Patriarchal Binary Oppositions in Narrative Texts Included in English Textbook for Senior High School in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
Patriarchal binary oppositions, which place men and women in dichotomies that marginalised women, can be reproduced through texts, including textbooks. The present study traces these binary oppositions represented in the narrative texts in English textbooks for grade ten High School. Adopting the interactive model of qualitative data analysis from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), the present study took Kate Millet's feminist perspective to closely analyse the male and female characterisations characters in the three narrative texts included in the book. It was revealed that most male characters in the narrative texts were given stereotypical male characterisations, such as strong, brave, rational, ambitious, hardworking, rough, smart, independent, honest, handsome, and careless;. In contrast, the female characters were given stereotypical feminine traits such as weak, fearful, irrational, passive, nurturing, articulate, stupid, dependent, untrustworthy, beautiful, and caring. However, there have been efforts to deconstruct gender-binary by inserting some on-stereotypical characterisations both the male and female characters in these texts. This implies that while the textbooks still maintain a certain degree of marginalisation toward women, deconstruction of gendered-binary opposition has started to be pioneered by English textbooks. Hopefully, it will be improved in the next production of English textbooks.

Keywords: *Binary Opposition, Gender, Marginalisation, Narrative Text, English Textbook*

1. INTRODUCTION

The persistence of patriarchy in the society has long been a concern [1], [2], where gendered binary opposition that marginalised women into depreciating traditional feminine roles (like cooking, babysitting, cleaning) and social roles (fashion designer, teacher) [3], [4] [5], [6] are maintained through discourses. As binary oppositions pair opposing qualities of a particular trait, with one quality is described as more precious than the other [7], the dichotomies rule how the conception of "masculine" and "feminine" works in the society in polar opposites: male/female/, man/woman, boy/girl, handsome/beautiful, strong/weak, rational/emotional, independent/dependent, public/domestic, aggressive/passive, and so forth [3].

Education should play a crucial part in deconstructing these binary oppositions and marginalisations of women in general [3]. Where textbooks act as one of the primary sources of knowledge holds a central role in developing the learners' characters [10]–[12], including the internalisations of values and communal norms [1]. Yet researchers have found that binary oppositions are still prevalent even in the educational textbook [1], [2], [4],[5], [8] –[22]. It has been revealed that textbooks still depicted patriarchal gender binaries. Those are selecting the soft colour female character, the identical female expression used during the conversation, the more frequent appearance of male characters, and the more extended male characters' roles than that of the female characters.

However, not all the studies proclaimed the English textbook is patriarchal. An effort has been made to

deconstruct the binaries as identified by [12] and [23]. Some researches found that ELT textbook encompasses the gender binaries and represent equal representation among the gender [1], [2], [8]. In Indonesia, studies related to gender stereotyping in ELT textbook for elementary school [9], junior, high school [11], and senior high school [4] and they mostly revealed that the woman is still under-represented in ELT textbook.

Regarding the contradicting findings found by research on gender representations in English textbooks, the present study will trace binary oppositions in the Indonesian ELT textbook. It is done by focusing on the narrative texts included in the textbook for the tenth grade to determine whether or not the narrative texts maintain gendered binary oppositions. It is essential to review the narrative text's position as one of the most entertaining reading texts for the students and its functions to preserve local wisdom, build intercultural awareness, and develop the students' characters in general [23]. Furthermore, narrative texts should include characters and events that they have to endure, which reflect characterisations [24]-[25]. Thus, how male and female characters in narrative texts are presented in a textbook will further the ideologies underlying the characterisations, which may affect the students' perceptions of these ideologies and their life-views [25]. Thus, gendered binary oppositions in the texts may negatively affect the students' perception of gender and their stereotyped roles.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The subjects of this study included all the narrative texts in the English textbook for the tenth grade in Senior High School in Indonesia, published by Indonesian Ministry of Education in 2017: The *Legend of Malin Kundang* in page 172, *Issumboshi* in pages 157-156, and *Strong Wind* in pages 183-185. The object of the study was the characterisations of every main character in the story, which were then analysed to determine whether the characterisations maintain the stereotypical gendered roles or whether they deconstructed them and undermine the binary oppositions. Based on the Interactive Model of Data Analysis by [26], the process of data collection, data reduction, data display, and the conclusion was simultaneously and repeatedly conducted. The character identification and categorisation between masculine and feminine traits to conclude the male and female characters can be undertaken to reveal whether the characterisation of each character confirmed or deconstructed the binary oppositions.

