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Gender representation in Balinese language textbooks: A semiotic and critical discourse analysis

Ni Luh Made Dewi Suterayani

Master's Program in Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia
Corresponding Email: dewisuterayani@gmail.com

Ni Made Suryati

Master's Program in Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia

Silvia Damayanti

Master's Program in Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia

Abstract--Gender representation in educational textbooks plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of social roles, identities, and relationships. As instructional materials, textbooks not only facilitate language learning but also transmit cultural values and ideologies. This study aims to examine gender representation in the *Mangu Sastra* Balinese language textbook series for Grades I–VI of elementary schools by employing a semiotic and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design. The primary data consisted of verbal and non-verbal elements, including narratives, dialogues, songs, and visual illustrations found in the *Mangu Sastra* textbooks published by Dwi Jaya Mandiri and developed by the Balinese Language Teachers Working Group (KKG) of Badung Regency. Data were collected through documentation, repeated reading, note-taking, coding, and translation techniques. The analysis integrated Barthes' semiotic framework to examine denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings, alongside Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to reveal underlying ideologies and power relations. The findings indicate that gender representation in the textbooks remains predominantly patriarchal. Female characters are largely portrayed in domestic and caregiving roles, whereas male characters dominate public,



professional, historical, and leadership domains. Furthermore, visual and textual representations reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by associating masculinity with authority, physical strength, and productivity, while femininity is linked to nurturing and domestic responsibilities. The study concludes that the textbooks reproduce patriarchal ideologies embedded within Balinese socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, integrating gender-sensitive perspectives into local language textbooks is essential to promote more inclusive and equitable educational practices while preserving cultural values.

Keywords---gender representation, Balinese language textbooks, semiotics, critical discourse analysis, patriarchy, gender ideology.

Introduction

Educational textbooks serve not merely as instructional materials but also as powerful instruments for transmitting cultural values, social norms, and ideological perspectives. As authoritative resources used continuously in formal education, textbooks significantly influence students' perceptions of social reality, including their understanding of gender roles and identities (Sunderland, 2000). Previous studies have demonstrated that school textbooks frequently portray males as central figures, leaders, and productive actors, while females are often represented in subordinate and domestic roles (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sunderland, 2000). Such representations may contribute to the reproduction of gender stereotypes and inequalities within society.

The issue of gender representation becomes particularly important in primary education because children aged between six and twelve years are in a crucial developmental stage characterized by the formation of social schemas and self-identity. According to Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2009), children at this stage increasingly internalize social norms and develop relatively stable gender identities. Furthermore, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory suggests that children tend to imitate behaviors observed in their environment, including those presented in educational materials. Similarly, Bem (1981) argues that children construct gender schemas based on repeated social experiences. Consequently, continuous exposure to gender-biased learning materials throughout elementary education may shape students' perceptions regarding socially acceptable roles for males and females.

In the context of Bali, the examination of gender representation in educational materials is particularly relevant due to the strong influence of patrilineal and socio-religious traditions. Balinese language textbooks occupy a unique position because they function not only as instruments for language learning but also as media for transmitting local cultural values and social norms. Nevertheless, studies have indicated that educational texts often reproduce patriarchal ideologies embedded within society (Gee, 2014). In Balinese society, gender-based divisions of roles remain strongly apparent in domestic, social, and religious spheres, with men generally dominating inheritance, ownership, and ceremonial responsibilities (Wikan, 1990). These cultural constructions may be

unconsciously reproduced in school textbooks and subsequently normalized through educational practices.

