

# Introduction to Teaching Gender in the EFL Classroom

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## 1. Gender: Why Does it Matter?

Since the 1980s, questions regarding the topic gender have become an important part of Social Studies and other related disciplines. Since the 1990s, they have even become a distinct research area, the so-called “Gender Studies”. Gender Studies deal with the analysis and criticism of asymmetrical gender relations (cf. Schößler 2008: 9) and they differentiate between gender as a social construct that is formed by discursive practices and negotiations; and the biological sex (cf. *ibid.*: 10; Decke-Cornill & Volkmann 2007b: 8).

why this book?

Although Gender Studies have found their way into most domains of academic research and teaching, they are not directly in the spotlight of foreign language teaching pedagogy and research. In 2007 Helene Decke-Cornill and Laurenz Volkmann, for example, claimed that there was no entry on gender in the most common handbook for teaching foreign languages in Germany (Bausch et al. 2007), and as the editors of this book have found out, neither will there be a specific section on gender even in the newest edition of this handbook (Burwitz-Melzer et al. *forthc.*). Yet, the question, how to deal with gender issues in the foreign language classroom seems to be a highly relevant one at a time in which the inclusion of learners from many races, socio-economic backgrounds and genders has become a key topic within educational theory, research and practice. The idea of living diversity in today's classrooms holds a transformative potential, not only to reflect upon one's own identity, but also to question the assumptions that we and others make. Many teachers today still believe in the myth that girls are better language learners than boys, and they thus might subconsciously approach and evaluate girls and boys differently in the language classroom (cf. Alexiou in this volume). And even though today's young women have many more choices in terms of their educational career and their private and professional lives, they are generally right in assuming that the majority of household and childcare responsibilities will sooner or later fall on their shoulders, making attaining their education even more difficult.

Looking into the teacher handbooks of common textbooks for the English language classroom, not much information for teachers can be found on how to raise critical awareness for such gender relations, even though pupils get to deal with gender topics (in a nutshell) in school – that is, as long as they reach their senior years of secondary schools.

The book “Gender and Language Learning: Research and Practice” reacts to these deficits and aims at raising awareness towards gender issues in different areas of foreign language teaching and learning. The primary objective

of the book is to spark university students', trainee teachers' and in-service teachers' analysis and reflection of gender relations in the foreign language learning and teaching section.

This book is based on a lecture series called "Gender Awareness in Foreign Language Learning, Language Teaching and Language Use" that was held at Goethe-University Frankfurt/Main, Germany in 2015.

When we started to ask gender specialists working in the field of TEFL Pedagogy, Applied Linguistics and Cultural Studies, whether they would be willing to give a talk in the context of our lecture series, we were overwhelmed by their enthusiastic responses. "Fantastic", "very exciting" and "highly relevant" were just some of the reactions we received from the lecturers, mirroring their credo that developing gender awareness is an important aspect within teacher education curricula. Similarly, the students who participated in the lecture series reacted very positively to the topic. The number of participants was constantly high and many of the attendees contributed to the discussions with great motivation. The contributions of the students throughout the semester proved evidence of an increasing level of gender awareness. Whereas in the beginning of the lecture, students had obvious difficulties with identifying gender stereotypes, e.g. in different advertisements, they were after a few sessions more and more able to apply the knowledge they gained throughout the lecture series. They started to critically reflect upon gender stereotypes and questioned their own and others' perspectives on gender-related issues. The positive feedback from both speakers and students as well as the obvious increase of gender awareness during the lecture series led us to conclude that there is a need as well as an interest in reflecting gender at university and especially among students who want to become teachers.

daily exposure to  
gender stereotypes

In daily life, be it private or public, everyone is confronted with all kinds of gender representations. Even at a very early age, children encounter "rules" about what colour to wear and what toys they are supposed to play with. Later, children and adolescents come to face with rules of gender-specific behaviour and lifestyles.

These norms are shaped by many kinds of media: family, peers, school and public media influence (self-)concepts of gender. Even the most gender-sensitive person is hardly able to avoid these concepts. Advertisements on TV, on billboards and everywhere else are omnipresent – some of them creating dangerous images of women being just submissive sex objects or men being strong and stable workaholics all the time. These images construct gender stereotypes that cannot be deconstructed easily. Taking the example of the famous "CALZEDONIA" advertisement bills from 2015, the viewer sees pictures of half-naked women with perfect bodies, long hair, big breasts and tanned skin in flattering yet uncomfortable poses. Seeing these perfect women who do not at all represent bodies of regular women might lead to the pressure to have similar assets, this holds particularly true for girls before and in puberty, but also for all other females.

