

LINKING GENDER AND SECOND LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN A DATABASE

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RESUMEN

Este artículo define los fundamentos de una base de datos especializada en los factores sexo/"género" en el aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas. En primer lugar, describimos las conexiones entre "género", sexo, coeducación, y aprendizaje/enseñanza de lenguas. En segundo lugar, repasamos las principales bases de datos disponibles en red y en CD-ROM relacionadas con los factores sexo/"género", y coeducación, dentro del campo de aprendizaje y enseñanza de segundas lenguas. Por último, esbozamos un posible modelo de base de datos que puede ser de utilidad a la hora de investigar y enseñar cuestiones relacionadas con los factores sexo/"género", y coeducación, en el contexto de aprendizaje y enseñanza de segundas lenguas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Enseñanza y aprendizaje de L2, "género", coeducación

ABSTRACT

This paper defines the basis for a database specialised in sex/gender and language education. First, it places the context with a description of the main connections between gender, sex, coeducation and second language learning and teaching. Second, it reports a survey of the main Internet and CD-ROM databases available for searching information on sex/gender/coeducation within the field of second language learning and teaching. The paper ends with a description of a tentative model of database designed with the purpose of filling a gap in bibliographical references and audio-visual resources useful for either researching or teaching issues related to sex/gender/ and coeducation within the context of second language learning and teaching.

KEYWORDS

L2 teaching, L2 language learning, gender, coeducation.

RESUME

Cet article établit les fondements d'une base de données spécialisée dans les facteurs sexe/"genre" dans l'enseignement/apprentissage des langues étrangères. Premièrement nous décrivons les rapports entre "genre", sexe, coéduca-

tion et apprentissage/enseignement des langues. Deuxièmement, nous revisons les principales bases de données disponibles sur internet et sur CD-Rom en rapport avec les facteurs sexe/“genre” et coéducation dans le domaine de l’apprentissage et de l’enseignement des langues. Finalement, nous esquissons un modèle de base de données qui pourrait être utile au moment d’enseigner ou de faire des recherches sur des questions concernant les facteurs de sexe/”genre”, et coéducation dans le domaine de l’apprentissage/enseignement des langues.

MOTS-CLES

Enseignement/apprentissages de langues étrangères, “genre”, coéducation.

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades are characterised by important innovations in communication as well as by the progressive appearance of new technologies in our daily lives such as the computer, satellite relay and digital audio video. This progress in communication and technology can particularly be seen in second language education and second language research. In just a few years, teachers have gone from having a blackboard and a chalk as the only pedagogical aids to having at their disposal a slide projector, an overhead projector, a tape recorder, a video cassette player, a computer and even television channels. Second language teachers and researchers have also access at electronic and digital information resources such as virtual libraries, internet directories, home pages, electronic journals and databases.

This paper reports the process of creating a database on bibliographical references and audio-visual resources for teaching and researching issues related to sex, gender, and coeducation in the field of second language education, understood here as the learning and teaching second or foreign languages in the context of the classroom. The first section is devoted to defining the terms sex, gender, and coeducation and establishing the main connections among them. Next, Internet and CD ROM Databases on education and gender are reviewed. The final section is a description of the steps and processes followed on designing *Genecolenguas*, a specialised database on the factors sex, gender and coeducation within the field of second language education.

DEFINITIONS AND CONNECTIONS

A database is a collection of data stored in a computer system, arranged by means of a management system and accessible to the computer user (Lizasoain, 1992). Thus, by means of a personal computer, and a Data Base Management System, it is possible: a) to store a great amount of information on different topics; b) to order, list, classify and to relate the information stored; c) to retrieve this information at will.

From the definition above, we can see the main advantages of using a database for those dealing with gender issues within second language education. It allows students, teachers, and researchers to store, classify, retrieve, and bring the information on language learning and teaching up to date; it makes it possible to locate and relate a great amount of data on learning theories, teaching methodologies, and research on these themes; it facilitates the exchange of information among teachers and researchers; last but not least, databases usually store the information sources of the discipline.

