EDUCARE 2022: 3

doi: 10.24834/educare.2022.3.8

Why are all dogs male? Gender in Swedish EFL textbooks

Cathrine Norberg
orcid.org/0000-0001-9170-1459
cathrine.norberg@ltu.se

Marie Nordlund
orcid.org/000-0002-6004-4115
marie.nordlund@ltu.se

Studies conducted over the past sixty years have reported stereotypical gender representation in school materials. Initiatives to counteract sexism have led to improvements, and the most overt gender-biased examples are less visible today. Despite this, studies still report gender imbalances. Since language has an enormous impact on how normative perceptions are created, increased knowledge about how we communicate and create knowledge about gender is needed. This study focuses on gender in EFL textbooks used in Swedish primary school. To reveal patterns of representation, a corpus was constructed and tagged to enable searches. The study reveals both equal and unequal representations. Equal patterns are shown in the numerical representation of proper names, and in verbs and adjectives collocating with females and males. However, animals and fantastic characters identified as either male or female in the books show traditional gender representations, with male characters not only occurring more frequently than equivalent female characters but also being represented as more active and innovative. The pronoun *he* is also considerably more common than *she* in the material.

Key words: textbooks; primary school; gender; stereotypes; corpus linguistics

1. Introduction

Gender equality has earned increased attention worldwide, and many attempts have been made and decisions taken to promote equal opportunities for women, men, girls and boys. Despite such initiatives, females and males are to a large extent represented differently in many contexts and settings (e.g. Norberg, 2016; Pearce, 2008). As is well known, school is extremely influential in shaping young individuals' views and attitudes, and, as such, society at large (Arnot, 2002; Ballantine & Hammack, 2011; Macalister, 2011). School textbooks play a crucial role in this context because they are used over a longer period of time and in a variety of ways. Language learning materials in particular often present readers with family-related activities, which means that a lot of information about gender and worldview is there for young learners to internalise (Adler, 1993; Kereszty, 2009; Lee, 2014). Since young children in particular imitate behaviours associated with their gender, the messages conveyed in language learning materials have an enormous impact on their ideological development (Lee, 2014, 2018; McCabe et al., 2011; Mustapha, 2012). LoBue and DeLoache (2011), as an example, conducted experiments on colour preference among children; they concluded that by the age of 2.5 girls prefer pink over other colours. Studies have also shown that young boys generally want stories about males; and even when a girl is presented as the main character and a boy as the secondary, it is common that they redefine the secondary male character as the main character when retelling the story (Davies, 2003; McCabe et al., 2011). Thus, from an early age children learn to use gender as a way to understand and categorise the world. Unequal and stereotypical gender representation in books for children is therefore likely to have an effect on young individuals' ways of life, future academic choices and careers, and their attitudes towards both themselves and other individuals (Kereszty, 2009; Lee, 2018; Lee & Collins, 2009; Witt, 2001).

Like many other countries, Sweden has over the last fifty years taken numerous measures to promote gender equality and has led the way with initiatives for women to take part in the labour market in the early 1970s (Ministry of Employment, 2020). Despite the centrality of gender equality in Sweden, no comprehensive study of how gender is communicated in EFL textbooks for young learners has been conducted thus far. The aim of the present study was to analyse whether political and social measures and initiatives are reflected in textbooks used in Swedish primary school. The study comprises analyses of male and female terms (such as *woman*, *man, boy, girl, father*, *mother*, *she, he* etc.) and verbs and adjectives collocating with these terms in seven EFL textbooks currently

used in Swedish schools. Since animals and fantastic characters – such as robots, monsters and aliens – have a particular place in books for children (McCabe et al., 2011), the study also includes an analysis of such characters referred to by gender in the books. The investigation reveals both equal and unequal representations – some of which are not easily identified at first sight.

To show underlying power relationships and hidden gender structures in the books, a corpus linguistic approach was chosen (cf. Lee, 2018; Macalister, 2011). The advantage of a corpus linguistic methodology is its ability to shed light on patterns of representations and nuances not equally likely to be shown in purely qualitative studies, such as content analyses. Corpus linguistic approaches have so far been sparsely used to study discourses of gender in learning materials, even if there are examples (e.g. Carroll & Kowtiz, 1994; Lee, 2018; Macalister, 2011). The approach implies that quantitative and qualitative analyses are combined, where the former is used to identify frequency patterns and the latter to complement the former with closer analysis.

What follows is first a literature review positioning the study within the field of education (section 2), followed by a short section on English as a subject in the Swedish school, highlighting the importance of it (section 3). Section 4 outlines the aim of the study, and section 5 the methodology and the material used. Section 6 presents the results, while section 7 discusses them and suggests future studies concerning gender and school materials. The final section is a short conclusion.

2. Literature review

A number of studies conducted over the last sixty years have reported gender-biased representations in educational materials and children's literature. In their study of 163 beginner reading books used in New South Wales, Australia, Baker and Freebody (1989) show that the word *boy*/s is more frequent than *girl*/s (a ratio of 3:2), that there is a predominance of male proper names in the books, and that girls are typically described as *little*, *young* and *pretty,* whereas boys are *brave, tiny* and *naughty*. Similarly, Sakitas' (1995) study of ten Japanese high school textbooks shows that women are less visible than males; further, they are typically associated with weakness, attractiveness and emotions, whereas males are associated with strength and activity.

