

Addressing student readers and representation of gender - A comparative analysis of Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks in Arabic and Norwegian

Mu‘men al-Badarin and Eva Maagerø

Introduction

This paper presents and discusses results from a comparative analysis of textbooks in the mother tongue subject (Arabic and Norwegian) in Palestine and Norway. The analysis will concentrate on two issues: the way student readers are addressed and on gender representation in the Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks. The analysis is part of a larger research project which involves the University of Bethlehem, Palestine, and Vestfold University College, Norway. Several textbooks have been analysed by pairs of researchers, one in Bethlehem and one in Vestfold. The research cooperation has gone on since November 2007 and will be concluded in June 2008.

The textbook situation in the two countries

Until recently, Palestinian schools have not had their own textbooks specially written for Palestinian students, and have traditionally used Jordanian textbooks. The collection of texts and examples has therefore been related to a Jordanian context. In 2006, Palestinian textbooks were published for the first time with texts specially related to the Palestinian people and culture. The new textbooks were initiated and published by the Ministry of Education, and the authors were also appointed by the ministry. The authors were organised in a National Syllabus Team for every subject. Each team was responsible for the textbooks for every grade in one subject, but the team was organised so that not all members wrote all books for the subject. The new textbooks are, together with the new National curriculum, an important tool for school development in Palestine and a symbol of independence for the Palestinian state. This also means that there is no choice of textbooks for schools and teachers in Palestine; there is only one existing textbook for every subject and grade. In addition, this means that the content of the textbook has been examined and approved by the government.

In Norway, however, the textbook situation is very different. As nearly every publishing house of a certain size produces textbooks, schools and teachers can choose between a number of textbooks in every subject. The publishers compete to “win” the textbook market. Until 2000 all textbooks had to be approved by a board appointed by the Norwegian government. Language and equality between boys and girls, and men and women, were important principles which had to be examined carefully before a book could be accepted. Today this governmental control has come to an end, and the publishers only have the National curriculum as a guideline for the production of textbooks. These differences in the textbook situation are important to bear in mind when reading this paper.

A brief presentation of the material

The analysis presented in this paper is based on textbooks for 5- and 8-grade; namely *Our beautiful language* for 5-grade and *Language's Science and Reading and Texts* for 8-grade (all from 2006) in Arabic, and *Zeppelin. Language book* and *Zeppelin. Reading book* for 5-grade and *From saga to cd A and B* for 8-grade (also from 2006) in Norwegian. The material therefore consists of seven recently published books, three Palestinian and four Norwegian ones, all produced in response to a new curriculum in both Palestine and Norway.

The Palestinian textbook for 5-grade is divided into two parts where each part consists of 13 lessons with five main topics: religion, nationality, social life, science and universal human themes. Every lesson has the same design: text, background, within linguistic benefits, syntax, spelling, composition and reading for enjoyment. In 8-grade the students have two textbooks, one with mainly fictional and non-fictional texts, and one with mainly linguistic topics. The first book has been analysed in detail while the second has served as a background reference. There are 42 lessons in the book *Reading and Texts*, designed in approximately the same way as the one for 5-grade: a fictional or non-fictional text followed by a discussion and an analysis of the content, drills, and linguistic benefits. The Norwegian *Zeppelin* for 5-grade consists of two books, one with topics mainly connected to language, text and genre (sending letters, learning to learn, from letters to words, spelling, non-fiction, oral presentations, nouns, verbs, writing a story, finding a story, the use of adjectives, punctuation, TV and films), and one with mainly fictional and non-fictional texts with instructions and exercises connected to the texts (in the library, a reading course, talking about books, humour and excitement, fairy tales, literature about nature, words become poetry, literature from the world). *From saga to cd* for 8-grade also consists of two books after the same principle as *Zeppelin*. In the A-book the chapters are about learning, conversation and oral presentations, cartoons, writing texts, and grammar, while the chapters in the B-book are about reading, language and literature in the time of the Vikings, urban legends, new Norwegian (one of the two official Norwegian written languages), newspapers and newspaper genres, and spelling.