3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1. Masculine Stereotyping

In the three narrative texts included in the textbook under investigation, all of them include stereotypical masculine characterisations for their male characters.

In *The Legend of Malin Kundang* there was only one male character, Malin Kundang. Malin Kundang was a strong man, ambitious, hard worker, brave, rational, independent and careless. Malin Kundang's physical condition was defined as "a healthy, diligent and strong boy" in the first paragraph. It was an indication that he was strong. The first paragraph also provides the description,

> *"He usually went to the sea to catch fish. After getting fish, he would bring it to his mother or sell the caught fish in the town."*

The above description indicates Malin Kundang as the breadwinner of his low-income family by being a fisherman, which describes him as hardworking. Malin Kundang was also described as strong and brave in the second paragraph, where he helped a merchant defeat the pirates with his bravery. The third paragraph elaborated Malin Kundang's hardworking and independent character as he was described to have become a wealthy tradesman who owned a huge ship. This means Malin Kundang was a professional worker who managed to improve his life into a success despite his poor background. The last paragraph tells about Malin Kundang's rational character as he "…just laughed and set sail" when his mother cursed him. It shows that Malin Kundang did not believe in an irrational myth.

In the second story, *Issumboshi,* there are three male characters involved: Issumboshi, Grandfather, and Lord. Issumboshi was described as a brave, ambitious, hard worker, independent, and handsome. Although Issumboshi was attributed to the small physique, it was emphasised that he was ambitious, as he stated, "I will go to the capital to study and become a respectable person."

In the above description, Issumboshi voiced his determination to become an intelligent and respectable person. He would reach these visions of himself in the capital with the plan. Further, it also indicates Issumboshi as a free-spirited character who could independently decide what he wanted to do, despite his parents' concern about his safety. As he was described to arrive in the capital safely, his determination was already proven, inviting the interpretation that he was also brave as he sailed alone in meagre provisions: a needle for sword and a chopstick for staff. Upon arrival, it was described that he demanded to see the feudal Lord, a ruler that was supposed to be respected and feared. Yet he went on to offer his service as a retainer and proved himself as capable. First, he killed the bee that could sting the Lord,

and then he declared his determination to protect the princess, "I will defend you upon my life," and proved so by killing the demons that attacked the princess. Issumboshi was also described as intelligent as he learned how to read and write quickly under the Princess' guidance. To make him even more masculine, at the end of the narrative, Issumboshi was transformed into "fine young man" when the princess used a magic hammer to make Issumboshi grow into a full-sized man.

The Grandfather and Lord in the legend of *Issumboshi* were not given rounded characterisation. Still, in general, they were both described as rational men when they could accept reasons given by Issumboshi. Both Grandfather and Lord were first sceptical about the ability of Issumboshi to survive and fight with his thumb-sized body. Yet, Grandfather showed that he understood Issumboshi's reason to leave for the capital and went on to prepare his departure. The Lord also changed his scepticism after seeing how Issumboshi fearlessly killed the bee to protect the Lord. Both Grandfather and the Lord showed rational scepticism that is related to the masculine ability to reason.