With some variation, many other early studies show similar results: males are more visible, represented as more interesting and innovative and participating in a wider range of activities than females (e.g. Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Helinger, 1980; Ritchie, 2005; Swann, 1992; Weitzman et al., 1972).

Many years have passed since the first of the above-mentioned studies were conducted. Increased awareness of both the existence and the consequences of gender stereotyping together with political initiatives to counteract sexism have led to improvement. The most overt examples representing the typical housewife as opposed to the male breadwinner have decreased in learning materials, and the numerical imbalance of male and female representation has lessened (e.g. Lee, 2014; Lee & Collins, 2008; Macalister, 2011), as has the use of the generic *he* and *man* to include all humankind (e.g. Lee, 2018; Lee & Collins, 2009). Gender-neutral terms such as *waitperson*, *salesperson, fire fighter, police officer* etc. are increasingly common both in educational materials and other texts (e.g. Baker, 2010; Lee, 2018). Females are now to a larger extent represented as capable and intelligent (Wharton, 2005), thus replacing the image of the traditional silly girl (Persson, 1990; Romaine, 1999).

Despite changes and improvements, recent studies continue to report persistent gender imbalances. Many of them have been conducted to investigate to what extent policies and attempts to promote gender equality are reflected in school materials. Lee (2018), as an example, studied the representation of gender in contemporary Japanese high-school textbooks by using a corpus linguistic methodology. She reports evidence of increased awareness of gender in the books, e.g. by the use of gender-inclusive vocabulary such as *salesclerk* instead of *salesman*. But she concludes that despite governmental attempts to improve women's status and opportunities, the way males and females are represented does not indicate substantial changes. Female characters are to a large extent still represented in traditional stereotypical ways focusing on age, physical appearance and emotions, whereas male characters are associated with success, wealth and physical and mental strength (cf. her [2014] study on textbooks used in Hong Kong primary schools). In a similar fashion, Gouvias and Alexopoulos' (2018) content analysis of language textbooks used in Greek primary school reveals that even if the official curriculum emphasises "gender equality in all aspects of public schooling" (as quoted in Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018, p. 646), the books display

extreme sexism, with representations glorifying the male gender. Similar results are reported by Lee and Collins (2009) in their study of gender representations in Australian English language textbooks for intermediate learners. Although their study shows evidence of change, it concludes that much still remains to be done. Like earlier studies on Australian textbooks (Clark, 1993; Ritchie, 2005), males are typically represented as heroes, villains, judges and police officers and are often engaged in physical and violent behaviours, whereas females are more typically ascribed passive roles. McCabe et al.'s (2011) study of the representation of males and females in children's books published throughout the twentieth century in the United States is also worth mentioning in this context. They studied titles and central characters in 5,618 children's books and conclude that, despite increased awareness of gender, males are represented nearly twice as often. Animal characters were found to be the most inequitable in terms of gender representations and child central characters as the most equitable (cf. Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010; Gooden & Gooden, 2001; Hamilton et al., 2006; Sovič & Hus, 2015).

A variety of studies with similar results as the above-mentioned have been conducted globally (e.g. Foroutan's (2012) content analysis of gender representation in Iranian school textbooks, Kereszty's (2009) investigation of gender roles in Hungarian elementary level textbooks, Nair and Talif's (2010) study of Malaysian children's literature, Tang et al.'s (2010) study of Chinese language textbooks). There are, however, also studies showing somewhat different results. In her critical discourse analysis of UK reading schemes, Wharton (2005) reports that even if males are still considerably more visible than females in most contexts, they are typically represented as incompetent buffoons providing humour to others (cf. Sunderland, 2000). Females, on the contrary, although appearing less often, are characterised as active, capable and responsible individuals, typically taking care of the problems caused by the males. More straightforward signs of change are reported by Macalister (2011). He conducted a diachronic corpus study of gender representation in New Zealand writing for children and concludes that much has changed since the first studies on gender in children's learning materials started to appear. He reports that boys and girls are now represented as equally active, and girls are no longer associated with more negative attributes compared to boys.

3. English in Swedish schools

Since the early 1950s, English has been a mandatory subject in Swedish compulsory school (ages 7–16). Today, it is one of three so-called core subjects in Swedish schools, together with Swedish and Mathematics, in which a passing grade is necessary for advancement to higher levels in the education system. There is flexibility nationwide as regards the starting age for the teaching of English in Sweden, as municipalities have the right to decide individually when pupils start their formal English education: at the age of seven, eight or nine years. Regardless of when they start, pupils are guaranteed a minimum of 480 hours of English teaching throughout the nine-year long compulsory school, with 60 hours allocated to the youngest pupils (ages 7–9), 220 hours to ages 10–13 and 200 hours to the oldest pupils (ages 14–16) (Skolverket, 2019).