reproducing gen-  
der stereotypes

If we perceive the traditional, normative and binary gender roles over and over again through different codes and modes, the stereotypes we have to deal with will be constantly reinforced and reproduced. Women should be self-confident, intelligent, successful (due to feminist movements) and at the

same time they should still be emotionally and socially competent, caring (mothers) and beautiful. Similarly, men see themselves entangled in conflicting expectations, too. Not only should they represent typical male traits like being the active ones, being independent and superior, but they also have to participate in housekeeping and child care, they should show emotions openly and take care of their outer appearance (cf. König et al. 2015b: 2). Still, both sexes try to dissociate themselves from the other sex in order to avoid gender-related identity conflicts. Thinking in binary structures can thus lead to developmental disorders, insecurity and result in fear and discrimination. This applies for many individuals, especially those not in line with traditional gender notions (cf. *ibid.*: 3).

Schools and teachers, too, can function as multipliers of those gender-related stereotypes – even if not deliberately. An example was found in the study logs that the students who took part in the lecture series had to write in order to get their credit points. One student who works at a school alongside her studies described a gender-related critical incident (cf. Nunan & Choi 2010):

I remember that I once said to a boy in the classroom: “Stop sending messages to your girlfriend”, as I assumed he is messaging to a girl. However, he replied: “Okay, but it is my boyfriend I am texting to.” (excerpt from an unpublished study log, anonymous author: 2015)

This example perfectly sums up the whole issue. As teachers, we want to be as open-minded and welcoming as possible, the aim is to treat every pupil as equal and to positively cope with diversity and heterogeneity. However, teachers are victims of gender images as well. This is why gender awareness has to be raised in teachers, firstly, to assure that the possibility of discrimination is narrowed down and limited, and, secondly, to make them able to foster gender awareness in their pupils likewise. Therefore, it is best to start as early as possible and raise awareness for gender issues at university level already. Future teachers have to be confronted with stereotypes, they have to be made sensitive towards them, in a next step, they should reflect their own and others’ stereotypes and lastly, they should try to deconstruct traditional binary gender roles in order to be able to prepare their pupils for modern, heterogeneous and diverse societies.

How awareness can be raised by questioning stereotypes can be seen in the reflective part of the above student’s study log:

I was quite shocked and embarrassed that I did not think about using gender-neutral language, or why assuming that he is texting to his partner in the very first place. After this incident I always tried to be actively aware of what I am saying to my students. (excerpt from an unpublished study log, anonymous author: 2015)

The student describes the incident, reflects on the impact of her reaction and also provides solutions (neutral language) about how to deal with situations like these in the future.

raising gender awareness

## 2. What is Gender?

historical back-  
ground

The concept of gender dates back to feminist movements in the 1970s. Activists claimed not only the analysis of asymmetric gender relations, but also the critique thereof. Whereas the focus of women's rights movements was on analysing and deconstructing the patriarchal supremacy, thinking in binary structures, the engagement with gender focuses on the socio-cultural constructedness of gender and the diversity, not binarity, of gender identities. Moreover, feminist theorists from the 1970s rather concentrated on the 'what' (what are the differences, raising awareness for differences, overcoming differences), while gender theory deals with the 'how' (how are gender stereotypes influenced and shaped?, how can they be deconstructed?) (cf. Angerer & Dorer 1994: 11).

The differentiation between sex and gender is attributed to Gayle Rubin who defined the "sex/gender system" as a

set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied. [...] Sex as we know it – gender identity, sexual desire and fantasy, concepts of childhood – is itself a social product. (Rubin 1975: 159, 166)

From the 1980s onwards, Gender Studies have become more and more important and in the 1990s, under the huge influence of Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble" (1990), they have even become a distinct academic discipline dealing with origins of social constructions of gender and their consequences. Gender discussions have also found their way into the everyday world, as many examples in pop-cultural media prove (e.g. Penny Laurie's "Meat Market" (2011), the TV series "Queer as Folk" (2000-2005), the discussion about metrosexuality (~ 1994).

defining gender

Gender, as opposed to sex, refers to the individual's identity. Whereas sex describes the biological binary difference between male and female, gender goes beyond that, taking into account individual factors. Gender is seen as a universal category that shapes socio-cultural discourse and the other way round (cf. Schößler 2008: 8).

