustrated in Figure 14), the text presents an important multimodal element that at first glance provides the reader an evident message about how women are always portrayed as the ones that get emotional and how “men’s social support networks are limited because seeking support or discussing emotions goes against male role expectations emphasizing strength and emotional restraint” (McKenzie et al., 2018, p. 1248). The image of a woman desperately crying sitting on an armchair, the subheading called “A

good cry”, and the paragraph itself are considered "codes that a society has configured by a previous human convention" (Yanes, 2012, p. 138), which together become a cultural product because, as Yanes (2012) points out, they "handle systems of meaning specific to the social group they are aimed at—systems that succeed in imparting significant weight to what the author intends to convey." (p. 138). Caricatures are usually used as a form of mockery or sarcasm towards reality (Acevedo, 2003), giving more emphasis, exaggeration, and relevance to the idea being addressed. In this case, it is the commonly accepted thought that states how for women, crying and being seen vulnerable is normal, which is an idea that usually encloses the entire female population and gives rise to biased interpretations that give the notion that women are more sensitive, explosive and let their emotions dominate them in many aspects of life. Likewise, this cultural product, by reproducing the discursive line that women express their sensitivity more, gives way to the historically established stereotype that men must be restrained when expressing and letting themselves be carried away by their emotions or they are considered weak, since they are asked to adopt an alpha male position that does not allow themselves to be dominated by how they feel.

Figure 14

Third paragraph and image from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



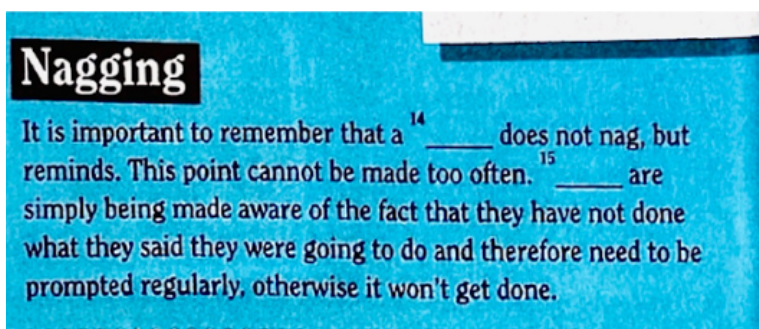
Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

The following section is called “Nagging” (see Figure 15). According to Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), to nag is “to criticize or complain often in an annoying way, especially in order to try and make someone do something”. In everyday talk, the term “nag” is mostly associated with women, especially in traditional gender roles where women are expected to take on domestic responsibilities. This stereotype implies that women do this to remind others, especially men, to fulfil their responsibilities. The text suggests specific roles of those responsible for giving the reminders (women) and those who are expected to act (men), reinforcing the stereotype of a passive-aggressive dynamic. This dynamic, that can be seen as satirical, could perpetuate the idea that men need to be reminded and women are responsible for overseeing household chores or relationships in society; even though “men are characterized as more *agentic* than women, taking

charge and being in control, and women are characterized as more *communal* than men, being attuned to others and building relationships” (Hentschel et al., n.d.)

Figure 15

Fourth paragraph from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

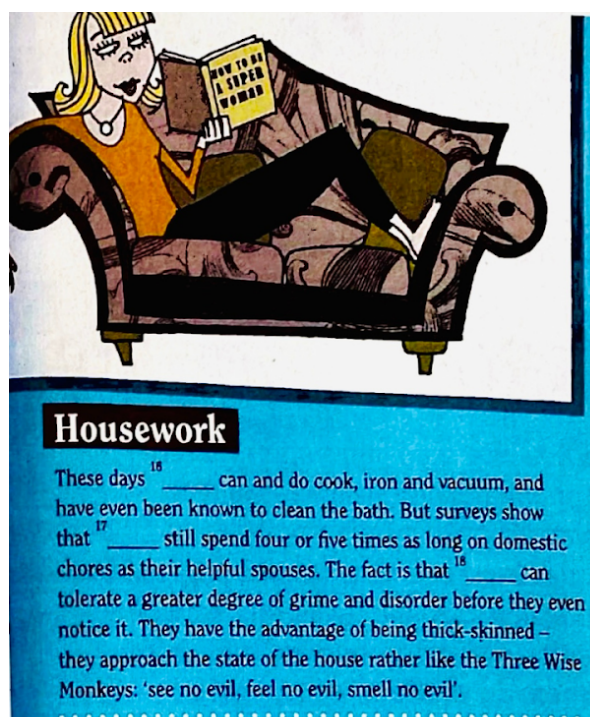
In the section called “Housework” (see Figure 16), it is exposed how women are the ones that take the lead regarding domestic chores. This is not only motivated by how men are able to apply the three wise monkeys theory: see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, which means they are able to ignore everything around them without feeling uncomfortable of living in grime and disorder, but also because it is well known that throughout history, caregiving and housework have been assigned to women, and many grew up with an education that imposed on them to continue being in charge of this.