Since the most recent national curriculum came into effect in 2011, language syllabi in Sweden have been more explicitly aligned with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001). Pupils receive grades twice every year starting in school year 6. Additionally, in school years 6 and 9 (ages 13 and 16), all pupils sit the National Test of English, where their proficiency in reading, listening, speaking and writing English is assessed.

4. Aim and research questions

The aim of the study presented here was to analyse to what extent attempts to counteract sexism are reflected in materials used for young learners of English in Sweden. The specific research questions addressed were:

1. What are the proportions of male and female references in the textbooks?
2. In what contexts and how are males and females referred to?
3. What are the proportions of male and female references to animals/fantastic characters in the textbooks?
4. How are gendered animals/fantastic characters described in the textbooks?

5. Research methodology

The present study analyses data from a corpus of seven textbooks commonly used in Swedish school years 3 and 4 (pupils aged 9–10 years). Textbooks for year 3 are as follows: *Happy* (Hansson, 2010), *Lift off, juniors* (Bowen & Söderlund, 2007), *Lighthouse* (Bowen & Söderlund, 2003) and *Right on!* (Nihlén et al., 2006). The books for year 4 include *Good stuff* (Keay et al., 2005), *New champion* (Bermheden et al., 2005) and *What's up?* (Göransson et al., 2006). The selection of books was based on a survey among EFL teachers in a large part of Sweden where they were asked about what books they use in their teaching. Even though some of the books appear somewhat outdated, they are, nevertheless, used on a daily basis in Swedish schools at the time of writing, which means that content and messages conveyed in them appear as truths for their users, regardless of publication date. In total, the corpus consists of 34,380 running words: 10,712 for school year 3 books and 23,668 for school year 4 books.

To compile the corpus, all the textbooks were scanned and then entered into .txt format and tagged to make searches of the corpus possible. Tagging included, among other things, word class, tense and number, and followed the BNC (British National Corpus) Basic (C5) Tagset. To search the corpus, the software MonoConc Pro was used. Searches included the pronouns *she/he* and *her/him*, general terms for humans (e.g. *girl, boy, woman*), family terms (e.g. *mom, dad, uncle*) proper names, and adjectives (found in both attributive and predicative position) and verbs collocating with males and females as subject. Animal terms and fantastic characters were extracted manually from the books. All the examples retrieved from the corpus were also studied contextually.

6. Results

6.1. Pronouns, general terms and proper names

As a point of departure for the analysis, data for how often personal pronouns, general terms (including both singular and plural forms) and the number of female and male proper names occur in the books are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Pronouns, general terms and proper names

	she/he	her/him	girl/boy	woman/man[a]	proper names[b]
Year 3	**20/28**	**6/2**	**16/25**	**--**	**117/116**
Happy	3/4	1/-	4/3	--	21/20
Lift off, juniors	9/4	2/1	6/11	--	40/47
Lighthouse	6/10	1/-	4/9	--	32/32
Right on!	2/10	2/1	2/2	--	24/17
Year 4	**67/131**	**8/12**	**16/14**	**4/15**	**483/486**
Good stuff	21/36	1/5	8/4	1/3	159/147
New champion	33/47	6/3	7/10	3/11	154/154
What's up?	13/48	1/4	1/-	-/1	170/185
Total:	**87/159**	**14/14**	**32/39**	**4/15**	**600/602**

[a] The school year 4 data also includes 5 instances of *lady*, 2 instances of *madam* and 1 instance of *gent*.

[b] Figures for female names are listed first.

As shown, the most conspicuous finding is that *he* is considerably more common than *she* in the books for year 4, where *he* is close to twice as common than *she*. The same difference exists in the corpus for year 3, but it is less pronounced. It is also notable that the object forms *him* and *her* occur seldom in the books, only 14 instances of each pronoun.

The first impression is thus, in line with many earlier studies (e.g. Baker & Freebody, 1989; Swann, 1992), that references to males are more common than references to females. However, it is important to note that the material also includes aspects indicating gender equal representation. The number of times a male or a female is mentioned by their name is close to identical, both on a general level and in the individual books. There is a preference for *boy* compared to *girl* in the books for year 3, but this difference is marginal in year 4.

The figures also show that general terms for adult humans, such as *woman* and *man*, in particular the former, appear infrequently in the material, most notably in the books for year 3 where no occurrence of *woman* and *man* is found. The scarcity of terms for adult individuals may be explained by the fact that the books focus on children's everyday situation and environment, where family-related terms, as shown below, are likely to occur more frequently than these general terms.

It can thus be concluded that the material shows both unequal and equal gender representations concerning pronouns and proper names, and few instances of general terms for humans, although with some variation across the two sets of books.

6.2. Family terms

Table 2 below lists gendered family terms, both with figures for the whole corpus and for the respective years. As for general terms for humans, the terms include both singular and plural forms.

