

## The Representation of Social Actors in EFL Textbooks: Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

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### **Abstract:**

*Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has gained popularity as a linguistic theory, especially in the field of education where it provides a useful method for examining textbooks. The goal of this study is to examine how social actors are portrayed in a particular textbook utilizing SFL framework. Textual data were gathered from a sample of the textbook, and transitivity patterns of process categories and pronoun usage were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that the pronoun "he" was primarily utilized and that the material process, which denotes physical actions, was most commonly used, depicting men as the main actors. These results imply that the texts in the textbook reflect how social actors are portrayed and represented in speech and offer an understanding of their functions, choices, agency, and relations*

*Keywords: pronoun; SFL; text; transitivity*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

English language learners' learning experiences all over the world are significantly influenced by the textbooks used to teach English as a foreign language (EFL). Textbooks are designed to give students the necessary language and communicative skills that can be functioned in English-speaking environments (Cicilia, 2017; Meihani & Khanlarzadeh, 2015). The values, attitudes, and beliefs in which they are produced and utilized are also reflected in the textbooks (Mahmud,

2019). Besides, textbooks greatly impact how students perceive the world and their place in it. In other words, the development of students' language skills and worldviews is greatly influenced by EFL textbooks.

Previous research on EFL textbooks has demonstrated the importance of textbooks in both teaching and learning languages [references]. One of the primary sources of information for language learners is textbooks, which also act as guidance for teachers when developing their lesson plans (Ahmed & Narcy-combes, 2011). The lack of authenticity, relevance to learners' needs, and fit for the learners' cultural and linguistic contexts have all been critiqued by numerous scholars of EFL textbooks. For instance, EFL textbooks frequently present a limited variety of vocabulary and fail to reflect the diversity of cultures and perspectives (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Furthermore, many EFL textbooks were concerned with grammar rules and form-focused activities at the expense of communicative competence and meaningful interaction (Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015). Researchers have, therefore, urged further study into the efficiency and suitability of EFL textbooks in fostering language learning.

The efficiency and usefulness of EFL textbooks for language acquisition have also been the subject of recent studies. For instance, Rezeq (2022) looked into how well EFL textbooks matched with the requirements for English language proficiency. The findings revealed that there were gaps and little possibilities in the textbooks' adherence to the standards for students to improve their communication abilities. Similar to this, Jamalipour and Farahani (2015) researched on a new EFL textbook's effectiveness for Iranian high school students and discovered that it improved students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. The study did point out certain areas where the textbook may be improved, such as giving students more chances to communicate orally and encouraging critical thinking. Another research has emphasized the significance of considering learners' language origins when developing EFL textbooks (Pan & Zhu, 2022). Overall, these recent studies imply that EFL textbooks might have merits and limitations and that additional research is required to create more efficient and culturally suitable materials and linguistic backgrounds for language learners.

The portrayal of social actors is a crucial feature of EFL textbooks that has gotten relatively little attention in earlier studies. Social actors are people, groups, institutions, and other things participating in social life. Their representation in the textbook can have essential implications for how they are perceived and evaluated. In this context, since social actors are not simply linguistic entities but also social ones with ideological connotations, it is crucial to look at how they are depicted in these textbooks. In fact, previous studies looked at social actor depiction in EFL textbooks from a variety of angles. Some have examined how nationality, race, and ethnicity are represented (Davidson & Liu 2018; Alshenqeeti, 2019), while others have examined how gender is represented (Nagatomo, 2010; Hall, 2014).

Few research, however, have looked at the systemic functional perspective of how social actors are portrayed in EFL textbooks. In the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), various grammatical structures, such as nouns, pronouns, and verb phrases, can be used to represent social actors (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). As such, in this article, the analysis of social actors in EFL textbooks will be done using an SFL framework. We will specifically look at how social actors are portrayed in the textbooks and how this could affect how students see themselves and other people. By doing this, we want to advance knowledge of the representations of social actors in EFL textbooks and the possible effects these representations

may have on students' language learning. Thus, the question to answer is how social actors are portrayed in EFL textbooks. Utilizing the SFL framework, focusing on transitivity patterns, and the use of pronouns, this question will be discussed in the current study.