There is agreement to classify information sources into two main categories: primary sources and secondary sources; the former refer to the documents themselves available either in print or in audio-visual format; the latter are mainly bibliographies which point to the original documents. Information sources are regarded extremely important since not only do they keep the knowledge in any field but also create the boundaries of a given discipline.

Let us now, define sex, gender and coeducation and draw the main connections among these terms. Within the scope of Sociolinguistics, Sociology of Language and Women's studies, traditionally a distinction is made between sex and gender. The former refers to the biological category of male or female, whereas the latter refers to the different social norms and patterns of behaviour allotted to each of the members of this category (Montgomery, 1995; Talbot, 1998). We are usually born and die with a given sex but the concept of gender changes according to time and place. The division into masculine and feminine social roles has given rise recently to a constructivist and dynamic view of gender. Under this new conception, gender is not a fixed category but may vary depending on the speech situation and the type of interaction that takes place, as Ehrlich puts it, gender is "*a construct shaped by historical, cultural, social, and interactional factors*" (1997, p. 424).

Throughout history the biological differences between men and women have given rise to: a) presuppose different abilities and aptitudes in the two groups; b) establish two social genders: masculine and feminine; c) justify different roles, norms and behaviours for each of the sexes, which frequently are disadvantageous to women. As we will see in the next paragraph, referring to the context of the classroom, sex, gender and coeducation meet together in the point of eradicating possible discriminating norms and patterns of behaviours for any of the sexes.

The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture defines *coeducation* as “the system of educating boys and girls together in the same buildings and classes” (1992, p. 239). In some educational contexts, among them, the Spanish one, the term conveys other meanings which have to do with the analysis and repairing of sex inequalities in the educational system, and with the development of equal opportunities for both sexes (Subirats & Brullet 1990).

Traditionally, sex inequalities have been referred to by means of loaded terms such as sexist discrimination and sexism. Both terms point to the sexual stereotypes and to the social restrictions imposed on men and women because of their sex. In practice, sexist discrimination and sexism refer to the inferior position that women experience in their daily and professional life, in society and in the world.

Within the Spanish educational system, coeducation is closely linked to cross-curricula subjects referred to as “transversales”, particularly to two cross-curricula subjects explicitly mentioned in the new education law (LOGSE): Education for the equality of the sexes (*Educación para la igualdad entre los sexos*) and sexual education (*Educación Sexual*).

Although sex, gender, and coeducation are terms that can be defined separately, when used together, they interrelate the ones with the others. As mentioned above, within Sociolinguistics and Sociology of Language, the term sex refers to the biological category male/female, whereas gender has to do with social norms and patterns of behaviour assigned to each member of the sex category. In daily life, sex and gender walk hand in hand as if they were the two sides of a coin. They are variables which influence the use of language by men and women but it is difficult to know clearly which one is dominant in a particular context. This does not happen within Applied Linguistics, particularly within one of its fields known as Second Language Acquisition (SLA), where sex is regarded as an individual learning factor capable of explaining possible cognitive and strategic differences on the part of male and

female students when learning a second language. Regarding gender, it is usually related to the different types of beliefs, attitudes, and motivations towards the second language learning and the second language culture held by male and female second language learners. Gender has also to do with the different learning strategies that happen to be used by male and female students as well as with the different patterns of interaction that have been observed in the language classroom between teacher and students and among the students themselves. In its turn, as already stated above, both sex and gender have direct connections with coeducation; these lie in the fact that social discriminatory norms and patterns of behaviour for each sex infringe upon the principle of equality claimed by the educational system.

The link between sex, gender, coeducation, and second language learning/teaching is similar to the one established between sex, gender, coeducation, and language. Language is both an instrument of communication and an instrument of knowledge of the world around us. By means of language, we shape our view of society, we organise our knowledge, we learn new things and, above all, we assimilate the norms and social patterns of our community. The learning of a second language gives us the opportunity to go deeply not only into a different way of living but also into a different way of understanding the world. As happens with a first language, a second language may reveal sexist stereotypes and discrimination towards a given sex. Researchers have claimed the existence of sexism towards women in the English language (Spender, 1980; Cameron, 1985; Gibbon, 1999; Piercey, 2000) as well as in grammars, dictionaries (Kaye, 1989; Hennessy, 1994; Jiménez Catalán & Ojeda Alba, 2001), and textbooks (Graci, 1989; Molina, 1997; Polou, 1997), used to teach this language to second language learners. (Further exploration of this aspect may found in Sunderland, 2000).