Table 2. Gendered family terms [a]

	mom/dad	grandma/grandpa	sister/brother	aunt/uncle	daughter/son
Year 3	**39/21**	**33/17**	**15/17**	**1/1**	**-- = 88/56**
Happy	3/2	1/1	3/3	--	--
Lift off, juniors	11/7	5/3	6/1	--	--
Lighthouse	18/5	24/10	1/7	--	--

Right on!	7/7	3/3	5/6	1/1	--	
Year 4	**87/103**	**18/32**	**18/12**	**8/16**	**5/4**	**= 136/167**
Good stuff	42/46	9/15	5/5	1/5	2/-	
New champion	39/33	3/12	2/2	--	2/3	
What's up?	6/24	6/5	11/5	7/11	1/1	
Total	**126/124**	**51/49**	**33/29**	**9/17**	**5/4**	**=224/223**

[a] Included in the figures are also alternative terms for *mom*, *dad*, *grandma* (e.g. *father*, *grandmother,* etc.).

Like the number of proper names in Table 1, the combined figures for the two school years show an almost identical number of references to male and female family terms. In this respect, the figures diverge from earlier studies on male and female representation that show that males are more visible than females in children's books, except for contexts describing family relations where female representation is more common (e.g. Brugeilles et al., 2002; Lee, 2018). To better understand the figures, the contexts where the above-mentioned terms occur were studied closer. The analysis showed that high or equal visibility is not necessarily the same as favourable or gender-neutral representation (cf. Wharton, 2005). This turned out as particularly true for the representations of fathers in *New champion.* The number of instances of the actual terms *dad* (30 instances), *father* (3), *mum* (38) and *mother* (1) in the book suggests close to equal representation. However, a closer look at the contexts of these examples showed that the descriptions of the fathers in the book are far from favourable. All the examples, except one, are used with reference to two males depicted as helpless but funny individuals, mainly there to provide humour to the text (cf. Sunderland, 2000; Wharton, 2005). In both cases, a daughter is shown to be the responsible one helping the incompetent father, for instance reminding him about his afterwork activities, or helping him in the kitchen when he spoils the whipped cream for dessert by using baking powder instead of vanilla sugar. Adjectives like *helpless* (a dialogue between one of the father figures and his daughter is illustrated under the heading 'You're hopeless') and *poor* (as in 'poor Henry' found in the above-mentioned kitchen scene) together with accompanying illustrations reinforce the image of the helpless but funny father, at the same time as traditional ideas of the kitchen not being a

man's domain are highlighted. No such generalised representation of the mums/mothers are discernible in the book. A similar description of a father figure is also found in *What's up?*, where a girl jokingly refers to her dad as a lazy couch potato lying on the sofa eating crisps and drinking pop in front of the television all day. Such representations may again be understood as a way of making the text fun to read, but the hidden message is undoubtedly that in domestic settings men are allowed to be both incapable and lazy.

Worth noticing is also that males are more visible in the books for year 4, and females more frequent in the set of books comprising year 3. This pattern of representation may suggest that female care is more important in the world of younger individuals, and that fathers, grandfathers and uncles become more important the older the children get. An additional indication of this is that *man* (15 instances) is more common than *woman* (4) in the books for year 4. This is particularly the case in the representation of males and females in *New champion,* where the majority of such instances occur.

6.3 Adjectives and verbs referring to males and females

There are few adjectives describing humans in the books for year 3 – a total of 25 instances. Of these, 17 describe males and eight females. The ones for year 4 are more numerous – a total of 134 tokens, with exactly the same number of adjectives describing males and females (67 each). All of these adjectives occur once or twice (48 types of adjectives describing a female and 45 a male), thereby indicating that no individual adjective shows a typical gender preference. The individuals appearing in the books are, regardless of gender, described as *tired*, *happy*, *clever, strong, nice, silly, hungry,* etc. (cf. Macalister, 2011). This may thus be understood as a sign of gender awareness and may be compared to many earlier studies on male and female representation, where females are typically described in terms of their looks and weakness and males in terms of their mental and physical capacity (e.g. Baker & Freebody, 1989; Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018).

Many earlier studies, but also more recent ones, have also shown that males and females are represented differently regarding what they do. Males are typically described as involved in a larger number of activities than females, who are often represented as more passive (e.g. Norberg, 2016; Ritchie, 2005; Swann, 1992). To analyse the material in this respect, the verbs collocating with male

and female subjects were retrieved from the data. The results tally with those for adjectives. There is a close to identical number of verbs collocating with male and female subjects: 368 verbs found with a male as subject and 374 with a female. To illustrate the results, the ten most common verbs in the books are listed in Table 3. They include both the base form and inflected forms. Passives and the primary verbs *be* and *have* are excluded from the data. The figures for year 3 and year 4 are combined. Bold font is added to verbs where both male and female representation is found.