The third story, *Strong Wind*, has one male character named Strong Wind. The opening line of the story states, "Once there was a great warrior named Strong Wind." This line directly characterised Strong Wind was a strong warrior. He was also described as having supernatural power, that he could make himself invisible. As could be invisible, he wanted to marry the woman who could see him. While the story did not explain why he wanted to marry or marry the woman who could see him, this action can invite several interpretations. First, as a man, he needed a woman to couple with. While biologically speaking it is logical, the sentiment also highlights the instinctive binary oppositions of male/female equals man/woman. The second interpretation would be the heteronormativity emphasised by a man's need to couple with a *woman*. The term of the marriage sparks the third interpretation: the woman should be able to see him. While this can be caused by the characterisation that Strong Wind could make himself invisible, the fact that Strong Wind wanted "to be seen" by the his future bride marks a strong logocentric ego that men should be the centre of attention, while placing women as the passive spectator who can only "see". Indeed, being able to see Strong Wind was the only term and condition proposed by Strong Wind. However, a fourth interpretation could also be purported, that the reason Strong Wind chose the ability to "see" Strong Wind was an effort to find an honest bride who would not lie to him. As he did marry the woman who could "see" him, this, in turn, emphasises the binary opposition that a man should demand a woman to be honest, which entails loyalty and servitude.

Another characterisation of Strong Wind that needs to be highlighted is his ability to give reward and punishment. As the older sisters lied about seeing String

Wind, they were turned into aspen trees as punishment. On the other hand, the youngest sister who honestly said she could not see the strong wind when he decided to be invisible, and then she could see him in Strong Wind's unusual appearance, Strong Wind rewarded her with wealth, status, and himself as the groom. While this description could mean that Strong Wind is characterised as fair in his judgement, it also commands a further interpretation. Giving strong wind the characterisations of the person who wielded power and used it to punish or reward women is another strong logocentrism that mark men as the more superior gender than women, hence underscoring the traditional binary oppositions.

Thus, all the five male characters in the three narrative text included in the English textbook for tenth-grade students in Indonesia are given stereotypical masculine characterisations, such as healthy, diligent, strong, brave, ambitious, hardworking, independent, rational, arrogant, loyal, handsome, egocentric, powerful, and just. These characterisations confirm the gendered binary oppositions that give precedence to men as the better member of society compared to women.

3.2. Feminine Stereotyping

In the narrative texts in the English textbook for tenth-grade students in Indonesia, there are seven female characters included. In the narrative text entitled *The Legend of Malin Kundang*, there was one female character: Malin Kundang's Mother. In *Issumboshi*, there were two female characters, namely Grandmother and Princess. There were four female characters in *Strong Wind,* namely Strong Wind's Sister, Older Daughter 1, Older Daughter 2, and Youngest Daughter.

At the beginning of *The Legend of Malin Kundang,* Malin Kundang's mother was briefly introduced as a passive, single-parent housemaker. She stayed at home waiting for Malin Kundang to bring home fish from the sea or the money he got from selling the fish. These characterisations is quintessential of a passive and dependent housewife feared by liberal feminists. Although there is a big possibility that the lack of description triggers this interpretation due to limitation of space instead of the description itself, it is precisely this lack that denotes the marginalisation of women in this textbook: when it comes to choosing which character to prioritise, the narrative takes the side of the male character to focus on as a classic example of how binary opposition placed women as the marginalised ones.

Another description of Malin Kundang's Mother came in the middle of the plot, where she was described to run to the beach to hug his son, "to release her sadness after being lonely after a long time." Emphasising how the woman "ran" to "hug" to "release her sadness" for "being lonely" was a series of description that highlight how irrationally emotional Malin Kundang's mother was.

Her behaviour represents how a woman tends to be dependent and emotional and evocative of the son's logocentric presence as a man who determines a woman's happiness.

In the story of *Issumboshi*, both Grandmother and the princess were supporting characters with very little characterisations. Together with his Grandfather, the Grandmother took care of Issumboshi, although he was no bigger than a little finger. Hence, the Grandmother was indirectly described as caring in this narrative. Grandmother also cooked good food for Issumboshi to eat in the hope that he would grow bigger soon, which reflects the Grandmother's nurturing characterisations. Grandmother's encouragement emphasises this, so Issumboshi did not feel sad when he was bullied by other kids whose size were normal. Also, Grandmother was described to be concerned with Issumboshi's announcement that he was leaving for the capital, yet she supported this decision by helping him with the provisions. Caring, nurturing and supporting are all feminine traits opposed to bravery, prowess, and valour, as aimed by Issumboshi. Thus, Grandmother's characterizations place her as the caregiver, which emphasized women's gendered roles in the family.

