

Gender Representation in Portuguese as a Foreign Language Textbooks Used in China

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Abstract—Foreign language textbooks play a crucial role in education, subtly shaping students' perceptions through the hidden curriculum, with gender representation being a significant element. This study, based on the perspective of the hidden curriculum, examines gender representation in four Portuguese as a Foreign Language textbooks (two published in China and two in Portugal) and assesses whether they reflect the roles of men and women in contemporary Chinese society. With the aid of the corpus analysis tool AntConc, it analyzes the frequency and proportion of male and female characters, their family and social roles, and gender stereotypes in linguistic structures, such as gendered pronouns and the order of mention of male and female characters. The findings reveal a marked gender imbalance. The representation of genders in four textbooks used in China reflects, to some extent, the current social situation between men and women in China. Chinese textbooks show a significant dominance of male characters, while Portuguese textbooks exhibit a less pronounced imbalance. Gender roles follow traditional stereotypes, with men being associated with leadership and physical work, while women are primarily linked to caregiving, service-oriented roles, and support tasks. Although social activities display greater diversity, stereotypes persist. Portuguese textbooks, however, actively encourage discussions on gender issues. Linguistic analysis highlights the predominance of male characters and their prioritized mention in both types of textbooks. To reduce gender stereotypes, the study recommends implementing editorial guidelines, raising awareness among authors, promoting equitable teaching practices, and training educators and students to identify and address subtle stereotypes.

Index Terms—textbooks, teaching and learning of Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL), gender representation, China

I. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks, as one of the important tools in the teaching and learning process, as pointed out by Smith (1985), convey values and attitudes to young people in various ways. Given that students generally attribute a high degree of credibility and authority to educational and reference materials, they are relatively less likely to critique these materials compared to others (Lee & Collins, 2010, p. 124). Moreover, as learners often need to assimilate and internalize the details present in textbooks, they tend to pay close attention to the information conveyed by them and are easily influenced by it (Lee & Collins, 2010, p. 124). Thus, the analysis of the content of textbooks used in schools constitutes an important part of research in the field of education. Gender equality, as a fundamental value, has garnered attention from researchers worldwide. Differences in gender representation in textbooks have increasingly become a focus of study (e.g., Benla, 2023; Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Dalle et al., 2023; Evans & Davies, 2000; Law & Chan, 2004; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010; Lee, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2018; Porreca, 1984; Poulou, 1997; Suwarno et al., 2021). Some studies conclude that there are significant differences in gender representation on a global scale (Sunderland, 2015), so it is essential to conduct further research in different global contexts (Dong & Li, 2023). Given the continuous development of the teaching of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) in China, this study presents the results of an analysis of the language and content related to male and female gender in PFL textbooks used in China.

Before 1949, women in China were seen as subordinate to men, with limited access to education and work, as reflected in the proverb, “A woman’s lack of talent is a virtue”. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the government enacted laws to promote gender equality, declaring it a fundamental policy in the Constitution. Key laws, such as the Civil Code, Marriage Law, Labor Law, and the 1992 Law on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests, strengthened women’s rights across various domains. Decades later, how does the situation of gender stand in contemporary Chinese society?

According to the China Population Census Yearbook – 2020, the male population was 723.34 million, and the female population was 688.44 million, with a gender ratio of 105.07 males for every 100 females. Moreover, according to the 2022 Statistical Monitoring Report on the “Outline for the Development of Chinese Women (2021–2030) of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2022, the number of female university students was 29.03 million, an increase of 1.225 million compared to 2021; representing 50.0% of the total student population, maintaining a balanced gender ratio. Of this total, 1.871 million were women enrolled in postgraduate programs, accounting for 51.2% of all postgraduate students. Regarding access to education, not only is the gender ratio in higher education essentially balanced, but women’s rights to higher education are strongly protected. The proportion of women enrolling in higher education courses has already surpassed that of men.

According to the latest data from The Third National Time Use Survey Bulletin (No. 3) —Time Use of Participants in Major Activity Domains by Urban-Rural Areas, Gender, and Age Groups, participants in the area of paid work¹ spend an average of 6 hours and 23 minutes per day on it. Of this total, men spend 6 hours and 44 minutes, while women spend 5 hours and 55 minutes. Participants in the area of unpaid work² spend an average of 2 hours and 45 minutes per day on it. Of this total, men spend 1 hour and 52 minutes, while women spend 3 hours and 29 minutes. These data reflect the imbalance in gender roles in Chinese society, particularly about family responsibilities and unpaid work, which falls more heavily on women. Thus, although women’s position in education and the workforce has improved, traditional gender roles still influence differences in time distribution between men and women, particularly regarding family and caregiving responsibilities.