A general result of the comparison of the textbooks is that the Palestinian and the Norwegian textbooks analysed here are quite different when it comes to design, illustrations and the use of colours. The design of the chapters seems to be more restrictive in the Palestinian than in the Norwegian books. Every chapter is organised in the same way, while the chapter design in the Norwegian books is varied. This can be explained by the teaching traditions in the two countries. In Palestine, every lesson in school has a clear aim which the chapter in the book follows closely. The chapter is organised as an outline for the lesson. The textbook is the most important resource for knowledge, and consequently there is a close relationship between the design of every chapter and the lesson in school. In Norway the textbook also plays an important role as a resource for teaching (Skjelbred et al 2004, Aamotsbakken et al 2004), but it is regarded as useful also to integrate other resources from the internet or other books. Some teachers even prefer to teach without a textbook. This might explain why the chapters in the Norwegian textbooks vary much more in structure and design than the Palestinian textbooks. The Norwegian books have more illustrations and photos and also more colours. One reason for this might be the above mentioned competition

between the publishing houses. They compete in making the books as attractive as possible in order to sell books to the schools.

Addressing student readers

Readers are a part of all texts (Bakhtin 1986, Eco 1979, Iser 1972), and all texts address the readers in one way or another. A declarative clause informs readers about something, for example: Jack met Jill at the gate. The reader is invited into this clause by accepting or not accepting the fact that Jack met Jill at the gate (Maagerø 2005, 139). Thus, the reader is addressed as in every declarative clause, but not in an explicit way. This implicit way of addressing readers is the case in most stories, novels, scientific articles, news articles etc. In other genres, however, like formal and informal letters, many kinds of instructions, e-mails, advertisements, notes etc, the reader is directly (or explicitly) addressed through the use of personal pronouns in second person singular or plural or the including *we*, first person plural (sometimes combined with corresponding possessive pronouns) or through the imperative mood of the clause (both in Arabic and in Norwegian). Questions (interrogatives) are also important when addressing readers. This can be made more or less explicitly, like –“Can *you* tell us about the characters in the story” (through the use of a second person personal pronoun) or –“How are the important characters in the story” (where the addressee is not explicitly mentioned) (al-Badarin 2008, Hamid 2000).

In the analysis of the Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks we found both similarities and differences in the way student readers were addressed. In stories and informative texts like articles, the readers are not addressed explicitly. They are invited into the texts as active participants, for example by filling gaps and concretizing the content of, for example, a story (Iser 1978), or accepting or not accepting the information in an article, but they are rarely addressed directly. In other genres like instructions and exercises, however, the books address the students explicitly through the use of personal pronouns, and here we find differences in the Palestinian and the Norwegian books. In the Palestinian textbook for 5-grade the student readers are addressed by the first person plural –“we”. In many cases the clauses open like this:

- we complete
- we go back
- we clarify
- we read
- we notice
- we conclude
- we train
- we write
- we insert
- we deduce, etc.

This is different in 8-grade. Here the author makes him- or herself more visible by using the first person singular: I go back to the verses, I determine the qualities of the beloved etc. There are also questions which are not addressed explicitly to the reader: –“What did the poet wish Hind to do?” There is no explicit use of second person

pronouns at all in the Palestinian textbooks. That means that the text never speaks directly to the students without including the author's voice.

In the Norwegian textbook *Zeppelin* for 5-grade there is, however, a clear tendency to use exactly the second person singular *du* (you) in instructions and exercises, which means that the text speaks directly to the reader individually. This is the case both in the language book and in the reading book. Norwegian has different grammatical forms in singular (*du*) and the plural (*dere*) of the second person pronoun, and in most cases the singular form is used. We find an illustrating example in an instructive text about learning to write letters in the language book:

Når du skal skrive brev, må du bestemme deg for

- *hvem* du vil skrive til

- *hva* du vil skrive om.

På neste side kan du lese et brev som Than har skrevet til vennen sin.

(*Zeppelin. Language book 2006 5*)

(When you write a letter, you must decide whom you want to write to, what you want to write about. On the next page you can read a letter which Than wrote to his friend.)