Table 3. The ten most common verbs collocating with male and female subjects

	Female		Male	
1	**like**	45	**like**	47
2	**want**	22	**say**	19
3	**love**	16	**play**	18
4	**say**	16	**think**	13
5	wear	15	**want**	13
6	**play**	14	take	12
7	**think**	12	**live**	9
8	**live**	11	read	9
9	**go**	11	come	8
10	**love**, sit	10	**go**, **love**, sit	8

As shown, males and females are associated with similar activities, with verbs expressing likes and wants as particularly common. Just like the adjectives, many of the verbs (apart from the ten most common ones) seldom occur more than five times, with the majority occurring once or twice, meaning there is no verb that stands out as typically male or female. The number of types for each gender category mirrors the result: 127 types of verbs for males and 128 for females. The verb *wear* has ten more instances with a female subject, which can be taken as an indication of female physical appearance as more important than male looks. It should, however, be noted that five of them occur in a song in *Right on!,* where the phrase "Sally is wearing red" is repeated many times.

Thus, in terms of what male and female characters are represented as doing, saying and thinking, and how they are described, the material appears to represent males and females in the same way.

6.4 Animals and fantastic characters

Table 4 below presents what animals/fantastic characters are referred to by gender in the material with the total number of references in brackets – either by reference to the actual animal term (*dog*[1], *cat,* etc.) or by a name used to refer to the animal or fantastic character in question (e.g. Henry, a dog in *Light house*, and Gloop, an alien in the same book). There is no distinction made in the table between the two sets of books. Fantastic characters here include 'human-made' objects such as robots, but also aliens, which can be defined as both male and female. Witches, wizards and snowmen that per definition are either male or female were excluded, although pronouns used to define them are included in the number of pronouns for each gender in Table 1 above.

Table 4. Animals/fantastic characters

Female	**Male**
Animals	
cat (20), dog (5), fish (16) parrot (10), monkey (4), mouse (1), snake (1), roe deer (1).	alligator (2), bear (1), cat (13), cheetah (1), dog (46), elephant (2), elk (1), fawn (5), fish (13), fox (1), giraffe (2), grizzly bear (1), hamster (4), horse (8), monkey (2), mouse (4), rat (1), snail (1) snake (1).
Types: 8, **tokens: 59**	**Types: 19, tokens: 109**
Fantastic characters	Sun (6), alien (46), robot (14)
Types and tokens: 0	**Types: 3, tokens: 65**

[1] In this paper we use *dog* as the superordinate term for all dogs, including both female and male dogs, as the word is used in this way in the books.

Like many texts written for children (McCabe et al., 2011), the books analysed include a good number of animals and fantastic characters, in particular the former, defined by gender. And like other children's texts, the way they are represented shows an extremely biased gender representation (Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010; Gooden & Gooden, 2001). There are 109 references to an animal defined as male across the books compared with 59 such references to a female animal. Even the different kinds of animals show a significant difference in terms of gender, with more than twice as many types of animals referred to as male. There are only two animals defined as female that are mentioned more often than a male: fish and cats. The former includes references to a gold fish named Juliet in *What's up?*. She appears in a fish tank together with a male fish, Romeo, and is mentioned 16 times, compared with twelve references to Romeo. The references to cats include six different cats. The male cats are less often referred to (a discrepancy of seven instances) and comprise references to five different individuals. Apart from references to these animals and ten references to a parrot in *New champion*, female animals are sparse. It is also notable that there is no reference to a female fantastic character in any of the books (for similar findings see Fitzpatrick & McPherson [2010]). There are 65 references to a male fantastic character in the material. The majority of them are found in *Lighthouse,* where the above-mentioned alien Gloop is featured as one of the main characters in the book, even appearing on the book cover together with a boy and a girl.

As for male animals, there is one animal in particular that turns out as typically male – the dog. There are 46 references to a male dog in the corpus compared with five references to a dog identified as female. The female references concern two dogs referred to twice and three times, respectively. One of them collocates with a verb two times (*want* and *wake up*). Neither of them is defined by an adjective. The male dogs, on the other hand, are not only more numerous but are also more vividly described. They *run, see, shake,* etc. and express likes. They are also *smart* and *sweet.* Like Gloop, Henry the dog is a prominent character in *Lighthouse,* described in terms of what he does and likes and what he looks like, and just like humans, in terms of personal characteristics, he is *clever, great, bad, good* and *sad.*

As noted above (see Table 1), the personal pronoun *he* is overall more common than *she* in the corpus. The figures presented in Table 1 cover human examples. If personal pronouns used for

animals and fantastic characters are added to the figures, the discrepancy between male and female representation in this respect is even greater. There are 16 instances of *she* with reference to a female animal compared with 59 instances of *he* with reference to an animal, and 29 instances with reference to a fantastic character. The object form *him* is found five times with reference to an animal and seven to a fantastic character. The object form *her* occurs zero times for both categories. This means that the total number (references to humans, animals and fantastic characters) of *he* in the material amounts to 247 instances compared with 103 instances of *she*.

Also, the adjectives used to describe animals display great gender differences, with 55 adjectives describing male animals and 13 female animals. Considering the many more male animals across the books, it is perhaps not surprising to find more adjectives defining them. There are, however, some interesting findings worth mentioning concerning the adjectives collocating with the animals appearing in the books. The most common adjectives used for an animal in the books are *bad* and *good*. They both occur eleven times with reference to a male dog. Other adjectives used for males show that apart from being described in terms of their behaviour, they are defined as *clever*, *sweet*, *crazy* and *smart*. And just like the traditional description of male humans, they are defined in terms of body size and physical movement (*big*, *slow*, *strong* and *well-built*) (e.g. Pearce, 2008). The adjectives used for female animals are, as mentioned, fewer, which makes it difficult to compare them with those for male animals. There is one instance of *naughty* and three of *sweet*, indicating personal characteristics, two describing the size of the animal (*short* and *tall*), four to identify its colour and three used with reference to intelligence or lack of it (two instances of *smart* and one of *silly*). There is also one instance of *dead*.