It has also been noted the absence of the factor sex/gender within most of the representative textbooks in SLA as well as the scarce presence of research on these factors in scientific and academic journals in that field (Jiménez Catalán, 2002). A correspondence can be observed in the scarce presence of women researchers within Applied Linguistics which contrasts with the almost outnumber of female language teachers in primary and secondary education compared with male language teachers. In our opinion, this can be understood, if not as an exclusion, unless as a kind of limitation for women, as they hold inferior teaching positions in second language education and they contribute to spreading the knowledge on the discipline less than men.

Failure or success in second language learning is determined to a great extent by individual factors, in which gender is included, but also by the social context in which learning takes place. This is made up of many variables as, for instance, the language planning and bilingual policy developed by educational authorities, the characteristics of the language teacher, the teaching method, and the teaching materials used. In addition, both the teaching and learning factors and the processes are influenced by the importance given by society to the learning of a foreign language as well to the teaching profession itself. If it is thought that such learning is more appropriate for girls than for boys, then, it will be no a surprise to find out that girls show a greater motivation and achieve better results in foreign language learning. Likewise, if society thinks that language teaching is a profession for women, then, students will associate the image of a foreign language teacher with that of a woman. What these examples reveal are social beliefs, attitudes, and patterns which have to do with the allotment of social attributes, patterns and roles (that is to say, gender) to each member of a biological sex category (male/female).

As a conclusion to this section, emphasis should be made on the existence of many variables interacting with the factors of sex, gender and coeducation. We agree with (Ehrlich, 1997) that gender is not fixed but a dynamic construct always in progress, and, as a consequence, it may change according to individual variables but also to the context and situation. Thus, an ideal database on sex, gender and coeducation within second language education should contain information both on individual learning factors and on teaching and contextual ones. In addition, all these factors should be interrelated under the umbrella of sex and gender. In order to do so, this ideal database should provide with information deriving from the main disciplines that conform the basis on sex, gender, and coeducation in the fields of language learning and teaching. It follows then, that not only linguistics, applied linguistics (second language learning and teaching), psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics –which have traditionally provided with information on how a language is learnt and taught–, should be represented but also, biology, psychology, education, sociology, history and law as they have contributed with knowledge that throws light on understanding cognitive and attitudinal differences as well as the construction of gender in classroom practices.

DATABASES ON EDUCATION AND GENDER

Directly or indirectly related to education, there exist well known databases such as ERIC, M.L.A, FRANCIS, ISOC, etc. These databases differ in the nature of information and the type of documents contained, their format, their coverage, and their volume, but information on language and educational issues is provided by them all. Following, in Figure 1, it is included a brief survey of five American and European databases, the list by no means claims to be exhaustive but representative of the existing databases. Partially inspired on Morville, Rosenfeld, and Janes 1996's meta information scheme for evaluating Internet Resources Guides, the features evaluated for each database have been:

- i) the type of information included: primary sources or secondary sources, general or specialised. Primary sources refer to the documents themselves whereas secondary sources consist of bibliographical references of the documents.
- ii) the resource format: paper, audio-visual, electronic (CD-ROM, on line) and, digital (World Wide Web site).
- iii) the type of the document included: book, journal, proceedings, songs, films, documentaries.
- iv) the geographical coverage: international, national, regional, local.
- v) the chronological coverage.
- vi) the main language of transmission.
- vii) the institution responsible for the database.
- viii) the URL address of the database.

Through these databases, particularly the first one –ERIC– it is possible to obtain bibliographical references to carry out research on issues related to L2 language education. A more specific database on these topics is the MLA International Bibliography which focuses on linguistics and modern languages, and through which, it is possible to trace L2 language learning and teaching references. It is also possible to obtain references on gender and language education, although these references are usually dispersed since neither of these databases is specialised on gender.