Critical scholars have argued that educational texts are never ideologically neutral. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that discourse does not merely reflect social reality but actively constructs and reproduces it. Likewise, Eriyanto (2005) demonstrates that gender ideology in educational texts is frequently embedded implicitly through lexical choices, narrative structures, and visual arrangements. Semiotics, as proposed by Barthes (1977), provides an analytical framework for uncovering meanings embedded in signs and symbols, whereas Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enables researchers to examine how power relations and ideological domination are reproduced through discourse (van Dijk, 1993). The integration of these two approaches offers a comprehensive framework for investigating both explicit and implicit gender representations in educational materials.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to gender representation in textbooks, existing studies have predominantly focused on national or foreign language textbooks and have generally examined only particular grade levels. Research specifically addressing Balinese language textbooks remains limited. Moreover, few studies have comprehensively investigated gender representation across the entire elementary school continuum. Examining the complete series of textbooks from Grades I to VI is essential because it enables the identification of patterns, consistency, and progression in gender constructions that may be introduced, reinforced, or transformed throughout children's educational experiences.

Therefore, this study aims to examine gender representation in the *Mangu Sastra* Balinese language textbook series for Grades I to VI of elementary school. Employing semiotic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, this study seeks to uncover how gender identities and ideologies are constructed through textual narratives and visual illustrations. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive, equitable, and gender-sensitive instructional materials while maintaining the cultural values embedded in Balinese language education.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine gender representation in Balinese language textbooks through the integration of semiotic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The primary data source consisted of the *Mangu Sastra* Balinese language textbook series for Grades I to VI of elementary schools, published by Dwi Jaya Mandiri and developed by the Balinese Language Teachers Working Group (KKG) of Badung Regency. The data comprised verbal and non-verbal elements, including narratives, dialogues, sentences, and visual illustrations containing gender-related representations. Data were collected through documentation and observation techniques, involving repeated reading, systematic note-taking, coding, and translation of Balinese texts into Indonesian to ensure contextual accuracy. The researcher functioned as the principal research instrument, supported by documentation tools for data organization and analysis. Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed

by Miles and Huberman, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Furthermore, Barthes' semiotic framework was employed to interpret denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings embedded in textual and visual signs, while Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis was used to reveal the underlying gender ideologies and power relations reproduced through discourse within the textbooks.

Result and Discussion

The analysis of the *Mangu Sastra* Balinese language textbook series for Grades I–VI revealed that gender representation is constructed through both verbal and visual signs. A total of twenty-three data units consisting of narratives, dialogues, songs, and illustrations were identified and categorized as symbols, icons, and indices. The findings indicate that gender representation in the textbooks remains predominantly influenced by patriarchal cultural values, resulting in unequal portrayals of male and female characters.

Female Representation in Domestic and Caregiving Roles

The findings demonstrate that female characters are predominantly represented within domestic and caregiving domains. Across various textual and visual representations, girls and women are frequently portrayed engaging in household activities such as cooking, cleaning, caring for siblings, washing dishes, and assisting mothers in the kitchen. Examples include the portrayals of *Ni Luh Sulastri* helping her mother cook, *Putri Cening Ayu* staying at home to care for younger siblings, and mothers consistently depicted as preparing meals and managing household tasks. These representations are reinforced visually through illustrations showing girls sweeping rooms, drying clothes, and performing domestic chores.

From a semiotic perspective, the repeated association between female characters and domestic activities functions as a cultural myth in Barthes' (1977) sense, naturalizing the assumption that caregiving and household responsibilities inherently belong to women. Through Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, these representations can be understood as discursive practices that reproduce traditional gender divisions and legitimize women's confinement to domestic spaces. Such findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that educational textbooks often position women as caregivers and household managers (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sunderland, 2000).

Male Dominance in Public, Professional, and Leadership Domains

The study also reveals a strong tendency to position men as dominant actors within public, professional, and leadership spheres. Male characters are frequently represented as farmers, hotel employees, pilots, ship captains, fishermen, village leaders, historical figures, and technical professionals. In contrast, female occupational representation is considerably limited, with women appearing primarily as traders, dancers, or homemakers.

Visual representations further reinforce male dominance. Among nine occupational illustrations identified in the textbooks, eight depict male professions, while only one portrays a female dancer. Moreover, historical

narratives exclusively highlight male figures, such as kings and national leaders, while female contributions remain largely absent.