Textbooks are essential for reflecting social actors within a given community as well as issues of values, attitudes, and beliefs. Social actors are people or organizations that actively participate in social interactions and behaviors. Students' representations and perceptions of social actors can be greatly influenced by the content and presentation of textbooks, which can considerably impact how they see the world and their place in it.

It is crucial to understand that the values, opinions, and viewpoints of authors, publishers, and the general public can all have an impact on how social actors are portrayed in textbooks. In order to give a more inclusive and truthful picture of social actors and their contributions to education, there should be a continuing discussion regarding the need for critically assessing and diversifying textbook content. This method encourages empathy, respect, and appreciation for various social actors while assisting students in developing a comprehensive grasp of social realities.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

EFL textbooks are essential to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). They might give students organized information and a variety of tasks to improve their language abilities. However, the balance between accuracy and communicative competence is one of the major problems in the examination of EFL textbooks. The communicative competence to utilize language successfully in everyday settings is more significant than accuracy when it comes to the development of learners' grammatical and lexical knowledge (Chun, 2016; Shin et al., 2011). Additionally, the way that identity and culture are portrayed in EFL textbooks is another problem. It is crucial for textbooks to present a fair and accurate representation of various cultures and viewpoints because EFL students are frequently exposed to social and cultural contexts that are different from their own (Mahmud, 2019; Siegel, 2014). This is supported by Meihami and Khanlarzadeh (2015) saying that a lot of textbooks have come under fire for supporting prejudices and stereotypes or failing to adequately capture the complexity and diversity of the target culture.

The effectiveness of EFL textbooks toward learners' language development and motivation has been assessed by a number of research. The compatibility of the textbooks with the veracity, learning objectives, and curriculum goals is one of the approaches used to examine the textbooks (Chan, 2013). Another approach is an assessment of how students feel and behave toward textbooks and their content (Xu, 2019). However, the evaluation of EFL textbooks is often complicated by the wide range of variables, teacher proficiency, classroom context, and learner motivation, that can influence their effectiveness (Limberg, 2016).

Additionally, there is increased interest in linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical analyses and evaluations of EFL textbooks. EFL textbooks have been examined using a number of academic frameworks, including as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Cultural Studies. CDA emphasizes the social and political features of texts and how they replicate and reflect societal power structures (Chu, 2015; Fairclough, 2010). Cultural Studies examine the larger cultural and historical contexts in which texts are situated (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Thus, analyzing and evaluating EFL textbooks is a difficult process involving many different factors and calls for

incorporating linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical viewpoints. Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach for textbook analyses and evaluations, using a variety of theoretical frameworks and research techniques can help to give a more complete picture of the benefits and drawbacks of EFL textbooks.

A linguistic theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), sees language as a social semiotic system that serves social functions. SFL can be used to examine language in a variety of settings, such as textbooks. In this respect, textbooks are examples of the genre of educational discourse, which is distinguished by the intention of transmitting knowledge to learners (Briones, 2016; Darong, 2021; Egging, 1994; Halliday, 1985; Montes et al., 2014). Saying it differently, SFL offers a helpful framework for examining the language used in textbooks and assessing how well they support language learning. SFL could be used to study a variety of linguistic phenomena, such as sign language, written texts, and spoken discourse. It has also been used in a variety of sectors, such as education, literary analysis, and teaching-learning instruction. SFL can assist teachers in making knowledgeable judgments about the choice and use of textbooks in language courses by examining the ways in which language is utilized to accomplish specific social ends. Unfortunately, the use of SFL in analysis still received little attention. Since it focuses on the representation of social actors in EFL textbooks, the current study attempts to apply it in its analysis of those texts.

Transitivity is a fundamental grammatical idea in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which deals with the realization of verbs and processes in clauses. The number and kind of participants (persons, things, or abstract entities) in a linguistic process are what transitivity is all about. Understanding how meaning is created within a clause and how it reflects the interaction between the language system and its context of use is greatly aided by this idea. Additionally, the transitivity system, which has three key components—the process, the participants, and the circumstances—is used to assess transitivity.