In the reading book we find the same phenomenon also in more informative chapters, for example in a chapter which introduces the students to non-fiction writing. Here it says: "Du skal kunne stole på at faglitteraturen gir deg riktige opplysninger" (You should trust non-fiction literature to give you correct information) (*Zeppelin. Reading book 2006, 12*). The chapter continues with the use of *du* (you), second person singular, which also is the case every time an informative text occurs between the literary texts. In the exercises in the two books for 5-grade symbols are used to indicate if an exercise is meant to be done individually or as group work. Illustrations of one, two or three heads above the exercises tell the students how they are expected to work. Also when the exercises are marked with two or three heads the use of the second person personal pronoun singular is often used (*du* – you), especially in the reading book. In other words, the individual student is addressed even when there is talk about group work. In one of the first exercises marked with three heads we find the following questions (the numbers refer to the number of questions in the chapter):

14. Hvordan kan du se at disse tekstene er faglitteratur?

15. Hvilke opplysninger får du i teksten om godteri?

16. Hvilke opplysninger får du om vannkalven?

(14. How can you see that these texts are non-fictional literature?

15. What kind of information do you get in the text about sweets?

16. What kind of information do you get about the water beetle?)

It is also typical for both *Zeppelin* books that imperatives are used to a large extent in the exercises. The students are asked to write, read, discuss, draw, paint, etc through the use of the imperative mood. As we have seen above this was not the case in the Palestinian textbooks. In the two Norwegian textbooks for 8-grade, *From saga to cd A and B*, we find exactly the same way of addressing the student readers even though the books are written by different authors. As mentioned above, the A-book contains

primarily chapters about language, texts and genres, while we find most of the fictional and non-fictional texts in the B-book. Both books contain a large amount of instructions and exercises. The second person singular *du* (you) is used in most cases in both kind of texts, and again the texts address the individual student. The following is an example from an instructive text in the A-book:

Når du har lest en fortelling, en novelle eller en roman, kan det være nyttig å lage et kart som viser rekkefølgen av de viktigste hendelsene eller *sekvensene*. Det kan du gjøre med ord eller bilder eller begge deler. Noen ganger kan det også være nyttig å notere eller tegne hendelsene i bokser (*From saga to cd. A-book*. 2006:21).

(When you have read a story, a short story or a novel, it can be useful to make a map which shows the order of the most important events or the *sequences*. You can do this by using words or illustrations or both. Sometimes it can also be useful to make notes or draw the events in boxes.)

The exercises in the two books for 8-grade are not marked with symbols that indicate whether the exercise is meant to be done individually, in pairs or in larger groups. In both books the student readers are also in these texts addressed individually by the use of the second personal singular pronoun *du* (you). Examples from the B-book are: –Hvilke bilder synes du er spesielt gode? Gi en begrunnelse for hvorfor du har valgt ut nettopp disse bildene” (*From saga to cd. B-book*. 2006, 195). (Which pictures did you find especially good? Give a reason for the choice of exactly these pictures.) When an exercise is meant for group work, the student reader is still often addressed individually by the use of the possessive pronoun in the second person singular *dine* (your): –Sammenlikn ordene dine med ordene til en annen elev” (B-book. 2006, 216). (Compare your words with the words of another student.) As was the case in the *Zeppelin* books, the imperative is also used extensively in the exercises, telling the student reader to read, make a title, give examples, compare, find out, etc. In exercises with questions to both literary texts and articles the students are often not addressed explicitly as the case was in the Palestinian books.