The social context presented highlights the importance of analyzing gender representation in textbooks used in China, as this representation forms a component of the hidden curriculum.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW: GENDER REPRESENTATION IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

As an essential part of foreign language teaching, textbooks have increasingly attracted researchers' attention regarding the issue of gender representation (Dong & Li, 2023). Among language textbooks, English textbooks are the most frequently analyzed, while studies on textbooks in other languages are relatively scarce. Based on the analysis of previous research on gender representation in foreign language textbooks, a review will then be carried out based on three main dimensions of study: the frequency of references to figures of both genders, gender roles, and the language in terms of gender.

A. Analysis of the Frequency of Appearance of Male and Female Characters

Most studies on language manuals analyze the frequency of male and female character appearances. Some focus on textual content (Hellinger, 1980; Porreca, 1984; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2010; Lee, 2018), others on images (Law & Chan, 2004; Sui, 2022), while some combine both (Lee & Collins, 2009; Lee, 2014b). These studies consistently reveal an imbalance, with male characters outnumbering female characters.

Hartman and Judd (1978) conducted a groundbreaking study on gender representation in language textbooks, analyzing the characteristics and linguistic features of English as a second language (ESL) materials. Their findings revealed that women were underrepresented and portrayed in stereotypical roles.

Lee (2018) used corpus linguistics tools to study gender representation in English textbooks in Japan, showing that women are underrepresented. In a study by Lee and Collins (2010), by comparing 10 English textbooks currently in use in Australia with 10 English textbooks from Hong Kong, they found that in the Australian textbooks, the proportion of female and male mentions was more balanced, while in the Hong Kong textbooks, it was much more male. A study by Porreca (1984) of ESL textbooks in the USA also revealed an asymmetry in the representation of men and women in the illustrations.

B. Analysis of Gender Roles (Gender Stereotypes)

In this section, we mainly look at research on gender roles. The researchers’ findings highlighted many different aspects. Evans and Davies (2000) conducted a specific study on how men are represented in reading texts in primary English textbooks in California, USA. They found that men are still mostly represented through stereotypes, generally described as “aggressive, argumentative, and competitive” (p. 255). In an analysis of images in Chinese language textbooks used in Hong Kong primary schools, Law and Chan (2004) observed that women were predominantly depicted in family and domestic settings with a narrower range of occupations, whereas men were more prominently featured in public domains.

Lee and Collins (2009, 2010) found that in English textbook illustrations in Australia and Hong Kong, many images show women in family activities more often than men, while images related to sports and work are generally dominated by men. Yang (2012) investigated illustrations in Hong Kong primary school English textbooks from the News Magic

¹ According to the explanation of The Third National Time Use Survey Bulletin (No. 2), the area of paid work includes domestic labor, the care and companionship of family members, the purchase of goods or services, as well as unpaid employment activities such as internships, under the category of labor activities, and voluntary social activities under the category of social interactions.

² According to the explanation in the Third National Time Use Survey Report (No. 2), the area of paid work includes all employment-related activities, except for unpaid internships and other similar activities.

series and found that women were no longer depicted with the traditional image of fragility. Furthermore, they are no longer limited to domestic roles, but are also active in society, reflecting gender equality in more recent textbooks.

Lee (2014a) analyzed two English as a foreign language (EFL) textbook series in Japan and found men linked to physical strength, wealth, success, and wisdom, while women were associated with appearance and delicacy. The number of verbs associated with conversations with male characters is significantly greater than with female characters, indicating that men often have more discursive power. However, the textbooks highlight some notable women, like the first female solo percussionist and the first female U.S. congresswoman.

In short, most studies examine gender roles in textbooks from two main perspectives: images and text. The representation of gender roles can be analyzed through personality characteristics, family roles, occupational roles, social activities, and appearance descriptions, among others.

C. *Analysis of Linguistic Structures That Mention Masculine and Feminine Genders*

In EFL textbooks, the analysis of linguistic structures focuses mainly on the following aspects: frequency of occurrence of masculine and feminine pronouns (such as He and She); the order in which men and women are mentioned when they occur together; the use of masculine generic constructions (such as they); and the use of titles of address (Mr, Mrs, Miss and Ms). In the analysis of linguistic structures, the methodology of corpus linguistics is often applied to obtain broader data and more accurate results (Carroll & Kowitz, 1994; Lee, 2014a).

Lee and Collins (2009) analyzed ten Australian secondary school English textbooks and found editors used strategies like “generic they”, “paired pronouns” (he/she, his/her), and “symmetrical sentences” to avoid gender bias. However, in gender pairs, excluding fixed expressions, the “male first” order was still predominant (pp. 354-356).

Lee (2014a, 2016) used Wordsmith tools to analyze high school EFL textbooks in Japan and found a preference for gender-neutral vocabulary. Masculine suffixes in derived nouns were replaced with neuter ones, but gender-neutral designations (Mrs) do not fully cover all textbooks. While masculine terms no longer refer to both genders, the traditional “male-first” order persists when men and women are mentioned together.