Finally, this assumption that women continue to be the ones who worry the most about taking care of house maintenance reproduces the discourse that men do not have the same concern

for care (neither of themselves nor of what surrounds them). As Colfer et al. (2015) stated in their study, there are still difficulties for women to become active in governance and greater leadership activities because it signifies men will need to take on a greater share of responsibilities within the household, responsibilities they are not keen on procuring because his workload, added to the idea that women are the ones already burdened with domestic and agricultural duties, does not force them to leave their comfort status. This example continues to promote stereotypical ideas that, if included in a textbook for students, can reinforce gender gaps that are intended to be eliminated. It is important to note that the image of a woman sitting on a sofa that can be seen at the top of this section does not correspond to the section itself, but to the "Guilt" section.

Figure 16

Sixth paragraph from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text

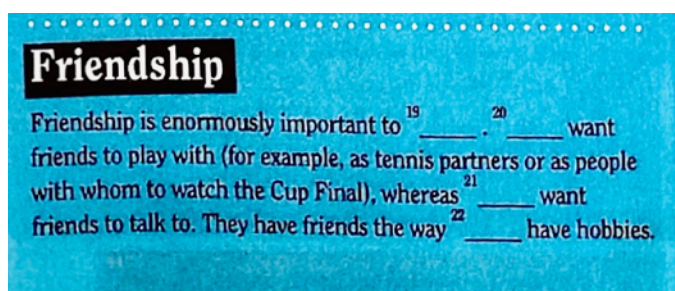


Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

The idea of friendship has a different significance for men and women (see Figure 17). While men are only focused on having friends to enjoy activities and sports, but not in creating deep and trusting ties beyond the areas aforementioned; women tend to create relevant and strong bonds, which allow for long-lasting, deep and mutually supportive relationships. Various studies have shown that women and men (specially through their adolescence stage) place a different value on friendship, which can therefore pose disadvantages for adolescents' socioemotional development. Supporting this idea, Rudolph and Dodson (2022) revealed that junior high school boys place more value on recreational support, while girls place more value on psychological support at the time of looking for friendships. This, as conveyed by the text, leads us to infer that men find it difficult to establish deep relationships, even if they are just friendly. Additionally, it makes us think that these types of relationships do not develop among themselves because men are not interested in generating trusty relationships with the intention to share, talk or generate something beyond interacting during their leisure activities.

Figure 17

Fifth paragraph from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

The paragraph “Guilt” (see

Figure 19) allows us to make an important reflection seeing how stereotypes, social networks, advertisements and society in general promote insecurities in every aspect in which women participate, and how nothing they do or achieve is enough to feel satisfied in any area they work on. First of all, analyzing the image (visual mode) (see Figure 18) that goes along with the reading, we see a woman sitting on a sofa, reading a book titled “How to be a superwoman”, this title immediately catches the reader's attention. From this, the reader can imply that women need to achieve and fulfill specific manners, attitudes and behaviors to be considered a “super woman”. This assumption, connected with what the author is saying in the whole text (linguistic mode), gives us a notion on how difficult it is for women to comply with what society expects from them. In general, just being a woman signifies having to excel in areas such as motherhood, work, home care, personal appearance and relationships. As an example, Sáenz-Herrero et al. (2020) stated