The analysis presented above builds only on a small number of books, and it is impossible to claim that we can find the same tendencies of addressing students in all Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks, not even in all textbooks in Arabic and Norwegian. Still we think that we have found some interesting differences in the way Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks address students. We have seen that the first person plural is extensively used when addressing the young students in the Palestinian books. It seems that the authors of the textbook are keen on making the student feel that authors and students are a team together. They are going to work together in the lessons, learn together, study together and develop knowledge together. The student is not alone in the study process. The authors will guide him or her, and through cooperation they will overcome difficulties. This might give the students self-confidence. Even if the students do the exercises alone in real life, they feel that they are part of a team, where the authors of the book and the student have a shared aim. In the Norwegian textbooks, however, we have seen that the student readers are most often addressed individually. The individual student is guided through the different topics and exercises to the texts. The idea seems to be that the student reader has to be able to manage this alone. The many group exercises tell the students that many tasks have to be done in groups, and that you cannot manage on your own in all learning

processes. Still we find that even in many exercises meant for groups the student is addressed individually by the use of the second person singular personal pronoun in second. From previous research we know that Norwegian students often read the textbooks alone, and the way of addressing them may also be a result of this practice (Skjelbred et al 2004, Aamotsbakken et al 2004).

These results might lead us to ask if Palestinian textbooks build up a collective shared society more than Norwegian textbooks do. If students and authors cooperate, a common knowledge will be built up which can serve as a basis for the common knowledge in society. Palestine is a young state with old traditions. The new Palestinian textbooks play an important role in the building of the nation. The selection of texts in a subject like the mother tongue Arabic is of course important for this project, and the title of the 5-grade book is of course also significant: *Our beautiful language*. However, the way of addressing students may also support this aim. Norway is also a young nation with old traditions, and the building of the nation was important during most of the last century. In this nation building project the textbooks played an important role, not least the mother tongue textbooks. Also today national values are of course important in Norway, but the situation is still different from that of Palestine. The need to emphasise Norwegian national values seems less important than it was a hundred years ago. This can be seen for example if we study the latest national curriculum from 2006, where multicultural and global values are emphasised at the expense of national values.

It is also interesting to speculate if the results presented above tell us something about values in Arabic and western European culture. It is sometimes claimed that the Arabic society represents a so-called we-culture. This means that family and relatives are more important than the individual. The social networks are dense and family and relatives often live close to each other and interact both in social matters and work (Milroy & Milroy 1997). The individual is strongly bound to the family, relatives and other groups. In this perspective the use of the including ‘we’ in the textbooks might be interpreted as a realisation of this culture. In the western European world, however, individuality is strong. The bond to the family and relatives is often weak, and the relation to friends and colleagues may often be stronger. In this case we can talk about open networks (Milroy & Milroy 1997). The individual has to make his or her own decisions, and cannot automatically rely on support from family and relatives. According to the German philosopher Thomas Ziehe, people in modern western European society are free to find their individual way through life, but they are also lonely in their choices and have to rely on themselves (Ziehe & Stubenrauch 1983). We could interpret the way of addressing the students in the Norwegian textbooks as a realisation of this individuality.

We have seen that the way of addressing students in the Palestinian textbooks changed from 5-grade to 8-grade. In 8-grade the first person singular, ‘I’, was used in many cases. This can be interpreted either as the author showing what to do to the students (I go back to..., I determine....). The author might be seen as one who knows, a leading person, and the student is an apprentice who is going to develop the same knowledge by doing the same thing as the author does. Another interpretation of the use of the first person singular is that ‘I’ represents the student, and the student is explicitly led to do certain actions like go back to, determine etc by identifying him- or herself with the ‘I’ in the text. In both interpretations this way of addressing student

readers is related to the author as the one who knows. This means that an asymmetric relationship between the author and the student is established, in the first interpretation by the author acting explicitly as a model, and in the second interpretation implicitly by letting the student into the text by telling him or her what to do. There will, of course, always be an asymmetric relationship between the author and the student, but the all-knowing author can be more or less visible. In the Palestinian classroom both the textbook and the teacher have a more dominant role and a clearer authority than the case is in Norway. Every lesson in school is, as mentioned above, built on defined steps in a lesson in the textbook. There are, therefore, certain activities that the student has to do in every lesson. This may be a reason for the use of I' in the texts for 8-grade. This way of addressing the students does not occur in the Norwegian textbooks at all.