In China, PFL teaching has evolved, and researchers have begun to explore this field. Sui (2022) analyzed four university Portuguese textbooks (local and imported versions) as objects of analysis, comparing and exploring the gender roles portrayed in the illustrations, and discovering a situation of gender imbalance. However, the analysis of gender roles in the textual sections is still missing. To fill this gap, as well as explore whether gender representation in PFL textbooks used in teaching in China reflects the characteristics of gender dynamics in the social context of China and analyze whether there are gender stereotypes in the PFL textbooks used in China, this study selected four PFL manuals used in China (two published in China and two in Portugal) and analyzed the gender representations present.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Jackson (1968) introduced the concept of the hidden curriculum. Later, researchers have approached its concept from various perspectives. According to Huang (2014), “the hidden curriculum” relates to the formal curriculum and its fundamental characteristic is that it is not explicitly included in the curriculum plan (p. 164). Kohlberg and Mayer (1970) identify the hidden curriculum concerning moral education and the role of teachers in transmitting moral standards. Yang and Wang (2008) consider that the hidden curriculum plays a very important role in the development of students’ moral cognition and emotional abilities.

According to Lee (2014a), one of the main agents of the hidden curriculum is textbooks, which play a significant role in transmitting values and norms that are not explicitly taught, but indirectly affect students. Students’ perceptions of gender roles are an example of this, that is, textbooks not only convey academic content but also influence the way students view social gender roles (Stromquist et al., 1998) and their perception of social equity (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008). Thus, the content of textbooks implicitly transmits meanings to students and this influence is exerted and assimilated subtly and unconsciously, but it cannot be guaranteed that this impact on students will always be positive and constructive. The hidden curriculum contains many implicit moral assumptions and values that may differ completely from the beliefs that educators consciously recognize and incorporate into their system of moral consciousness (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Therefore, critical analysis of the hidden curriculum present in the content of textbooks is an important step.

Furthermore, “hidden curriculum is acknowledged as the socialization process of schooling” (Kentli, 2009, p. 83). Through this process, education plays a crucial role in deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes, promoting a culture of respect and equality. This impact goes beyond the transmission of formal knowledge, subtly influencing students’ perceptions of social issues such as gender roles and equality, often unintentionally. Thus, by promoting awareness of the implicit meanings conveyed by the hidden curriculum, education becomes a powerful tool for forming critical and responsible citizens, capable of challenging and transforming social dynamics. True transformation does not depend solely on government public policies, but also on the mobilization of each individual, starting with education, which acts as the basis for profound and lasting changes in society.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The four textbooks analyzed include two published in Portugal: *Português em Foco (MPF)* and *Português XXI (MPXXI)*; and two in China: *Português para Ensino Universitário (MPEU)* and *Curso de Português para Chineses (MCPC)*. Considering that most of the information contained in the Teacher's Books is based on the contents of the Student's Books, the content of the corpus of analysis only includes the texts present in the Student's Books and the Exercise Books of the textbooks.

Thus, to achieve the objectives mentioned above, the research questions are:

1. In the PFL textbooks analyzed, how many male and female characters appear, and how often are they mentioned?
2. What are the family roles and social roles played by male and female characters in the textbooks? Are there gender stereotypes in the assignment of these roles?
3. What types of activities do male and female characters participate in the PFL textbooks? Are there gender stereotypes in these activities?
4. From the perspective of linguistic structure, how often do masculine and feminine personal pronouns appear? When female and male characters appear together, what is the order in which they are mentioned?
5. Regarding the four aspects mentioned above, are there any differences between the textbooks published in China and Portugal? If so, what are these differences?

To answer research question 1, we manually extracted all textual references to male and female characters present in the four manuals (excluding images and auditory content). These references were recorded and accounted for in Excel.

To answer question 2, during the manual extraction of male and female characters, we also recorded the family roles and social roles played by these characters. In this process, we used Lee's (2018) categorization of family roles: "father/papa" and "mother/mama/mom"; "husband" and "wife"; "son" and "daughter"; "brother" and "sister"; "grandfather" and "grandmother"; "uncle" and "aunt" (p. 210). In addition, we added the categories of family roles identified in the database of this study – "cousin (female)" and "cousin (male)"; "nephew" and "niece"; "brother-in-law" and "sister-in-law"; "grandson" and "granddaughter"; "son-in-law"; "father-in-law" – thus forming the final framework of analysis. Regarding social roles, according to Law and Chan (2004), social roles can be divided into five main categories: monopolized by men, dominated by men, monopolized by women, dominated by women, and shared between genders. Male-dominated roles refer to those predominantly played by men rather than women in textbooks, while female-dominated roles refer to those in which women are portrayed more often than men. If the role type was played exclusively by men, it was called male-monopolized; Similarly, if a role was played exclusively by women, it was called a female-monopolized role. The last category, shared gender roles, refers to those with a balanced number of male and female representations. In this process, due to the variation in the level of detail with which information about characters is presented in the manuals, some characters had no mention of their roles. On the other hand, some characters played more than one family or social role. Thus, when carrying out the final accounting, the number of family and social roles recorded does not necessarily coincide with the total number of characters identified.