To sum up, if verbs collocating with humans show no distinctive gender difference, the verbs collocating with male animals as subject tally with the traditional representation of males as physically more active than females (e.g. Norberg, 2016; Baker, 2014; Pearce, 2008;). The male animals in the corpus *climb*, *fall, go*, *gallop*, *jump*, *kick*, *run*, *shake*, *swim* and the like. No such verbs are found in the description of what a female animal does. As a matter of fact, there are only seven instances of a verb describing what a female animal does across the whole corpus, compared with 63 collocating with a male animal as the subject.

Just like the representations of humans in the books, the male animals also express likes, with the verb *like* as the most common one (14 instances).

There are fewer fantastic characters than animals defined by gender in the books, but those that occur are male. Like the male animals, they are described as *short*, *tall, big, slow, fast* and *well-built*. And like humans, they express feelings (*smile* and *laugh*) and likes (13 instances of *like*) and wants. They are also *love-sick* and *silly*.

It is true that there are differences between the books regarding the representation of animals and fantastic characters. There are, as an example, no references to animals referred by gender or fantastic characters in *Right on!. Lighthouse*, on the other hand, includes both the alien Gloop and Henry the dog, which together are referred to considerably more than any of the humans in the book. But even so, the numerical discrepancy of animals and fantastic characters identified as male compared with female, together with the many more adjectives and verbs used to describe what the male animals/fantastic characters do, not only makes the male world more visible, but it also contributes to a more vivid and interesting representation of it.

7. Discussion

The study presented in this paper has analysed male and female representation in seven EFL textbooks currently used in Swedish primary schools. It reveals both equal and unequal gender representations. The unequal representation is particularly notable in the uneven number of the personal pronouns *he* and *she,* and in the representation of animals and fantastic characters . In this sense, the material tallies with many previous studies both on school materials (e.g. Baker & Freebody, 1989; Swann, 1992) and on more general materials on male and female terms (e.g. Norberg, 2016; Baker, 2014; Pearce, 2008). The equal gender representation, both on a general level and in the individual books, is primarily shown in the numerical analysis of proper names, and also the verbs and adjectives collocating with the female and male characters presented in the books. No single adjective or verb stands out as typically male or female in the material (cf. Macalister, 2011).

The study has shown the value of using a corpus linguistic approach where quantitative and qualitative analyses are combined. Further, it is a reminder that what on the surface may be understood as equal representation may be misleading. The number of female and male family terms is more or less identical in the material, which may be taken as a sign of gender equal representation. However, closer analysis of the many terms for father figures showed that in domestic settings, which language learning materials for younger individuals typically describe, fathers are likely to appear as happy-go-lucky individuals in need of assisting females (cf. the 'bumbling father' in parenthood literature highlighted in Sunderland [2000]). Such representations are probably there to make the texts humorous and enjoyable to read, but instead they actually send messages, although not articulated explicitly, about what it is to be a male or a female, and are perhaps not as innocent as they appear. The analysis of family terms also showed differences in male and female representation between the two sets of books analysed with more references to mothers and grandmothers than equivalent male terms in the books for school year 3, and the opposite for school year 4. Such a discrepancy may appear innocent, but it may transmit ideas of women as more important than men in the world of younger children.

As mentioned, the study shows many patterns of equal representation concerning human beings presented in the books. Boys and girls are referred to equally often, and the activities and attributes ascribed to them are similar both in number and in kind. This undoubtedly shows an increased awareness of gender representation among the writers of the books and that references to males and females have been counted when constructing the books. However, the analyses of animal terms and fantastic characters showed that writing through the lens of gender requires training. The references to male animals are more than twice as many as those to female animals. It is also notable that there are no female fantastic characters in any of the books, but a good number of references to male aliens, robots and the like. Worth noticing is also that unlike the verbs and adjectives referring to humans, there is a noteworthy gender difference when it comes to the description of animals. There are few verbs or adjectives defining the female animals appearing in the books, whereas the male animals and fantastic characters are vividly described in terms of activities and characteristics ascribed to them. The results clearly indicate that when something is unknown, or when an individual's gender is unknown, the male norm is taken for granted, and traditional thinking of males as more active and innovative than females emerges, consciously or

not (cf. Hamilton et al., 2006; McCabe et al., 2011). The overrepresentation of male animals involved in a variety of funny activities compared with equivalent female animals is particularly troublesome as it has been shown that children pay more attention to animals and fantastic characters than human characters (McCabe et al., 2011). With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising, as shown by Davies (2003) and also problematised in McCabe et al., (2011), that young boys prefer books with male characters and that girls acquiesce to reading stories where males are overrepresented. It becomes a way of seeing the world. It is also notable that, like the personal pronouns for humans, the pronoun *he* used with reference to animals and fantastic characters is considerably more frequent in than *she* the material.