The process, which represents the kind of action or occurrence that the verb expresses, is the key component of the transitivity system. In SFL, processes are divided into three main categories, including material, mental, and relational processes. Material processes are focused on actions taken by participants and frequently relate to physical actions or events. Mental processes, cognitive or mental activities, relate to participants' internal mental states or perceptions. Meanwhile, the relational process is focused on a state of being or relationship between participants.

Participants are the things that take part in the process, whether they be actual humans, inanimate objects, or intangible notions. As a result, they are separated into two primary groups, including actors, which refer to the entities that carry out the action throughout a material process. The goal, beneficiary, or phenomenon are things impacted by the action or participating in the mental or relational processes, and they correspond to the subject of the verb in conventional phrases. In normal sentences, they are equivalent to objects, indirect objects, or complements. Last but not least, circumstances give us further details about a process by describing how, when, where, why, or under what conditions it happens. They are modifiers that give the clause context rather than being active participants in the process. Summing up, transitivity analysis aids in comprehending how various procedures and the individuals who participate in them affect the overall meaning of a clause. It also clarifies the decisions that

speakers make in order to successfully communicate their intended messages while taking into account the context and the responsibilities of the participants.

Pronouns, on the other hand, are important in the analysis of language, particularly in terms of coherence and reference within texts. Pronouns are a sort of function word that often replaces nouns or noun phrases. By doing so, they help to prevent the repetitive usage of entire noun phrases and improve the coherence and effectiveness of communication. Consequently, pronouns play an important role in SFL. The first type of reference is the one that is concerned with pronouns that are used to refer back to earlier stated individuals, groups, or ideas in a text. They establish a connection between various discourse components, guaranteeing continuity and coherence. Furthermore, both anaphoric and cataphoric pronouns are used in the reference. However, in SFL, the choice of pronouns is controlled by both communicative and interpersonal language functions in addition to grammatical considerations. For instance, the use of first-person pronouns (such as "I," "we") can indicate the speaker's engagement and subjectivity, whereas the use of third-person pronouns (such as "he," "she," or "they") can convey distance and objectivity. Thus, pronouns are a crucial component of language in SFL because they make texts more cohesive and coherent, make references easier, and enable effective information transfer.