To answer question 3, during the extraction of male and female characters, we also recorded the different types of activities they participated in. According to Law and Chan's (2004) classification, the activities related to the characters' roles were divided into seven categories: "Doing household chores", "Working in workplaces", "Studying at school", "Participating in social activities", "Talking to other people", "Thinking" and "Personal activities" (p. 59).

To answer question 4 and ensure a more comprehensive analysis, we also extracted some content from a linguistic point of view using the corpus linguistics instrument Antconc (Anthony, 2024), as a complement to the analysis: a) we extracted and counted the masculine and feminine personal pronouns in Portuguese and Chinese — "Ele(s)/Ela(s)" and "ta" (他)/ "tamen" (他们)/ "ta" (她)/ "tamen" (她们) (node words) — as well as their frequencies; b) we extracted all conjunctions in Portuguese, "e/or", and Chinese, "he" (和)/ "tong" (同)/ "yu" (与) — as Node Words/Keywords and the five words before and after these conjunctions (Collocates). We then manually identified all situations in which male and female characters appeared simultaneously, recording the order in which they were mentioned.

To answer question 5, we separately classified the data obtained in the analyses of questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, presenting the results of the statistics relating to textbooks from Portugal and China, to explore the differences between them.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Female and Male Characters in the Four Textbooks

Table 1 presents the number and proportion of male and female characters in the four manuals analyzed and the frequency and proportion of mentions of male and female characters in these manuals. According to the values of this table, we can observe that, in the four manuals analyzed, the number of male characters is significantly higher than that of female characters (MPEU: 329 vs. 189; MCPC: 427 vs. 237; MPF: 836 vs. 624; MPXXI: 327 vs. 233), and the frequency with which male characters are mentioned is also higher than that of female characters (MPEU: 852 vs. 369; MCPC: 836 vs. 503; MPF: 1884 vs. 1539; MPXXI: 744 vs. 441).

TABLE 1
CHARACTERS AND FREQUENCY OF REFERENCE TO MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MANUALS

CHARACTERS AND FREQUENCY OF REFERENCE TO MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN MANUALS											
Textbooks		No. of characters					Frequency of reference to characters				
		Female		Male		Total No.	Female		Male		Total No.
		No.	%	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%	
Chinese textbooks	MPEU	189	36.5	329	63.5	518	369	30.2	852	69.7	1222
	MCPC	237	35.7	427	64.3	664	503	37.5	836	62.4	1340
Portuguese textbooks	MPF	624	42.7	836	57.3	1460	1539	45.0	1884	55.0	3423
	MPXXI	233	41.6	327	58.4	560	441	37.2	744	62.8	1185
		1283	40.1	1919	59.9	3202	2852	40.0	4316	60.2	7170

This result is similar to that presented by Lee and Collins (2008) and Lee (2014a), who indicated a lower female representation compared to male representation in textbooks. However, we found that this inequality in the numbers of female and male characters presents a certain similarity with the contemporary social context of China, where the female population is smaller than the male population. In addition, we found that the difference in the number of male and female characters in Portuguese textbooks is slightly smaller than that in Chinese textbooks. This suggests that Portuguese textbooks pay slightly more attention to the representation of female characters compared to Chinese textbooks.

B. Family and Social Roles of Female and Male Characters

Table 2 presents the family roles played by male and female characters in the four textbooks analyzed, along with the corresponding frequencies. As illustrated in Table 2, both types of textbooks present men and women in traditional family roles, such as father and mother, husband and wife, daughter and son, sister and brother, etc. In Portuguese manuals, the family roles played by the characters are more varied, still including, for example, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, aunt, father-in-law, son-in-law, and grandfather. However, we found that in Chinese textbooks, men appear more frequently as fathers than women as mothers, while in Portuguese textbooks the opposite occurs. However, this does not seem to indicate that Chinese manuals place greater emphasis on the role of men in the family and family activities. A closer look reveals that only women are described as “housewives.” For example,

1) “离新年还有半个月，我妈妈和别的家庭主妇一样，忙着打扫家里。” (There are still two weeks until the New Year, and my mom, like other housewives, is busy cleaning the house.) (MCPC, Student’s Book, Volume 2, Unit 2, p. 18)

2) “A minha mãe está sempre ocupada com os trabalhos domésticos.” (My mother is always busy with housework.) (MCPC, Student’s Book, Volume 1, Unit 8, p. 73)