The opposite holds true for databases on gender; there is a good representation of databases such as: NAU, GRACE, IGALA but none of them is specialised on language learning and teaching. As happens with

Database	Description
ERIC	Secondary sources, bibliographical references specialised on education, electronic/digital, articles from North American journals mainly, USA, since 1966 to the present, English, USA located: Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), US Department of Education, http://eric.syr.edu/Eric/
M.L.A	Secondary sources, bibliographical references on modern languages and literatures, electronic (CD-ROM), articles from academic journals mainly but also books, working papers, bibliographies from all over the world, since 1963, English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, USA located: Modern Language Association.
FRANCIS	Secondary sources, bibliographical references on social sciences, economy and humanities, electronic (CD-ROM), articles from academic journals, doctoral thesis, proceedings and books from Europe, since 1963, French, English and Spanish, Europe located: Institut de l'Information Scientifique et Technique (INIST), French National Research Council (CNR)
ISOC	Secondary sources, thousands of bibliographical references on social sciences and humanities, electronic/digital, articles from Spanish academic journals, Europe, since 1975, Spanish mainly but also English and French, Spain located: Centro de Información y Documentación del CINDOC, del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones (CSIC), URL: www.cindoc.csic.es/prod/database/isoc/isoc~text.html

Figure 1. Databases related to language education

education, gender databases are born with the aim of being useful in spreading information, in this case, gender databases share the general purpose of contributing to the equality of the sexes, but they are extremely varied regarding specific objectives and the type of documents and resources included as can be observed in the description of a sample of databases displayed in Figure 2.

As a conclusion to this review of databases¹, it can be pointed out the existence of a gap concerning databases on sex/coeducation/gen-

¹ In addition to the databases included in Figure 2, it is worth mentioning databa-

Database	Description
NAU	Secondary and primary sources: bibliographical references drawn from gender periodicals and journals specifically devoted to women's studies and feminist scholarship, full text provided for some publications; it also provides a comprehensive list of films and documentaries as well as information on Women's Studies Internet Resources; digital; USA, no chronological trace, English, USA located: Northern Arizona University; URL: http://www.nau.edu/~wst/
GRACE	Secondary and primary sources: bibliographical references drawn from journals and other documents are provided, but the main scope is references of centres and researchers on gender from all over the European Union as well as university courses in Women's Studies; electronic (CD-ROM)/digital in progress; since 1990; languages of European countries; Europe located: GRIF (Groupe de Recherche et d'Informations féministes), founded in 1987 in Belgium, since 1996 it is accessible through the national centre in each European Union member state. URL: http://www.univ-tlse2.fr/grace/engl/centre2.html
IGALA	Secondary sources: by clicking the section Language & Links different resources are provided such as The Language and Gender Page, IGALA mailing list, and The Berkeley and Language Group. The latter offers, among other things, bibliographical references of the proceedings of the congresses organised by the group, they are devoted to the study of language and gender from different fields; U.S.A located: IGALA (First International Gender and Language Association Conference). URL: http://-linguistics.stanford.edu/conferences/igala/links.html

Figure 2. Databases on gender issues

ses in libraries as well as Gender web sites specialised on Women's Studies. An example of the former are: The New York Public Library and The Fawcett Library in London; as to the latter, good representatives are WSSLINKS (Women And Gender Studies Web Sites), and CIM-MEd (Centro Internacional de Mujeres del Mediterraneo).

der and second language education. It is true that important databases are found in each of these fields, but the type of documents and the information contained are usually different; there is not an attempt at integrating references from the different disciplines involved in the study of sex/gender/coeducation in relation to second language learning/teaching and as a result, a thorough search on these issues is difficult and often very time consuming for teachers and researchers.

'GENECOLENGUAS': A PROJECT OF DATABASE FORMATION

The model of database that we propose differs from the above mentioned in several ways: i) it is specific on the variables of sex, gender, and coeducation in the fields of second language acquisition and teaching; ii) it is a private database generated by the needs of a group of language teachers and researchers who were interested in the study of sex, gender, and coeducation in the fields of second language learning and second language teaching; iii) it is an interdisciplinary database. It embraces references of documents drawn from many disciplines such as Applied Linguistics, Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Psychology, Psycholinguistics, Education Sciences, Pedagogy, Literature, Social Sciences and Technology. Although some of these disciplines are closely related, teachers as well as researchers do not usually move beyond the frontiers of the discipline they work with. Our database model focuses on three related topics: (sex, gender, and coeducation) in two fields, second language learning and teaching, and it draws from many theoretical sources. Figure 3 is an attempt at displaying the different factors and the main disciplines involved.