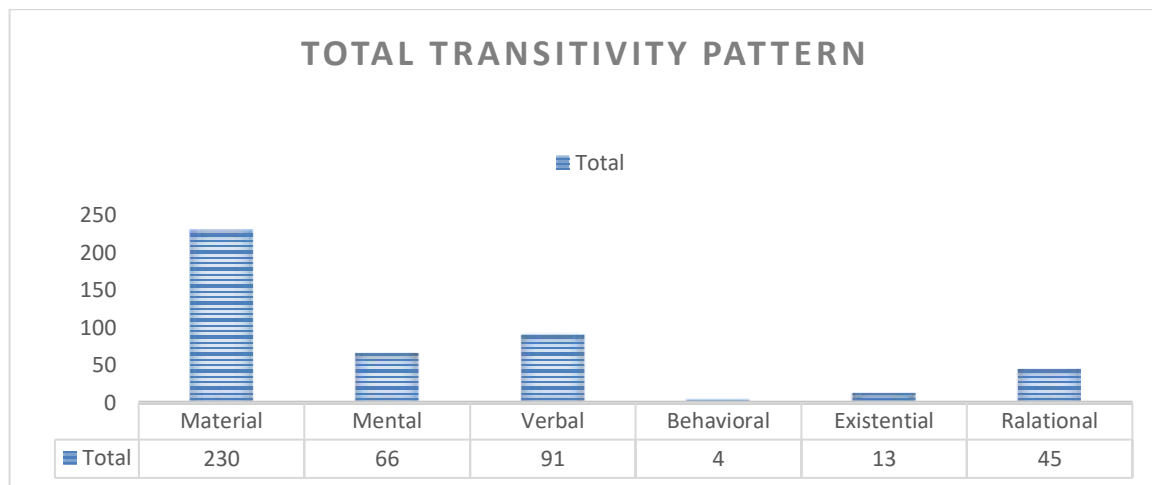
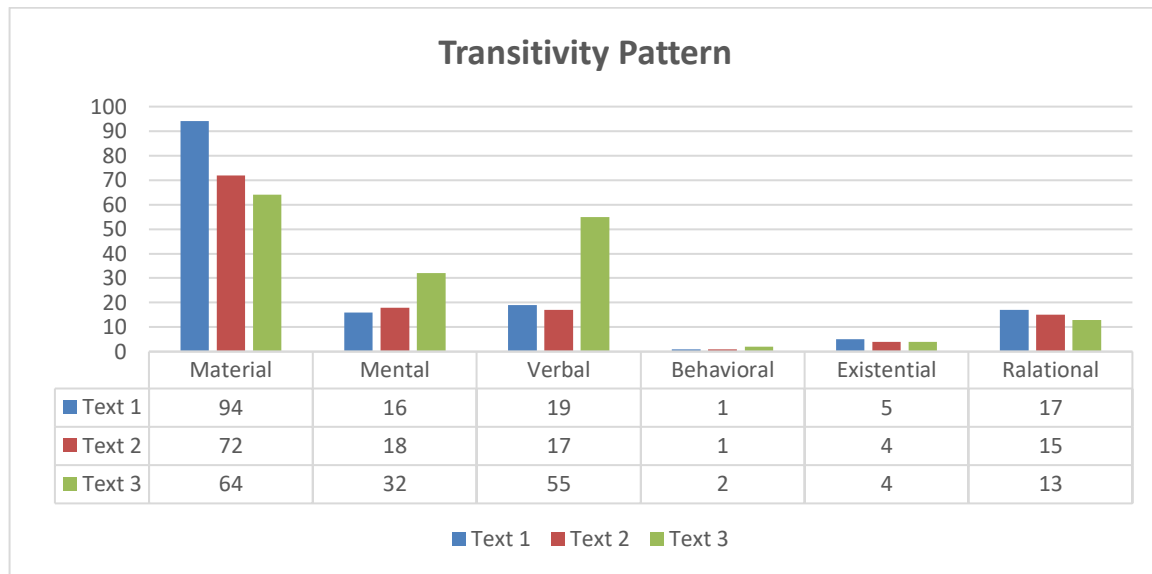
### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study belongs to qualitative analysis. It examines the language and content of the EFL textbooks by means of SFL frameworks. Through SFL, EFL textbooks are examined to comprehend how language works in teaching English to foreign students, accommodating a range of ability levels and cultural situations. SFL offers insights into language learning goals and communication purposes by examining textual organization, genre elements, and linguistic choices. It assesses the efficacy of resources, provides guidance for curriculum creation, and improves the experiences of language teaching and learning. This involves analyzing the social actors and roles represented in the three- selected secondary textbooks that were chosen conveniently. Furthermore, we looked at the social actors that are shown in the three selected passages from the chosen EFL textbooks using corpus-based methodologies and SFL concepts namely transitivity and pronoun. In this regard, transitivity analysis may provide details about the overall portrayal of various social actors in the texts. To support this, pronoun analysis, on the other hand, looks at the pronouns used in the texts to determine who is acting or being acted upon to reveal the textbooks' social actor. The ways in question are helpful for the researchers to recognize the social actors in the textbooks. In addition, the researchers conducted separate analyses of the data to lessen the possibility of analysis bias and cross-referenced their analysis to gauge the level of agreement. In this respect, in order to increase the dependability and rigor of the analysis, the study adhered to the advice of Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) by creating an auditable decision trail. Finally, a final conclusion was reached using the analysis's findings.

### **4. RESULTS**

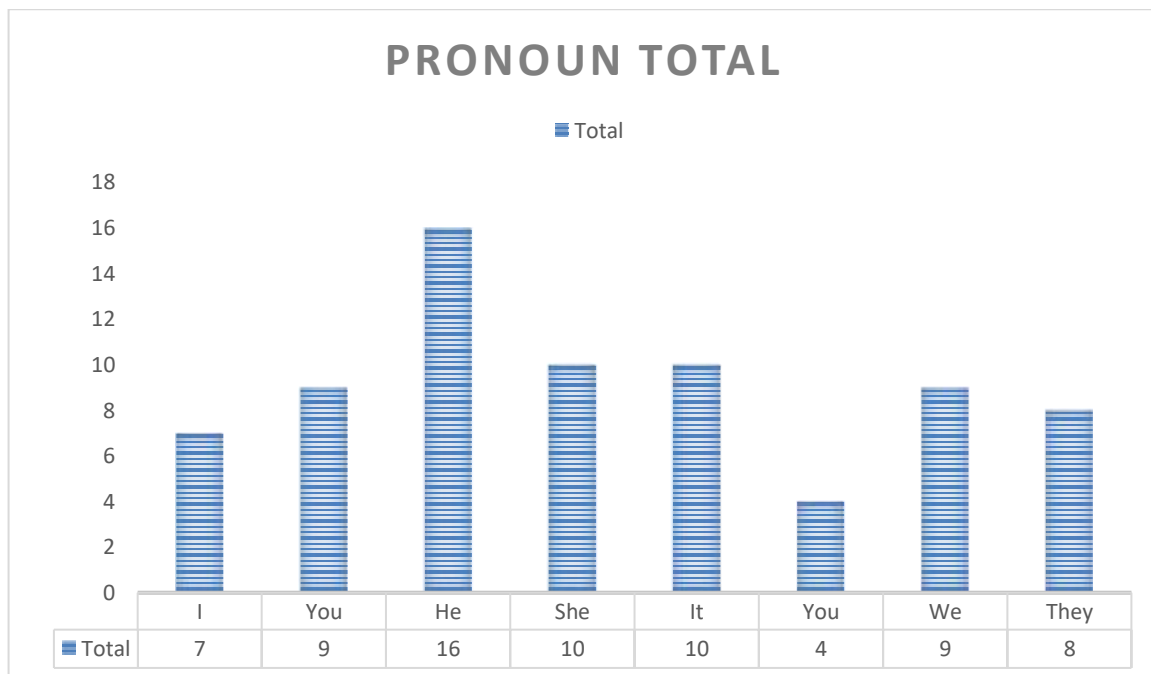
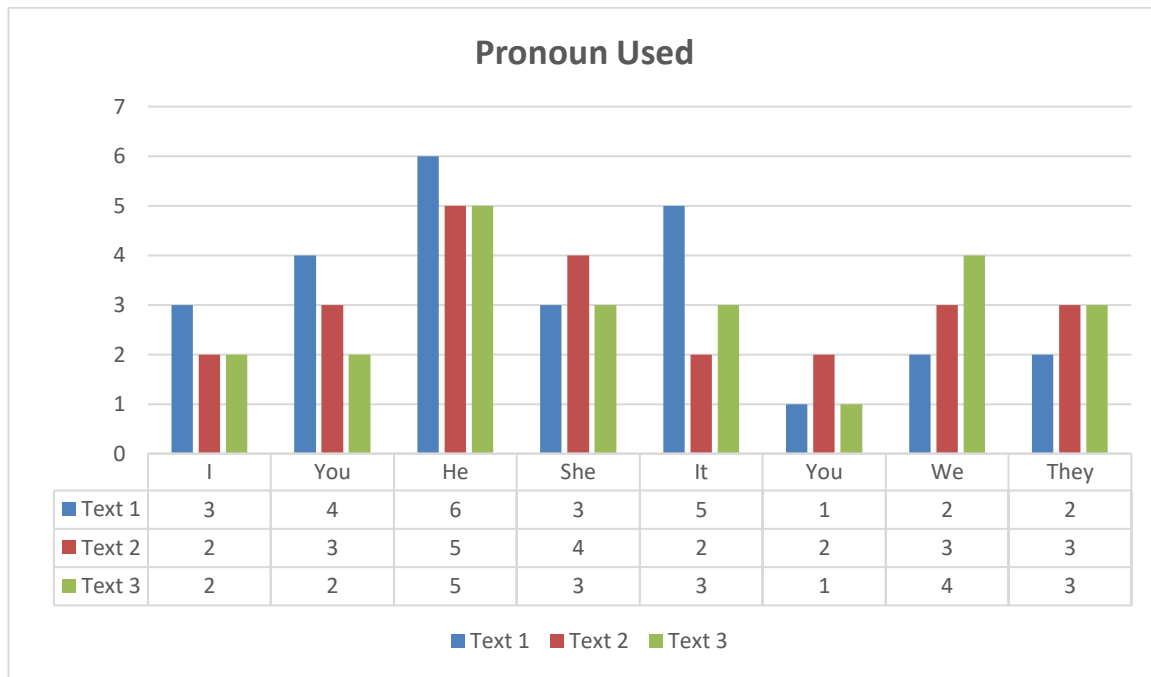
The primary focus of this study was to examine how social actors were portrayed in the textbooks, hence, it is important to exhibit the graphics. These graphics were made based on the transitivity patterns and pronoun analysis used in the texts, which provide insight into the representation of social actors being studied.