3) “Em casa, eu ajudo a minha mãe a fazer os trabalhos domésticos, e o meu irmão ajuda o nosso pai a fazer outros trabalhos.” (At home, I help my mother with the housework, and my brother helps our father with other chores.) (MPEU, Student’s Book, Volume 1, Unit 8, p. 117)

On the other hand, we identified contradictory messages in Chinese manuals, as they promote the idea that women should work outside the home and be independent. For example:

4) “...na China, a grande maioria das mulheres volta a trabalhar logo depois de terminar a licença de maternidade.” (...in China, the vast majority of women return to work soon after finishing their maternity leave.) (MCPC, Student’s Book, Volume 4, Unit 6, p. 97)

5) “Uma mulher não pode viver dependendo de um homem.” (A woman cannot live depending on a man.) (MPEU, Student’s Book, Volume 2, Unit 14, p. 379)

Thus, we can summarize that, although Chinese textbooks demonstrate a conscious intention to highlight female independence, they also perpetuate stereotypes related to the role of women as “housewives” and those largely responsible for carrying out domestic tasks.

TABLE 2
FAMILY ROLES PLAYED BY MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE TEXTBOOKS

Chinese textbooks				Portuguese textbooks			
Family roles	Women	Family roles	Men	Family roles	Women	Family roles	Men
Mother	8	Father	15	Mother	30	Father	21
Wife	19	Husband	21	Wife	25	Husband	21
Daughter	23	Son	46	Daughter	34	Son	50
Sister	11	Brother	9	Sister	13	Brother	11
Cousin (female)	6	Cousin (male)	5	Cousin (female)	5	Cousin (male)	4
Niece	2	Nephew	3	Niece	2	Nephew	9
Sister-in-law	0	Brother-in-law	0	Sister-in-law	1	Brother-in-law	1
Aunt	0	Father-in-law	0	Aunt	7	Father-in-law	1
Grandmother	4	Son-in-law	0	Grandmother	6	Son-in-law	2
Granddaughter	8	Uncle	1	Granddaughter	8	Uncle	2
		Grandfather	0			Grandfather	6
		Grandson	7			Grandson	6

After analyzing the family roles played by male and female characters in textbooks, we will now look at the social roles they play and see if there are gender stereotypes. Table 3 shows that, in the two types of textbooks analyzed, men

play broader social roles in the male-monopolized and male-dominated categories: in the Portuguese textbooks, the numbers are 57 and 10, respectively; in the Chinese manuals, 51 and 16. The corresponding numbers for the female-dominated and monopolized categories are significantly lower: in the Portuguese textbooks, 2 and 4, and in the Chinese textbooks, 1 and 6. Thus, in both the Portuguese and Chinese PFL textbooks, the social roles performed by women are consistently more limited than those performed by men. This finding is similar to that observed by Gupta and Lee (1990), Law and Chan (2004) and Lee and Collin (2010).

TABLE 3
FEMALE AND MALE SOCIAL ROLES

	Chinese textbooks	Portuguese textbooks
Male-monopolized social roles	57	51
Male-dominated social roles	10	16
Female-monopolized social roles	2	1
Female-dominated social roles	4	6
Gender shared social roles	6	9

Further analysis of the textbooks revealed that traditional stereotypes associated with female and male professions persist. Women are often portrayed in professions related to care, service, and support, such as teachers, babysitters, company secretaries, and saleswomen. However, women are also occasionally represented as sociologists or pianists. As mentioned by Lee and Collin (2010), these occasional representations may suggest progress toward gender equality. Male representation remains limited to traditional “masculine” roles, ranging from lower-prestige positions such as factory worker, welder, and meat cutter, to higher-prestige positions such as president of the country, prime minister, diplomat, (former) minister of national government bodies, (former) member of parliament, politician, among others. Men tend to be more often associated with physically demanding jobs or activities, such as (ex-)football player/soccer player, fisherman, and vegetable garden owner. In addition, men are also associated with roles and activities such as “criminals”, such as thieves. In the MCPC, in Volume 3, Student’s Book, in Unit 12, a text presents the criminal behavior of Johansen, a 16-year-old Norwegian boy who created a program capable of breaking the anti-piracy protection of DVDs, allowing the content to be copied without paying copyright fees, and made the program available on the Internet, harming the Hollywood film industry, which invested millions in this technology. As a result, his equipment was seized and he was questioned along with his father, accused of violating copyright laws.

Men always occupy leadership or decision-making positions in companies, such as (sub)/(ex)-director, general manager, and company president; women are rarely portrayed in these roles. In the academic and artistic fields, men always play creative and intellectual leadership roles, such as anthropologists, philosophers, historians, film directors, composers, playwrights, and architects, among others. Although this phenomenon is a type of gender stereotype, this representation reflects the workforce patterns in China’s censuses, that is, according to the data shown in the China Population Census Yearbook - 2020, the distribution of work between men and women reveals that, although many men occupy technical and leadership positions, women have a greater presence in service and technical areas (such as teachers and nurses), with a smaller share in leadership positions. As Lee and Collins (2010) state, the question remains whether authors should portray reality or promote gender equality by representing men and women in a balanced way. However, for teachers, adopting proactive and positive teaching methods will provide students with the opportunity to reflect and explore ways to correct the gender imbalance (Lee & Collins, 2010).