The use of imperative is another interesting difference between the Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks. While the Norwegian textbooks frequently use the imperative in exercises, the imperative is clearly avoided in the Palestinian textbooks. This fact has to do with general conventions connected to the use of the imperative in the two languages. In both languages the imperative is the mood for commands, but is, however, in many situations regarded as being too direct and perhaps even impolite and rude. It is frequently used inside the family from parent to child, from husband to wife etc, and among good friends. Outside the family, the imperative has a more restricted use. Still, in Norwegian the author of the textbook can use the imperative when he or she is communicating with student readers in exercises. This is not possible in Arabic where imperatives might have an unfavourable influence on the readers.

Representation of gender

Arabic is a highly inflectional language, where nouns, pronouns and adjectives are inflected for number, gender and case (Khalil 1999, 36). Norwegian realises also gender and number differences in nouns, pronouns and adjectives, but only personal pronouns realise reminiscences of case. In Arabic there are gender differences in all persons and numbers of personal pronouns and also in other pronouns like demonstrative and possessive pronouns (Rajab 1998, Khalil 1999, 135), while in Norwegian there are only gender differences in the third person singular of the personal pronoun (*han, hun, det, den* corresponding to *he, she, it* in English, where *den* points back to an inanimate masculine or feminine noun while *det* points back to a neuter inanimate noun) (Moen & Pedersen 2003). There is therefore much richer gender morphology in Arabic than in Norwegian. Nouns like *girl, boy, mother, father, sister, brother, aunt, uncle* etc represent, however, males and females in both languages. In addition, names of persons, boys and girls, and men and women, as photos and illustrations may visually represent males and females in textbooks.

The representation of the masculine gender is predominant in the Palestinian textbooks. In the sections of the book for 5-grade especially analysed here, about two thirds of the pronouns which realise gender are masculine. In addition, 19 different animate adjectives are masculine and only three feminine. One of the feminine forms of the adjective is, however, used five times in the text, and gives a certain female representation. All names of persons are masculine. The sections also include two

main pictures and 14 small symbolic pictures. There are no representations of females on the pictures, only males. Together, this realises a massive dominance of masculine representation. This impression is strengthened by the fact that there are only three texts written by female authors in the collection of texts selected for this book. These texts are written by the Egyptian poet Sharifa Fathi and the Palestinian writer Samara Azzam. In addition, one text is related to a mother's love and could therefore be said to describe the world of females. The representation of gender in the textbook for 8-grade shows the same. In the analysed sections there is a majority of masculine representation both in pronouns, animate adjectives, nouns and names. In one of the units analysed there is a complete lack of female representation. This text is called "Our world before the challenges of the twenty first century", and it presents a number of scientists who have been important for the development in different fields of society. No reference to a female scientist is made, and no quote from an important female researcher is included. Pictures are nonexistent in this section, as is the case for all sections in the book for 8-grade. The main impression of the first section of the textbook 8-grade is that the female role has been overlooked both as a part of the content and in the choice of authors. Three exceptions can be found in the first part of the book. The readers meet a female person in two texts which can be classified as love poetry, and in one text there is a description of a small girl, the daughter of the poet. In addition, there are two texts written by Palestinian female writers; one is a narrative article and one is a poem. The representation of females is increased in the second part of the book. Five out of 22 texts are written by Arab female writers, and in three lessons females are important in the content of the texts.

The Norwegian textbooks differ from the Palestinian ones in gender representation. The analysis shows that all four books have a rather balanced representation of gender both grammatically and by the use of nouns and names for males and females and pictures. The same result is found in the selection of texts where both male and female authors are well represented. In the books which are published according to the new curriculum from 2006 we also see the textbook s authors' strong motivation to include girls and boys from minority groups in the content of the texts as well as through the use of names and pictures. An example from *Zeppelin* (2006) is that the students learn to write a good letter through the story of Than, a boy with Vietnamese parents, who writes to his relatives in Vietnam. This is a much more prominent feature in the new textbooks compared to the ones which were written according to the previous curriculum from 1997. Even if the overall impression of the Norwegian textbooks is that the gender representation is balanced, there is also here a slight balance towards males represented in the stories and other texts in the reading book for 5-grade. This is also the case for the choice of authors in the same reading book where as many as 34 male and only 18 female writers are represented. Another interesting observation can be made in the many stories about animals for 5-grade. Here, the author has the choice of letting an animal be male or female. It is interesting to observe that nearly all animals are made to be males through the use of the masculine personal pronoun in the 3rd person singular *han* (he). The same results are found in *From saga to cd* (2006). Again, the representation of gender is rather balanced with a slight balance towards male representations through pronouns, nouns, names, photos and other illustrations. Both genders are represented among the authors but, as the case was with *Zeppelin*, more male writers are found in both the A-book and the B-book (respectively nine male and six female authors in A, 27 male and 14 female authors in B).