how “Women are acculturated to build their self-image using the eyes of others as the primary view of the physical selves” (p. 1), exploring the idea that women grow up in order to meet the femininity standards imposed on us by society that “contains traits and behaviors related to caregiving, love, and a stereotypical thin body ideal as core factors, all of which constitute a part of the feminine gender role.” (Sáenz-Herrero et al., 2020, p. 2). These standards tend to be unattainable, hegemonic and exclusive, and they cannot be met even if following diets, doing exercises, buying products or reading the books that are required from us. Being so out of reach causes an eternal feeling of imperfection, guilt and frustration regarding gender-stereotyped ideals that increases the possibilities of mental health problems, self-objectification and risk of eating disorders (Sáenz-Herrero et al., 2020), which tend to perpetuate themselves and sacrifice women's quality of life and peace of mind.

Figure 18

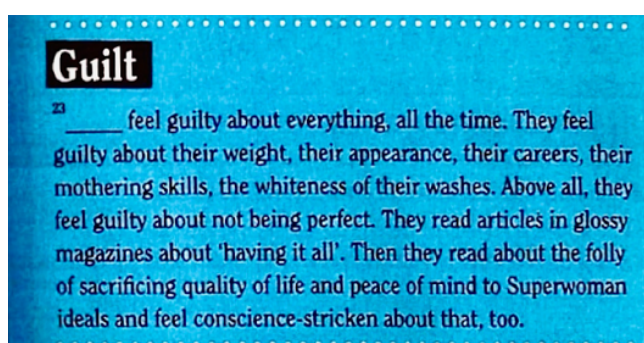
Visual element from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

Figure 19

Seventh paragraph from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



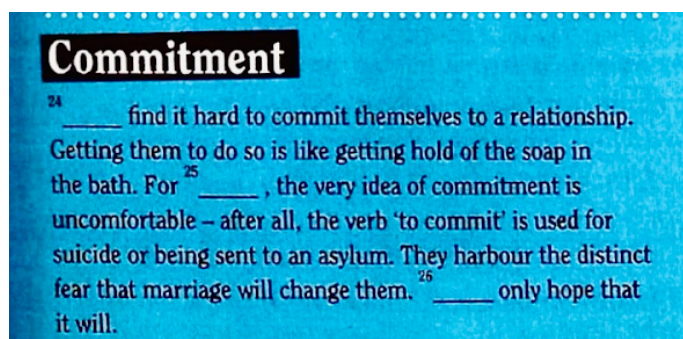
Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

Men are frequently portrayed as afraid of commitment and marriage, as illustrated in Figure 20, in the "Commitment" section of the reading. In contrast, women are depicted in society as dreaming of and desiring these commitments. This perspective is rooted in a long history of misogyny, reflecting societal views on marriage as a tradition where "women need men much more than men need women" (Ehrenreich, 2011, p.1). This idea and section reinforce the idea that men are not capable of creating a long-term commitment, and women dream about being married. The passage suggests that the fear of marriage arises from men's concern that marriage will change them. This implies that men fear losing their independence once they commit, which is a stereotype rooted in the idea that men in marriage lose their freedom. In contrast to the stereotype that women

desire marriage to change their male partners, which reinforces the idea that marriage is something that women demand, and men resist.

Figure 20

Eighth paragraph from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



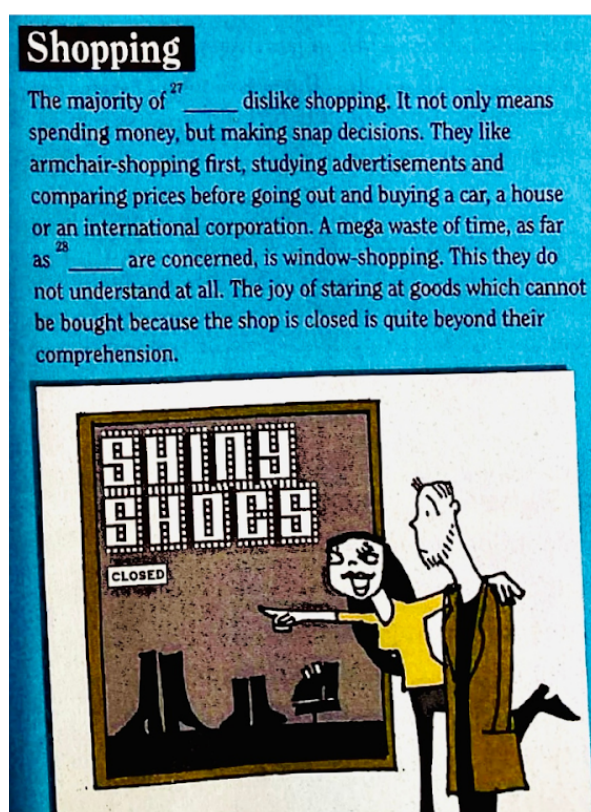
Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