This point is reflected in Portuguese manuals. For example, in MPXXI, in Volume 1, in Student’s Book, in Unit 11, a discussion on this topic is mentioned, that is, a reflection on the role of women in society and in the family, as can be seen in the sentence: “A Teresa fez um trabalho sobre a desigualdade profissional entre homens e mulheres. Acha que há profissões próprias para homens e profissões para mulheres?” (Teresa did a job on professional inequality between men and women. Do you think there are professions for men and professions for women?). In addition, some statements about the social roles and activities of male and female figures are presented, asking for the students’ opinions (Figure 1). MPXXI launches this topic for discussion among students, and this teaching method can not only draw students’ attention to the issue but can also lead them to reflect on the social roles of men and women.

1. Concorda com estas afirmações ?

	SIM	NÃO
a. Os homens devem partilhar os trabalhos de casa.	☐	☐
b. As mulheres devem ter um emprego, mesmo quando têm filhos.	☐	☐
c. Só as mulheres que trabalham têm independência económica.	☐	☐
d. A sociedade ainda vê a mulher essencialmente como mãe e dona de casa.	☐	☐
e. Quando a mulher trabalha fora de casa, há mais problemas para o casamento e para os filhos.	☐	☐
f. Um homem pode educar os filhos tão bem como a mulher.	☐	☐

Figure 1. Questionnaire on the Social Role of Gender (MPXXI, Student’s Book, Volume 1, Unit 11, pp. 178-179)

C. Activities of Female and Male Characters

Intending to investigate the possible existence of other gender stereotypes, according to the classification of the activities carried out by the characters of Law and Chan (2004) previously mentioned, we obtained the data presented in Table 4, which shows the number and proportion of activities divided by gender in textbooks from China (MPEU and MCPC) and Portugal (MPF and MPXXI). We observed that in both Chinese and Portuguese textbooks, female protagonists are more often associated with household chores such as making beds, washing clothes, and cooking than male protagonists (6 vs. 1; 8 vs. 5). On the other hand, male protagonists appear more frequently associated with workplace activities, with proportions of 18.4% vs. 9.0% in Chinese manuals and 8.0% vs. 6.6% in Portuguese manuals. This pattern is consistent with the most recent data from The Third National Time Use Survey Bulletin (No. 3), that is, women are associated more with housework and men focus on paid work. To the activities of “Studying at school” and “Participating in social activities”, it was found that, in absolute terms, male characters appear in greater numbers than female characters. However, in proportional terms, the differences between the genders are minimal. In the case of “Thinking” activities (such as “finding”, “thinking”, “wanting”, etc. mental activities) in Portuguese textbooks, the proportion is identical between male and female characters. In the categories of “Personal Activities” and “Talking to other people”, in both Chinese and Portuguese textbooks, male characters appear more frequently in absolute terms. However, in proportional terms, female characters slightly outnumber male ones.

TABLE 4
ACTIVITIES BY CHARACTER GENDER IN CHINESE (MPEU AND MCPC) AND PORTUGUESE (MPF AND MPXXI) TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks	Types of activities	Female Characters		Male Characters	
		No.	%	No.	%
Chinese textbooks	Doing household chores	6	1.6	1	0.2
	Working in the workplace	33	9.0	121	18.4
	Studying at school	22	6.0	40	6.1
	Participating in social activities	37	10.1	70	10.7
	Talking to other people	139	37.9	195	29.7
	Thinking	18	4.9	48	7.3
	Personal activities	112	30.5	181	27.6
	Total	367		656	
Portuguese textbooks	Doing household chores	8	1.1	5	0.5
	Working in the workplace	48	6.6	75	8.0
	Studying at school	25	3.4	34	3.6
	Participating in social activities	57	7.8	75	8.0
	Talking to other people	232	31.8	276	29.4
	Thinking	48	6.6	62	6.6
	Personal activities	301	41.3	358	38.2
	Total	719		885	

The results of the analysis show that traditional gender stereotypes are still present, especially in Chinese textbooks — where the idea of “the man outside the home and the woman inside the home” is reflected, with men working and supporting the family and women to take care of children and household chores. For example, in MPEU, in Volume 2, in Student’s Book, Unit 10, there are descriptions such as:

6) “A Isaura dedica todo o seu tempo aos filhos.” (Isaura devotes all her time to her children.) (p. 257)