Semiotically, these occupational and historical representations symbolize authority, power, and social prestige as masculine attributes. At the discursive level, the textbooks construct public leadership and professional achievement as predominantly male domains. This finding supports van Dijk's (1993) argument that discourse serves as a mechanism for reproducing social dominance and maintaining unequal power relations.

Gender Stereotypes in Children's Activities and Behaviors

Gender stereotyping is also evident in representations of children's daily activities, play, and behavior. Female characters are generally portrayed as disciplined, obedient, responsible, and nurturing. In contrast, male characters are more frequently associated with physical activities, outdoor games, and, in some instances, undesirable behaviors such as fighting and cheating.

The illustrations of traditional games demonstrate clear gender segmentation. Girls are mainly associated with games requiring calmness and social interaction, such as *macingklak* and *cek-cek pyak*, whereas boys are represented engaging in physically demanding outdoor activities, including kite flying and *pentil* games. Likewise, boys are commonly depicted performing physically demanding tasks, such as lifting heavy objects, while girls are represented performing passive or domestic activities.

These repeated representations contribute to the formation of gender schemas among children (Bem, 1981). Through continuous exposure to stereotypical portrayals, students may internalize socially prescribed expectations concerning appropriate behaviors and aspirations for boys and girls.

Contradictions between Verbal and Visual Representations

An interesting finding emerging from the analysis concerns inconsistencies between textual and visual representations. In one lesson discussing flag ceremonies, female students are verbally identified as flag raisers; however, the accompanying illustration depicts male students performing the activity. This discrepancy indicates that visual discourse tends to privilege male representation in public and formal activities, even when textual discourse explicitly acknowledges female participation.

Such inconsistencies suggest that visual signs may function more powerfully than verbal signs in constructing social meanings. According to Barthes (1977), visual representations possess strong ideological functions because they often appear natural and unquestionable. Consequently, male visual dominance may unconsciously reinforce patriarchal assumptions regarding leadership and public participation.

The Reproduction of Patriarchal Ideology

Overall, the findings indicate that the *Mangu Sastra* textbook series reproduces patriarchal ideology embedded within Balinese socio-cultural contexts. Men are consistently positioned as leaders, breadwinners, historical actors, and public

decision-makers, whereas women are largely confined to domestic, supportive, and nurturing roles.

At the denotative level, these representations appear to reflect everyday social realities within Balinese society. However, at the connotative and mythological levels, the repeated association of masculinity with authority and femininity with domesticity contributes to the normalization of unequal gender relations. Through educational discourse, these representations become institutionalized and transmitted to younger generations, potentially influencing students' perceptions of socially acceptable gender roles.

Although the preservation of local cultural values remains an important educational objective, textbook development should also accommodate contemporary principles of gender equality and inclusiveness. Educational materials should therefore provide more balanced representations by depicting both male and female characters in diverse social, professional, and leadership roles.

Conclusion

This study investigated gender representation in the *Mangu Sastra* Balinese language textbook series for Grades I–VI through the integration of Barthes' semiotic analysis and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings reveal that gender representation within the textbooks remains predominantly patriarchal. Female characters are largely portrayed in domestic and caregiving roles, whereas male characters dominate public, professional, historical, and leadership domains.

Semiotic analysis demonstrates that textual and visual signs construct cultural myths that naturalize traditional gender divisions, presenting domestic responsibilities as inherently feminine and leadership as inherently masculine. Furthermore, Critical Discourse Analysis reveals that these representations function as discursive mechanisms that reproduce existing social hierarchies and patriarchal values embedded within Balinese society.

Although the textbooks successfully preserve local cultural identities, they simultaneously reinforce gender stereotypes that may influence students' perceptions of appropriate social roles for men and women. Consequently, textbook developers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers should incorporate gender-sensitive perspectives into instructional materials while maintaining the cultural values of Balinese language education. More balanced and inclusive representations are necessary to promote gender equality and provide learners with broader perspectives regarding social participation and future aspirations.

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