Both in Palestine and in Norway all children are, of course, important in the education system, and the curriculum in both countries is directed towards both boys and girls. In Norway there has been a focus on gender equality in school for many years. In Palestine, many girls chose to study after compulsory school and female students are in majority for example at Bethlehem University. Many teachers both in Palestine and Norway are females. Still, we see that there are gender differences in the books which have been examined here, and that males are more strongly represented than females especially in the Palestinian books. In both countries textbooks have a high status. For different reasons, many young people do not read many other books than the textbooks that they have in school. It is therefore important that the texts in the textbooks not only in Arabic and Norwegian but in all subjects give the students possibilities for identification. Both girls and boys need to meet other girls and boys in the texts, and also see that both males and females are important and valuable contributors in society. The most important thing here is, of course, not only the *amount* of pronouns which realise the masculine and the feminine, male and female nouns and names which represent males and females. It is also important to show that both genders have many possibilities in society through the activities that are described. One reason for the strong representation of males and the generally low representation of females on all levels in the Palestinian textbooks might be that few female authors were part of the National Syllabus Team (see above). In Norway, one reason for emphasising boys in mother tongue textbooks may be the fact that boys in the last few years have tended to pay less attention to reading and school work than girls do. Girls' results in school are better than those of the boys, and girls also read much better than boys do. In the mother tongue subject many boys seem to not feel at home. Therefore it might be important to make sure that males are well represented in the textbooks, and that boys can recognise a boys' world and not only the world of females in the texts. On the other hand, girls also need to be supported also through the texts they meet. Therefore, gender representation is a textbook feature which it is always interesting to discuss.

Summing up

In this paper we have presented results from an ongoing study of Palestinian and Norwegian textbooks in Arabic and Norwegian, which means the mother tongue subject in the two countries. In the presentation we have focused on the ways students are addressed and how gender is represented in three Palestinian textbooks (one for 5-grade and two for 8-grade) and four corresponding Norwegian textbooks (two for 5-grade and two for 8-grade). We have seen that there are similarities but also differences between the books. The differences might be due to general traditions in the two societies, but also to different textbook conventions. From visiting schools both in Palestine and Norway we also get the impression that the teaching style, the relationship between teacher and student and the role of the textbook in the lessons are important factors. While textbooks have a high status as prominent texts in both societies, it is, the way we see it, important how each book "speaks" to the student reader, and to which degree the student reader can identify with the content of the texts and thus feel included in the world of the book. It is our belief that text analysis with a *comparative* perspective is a good method for an increased consciousness about texts; in this case about textbooks. Through comparison, a convention might be lifted up and looked at in a new way, which can be powerful in order to understand

more of the ‘text world’ we live in. As we see it, this has been the case for us in our analysis, especially in relation to the issue addressing student readers. The way this is done is embedded in the textbook culture, and rarely reflected upon. The gender differences are more visible on the surface of the textbooks, as they can be seen by studying pictures, names, nouns, main characters and contents of both stories and non-fictional texts. Still, a grammatical analysis of, for example, personal pronouns is of importance because the picture of gender representation might then be drawn more clearly.

The results presented in this paper build on quite a large number of texts, but a limited number of textbooks. Only textbooks for 5- and 8-grade were part of the analysis. We would like to expand our text analysis to other grammatical features of the texts, and perhaps also to multimodality, and we would also like to increase the research material and include textbooks in Arabic and Norwegian for more grades. The results presented in this paper must therefore be seen as preliminary.

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