7) “O João dedica-se de corpo e alma ao seu trabalho.” (João dedicates himself wholeheartedly to his work.) (p. 257)

In MPXXI, Volume 1, Student’s Book, Unit 9:

8) “A mãe, a Cristina, está a preparar uma festa para o aniversário do filho.” (The mother, Cristina, is preparing a party for her son’s birthday.) (p. 144)

In the MPF, in Volume 1, Student’s Book, Unit 4, an exercise presents:

9) “O Jorge nunca ____ (fazer) os trabalhos de casa.” (Jorge never ____ (do) his homework.) (p. 59)

These results are in line with those of previous studies, such as those by Law and Chan (2004) and Lee and Collins (2008). In a study of image analysis in Chinese language textbooks used in Hong Kong primary schools, Law and Chan (2004) concluded that female characters tend to be more visible in family contexts, with a limited range of occupations, while male characters predominate in public settings.

Additionally, we observed other differences, particularly in the representation of driving abilities. In Volume 1, Student’s Book, Unit 8, of the MPF, the lowest driving competence is attributed to a female character:

10) “A Sara conduz pior do que o Paulo.” (Sara drives worse than Paulo.) (p. 102)

However, we also notice that these gender stereotypes are weakening, especially in Portuguese textbooks. These show women and men sharing social responsibilities and the female characters having a rich and autonomous personal and social life.

D. Feminine and Masculine Pronouns

To further explore the issue of gender representation in the four textbooks analyzed, this study also includes a quantitative analysis of the pronouns used to refer to male and female characters. Table 5 presents the frequency and proportion of occurrence of masculine and feminine personal pronouns in the four textbooks analyzed. According to Table

5, in all the textbooks, the frequency of masculine personal pronouns is higher than that of feminine personal pronouns. This result once again confirms the lower representation of women, consistent with the previously presented data on characters and mentions. The result of Lee's (2014b) study is similar. When Lee (2014b) analyzed two sets of primary school ELT textbooks in Hong Kong, published in 1998 and 2005, he found that masculine pronouns were more frequent than feminine pronouns.

TABLE 5
MASCULINE AND FEMININE PRONOUNS IN THE FOUR MANUALS

Manuals		Personal pronouns (referring to male characters) ³		Personal pronouns (referring to female characters) ⁴		Total No.
		No.	%	No.	%	
Chinese textbooks	MPEU	729	82.4	156	17.6	885
	MCPC	449	72.9	167	27.1	616
Portuguese textbooks	MPF	648	61.7	403	38.3	1051
	MPXXI	753	62.6	449	37.4	1202
Total No.		2579	68.7	1175	31.3	3754

When comparing the two types of textbooks, it is observed that the difference in the number of masculine and feminine pronouns is greater in textbooks published in China compared to those published in Portugal. This is in line with the results of the previous analysis of male and female characters. It can be seen that Portuguese textbooks give greater attention to female characters compared to Chinese textbooks.

E. Order of Mention

Although in contemporary society we often say “ladies first” or “ladies and gentlemen”, expressions that, on the one hand, demonstrate respect for women and, on the other, reflect the chivalrous behavior of men, in practice, when we mention men and women together in social life, it is common for men to be subtly placed first. As Lee and Collins (2010) point out, this can be observed in traditional foreign works, such as “Romeo” and “Juliet”, and in the four great love stories of Chinese folk tradition, such as “Liang Shanbo” (梁山伯) and “Zhu Yingtai” (祝英台). Table 6 presents the order in which female and male characters are mentioned (women first and man first), along with the corresponding frequencies.

TABLE 6
ORDER OF MENTION OF FEMALE AND MALE CHARACTERS

	Woman first	Man first
Portuguese textbooks	35	67
Chinese textbooks	13	25

From the data, we found that, in Chinese manuals, mentions of male characters appear first more often than female characters, with 25 and 13 occurrences, respectively. In Portuguese textbooks, the numbers also show a male predominance, with 67 mentions of men first against 35 of women, as examples 11 and 12 present.

Examples:

11) “O **Sr. Silva** e a **mulher** trabalham num hotel: ele é cozinheiro e ela trabalha na lavandaria.” (**Mr. Silva** and his **wife** work at a hotel: he is a cook, and she works in the laundry.) (MPXXI, Volume 1, Student's Book, Unit 12, p. 186)

12) “**马里奥**喜欢和他**女朋友**一起去海滩。” (**Mário** likes going to the beach with **his girlfriend**.) (MPEU, Volume 1, Student's Book, Unit 12, p. 215)

Furthermore, when mentioning roles in the family context, “father” is always referred to before “mother”, “grandfather” before “grandmother”, “grandson” before “granddaughter”, “uncle” before “aunt” and “brother” before “sister”. This phenomenon has been observed 9 times in Chinese manuals. For example,