This part of the reading is titled “Shopping”, as illustrated in Figure 21. The text implies that men dislike shopping, supporting the stereotypical view that men are more decision-focused, and view shopping as a chore, unlike women. The phrase "It not only means spending money, but making snap decisions" further reinforces the fact that men take their time to make careful and rational decisions, differently from women who are culturally attributed to be more spontaneous when referring to shopping. When the reading refers to "armchair-shopping" and men comparing prices before buying a product, it hints that they have a methodical approach when purchasing items like cars or houses, and these purchases are seen as rational investments. Whereas the stereotypical view of women is being emotional and impulsive shoppers, especially when referring to trivial purchases, such as shoes (as shown in the image). In general, the image depicts that

“waste of time” that men think shopping is. As can be seen, the girl is excited about the shoe store even though it is closed, while the guy appears to be bored and as mentioned in the text, cannot comprehend why she is excited if she cannot purchase them at the moment.

Figure 21

Ninth paragraph from the 'A bluffer's guide to men and women' text



Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

Moving forward to the last while-reading exercises, exercise 4a (Figure 22) aims for the student to do the reading again and answer three questions while underlining examples that serve as support for their answers. The first question asks about the parts of the extract that the student

finds true or unfair. The second one queries if the text presents any particular bias towards men or women, or if it is equally critical to both. The third one inquires whether the text's generalizations are meaningful or are reduced to mere sexual stereotyping. This exercise, hand-in-hand with task 4b, introduces a thoughtful analysis, enabling students to develop critical thinking by forming opinions, sharing them with others, and considering different perspectives, ultimately fostering a more structured and well-rounded opinion.

Figure 22

Exercise 4a and 4b from the while-reading section

- 4a Read the extract again and answer the questions. Underline examples in the text to support your opinions.**
- Which points in the extract did you find particularly true/particularly unfair?
 - Is the text biased against either men or women, or is it equally critical of both?
 - Are such generalisations about men and women meaningful or is this just sexual stereotyping?
- b Work in groups. Compare and discuss your answers.**

Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 80.