It is true that the material used for this study is rather small compared with studies based on large data bases, which is common practice in corpus linguistic studies. Nevertheless, the findings are important. They show how gender is communicated in school materials used by thousands of young learners on a daily basis. Because school plays an extremely important role in shaping young individuals' attitudes and world view (e.g. Arnot, 2002; Macalister, 2011; Witt, 2001), and because young individuals in particular imitate behaviours understood as typical of their gender (Lee, 2014), regardless of the form, as pointed out by Fitzpatrick and McPherson (2009), additional studies investigating how gender is represented and communicated in school materials, both explicitly and implicitly, are needed. If the aim is to shape societies where "all individuals irrespective of gender can live their lives to their full potentials" in all walks of life, a goal expressed by the Swedish government (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2019), the way we communicate and create knowledge about gender, consciously or not, needs to be seen and problematised. Future studies could include in-depth analyses of 'gender-neutral' words such as *robber, thief, villain, angel, friend,* etc. in school materials to see to whether hidden patterns of representation exist in the way such words are used, and if so, problematise the effect of it from a gender point of view. Studies could also focus on family terms from a heteronormative standpoint. Although the present study does not include such analyses, it is notable that the families presented in the books analysed are all examples of the traditional Western conception of the nuclear family.

8. Conclusion

The present study has shown that despite initiatives to counteract sexism have been taken in many settings and situations, and have led to improvements, the way females and males are represented still indicates gender-biased structures, with males represented as more innovative and active than females. It is true that the study shows an increased awareness of gender with the most overt gender-biased representations less visible today. However, many patterns of representations emerging from the material show that traditional gender representations are persistently present, although not always shown explicitly at first sight. Like many previous studies on children's books, biased gender representations in this study are particularly visible in the representation of animals and fantastic characters, which are predominantly male. Undoubtedly, the findings show that discrimination is still an issue, and that it emerges when mere counting of human characters is set aside. Since gender development starts early in life and has an effect on young individuals' societal perceptions and worldview, the results are noteworthy and need to be problematised and studied further.

References

Adler, S. (1993). Aprons and attitudes: A consideration of feminism in children's books. In H. Claire, J. Maybin & J. Swann (Eds.), *Equality matters: Case studies from the primary school* (pp. 111–123). Multilingual Matters.

Arnot, M. (2002). *Reproducing gender*. Routledge.

Norberg, C. (2016). Naughty boys and sexy girls: The Representation of young individuals in a web-based corpus of English. *Journal of English Linguistics, 44*(4), 318-345.

Baker, C. D., & Freebody, P. P. (1989). *Children's first school books*: *Introductions to the culture of literacy*. Blackwell.

Baker, P. (2010). Will Ms ever be as frequent as Mr? A corpus-based comparison of gendered terms across diachronic corpora of British English. *Gender and Language, 4*(1), 125–149. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.v4i1.125

Baker, P. (2014). *Using corpora to analyze gender*. Bloomsbury.

Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2011). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (7th ed.). Prentice Hall.

Bermheden, C., Sandström, L.-G., & Wahlgren, S. (2005). *New champion 4*. Bonnier Utbildning.

Bowen, M., & Söderlund, K. (2003). *Lighthouse 4*. Gleerups.

Bowen, M., & Söderlund, K. (2007). *Lift off, juniors*. Gleerups.

Brugeilles, C., Cromer, I., & Cromer, S. (2002). Male and female characters in illustrated children's books or how children's literature contributes to the construction of gender. *Population, 57*(2), 237–267. https://doi.org/10.2307/3246609

Carroll, D., & Kowtiz, J. (1994). Using concordancing techniques to study gender stereotyping in ELT textbooks. In J. Sunderland (Ed.), *Exploring gender: Questions and implications for English language education* (pp. 73–82). Prentice Hall.

Clark, P. (1993). Gender, ethnicity and textbooks. *Australian Mathematics Teacher, 49*(2), 14–16.

Council of Europe. (2001). Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Modern Languages Division.

Davies, B. (2003). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender* (Rev. ed.). Hampton Press.

Fitzpatrick, M. L., & McPherson, B. J. (2010). Coloring within the lines: Gender stereotypes in contemporary coloring books. *Sex Roles, 62*, 127–137. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9703-8

Foroutan, Y. (2012). Gender representation in school textbooks in Iran: The place of languages. *Current Sociology, 60*(6), 771–787. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392112459744

Gooden, A. M., & Gooden, M. A. (2001). Gender representation in notable children's picture books: 1995–1999. *Sex Roles, 45*(1/2), 89–101. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013064418674

Göransson, M., Hjälm, A., Widlund, K.-E., & Cowle, A. (2006). *What's up? 4*. Bonnier Utbildning.

Gouvias, D., & Alexopoulos, C. (2018). Sexist stereotypes in the language textbooks of the Greek primary school: A multidimensional approach. *Gender and Education, 30*(5), 642–662. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1237620

Hamilton, M. C., Anderson, D., Broaddus, M., & Young, K. (2006). Gender stereotyping and under-representation of female characters in 200 popular children's picture books: A twenty-first century update. *Sex Roles, 55*, 757–765. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9128-6

Hansson, C. (2010). *Happy year 3. Textbook*. Gleerups.

Helinger, M. (1980). 'For men must work and women must weep': Sexism in English language textbooks used in German schools. *Women's Studies International Quarterly, 3*, 267–275. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-0685(80)92323-4

Keay, C., Coombs, A., & Hoas, B. (2005). *Good stuff 4*. Almqvist & Wiksell/Liber.

Kereszty, O. (2009). Gender in textbooks. *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education, 4*(2), 1–7.

Lee, J. (2014). Gender representation in Hong Kong primary school ELT textbooks: A comparative study. *Gender and Education, 26*(4), 356–376. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.916400

Lee, J. (2018). Gender representation in Japanese EFL textbooks: A corpus study. *Gender and Education, 30*(3), 379–395. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1214690

Lee, J., & Collins, P. (2008). Gender voices in Hong Kong English textbooks: Some past and current practices. *Sex Roles, 59*, 127–137. https://doi.org/10.1007/211199-008-9414-6

Lee, J., & Collins, P. (2009). Australian English-language textbooks: The gender issues. *Gender and Education, 21*(4), 353–370. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250802392257

LoBue, V., & DeLoache, J. S. (2011). Pretty in pink: The early development of gender-stereotyped colour preferences. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 29*, 656–667. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-835X.2011.02027.x

Macalister, J. (2011). Flower-girl and bugler-boy no more: Changing gender representation in writing for children. *Corpora, 6*(1), 25–44. https://doi.org/10.3366/cor.2011.0003

McCabe, J., Fairchild, E., Grauerholz, L., Pescosolido, B. A., & Tope, D. (2011). Gender in twentieth-century children's books: Patterns of disparity in titles and central characters. *Gender and Society, 25*(2), 197–226. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211398358

Ministry of Employment. (2020). *Three important welfare reforms to promote gender equality in Sweden*. Retrieved March 9, 2021 from https://www.government.se/articles/2020/11/three-important-welfare-reforms-to-promote-gender-equality-in-sweden/

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. (2019). *Fact sheet: A feminist government*. Retrieved March 9, 2021 from https://www.government.se/information-material/2019/03/a-feminist-government/

Mustapha, A. S. (2012). Dynamics of gender representations in learning materials. *GÉNERO. Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies, 1*(3), 243–270. https://doi.org/10.4471/generos.2012.12

Nair, R., & Talif, R. (2010). Lexical choices and the construction of gender in Malaysian children's literature. *Kajian Malaysia, 28*(2), 137–159.

Nihlén, C., Gardenkrans, L., & Robinson Ahlgren, A. (2006). *Right on! 3*. Liber.

Norberg, C. (2016). Naughty boys and sexy girls: The Representation of young individuals in a web-based corpus of English. *Journal of English Linguistics, 44*(4), 318-345. https://doi.org/10.1177/007542421666567 E**rror! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

Pearce, M. (2008). Investigating the collocational behaviour of MAN and WOMAN in the BNC using *Sketch Engine*. *Corpora, 3*(1), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.3366/E174950320800004X

Persson, G. 1990. *Meaning, models and metaphors: A study in lexical semantics in English*. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Ritchie, A. (2005). Whose code are you teaching? A popular Australian coursebook unraveled. *BABEL, 39*(3), 4–7.

Romaine, S. (1999). *Communicating gender*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Sakitas, T. (1995). Sexism in Japanese English education: A survey of EFL texts. *Women and Language, 18*(2), 5–12.

Skolverket. (2019). *Timplan för grundskolan* [Allocation of teaching hours in compulsory school]. Skolverket.

Sovič, A., & Hus, V. (2015). Gender stereotype analysis of the textbooks for young learners. *Procedia – Social Behavioral Sciences, 186*, 495–501. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.080

Sunderland, J. (2000). Baby entertainer, bumbling assistant and line manager: Discourse of fatherhood in parentcraft texts. *Discourse and Society, 11*(2), 249–274. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926500011002006

Swann, J. (1992). *Girls, boys and language*. Blackwell.

Tang, H., Chen, B., & Zhang, W. (2010). Gender issues in mathematical textbooks of primary schools. *Journal of Mathematics Education, 3*(2), 106–114.

Weitzman, L., Eifer, D., Hokada, E., & Ross, C. (1972). Sex-role socialization in picture books for preschool children. *American Journal of Sociology, 77*, 1125–1150. https://doi.org/10.1086/225261

Wharton, S. (2005). Invisible females, incapable males: Gender construction in a children's reading scheme. *Language and Education, 19*(3), 238–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780508668677

Witt, S. (2001). The influence of school texts on children's gender role socialization. *Curriculum and Teaching, 16*(1), 25–43. https://doi.org/10.7459/ct/16.1.03