13) “O **pai** ou a **mãe** receberão a primeira fatia do bolo.” (The **father** or the **mother** will receive the first slice of the cake.) (MCPC, Volume 4, Student's Book, Unit 9, p. 161)

14) “O filho do **neto** ou da **neta**” (The son of the **grandson** or **granddaughter**) (MPEU, Volume 1, Student's Book, Unit 8, p. 129)

Some results similar also were found in the study of Lee (2014b). When the author examined the content of a widely used series of primary school English-language textbooks from 2005 and the same series from 1988, he also observed that in gendered noun pairs, men were more frequently mentioned before women (p. 367). The other result is different from our study. Lee (2014b) observed, “informal domestic terms for family *mom* always appeared before *dad*” (p. 370). The author interpreted this fact as an indication of the more significant role of women in the family context. However, in our study, we found that, in the order in which family roles are mentioned, men are invariably mentioned before women, which seems to reflect a deeply rooted mentality of male priority.

³ In Portuguese, it refers to the masculine personal pronoun, “Ele” and “Eles”. In Chinese, it refers to “ta” (他) and “tamen” (他们).

⁴ In Portuguese, it refers to feminine personal pronouns, “Ela” and “Elas”. In Chinese, it refers to “ta” (她) and “tamen” (她们).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study, through a content analysis combined with the use of corpus linguistics instruments, employed quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to examine four PFL manuals used in PFL teaching in China (two published in China and two in Portugal). The research focused on the statistical analysis of the quantity and frequency of male and female characters mentioned in the Student's and Exercise Books of the manuals, verifying whether there are gender stereotypes in social and family roles even from the perspective of language. The aim is to verify whether the conditions of gender social roles presented in textbooks used in China reflect the current social reality in China.

The results of this study allow us to conclude that:

1) The number and frequency of mentions of male and female characters in the four PFL textbooks analyzed show a notable imbalance, especially in Chinese textbooks, where the number and frequency of male characters significantly outnumber female ones. On the other hand, in Portuguese textbooks, the gender imbalance is less pronounced.

2) Regarding the analysis of gender roles in the texts, although some Chinese manuals present textual descriptions of "women working outside the home independently and autonomously", male and female roles are still often limited to traditional stereotypes, with men focused on careers and women dedicated to family care. In addition, the social roles played by men are significantly greater in both quantity and diversity, with them mainly occupying leadership positions (national leaders, decision-makers in companies, creative and intellectual figures in academic and artistic fields), as well as roles that require physical effort and related to crimes. On the other hand, women are more associated with care, service, support, and assistance roles.

3) In the analysis of male and female activities, although the stereotypical perception that "women take care of the house" and "men go out to work" persists, in other activities (social/conversations/personal activities), both men and women can take on multiple social roles and have their own more diverse lives. In Portuguese textbooks, the approach of directly posing questions (about the social division of gender) is used so that students can discuss and reflect, providing an opportunity to explore topics related to gender imbalance.

4) In the analysis of the linguistic structure, the frequency of masculine and feminine personal pronouns also confirms the discrepancy in the number of female and male characters appearing in the manuals, further reinforcing the imbalance between male and female characters; as for the analysis of the order in which male and female characters are mentioned, it is revealed that in both Chinese and Portuguese textbooks, the male character is mentioned first in most situations.

In summary, the gender representation in the four PFL textbooks used in China reflects, to some extent, the current social situation between men and women in China. For example, the number of male characters in the textbooks exceeds that of female characters, which corresponds to the current population size, where men slightly outnumber women. In addition, the social role assignments between men and women in the textbooks show similarities, i.e., men often take on leadership roles, while women are underrepresented. In social activities, there are also similarities, such as the fact that household chores are more often undertaken by women, while men participate more in paid activities. However, much of this content perpetuates gender stereotypes. Therefore, for social progress, breaking these stereotypes is an essential task in the educational process, and it is crucial that the hidden curriculum receives more attention from education-related researchers.

Based on the above findings, we present some suggestions on how to try to reduce gender stereotypes in textbooks and promote gender equality. From the perspective of publishing and supervising institutions, it is essential to implement guidelines to avoid gender stereotypes in textbooks, helping students form a fairer and more balanced perception of gender issues. As for textbook authors, it is important to be aware of national and international research on gender representation in textbooks, avoiding stereotypes and prejudices. Educators and students, as the main users of these textbooks, should focus on gender equality in their educational practices, promoting a balanced and ethical awareness regarding gender. In education, gender stereotypes are often more subtle than unbalanced representations and explicit discrimination, making it essential to train educators and students to develop skills in dealing with issues of gender representation. This study also has some limitations, such as the manual process of extracting male and female characters, which may introduce errors in the data due to human constraints. Future research could include a greater focus on the actual users of the manuals, i.e., teachers and students, as well as investigating the practical use of PFL manuals by observing classroom interactions between students and teachers based on these manuals.

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