4.3 Implications of Gender Representations in Post-Reading Exercises

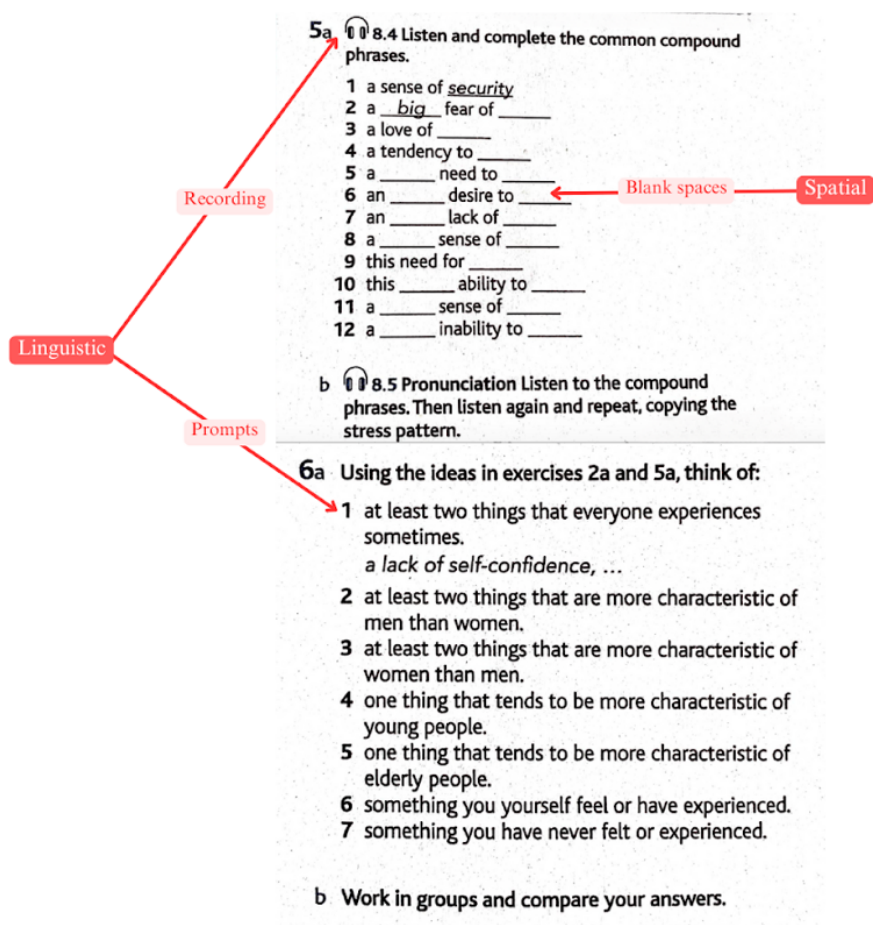
To conclude this analysis, the conditions for using the post-reading activities are presented. For this first step, the reader combines their background knowledge, the new information obtained from the text, and as a result, they can make real life connections with that (Tanjung et al., 2022).

Regarding the analyzed text, the post-reading section is divided into four activities (5a to 6b; see Figure 23). These activities fulfill the role of reinforcing the learning and consolidating a better understanding of the text. They also aim to improve language skills and encourage the use of their knowledge in everyday situations.

Building on this, the second step involves the base units that compose the post-reading exercises. They work as closure activities and aim to leave the reader with a reflective mindset while allowing to put into practice the grammatical structures previously presented.

Figure 23

Base units in the post-reading exercises



Note. Own elaboration diagram of the base units presented in the post-reading exercises

Regarding the third step, and as portrayed in Table 4, the two main modes of communication present in this section are the linguistic and the spatial. In exercise 5a, the linguistic mode is presented in an auditory format, differing from the previous sections. This auditory presentation allows students to engage with the material through a different channel, adding variety to their processing approach. In the same exercise, the blank spaces serve as a spatial mode of communication, providing opportunities for active learning. Combined with having to listen to a recording, students take part in an interactive exercise, reinforcing their comprehension and recall of the material.

Table 4

Base units and modes of communication in the post-reading exercises

Base Unit	Mode	Function
Recording	Linguistic	Provide the linguistic patterns to talk about characteristics and feelings
Blank spaces	Spatial	Provide opportunities for active learning
Prompts	Linguistic	Encourage discussions


The concluding step in this section is the establishment of intersemiotic relationships. First, the recording in exercise 5a offers a way to construct and share experiences through language. This, together with the representation of processes via the prompts, represent the ideational

meaning by creating a framework for participants to engage in verbal interactions and share their perspectives. The linguistic elements that create the interpersonal meaning encourage participation, and create a sense of community, while the spatial elements invite the reader to engage with the material and express themselves. Lastly, all of the elements provide structure, coherence, and good progression, which is identified as the textual meaning.


Moving along to each of the activities, exercises 5a and 5b (see Figure 24), are based on listening to an audio (see transcript in Figure 25) that presents a series of statements about people's personality traits and tendencies where the student must fill the gaps according to what is heard. The main purpose of this exercise is to practice compound phrases, which are one of the grammatical aims of the unit, alongside the implementation of the gender-related vocabulary. Furthermore, these statements can also be analyzed through a gender lens to identify potential gender stereotypes or biases.