Graphic 1 Transitivity Pattern



The material process regarding social actor representation is the primary process type in a text, which means the text focuses on portraying tangible actions and physical activities carried out by individuals or groups. This emphasis draws attention to social actors' active participation and agency in the narrated events. Their contributions, jobs, and social contacts may be vividly portrayed in the text, which offers a utilitarian viewpoint on their positions. Though they might get less attention, material processes are more common, which emphasizes the importance of human action and practical effects. The text, in its whole, focuses on the concrete acts and activities of social actors while also providing insights into their roles and contributions within the context being discussed.

Graphic 2 Pronoun



In the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the predominance of singular pronouns as shown in the graphic implies an emphasis on addressing things or people in a more remote or objective way. The prevalence of third-person pronouns suggests that, rather than engaging the reader directly or expressing the author's point of view, the text frequently addresses phenomena from the standpoint of an observer. The use of third-person pronouns in this

situation can have a variety of effects on communication and representation. Furthermore, since third-person pronouns avoid making obvious allusions to the reader or writer, they tend to give the text a feeling of objectivity and distance. Particularly in informational or research-focused environments, this might help create a more formal or academic tone.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This study seeks to identify how social actors are portrayed in an EFL textbook. The transitivity pattern and the employment of pronouns expressing the representation in question were the concerns of the examination. In relation to the frequency of appearance, it is clear that all six transitivity process types are present. Furthermore, based on the data provided, it was found that the material process is predominantly used, followed by verbal process types. The mental process occupies the third position, with Textbook 3, textbook 2, and Textbook 1 occupying respective grading positions in terms of their appearance. The relational position is placed at the fourth position, followed by the existential and behavioral processes, which appear as the fifth and sixth level, respectively. Notably, the occurrence of behavioral and existential process types highlights a significant difference and undergoes the lowest process types employed in the textbook. This can be attributed to the author's consideration of the sense of priority, where existence is the final goal and needs action to be achieved. Overall, the authors have a tendency to use material processes that carry the message, with the actions of the actors presented in the textbooks.

Pronoun analysis, which entails looking at how the author introduces and tracks participants in the text, is another way for identifying the social actors in the textbooks. By doing this, it is feasible to identify the main actors and the subject matter of the textbooks. Pronoun analysis can help identify which characters are central to the text (Eggs, 1994; Darong et al., 2022). Regarding the data, "he" was the most frequent pronoun used and was followed by the pronoun "she and it". The third-person singular pronouns "he," "she," and "it" represent the social actors they are referring to in the texts. The more commonly used pronoun "he" denotes a predominance of male social actors in the text. Furthermore, if we refer to the frequent use of the pronoun "he" to the material process types found in the texts, it refers to the actor as well as the senser of physical and mental effort, such as running, driving, or thinking. Since "he" is commonly used in texts, it may be assumed that the actions and activities of a male character or group of male characters are the focus of the text. Likely, the pronoun "she" is also used to show a predominance of female social actors in the text. When referring to social actors, the pronoun "it" highlights a non-human or inanimate representation. Overall, the third-person singular pronouns that are used to portray social actors in a text can provide crucial details about the gender and grammatical functions of the social actors who are being shown. This supports previous research studies done by Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) and Hall (2014) that focused on how gender roles are portrayed in EFL textbooks, which reinforces gender stereotypes and unequal power structures.

