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Gender Identity in Words for Professional Titles in Textbooks

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Introduction

The literature on textbooks in Spanish for Spanish as a Foreign Language (henceforth ELE) analysed from a gender perspective is very scarce. Not only has it not dealt with the six dimensions covered by Sunderland (1994b:55) in the analysis of stereotypes – visibility, occupational roles, relationships, personal characteristics, discourse roles and female degradation – but most analyses have been superficial. The pages of the proceedings of the annual conferences of the Association for the Teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language (ASELE) outnumber 15,000 but during the 20 years of the Association’s existence, only one paper has dealt with sexist representation in ELE textbooks (Galiano Sierra, 1993); one other paper has shown concern for the treatment of gender in five entries of professional titles in ELE dictionaries (Gallardo Saborido, 2005); and four papers have put forward some practical exercises addressed to ELE students to raise consciousness on sexist language in Spanish (Izquierdo Merino, 1998; Sitman et al., 1999; Portal Nieto, 2000; Guerrero Salazar, 2003). Outside ASELE, research on the representation of gender identities in ELE materials has also received the scantest attention: De Santiago Guervós (1996) investigated sexist roles, negative representations of women and their contribution to disempowering women in eight ELE textbooks published between 1976 and 1994. Recently Robles Fernández (2007; 2005) analysed men’s and women’s presence in illustrations, and women included as celebrities in 13 textbooks published between 1991 and 2005; and Barceló Morte (2006) studied verbal and graphic representations of men and women in four textbooks for beginners. As for lexicon specifically, in a comprehensive bibliography on the teaching of the lexicon in ELE published by one of
the most relevant ELE Journals, there was not a single reference on how to deal with gender, stereotypes or sexism (Larrañaga Domínguez, 2004).

Only students of EFL exceed students of ELE in the world – in 2006 there were over 14 million students of ELE.² ELE is a salient industry in Spain³ – for example, students of ELE who came to Spain in 2000 left some 255 million euros; in 2006 Erasmus Students represented some 140 million euros in the national GDP (Carrera Troyano and Gómez Asencio, 2007). Consequently, in the last two decades ELE textbooks have multiplied; concern for gender representation has not. Despite the fact that most of the studies mentioned above concluded that stereotypes were pervasive and men and women were not portrayed symmetrically or with identical attributes, the concern for gender identity in ELE materials is practically non-existent. Suffice to say that publishers lack guidelines for gender-neutral language or images.

Our aim

We will analyse how ELE materials have approached gender and occupations in the last decade. We are interested in the words for jobs for males or females portrayed in ELE materials. We take as a starting point that in Spanish stereotyping can be achieved through the choice of occupations for the men or the women depicted in textbooks, and through the presentation of the lexicon of professions. In the present survey we will place our emphasis on the latter. Instead of counting the number of jobs associated with men or women throughout textbooks, we will look into how professional titles are presented in the sections devoted to ‘professions’ or ‘occupations’ in textbooks and grammars.

We are also interested in professional gender identities depicted in grammars and teachers’ textbooks. In the last two decades, the processes of ideological production of female professional identities in Spain have been linked to the very name of the profession in the feminine or in the masculine: female identities were partly constructed through the names adopted by women or imposed on them by the ‘regulative discourse’ (Bernstein, 1996). This has been the source of an intense debate which still continues. We will thus focus attention not only on the ‘name’ assigned to certain professional women, but also on the way teachers’ textbooks deal with that issue. Sunderland et al. (2002; 2001) have suggested that we turn our attention from the sexist bias ‘in the text’ to teacher-talk or discursive practices around the text. Although we basically agree with this proposal, we think that perhaps, in the case of ELE, before focusing on teachers’ responses to textbooks, we should focus on how textbooks help teachers to deal with