Figure 24

Exercise 5a and 5b from the post-reading section

5a  **8.4 Listen and complete the common compound phrases.**

- 1 a sense of security
- 2 a big fear of _____
- 3 a love of _____
- 4 a tendency to _____
- 5 a _____ need to _____
- 6 an _____ desire to _____
- 7 an _____ lack of _____
- 8 a _____ sense of _____
- 9 this need for _____
- 10 this _____ ability to _____
- 11 a _____ sense of _____
- 12 a _____ inability to _____

b  **8.5 Pronunciation Listen to the compound phrases. Then listen again and repeat, copying the stress pattern.**

Note: This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

Figure 25

Audio transcript from the exercise 5a and 5b in the post-reading section

UNIT 8 RECORDING 4

- 1 Annie loves her new job. I think it's given her a sense of security at last.
- 2 He's got this big fear of rejection. I think that's why he won't apply for promotion.
- 3 You know Hannah – she's always had a love of adventure.
- 4 Don't take any notice of me. You know I've got a tendency to worry about the slightest thing.
- 5 I get so fed up of Al! Why does he feel a constant need to show off?
- 6 I think my mother always felt an enormous desire to please other people.
- 7 For someone so talented, Ben's got an amazing lack of ambition!
- 8 One thing you can say about Martin – he's got a great sense of fun!
- 9 Sorry if I keep asking you the same thing again and again – I've just got this need for reassurance.
- 10 You can't keep secrets from Alex – she's got this strange ability to read your mind.
- 11 I'm so glad I've done all that filing. It's given me a weird sense of achievement.
- 12 It's no good talking to Andy – he's got a complete inability to see other people's point of view.

Note: This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 173.

In the audio, while the text presents a variety of personality traits, some of the statements can be interpreted as reinforcing gender stereotypes. For instance, the phrase "He's got this big fear of rejection", might perpetuate the stereotype that men are more afraid of rejection than women. While both genders can experience fear of rejection, this statement specifically attributes it to a male character. Similarly, the statement "I think my mother always felt an enormous desire to please other people" might perpetuate the common stereotype that women are more nurturing than men. Even though this stereotype has been challenged over the years, it's still present in some cultures. Nevertheless, apart from these two statements, the others mentioned in the audio are

shown to be far from the ideas about gender conveyed in the text, in addition to the fact that the compound phrases are not mentioned throughout the text.

Moving to exercise 6a (Figure 26), the instruction states that using the ideas in exercises 2a and 5a, the reader should think about seven given sentences (e.g. Think of at least two things that everyone experiences sometimes) and the answers should be taken from the phrases in exercise 2a (e.g. A tendency to be competitive) or the compound phrases in exercise 5a (e.g. A sense of security). These activities seem to help reinforce the language skills acquired during the reading of the text and the while-reading tasks. Also, they keep on with the critical thinking process that began in the while-reading activities by encouraging the reader to engage with the text portrayal of gender dynamics.

Figure 26

Exercise 6a and 6b from the post-reading section

- 6a Using the ideas in exercises 2a and 5a, think of:**
- 1** at least two things that everyone experiences sometimes.
a lack of self-confidence, ...
 - 2** at least two things that are more characteristic of men than women.
 - 3** at least two things that are more characteristic of women than men.
 - 4** one thing that tends to be more characteristic of young people.
 - 5** one thing that tends to be more characteristic of elderly people.
 - 6** something you yourself feel or have experienced.
 - 7** something you have never felt or experienced.
- b Work in groups and compare your answers.**

Note. This figure was taken from the Cutting Edge Advanced textbook by Sarah Cunningham, 2014, p. 81.

One might expect that post-reading activities would lead to a more critical discussion about what has been read. However, the post-reading activities present in this task offer only a basic level of critical analysis. They do not encourage the reader to generate meaningful discussions about how the text in the exercise could influence students' opinions regarding gender stereotypes or how it might also contribute to widening gender gaps among them while using the book. Nonetheless, it is evident that vocabulary or expressions are perpetuated and continue to be connected to gender stereotypes.

5. Discussion

In order to answer the research question proposed in this investigation which is: To what extent does a reading task in a multimodal text address gender stereotype, portray the female role, and influence the readers' perspectives on gender? This section will illustrate how the central topic of this analysis, gender representations and gender stereotypes, is portrayed in this document and its relationship with previous literature and studies. As well, we will address the implication this research has for future English educators, understanding the importance of bringing these issues to the classroom.