Just like Simone De Beauvoir's famous assertion "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949: 267), gender theorists stress the constructedness of gender. A recent definition from the special issue of *Der Fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch* "Negotiating Gender" defines the term as follows:

a social and discursive construct based on – but not limited to – the cultural opposition of femininity vs. masculinity (adjectives: e.g. feminine, gender-queer, masculine); often differentiated from 'sex' as the idea of an anatomical opposition of femaleness vs. maleness (corresponding adjectives: e.g. female, intersex, male). (König et al. 2015a: 135)

The gender identity and/or gender role may match the biological sex – which should not be seen as a norm – or it may not, meaning that a person feels genderqueer but is biologically male. One aim of gender activists is to overcome the heteronormative assumption that everyone is either male or female and heterosexual.

To overcome stereotypes in general, one has to become aware of own and others' stereotypes. In case of gender, one has to become aware of and deconstruct heteronormative structures. This can be enabled through three steps:

defining gender awareness

- **identify** heteronormative stereotypes (e.g. the student's previous example: she realised that she reacted heteronormatively by assuming that the boy in her class was heterosexual.)
- **reflect** on your own and on other people's stereotypes (e.g. thinking about the question where these stereotypes come from, in the previous example: the student presumes from her own experience, she probably has not been confronted with other gender identities that much and therefore was not aware of them.)
- **deconstruct** stereotypes (e.g. thinking about alternative options and ways of thinking to deal with gender-sensitive situations, in the previous example: the insight that she could have used gender-neutral language. ("Stop texting your partner!" or even better "Stop texting!"))

The book assists university students, trainee teachers and teachers to become aware of gender-sensitive issues. The contributions spotlight gender-related problematic situations, provide room for reflection and help overcome stereotypes in the students/trainee teachers and teachers themselves, but also – and even more important – this book gives examples how to raise awareness in the EFL classroom and help pupils to become sensitive towards gender identities, gender roles and gender stereotypes.

### 3. About this Book

Gender topics have found their way not only into universities but also into schools. There are more and more attempts to develop a gender-sensitive school culture in terms of teaching, attitudes and behaviour of teachers as well as teaching materials (cf. König et al. 2015a). This specifically applies for teaching pedagogy in general, very often in the context of inclusion (e.g. Budde et al. 2016). Recently, lots of publications have shown a growing interest in gender awareness, on behalf of the teachers and the pupils (e.g. Hartmann 2010; Mörth 2010; Rieken 2014).

gender at school

Even though gender is a growing field in terms of school education, there is not as much interest and development in the context of TEFL as compared to general pedagogy; or, in other words, within the TEFL setting, gender finds its way more slowly. Yet, there seems to be a new wave of publications and the interest in the topic is constantly growing (cf. next paragraph for recent publications). This might be due to the reason that the TEFL classroom is perfectly suitable to talk about gender. The reasons for this are threefold:

gender in the EFL classroom

1. **Identity:** Foreign Language classrooms provide the opportunity to develop pupils' identities. More than other subjects, foreign languages aim at changes of perspectives, comparing cultures and lifestyles, noting similarities and differences. Therefore, students are afforded to find their

own place in society, not only on in a traditional cultural perspective but also with regards to gender issues.

2. Language: Talking about sensitive topics can be easier in a foreign language. Discussions and negotiations might, of course, be slower and less complex, but on the other hand, the pupils can talk about gender in a more distant way as they can in their first language and this thus enables more open, free and unbiased multifaceted perspectives (cf. König et al. 2015b: 4), giving them a feeling that their contributions will be judged less contentwise than in subjects in which they express themselves in the L1.
3. Academic and public context: As Gender Studies have their origin in the Anglo-Saxon academic culture, many theoretical texts are in English. This provides the chance to read authentic material about the topic from a real-world context in the EFL classroom.

gender in curricular guidelines

While gender is not a distinct part of the educational standards for English, it can be found in many of the core curricula for the respective federal states. In the Hessian *Landesabitur* 2016 for example, gender is described explicitly and can be linked to various other (sub-)topics (highlighted):

Obligatory Content	Key Words
Q1 The Challenge of Individualism	
GK/LK: USA	the American Dream, living together ( <b>gender issues</b> ) ( <i>ethnic groups</i> : Hispanics)
GK: Science and Technology	electronic media, biotechnology
LK: Them and Us	the one-track mind (prejudice, intolerance, ideologies)
Q2 Tradition and Change	
GK/LK: The United Kingdom	social structures, social change (ethnic minorities, multiculturalism), Great Britain and the world (the British Empire, the Commonwealth)
GK: Work and Industrialisation	business, industry and the environment, trade and competition
LK: Extreme Situations	<b>love and happiness, initiation, the troubled mind</b>
Q3 The Dynamics of Change	
GK/LK: Promised Lands: Dreams and Realities	political issues, social issues, country of reference: South Africa

GK: Order, Vision, Change	the models of the future (dystopias, 'progress' in the natural sciences), revolt and revolution
LK: Ideals and Reality	structural problems (violence, <b>(in-)equality</b> )

Table 1: Content for the *Landesabitur* in Hesse, terms highlighted by the authors (cf. HKM 2014: 4f.)