On the other hand, the princess was stereotyped as what princess "should be", that is beautiful and cultured. The princess was described as smart as she was told: "…she taught [Issumboshi] reading, writing, and various studies." Yet, the princess was also described as weak, as she was defenseless against the demons; she only survived because Issumboshi saved her, emphasizing the passive position of a woman as she relied on the male character to defend her. To highlight the patriarchal fairy tale story, the princess then fell in love with Issumboshi when he grew a "fine, young man." Of course, it has to be a [prince] charming that saves a princess, underscoring the "saving dame in distress" masculine theme of the patriarchal romance.

The four female characters in the narrative text *Strong Wind* are Strong Wind's Sister, Older Daughter 1, Older Daughter 2, and Youngest Daughter. In the first paragraph, it is stated that Strong Wind's sister stayed in their tent while waiting for her brother to come home, and she did his bidding in choosing a wife for him. Meanwhile, the chief's daughters have a different personality. The older sisters were described as cruel and mischievous as they "…and treated [the youngest daughter] badly." The older sisters were also dishonest as it is said "They lied to their father that she did these things to herself" as they also lied to Strong Wind's sister about their ability to see Strong Wind. Conversely, the youngest daughter, was described as "…gentle, kind and beautiful,…" as an addition to being honest.

While Strong Wind's Sister is easily placed as the caregiver to nurture Strong Wind's narcissistic personality, the village chief's three daughters were placed in the opposite ends of good and evil. The two older daughters were the envious, dishonest, treacherous, emotional that characterise the evil feminine. On the other hand, the Youngest Daughter was the passive, innocent and naïf feminine. Following the classic resolution for female characters, the evil female characters were then punished, by Strong Wind as the male protagonist. On the other hand, the Youngest Daughter was rewarded for her purity and exemplary honesty, passivity, beauty, and kindness. The female characters who did not follow the assigned feminine roles that support the male characters will be punished by the superior male character.

3.3. Deconstruction of Binary Oppositions

Despite the stereotypical opposing masculine and feminine characterizations given to the male and female characters in the three narrative texts included in the textbook, several efforts to deconstruct the gendered binaries did not happen in this text.

In *The Legend of Malin Kundang*, while Malin Kundang's mother was mainly described as the passive, dependent, homemaker, it was also implied that she was a strong woman. First, it was said that she had to live hard because her husband had passed away when she had Malin Kundang. This means until Malin Kundang was able to support the family, she was the single parent who put food into Malin Kundang's mouth. Later on, Malin Kundang left his mother alone for many years, indicating that Malin Kundang's Mother had survived independently while Malin Kundang was away. While this entails a strength in Malin Kundang's Mother's characterisation, the effort to insert masculine trait into Malin Kunndang's Mother was undermined by the ending of the story, where Malin Kundang's mother used her power to become the epitome femme fatale by cursing him into a stone. The legend did tell that Malin Kundang Mother cursed Malin Kundang for his arrogance, with the story being implanted with patriarchal values that marginalized strong women. But the choice to use this legend as one of the narrative texts in a textbook is made only recently, reflecting the persistence of society's patriarchal fear toward powerful women.

In the story of Issumboshi, the princess was given the intelligence of being literate and the competence to teach Issumboshi to read and write. However, as the story is set in Feudal Japan, where the female aristocrats were given the privilege to study literature and arts, the effort to insert the intelligent male trait into the Princess' characterizations is weakened by two aspects. The first is the failure to extend this intelligence to achievement in subjects traditionally considered masculine such as math and science. The second is the underscoring of the princess' social status that reminds how women, in

general, are at the lower hierarchy than the princess as commoners will be void of the privilege of being literate.

However, one detail does highlight a deconstructive trait in the tale of Issumboshi. At the end of the narrative text, it was described that the princess assertively "asked the King to let her marry Issumboshi." This shows that the princess can decide things on her own such as her marriage. Related to feudal Japan's context in this story, a Princess was usually married off by the Lord to gain an alliance with other Lords. Thus, to insert such assertiveness on the part of the princess and lenience on the part of the Lord does mark a departure from a princess's gendered role. It denotes a deconstruction toward the traditional binary oppositions where the princess should be a passive property instead of an assertive person who could marry for love.

The deconstruction in the Strong Wind story is found in the characterisation of Strong Wind's sister. In the first paragraph, it was said "His sister could see him, but no one else could" describing that she had magical power. Her action later proves when used her magic to grow the youngest daughter's hair back. Moreover, she was described as smart, as she could identify how the two older daughters of the chief were lying. She was described as having the capacity to test the girls' honesty by asking them various questions, marking her critical thinking.

Another deconstructive characterization can be observed in the Youngest Daughter's characterizations, as she was described to come to Strong Wind's Sister "wearing rags, and burn covered her face." This may be a means to emphasize the cruelty her sisters had done her, but at the same time, it may also imply that she did not care about her appearance and that she was determined to become Strong Wind's sister. While these two characterizations can deconstruct the traditional feminine traits attributed to a female protagonist, the cause-and-effect relationship between actions and events in the plot development may invite disparaging interpretation. Was there any possibility that the Youngest Daughter sought marriage as an escape from the misery in her paternal home? Being female and the youngest, it seemed that the village chief trusted the older daughters, placing the youngest one at the bottom of the hierarchy. This interpretation is emphasized by the information that the Youngest Daughter had never seen her intended groom, which means she could not have to marry him for love. In turn, this may invite another interpretation that the Youngest Daughter was invested into the marriage to seek comfort from the powerful warrior, which could also mean that he was wealthy as he could afford fine clothes to give to his future bride.

Among the three narrative texts, Malin Kundang and Issumboshi were given were also given several characterizations that do not confirm the masculine stereotypes. Malin Kundang, in the first story, got all the

male representation characterisation, but he had his feminine traits. He is not as honest as what a good man expected; he was a liar, as he lied about his mother's identity. As dishonesty is traditionally attributed as a feminine trait, Malin Kundang's dishonest characterisation include a slight departure from the traditional binary opposition.

In Issumboshi, the beginning of the story provides deviation of a typical strong male protagonist as Issumboshi was born small and unintelligent. However, with his stereotypical characterisations of ambitious, brave, adventurous, and assertive, he was transformed into the logocentric male hero with the additional characterisations of being physically normal-sized and fine-looking.

4. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that marginalization against women still exists in three narrative texts inserted in Indonesia ELT textbook, even though the effort of deconstructing the binaries existed, albeit fleetingly. There were strong patriarchal traits depicted by male characters and typical female inferiority shown by female characters. The male characters still present masculine traits such as strong, brave, rational, ambitious, hardworking, rough, smart, independent, honest, handsome, and careless. Meanwhile, the female traits like weak, fearful, irrational, passive, nurturing, articulate, stupid, dependent, untrustworthy, beautiful, and caring still found in the female characterize.

Some of the efforts for deconstructing the gendered binary oppositions seemed to be able to send assertiveness and decision making, as was the case with the princess in the tale of *Issumboshi*. However, in other female characters, the insertion of masculine traits still invites the ambivalent interpretation that undermine the effort to deconstruct the gendered binary oppositions. Likewise, the insertion of feminine traits into male characterization's characters did not help with positive characterizations, as was Malin Kundang. In the case of Issumboshi, the plot development itself negate the effort as the feminine characterizations were then replaced with the masculine ones.

These findings imply that more conscious effort should include more deconstruction of the gendered binary oppositions in textbooks. After all, the awareness about gender differences and gender equity is part of the awareness about society's social issues. When promoted well, such attention will build compassionate traits among the students, which will prepare them with one of the necessary 21st Century life skills.

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