5.1 Presence of Gender Stereotypes in EFL English Textbooks

With regard to the research question mentioned above, the findings suggest a significant presence of stereotyped elements through the whole task. This is evident in various aspects, including the quotes present in the pre-reading exercises, the interactive exercise querying to complete the blank spaces in the while-reading, the text itself and each of its categories, and the prompts and statements asking to associate men and women to specific characteristics and behaviors. In these activities, the majority of ideas portrayed by the author are focused on presenting women and their relationships with men under a traditional and stereotypical societal view (men are dominant and assertive, women are passive and in nurturing), as Bem (1974; as cited in De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2022) mentioned, “the few attributes assigned to women tend to be from those items considered to be feminine”, demonstrating that in EFL materials there’s an inequality of representation and intentions. This has shown compatibility with what Shallaita et al. (2021) found in their study, where they mentioned that the representations of gender in textbooks usually generate gender bias in favor of men, and the presence of women is minimal and marked by a sexist tone. Additionally, the inequality regarding how the representations of men and women are portrayed is supported by UNESCO (2014), which mentioned that “the most extreme cases of inequality in secondary education continue to afflict girls” (p. 77), being women the most affected individuals by the reproduction of gender stereotypes in textbooks. This highlights the idea that the way in which images of women and men are represented in textbooks will “subsequently influence adolescents’ attitudes and behaviors in multidimensional aspects” (Guo, 2022, p.1), generating acceptance and naturality of gender roles among adolescents. Although gender stereotypes primarily impact women, men are also affected by these portrayals, as they are pressured to perform certain behaviors and dynamics defined by

socially imposed standards of masculinity. As Koutsoupaki (2022) concluded in her study, even if men are more represented in textbooks, gender stereotypes negatively impact males and females because of an insufficient representation to feel acknowledged. Besides, these stereotypes create expectations for men affecting their self-perception and limiting their emotional expression and personal development.

5.2 Implications for Future English Educators

This study was motivated by the scarce inclusion of gender discussions in the planning processes of the English classes of the *Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés* teaching program. In order to keep up with today's world, this document shows the essentiality of recognizing the importance of including gender topics in the educational materials incorporated into the curriculum, considering that these issues are becoming increasingly more relevant in our society, especially among young people. The results of this analysis demonstrate that the gender-related content in this reading task is highly relevant to students, underscoring the critical role that education plays in addressing topics found across all social structures. As Sharma (2017) agreed on, “education is a major force that will help trigger change, but this will occur only when teachers and learners assists [*sic*] in adopting classroom initiatives that effect new images based on a positive gender equity ideology” (p. 39). This finding reinforces the importance of educational materials in engaging students with societal issues and providing a foundation for critical understanding and discussion of the gender subject, as De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina (2022) also suggest in their study, textbooks should ideally "be showing a broad range and diversity of sexual roles and positive models both in the public and domestic domain...they must advocate for the equality of conditions and possibilities between both genders" (p. 11). This needs

to portray more gender representation topics in textbooks also prompts a review of how they address such themes, given their significant influence on students. In the task analyzed from the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook, gender stereotypes continue to be presented and reinforced, potentially shaping students' perceptions on how men and women behave, interact, and expand gender gap. Similarly, in their study, De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina also highlighted this issue:

Given the increase in gender awareness prompted by the feminist movement during the Spanish democracy, we would have expected greater progress to have been made in the current textbooks in terms of a more equitable presentation of male and female characters. (2020; as cited in Guichot-Reina & De la Torre-Sierra, n.d.)

This demonstrates that the field of education continues to lag in terms of inclusion and equity in curriculum planning. Additionally, this study highlighted how the exercises presented still do not provide depth dialogue, offering only shallow attempts at discussion. The interactions encouraged for students continue to fall short in fostering critical analysis. The curriculum should begin to incorporate changes and configurations that enable educators to address these topics in the classroom with a focus on analysis and openness. UNESCO (2014) agreed on this, emphasizing that:

Other starting points towards gender equality include making sure the school environment is safe, improving facilities to provide, for example, separate latrines for girls and boys, training teachers in gender sensitivity, achieving gender balance among teachers and rewriting curricula and textbooks to remove gender stereotypes. (p.77)

Moreover, this demonstrates that it is not enough to simply renew and redesign the textbooks, but it is also crucial to prepare and support teachers in these areas “taking into account that EFL teachers feel unprepared and discouraged to independently introduce a more inclusive approach, the first step could be to incorporate discourses of gender equality and sexual diversity in the mandatory EFL textbooks (Koutsoupaki, 2022, p. 30 - 31). The findings from this and other previously cited studies highlight the need for more classroom materials that address gender topics in a careful, rigorous and responsible way. In this particular case, given that the selected textbook is used in English classes for pre-service teachers, it is crucial to encourage educators with training and resources for effectively addressing, discussing, and critically analyzing these topics in the classroom and fostering an environment that promotes equity and awareness in the education field.

6. Conclusions

This research study aimed to perform a multimodal discourse analysis on a reading task from the *Cutting Edge Advanced* textbook in order to identify representations and constructions of gender. After thoroughly analyzing the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities, it was concluded that this reading task reinforces a stereotyped view of gender roles, specifically highlighting how women are perceived in a social context. These perceptions appeared as biased views regarding the roles, characteristics, and attitudes of women in various social contexts, involving emotional expression, interactions with men, relationships, and self-perception. In each of these situations, women and men were depicted in completely opposing ways, reinforcing socially imposed stereotypes of masculinity and femininity from a fundamentally sexist

perspective. These ideas have contributed to the current gender gap and continue to perpetuate notions that are harmful for individual and social development.

In terms of addressing the first objective of this research, the data analysis revealed that, although the text addresses relevant and sensitive topics, the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading exercises do not provide sufficient prompts and questions for discussions that would encourage critical thinking. This is a limiting factor, as students at this level possess the language skills proficiency that allows them to engage in more substantive and reflective classroom debates. For topics as relevant as gender issues, we would expect discussions marked by rigorous and critical analysis that foster a space for debate and communicative growth. However, the aim in the reading task falls short on the previously mentioned criticality; this highlights that, despite the valuable topics raised for discussion, the texts continue to focus on the linguistic elements, sidelining the adequate gender representations topic that should be central to these exercises. Finally, this analysis guides us to think that it is necessary to re-evaluate the textbooks used for teaching English within current educational contexts because it is well-known that a “textbook plays important roles in English language teaching” (Shallaita et al., 2021, p.1). It is crucial to select resources that foster critical pedagogy, rather than relying on materials that impede the potential for engaging critical discussions and effective teaching practices among future educators.

The above brings us to addressing the second objective, which was to discuss the potential impact that gender representations present in an EFL reading task might have on students' perceptions. The thoughtful analysis of the activities and the text, together with the existing theory revised to develop this document, led to the conclusion that this content significantly impacts students' mindsets and their views on gender roles in society. Exposing students to stereotypical

portrayals can reinforce traditional gender roles, framing women in roles centered on maternity, physical beauty, compliance, and subordination to men. These portrayals contribute to internalized beliefs about gender roles, which can impact students' self-concept, career aspirations, and personal growth—especially among girls. Additionally, the exercises proposed in the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities become even more relevant because these are the ones that can provide opportunities for students to reflect on these stereotypes and do not take things literal regarding the information conveyed in the text. If these exercises provide opportunities for critical analysis and debate, they can have a positive influence by encouraging students to question their own biases and perspectives. In this case, the text presented contains sexist and stereotyped content that conveys a demeaning view of women. As previously mentioned, the exercises fail to offer adequate discussion opportunities to approach these ideas. Consequently, this activity presents and uses language unfavourably, promoting and spreading gender stereotypes without encouraging critical analysis. This ineffective critical engagement leaves pre-service teachers unprepared to address these issues effectively and consistently in their future classrooms.

To summarize, in the analysis presented we concluded that this reading task reinforces gender stereotypes that portray women from a sexist and misogynistic view. Due to that, traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity continue to be reinforced, sustaining societal inequalities and persistence of the gender gap. Moreover, the activities proposed for discussion are superficial and do not allow a meaningful critical analysis of gender issues, demonstrating that students could easily be influenced by the ideas presented in the task. This is especially concerning, as exposure to such content without deeper discussion may negatively impact women's self-perception by reinforcing traditional gender roles.

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