With regards to general teaching pedagogy, there are more publications than in TEFL pedagogy (e.g. Bartsch & Wedl 2015; Ferrebe 2012; Plaimauer 2008) that either deal with gender awareness in teachers or with methodological guidelines about how to teach gender topics. For TEFL, there are some publications, starting with the most common one by Helene Decke-Cornill and Laurenz Volkmann "Gender Studies and Foreign Language Teaching" (2007) which deals with theoretical and research topics concerning gender.

state of the art

In 2009, two practical issues dealing with gender in the EFL classroom were published: *Praxis Fremdsprachenunterricht* (Thaler 2009a) published one issue called "Gender", and the journal *Englisch betrifft uns* published one called "Gender Roles" (Düwel & von der Grün 2009).

More recently, the interest in the topic seems to be growing. A special issue of *Der Fremdsprachliche Unterricht Englisch* (König et al. 2015a) called "Negotiating Gender" was published in 2015, providing theoretical as well as practical information about teaching gender. In 2015, Renate Haas, who is an author in this book too, published a book that deals with gender historically: "Rewriting Academia: The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe".

More information about publications on gender in the EFL classroom can be found in the essays of this edition and in the paper by Lotta König, Sonja Lewin and Carola Surkamp in particular.

This book serves as a source for university students, trainee teachers and teachers of all ages and training or work levels. It covers two aspects of gender awareness: first of all, it is supposed to raise gender awareness within the students and/or teachers and secondly, it is supposed to help teachers to raise gender awareness in the EFL classroom at secondary level. It offers the theoretical background of numerous gender factors in teaching as well as methodological ideas about how to teach gender in a sensitive way. The book wants to trigger reflective processes in the teachers in order to make them aware of stereotypes and to avoid the reproduction of stereotypes.

aims of this book

The book is structured in five chapters: Gender and TEFL; Gender and the Teaching Profession; Gender and the Learner; Gender, Language and Texts; as well as Gender, Topics and Media. Each article starts with a short abstract describing the aims and contents of the contribution. Then, there are a few pre-reading tasks that will trigger reflection processes before reading and guide the reader through the text. All articles are followed by a review, reflect, research section which is intended to deepen the content of the texts. Besides, there are further reading suggestions for all topics.

structure of this book

The second text of **this chapter**, preceded by this introduction by **Daniela Elsner** and **Viviane Lohe**, written by **Lotta König**, **Sonja Lewin** and **Carola Surkamp**, describes the relevance of gender for students at school. The authors illustrate how the topic of gender and the foreign language classroom can benefit from each other. After the provision of an extensive overview on previous publications dealing with gender in foreign language teaching (FLT), the authors present Gender Studies as a reference discipline and outline selected theoretical approaches to the topic of gender. The different theoretical approaches are put into practice in teaching units afterwards. Finally, this contribution addresses the role of the teacher, arguing that gender reflection should become a constituent of teacher training curricula.

**Chapter two** focuses on Gender and the Teaching Profession. First **Renate Haas** surveys the historical process of the professionalisation of teaching and highlights the gender blindness of mainstream concepts of profession. The author traces the development of crucial underlying gender binaries in the context of Western cultural ideals and ideas of education. Against this background, the contribution focuses on recent feminisation debates, presents a fresh statistical analysis and draws conclusions on the basis of recent Gender Studies.

Hereafter, **Britta Viebrock** reflects on *Fremdsprachendidaktik* as an academic discipline in Germany, describing it as a “strange species” in terms of gender issues. Comparing the discipline to other academic fields, it becomes obvious that it holds a remarkable proportion of female staff. The article provides a short historical account of how *Fremdsprachendidaktik* has developed as an academic discipline after 1945 with a special focus on gender issues. Based on the results of a study of the living and working conditions of professors in the field of *Fremdsprachendidaktik* carried out in 2014, male and female perspectives on work-related issues are being compared. Ultimately, an answer to the initial question whether *Fremdsprachendidaktik* is a female domain and implications of this are being provided by the author.