After a thorough analysis, the employment of material process types in texts, however, might also reveal the degree of agency of the social actors. In this respect, the material processes that are predominantly used and are carried out by a single social actor highlight a high level of agency or control over the events in the texts. On the other hand, the fact that the material processes are shared across numerous social actors suggests that the texts have a more communal or shared agency. It's also crucial to remember that the pronoun "he" does not always refer to a character's

gender when it is used in a sentence. It's possible that the context or other passages in the texts indicate the gender of the character.

Yet, "You" as a second-person pronoun was used to refer to other actors in the texts. It is used to create an interpersonal relationship between them. The pronoun "you" might place the actors as active participants or collaborators in the action or event being described in the texts, which is important for social actor representation. In the meantime, a group that consists of the speakers and other actors depicted in the texts was referred to by the pronoun "We" as a first-person plural pronoun. The speakers and the other actors are placed as being a part of a shared experience or purpose, and a personal relation establishment. Thus, the use of "we" in social actor representation can place the actors as the agents of the action or event being recounted and foster a feeling of solidarity or unity among them. Last but not least, the third-person plural pronoun "They" was employed to refer to either things or a group of actors. The "they" in social actor representation allowed the actors to be seen as the cause of the action or event being described while establishing a sense of distance between them. It is frequently employed to denote new or unidentified actors in the texts.

By and large, as depicted in Graphic 1, material processes are predominantly used in all three texts. This implies that the texts are centrally concerned with actions, events, and the participants who carry them out. In the context of social actors' representation, material processes tend to highlight the roles and actions of human and non-human agents in the texts. Transitive clauses, which include a process, a participant or agent who performs the activity, and a participant or patient who endures the process, are frequently used to represent material processes.

Pushing further, the employment of material processes and the participants they correspond to reveals how social actors are pictured and represented in the discourse. Most of the time, human agents—such as "he/she/they/we who perform something"—employ the material processes. As a result, it might imply a focus on human agency as well as the actions and roles of the presented characters in the texts. A focus on the actions and roles of non-human entities, such as technology, nature, or animals, is also suggested by the material processes mostly performed by non-human agents, such as "it did something". These findings reflect the study of Darong, Jem, & Guna (2022) and Kusuma, Dewi, & Kurniawan (2018) who found that material processes were the most common process used and used more frequently in EFL textbooks. Along this line of the statement, the selection of participants in physical processes, such as who performs the action and who is affected by it, also reveals how social actors are portrayed in the texts. In this respect, a group of people are shown in the text as active actors who do the acts. Thus, material processes and their corresponding participants (pronouns) in this study reveal how social actors are pictured and represented in the discourse, emphasizing their roles, actions, agency, and relationships.

Integral to the aspects mentioned, the current study's findings make it clear that textbooks should be more powerful and significant learning resources for students while considering their language features. Overall, the results of the study imply that language used in the textbooks should be designed in such a way that they give students a thorough and balanced approach to learning a foreign language; and include a variety of linguistic elements and structures. In order to construct effective language teaching materials and activities, it is helpful to understand the functional and communicative goals of the language features and structures. This can be done by using SFL to examine the textbooks. An SFL-based analysis of EFL textbooks, according to Zhang and Zhang

(2018), may offer insights into the linguistic aspects and the ideological values encoded in the texts, which can assist teachers and textbook writers in making better-informed judgments in the design and selection of textbooks. Finally, SFL has the potential to improve language learning by enabling students to use language in real-world contexts and to comprehend the linguistic aspects, such as pronouns and process types that benefit from expressing social and cultural meanings in textbooks.

## 6. CONCLUSION

With regard to the analysis of material process and pronouns, the texts under study were concerned with activities and events carried out by masculine individuals or entities. This raises the possibility that the text has gender bias or a male-centric viewpoint, which might be further studied and examined in the context of social and cultural variables.

However, it is important to note that this conclusion is based solely on the analysis of the material process and the use of pronouns. As such, the analysis does not necessarily reflect the overall meaning or intention of the text. In this respect, the representation and meaning of the text by social actors may also be significantly influenced by additional linguistic characteristics and contextual factors. Pronoun usage can also change according to the text's genre, context, and purpose. As a result, a more thorough examination of the text's context and features is necessary to fully understand the language choices and social actor portrayal in a given text in future research studies.

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