Because of this, we can obtain cross references, which would be very difficult to obtain only by consulting the MLA database or the NAU database; iv) in comparison with these and the other databases, *Genecolenguas* is small but is restricted neither to English language nor to printed primary sources published in the United States or Great Britain; on the contrary, it includes references to papers and books on sex/gender/coeducation in second language learning/teaching published in Spanish as well as in English; v) it also stores references to audio-visual materials such as videos, songs, and interviews which are not found in other databases; these materials could be used as resources to work coeducation as a cross-curricula subject in the second language classroom.

ISSUES	MAIN DISCIPLINES INVOLVED
Sex: cognitive/innate language learning differences	Biology, Psychology, Psycholinguistics, Linguistics, Applied Linguistics...
Gender: socially acquired differences in the learning/use of both the mother tongue and other languages (second, third...)	Sociology, Sociolinguistics, Anthropology, Education, Psychology, Psycholinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Linguistics...
Coeducation: teaching and learning languages in the context of the classroom	Education, Law, Sociology, Technology, Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Applied Linguistics, Literature, Culture Studies, History, Women Studies...

Figure 3. Map of factors and the disciplines covered in *Genecoleguas* database

THE STRUCTURE OF GENECOLEGUAS

Having explained the key concepts upon which our database is based, in this part we will briefly describe its structure. In its design several steps were followed:

- i) Selecting File Maker for PC as Data Management System. This program runs with PC as well as with Mac, it is well known and widely used, it has many applications and at the same time, it is user friendly.
- ii) Deciding how many files to include in the database. Given the different nature of the references to be stored in it, we decided to have five: articles from journals, works from different types of books, electronic publications, audio-visual materials, institutions and associations.
- iii) Configuring the number of fields for each file. Space limitation does not allow us to give detailed information for all of them here. As an example of this step we will describe the file titled 'articles from journals' for which, twelve fields were created: (1) author/s, (2) title of the article, (3) title of the journal, (4) date of publication, (5) number, (6) pages, (7) language of publication, (8) type of publication, (9) identifiers, (10) descriptors, (11) abstract, and (12) observations.

- iv) Constructing a provisional thesaurus for indexing in the database compilation and for searching purposes. At present, this is still being done. Several decisions have been adopted as a starting point. The first one was to use “Instituto de la Mujer’s” thesaurus as a basic framework and to adapt it to our needs; that meant taking into account the characteristics, the purpose and the future system users of our database. The second decision was to use Spanish as the language for this thesaurus as a consideration to the language of the region and the university in which this project is located.
- v) Adopting the criteria to follow in the selection of primary and secondary sources for the data compilation phase. These criteria are: to begin by compiling bibliographical references of the last two decades from primary sources such as journals related to Second Language Learning/Teaching, Applied Linguistics, Gender and Language, Education and Language; then, we will compile references from books on sex/gender/coeducation and second language learning and teaching, language and education, followed by books on sex/gender/coeducation and language. The final phase will be devoted to the compilation of references of audio-visual materials.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper has been to report our proposal of a model for database capable of linking issues related to gender in second language learning and teaching. Thus, after describing the main connections between them, and, briefly surveying the main Internet and CD-Rom databases available, we went to describe and justify the first stage of our project to construct a specialised database containing references for sex/ gender/ coeducation related to second language learning/ teaching. This stage corresponds to the discussion of key theoretical concepts and to the design of the database structure described in the paper. *Genecolenguas* is justified mainly by the need of integrating primary printed and audio-visual references on related topics –sex/gender/coeducation and second language learning and teaching– published or produced in very dispersed sources. It seeks to integrate most references on these topics and to provide cross references.

The next stage in our project will be to deal with examining the documents to assign the classification, then indexing and abstracting the

information. In the short term, we plan at making this database available in electronic form for teachers and researchers interested in finding references in these issues.

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