In **chapter 3** the perspective is changed towards the learner. **Sabine Doff** provides us with historical information on foreign language learning and teaching traditions at higher girls’ schools during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Germany. The author thoroughly examines characteristics of teaching and learning modern languages (content, methods and aims) at higher schools for girls. In this context, it becomes obvious that higher education for girls had to fulfil a double, partly contradictory purpose which could be labelled as “different but equal”. On the one hand, it had to be established as equal to higher education for boys. On the other hand, higher education for girls had to provide a specific type of state education for those who were not (yet) admitted to universities. A closer look at this past approach offers worthwhile insights for (future) language teachers who are still faced with the challenges of gender and language learning.

The paper by **Thomai Alexiou** deals with the concept of gender as an individual difference and its impact on the learner. Readers will learn about factors that determine gender and certainly recognise long-held myths. The author provides an updated overview of recent theories and literature regarding potential differences in EFL performance between males and females. Moreover, the text holds information about the implications of pre-

conceptions regarding gender in the foreign language classroom; suggestions on how to deal with these issues will be given.

**Chapter 4** deals with gender issues in language structure and use as well as (classroom) texts. **Heiko Motschenbacher** starts with an introduction of the basic tenets of inclusion, relating them to matters of linguistic gender inclusivity in educational contexts. Various linguistic approaches to the study of gender exclusion and inclusion are outlined, namely ethnographic approaches, discourse analytic approaches and structural gender linguistics. The author provides us with an overview of linguistic gender categories commonly used as descriptive tools in structural gender linguistics. Finally, he shows how gendered language structures can play a role in critical research on gender-related linguistic practices in classroom communication and teaching materials.

**Laurenz Volkmann** outlines the vast and highly complex field of literature and gender, reducing it to the question of how literature can function in the classroom when there is a special emphasis on gender matters. A tentative first answer of the author is that literature can work in two seminal ways: first, it can serve as objects of study and interest with regard to gender issues; second, working with literary texts can support students in their development of analytical and interpretative skills which they can use when dealing with other media or in real life. The author illustrates how songs, poems, dramas and novels can create a greater awareness of one's 'gendered identity' and how texts can be used to gain insights into how different cultures define gender differently. A number of activities and methods for dealing with gender and literature are being presented.

**Gabriele Linke** outlines the connection between gender stereotypes and popular culture. Several conceptualisations of popular culture are being presented and their potential for the teaching of gender issues in the EFL classroom are thoroughly examined. In addition, the author informs us about major principles and basic strategies of dealing with gender in the foreign language classroom. Ultimately, these strategies are applied to selected popular texts in different media with a particular focus on print media and digital media.

The **last chapter** looks at gender topics and media. **Engelbert Thaler's** contribution consists of five sub-parts each focusing on one of the five dimensions of the male-female relationship: man or/and/versus/is/without woman. A number of possible topics to be dealt with in the EFL classroom are enumerated by the author, and a variety of sample tasks demonstrate in an exemplary way how to work on each of the five dimensions. At the end, the author elucidates the 6th Place of gender competence, which frames the five dimensions of the male-female relationship.

**Nora Benitt** and **Jürgen Kurtz** discuss a range of issues related to the representation of gender in TEFL textbooks. As a starting point, they offer an overview of current research trends dealing with gender in the field of language teaching and learning, focusing in particular on studies examining gender representation in English language instructional materials. The authors then report on a qualitative mini-study they conducted, examining representations of gender in TEFL textbooks published in Germany since 1957. To conclude with, they present a Canadian gender stereotype evalua-

tion instrument that can be useful to identify gender stereotypes, both in practice and in research.

**Judith Buendgens-Kosten** deals with the question how gender and perceptions of gender roles can impact computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the classroom. Therefore, she firstly defines CALL and the notion of the “digital divide” in its historical and current form. Hereafter, readers will learn more about computer use and computer skills by male and female teenagers. The author discusses three different scenarios in which gender impacts a CALL scenario. These three scenarios are supposed to develop an awareness of key decisions a teacher should make when implementing CALL in the classroom with regards to gender. The chapter ends with recommendations regarding gender and CALL.

The book closes with a full bibliography and a glossary supporting browsing through the terms when looking for specific information on elected areas of gender and foreign language teaching pedagogy and research.

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Lastly, we hope that you – the readers of this volume – enjoy this book and that it triggers your gender awareness. We would like to close this introduction with a picture of a sign we hung up on a door on the first day of our lecture series. The sign said: “Gender Awareness in HZ 14”, stating that the room for the lecture series had changed to room number HZ 14. One day later, someone had added the sentence “Hoffentlich nicht nur da!” [Hopefully, not only in there!]:

