WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIONS
IN ENGLISH COURSE-BOOKS IN ITALY
A diachronic survey from the 50s to the 80s

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Abstract – English language teaching materials usually reflect both the explicit and the implicit attitudes and beliefs of their authors, of the society and the culture of the times they live in. Attitudes and beliefs are bound to change over time and are affected by socio-cultural changes, particularly in areas such as power relationships, the image of women and that of identity construction. The first coursebook analyses in terms of women's representations and sexist attitudes date back to the 70s and the 80s (e.g. Hartman, Judd 1978; Porreca 1984; Schmitz 1975, 1984; Stern 1976) and have been greatly influenced by language and gender studies (e.g. Cameron 2005; Sunderland 1992, 1994, 2000; Sunderland, Litosseliti 2002).

This paper is aimed at presenting the results of a study on how women and their voices have been portrayed in ELT coursebooks addressed to Italian students over time. The analysis carried out in a diachronic perspective, have specifically focussed upon textbooks published between the 1950s and the beginning of the 80s in order to represent different historical perspectives. The proposed stretch in time to the 80s is aimed at investigating the most relevant shifts occurring in ELT coursebooks in the 70s as a consequence of changes in society and the influence of gender studies. The categories used to analyse the ELT materials have been: the representation (as well as the omission) of women and their roles in texts and illustrations; the language used to refer to women and its role in maintaining, diminishing or reinforcing sexist values.

Despite a correspondence between gender representations and ongoing changes in society, the textbooks examined appear to represent more traditional than innovative views on women.

Keywords: ELT course-books, women, attitudes, gender studies, diachronic study.

> *Foreign language textbooks can be seen as worth*
> *examining for their gender significance because they*
> *are characteristically densely populated with people*
> *who are not only in social relationships with each*
> *other, but who continually verbally*
> *interact with each other*
> (Sunderland *et al*. 2002, p. 223).

1. Introduction[1]

Textbooks can certainly be seen as a mirror of their times, in representations of gender as well as of other issues; as noticed by Hartman and Judd (1978, p. 384), "ESL materials are bound to reflect both the explicit and implicit attitudes of the writers of their societies, attitudes which are likely to change over time". English Language Teaching (ELT) materials – whether for second (ESL) or foreign (EFL) language teaching – are

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particularly prone to reflect their times: cultural elements associated to the target language are traditionally an integral part of materials, and "reflect the linguistic and cultural reality of the world in the target language and thus are an essential part of learning the target language for all learners" (Rifkin 1998, p. 218).

"Gendering shapes gender roles: what men and women, boys and girls do, occupationally and socially" (Sunderland 1994, p. 2). Foreign language (FL) materials are intrinsically characterized by textual educational practices, centred on language and – at least more recently – on language as social and local practice. Representations of gender in textbooks, given their educational role, can therefore also influence perceptions, and contribute to challenge stereotypical visions; indeed, stereotyping plays a salient role in the social construction of gender (Sunderland 1994, p. 3), and "different social and textual practices contribute to shape these [individual gender] identities" (*ibid*., p. 4; cf. also Sunderland 1992). In addition, FL course-books can be said to reflect aspects of the society in which the textbook is used, or addressed to. If issues related to a biased approach to gender – as well as other forms of discrimination – are not overtly taken into consideration and examined, educators "are implicitly supporting as well as possibly socializing the students to accept it" (Sherman 2010, p. 40; cf. also Gaff 1982, p. 78; Jones *et al*. 1997; Macaulay, Brice 1997; Sunderland 1994, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, it can be said that "English (like other languages) is gendered linguistically in its 'code', means that learning English, and other foreign languages as well, in classroom, also entails conceptualising the world in a gendered way" (Sunderland 1994, p. 7).

In this paper we will examine how women have been represented in a series of textbooks aimed at secondary school and adult English language learners in Italy, spanning from the 50s to the 80s, covering therefore quite a broad period of time, which was particularly dense in changes both at a societal and at a FL methodological level, from the grammar-translation methods in the 50s and 60s and over to the 80s (in one case only) to the first instantiations of Communicative Language Teaching. Our main aim is to investigate how gender has been represented in these EFL textbooks and whether the salient societal changes that took place in those decades, particularly in the Italian context, together with methodological shifts directed at language use in EFL, have been taken into account.

2. Theoretical framework – an overview on gender and ESL/EFL textbooks

The interest in the relationship between gender and language developed from the 1960s, often in connection to women's studies as an academic field of research (Wright 1985). These studies developed particularly in Great Britain and in the USA, and constituted a point of reference for the European contexts, too. The debate developed, though marginally, also in the Italian academic context (Barazzetti 2001), particularly within historical, anthropological and sociological research (De Longis 2001). In the 1970s there were considerable innovations in the field, also in parallel to the emergence of the feminist movement. Positioned research developed within the sociocultural construct of 'gender' in the areas of differences characterising men's and women's speech, as well as the role of language in "creating and maintaining social inequality" between the two sexes (Kendall, Tannen 2001, p. 549). By the 1980s, the focus had shifted towards the view that "women's language was a function of the existing power relationship between women and men" (Valentine 2006, p. 571).

Lingue e Linguaggi

Three main phases can be identified in research on gender and FL instruction, which are largely connected with the development of feminist thinking and women's studies, particularly in Western educational contexts (Wright 1985). While at first the focus was primarily set "on images of women and girls in textbooks", later concerns included "women's place in the target culture", and researchers then took "a critical look at the very language itself that we are teaching and at the value judgements which inform our decisions to include or exclude certain semantic and syntactic possibilities" (Wright 1985, p. 86). By the late 1970s a number of focus groups had contributed to developing awareness of women's representations in textbooks, and guidelines and checklists were developed in the USA to sensitize educational bodies and practitioners – as well as publishers – to the subject, even though this awareness often resulted in changes that were only superficial (Wright 1985; Graci 1989; for an overview cf. Ansary, Babaii 2003). Women studies' pluralistic approach contributed to setting research on women's representations in educational materials within a broader interest area, related to marginalization and exclusion from dominant cultures, with a consequent aim for FL teaching to reduce ethnocentrism in broader terms (Wright 1985, p. 97 ff.; Hartman, Judd 1978). Textbooks were seen as mirrors of the target-foreign culture (Wright 1985, p. 99 ff.), and the focus of reflection on gendering was to "sensitize our students and be prepared to discuss the symbols and manifestations of misogyny in the target culture" (Wright 1985, p. 101), in the view that they could be exploited in terms of awareness by both teachers and learners (Sunderland 1994, p. 6, 1992, 2000b).

Research in language and gender in second and FL education has tackled different issues, particularly since the 1990s, investigating areas such as language learning ability, motivation, individual differences in learning styles, as well as classroom interaction patterns between teacher to students, student to teacher, and student to student (Sunderland 2000b, 2001; Swann 2003). Attention to the way in which language conveys attitudes in the representation of women has also been given, within the broader area of sexist language: "[as] the status of women has changed in western society, people have become more sensitive to the ways in which the semantic feature 'female' is expressed in the language", particularly with reference to the English language (Holmes 1991, p. 214, cf. also Sunderland 1994).

From the early 70s to the late 80s several publications focused on gendering and sexism in ESL/EFL textbooks (and partly on pedagogic grammars and dictionaries) as "the most prototypical as well as the most researched language learning materials" (Sunderland 1994, p. 55; cf. also Sunderland 2000b). Different studies have examined generic linguistic forms and firstness, as well as omission and stereotyped portrayal of personal traits, roles, e.g. occupation both in terms of type and range of jobs represented, and relationships, both in textual forms and in illustrations; these earlier studies mainly focused on content rather than on a quantitative linguistic analysis.

In the mid 80s Wright pointed out that "[u]ntil recently, textbooks tended to be extremely conservative: they taught what was 'right' even if it sounded stilted or was no longer in common use. Recent emphasis on 'communication' has changed that somehow, but not to the benefit of women" (Wright 1985, p. 101). Indeed, societal changes may not be promptly reflected in materials (cf. e.g. Graci 1989), or a distorted reality may be represented (Wright 1985, p. 93), particularly in gender terms; worth noticing that, for instance, the movement towards non-discriminatory language was not appropriately acknowledged in textbooks.

However, since the 1990s, in gender studies there has been a

> growing recognition of the problematic nature of the binary 'gender differences' approach to language use, which underpinned theories of 'deficit', 'dominance' and '(cultural) difference'. […] Gender and language study now acknowledges gender as more complex and more specific: complex since it interacts with other identities such as those of ethnicity and sexuality; specific since its realisations are far from universal. (Sunderland 2000b, p. 214)

Investigation of gender came to be intrinsically related to concepts of identity/ies, social representations and construction of gender, as well as gendered discourse(s) as social practice (Sunderland 2000b: 214; cf. also Kendall, Tannen 2001; Holmes 1991; Thorne *et al.* 1983); concerns shifted to "the diversity of gender identities and gendered practices" (Cameron 2005, p. 482) and of "gender (identity) as multiple, fluctuating, and shaped in part by language (Litosseliti, Sunderland 2002, p. 6).

In parallel, studies on FL textbooks in the 1990s saw a shift from content to linguistic analysis, with the inclusion of classroom perceptions and treatment of materials (for a comprehensive account cf. Sunderland 2000a, 2000b), as well as on language as discourse and gender as social representation (Sunderland 1992, 2000b).

As it has been noticed for other aspects, particularly in relation to representations of the target culture (cf. e.g. Prodromou 1988; Alptekin 1993), course-books tend to portray a 'sanitised' world (Tomlinson 2001; cf. also Wright 1984), often within a western-centric perspective:

> Linguistically, we find a bias towards a bland, educated public, 'correct' language without trace of regionalists, class characteristics, dialect or intimate usage. Students learn the vocabulary for socially conservative, politically innocuous behaviour, never the language of outrage or rebellion. Sociologically, emotionally and linguistically, these textbooks offer a remarkably impoverished slice of life. (Wright 1985, p. 102)

As to gender, which is of course also culturally shaped, the Western-centred portrayal in FL textbooks often results in patronising, ethno/male centred viewpoints. Furthermore, the frequent focus on factual communication and transfer of information, downplaying language as an act of communication with people, privilege what can be defined as a 'male', factual use of language; 'female' uses as "indirect and subjective, for expressing emotions or relating to others" have tended to remain excluded (Wright 1985, p. 103). As a consequence, textbook dialogues have tended to represent straightforward instances of interactions, excluding language-in-use authentic examples as "hedges, tag questions and qualifiers, 'empty' adjectives, diminutives and super-polite forms" (*ibid.*, p. 104), or "spontaneous emotional outbursts" (*ibid.*, p. 105).

To sum up, studies in the area of gender representations and FL textbooks, particularly from the 60s to the 80s, have widely shown that "many EFL texts were biased against femininity" (Healy 2009, p. 92), largely mirroring the fact that, as Healy continues, a "woman's place was in the home, raising a family and supporting her husband from the sidelines. There was no need to represent women in a different light. Putting it bluntly, men were more important than women. Men led interesting lives out and about, doing things and making important decisions in companies and governments, on the other hand women lived for two things only, to be the best homemaker and car giver […]. Because women led mundane daily lives compared to men's adventure filled days, women were represented far less than men" in ESL and EFL textbooks (Healy 2009, pp. 92-93).

3. The study

Given the findings from previous research on gender representations in FL textbooks, in order to investigate this area, a research study on how women and their voices have been portrayed in ELT coursebooks and teaching materials addressed to Italian students over time was developed.

3.1. Research Design

The analysis was carried out in a diachronic perspective, and it specifically focussed upon textbooks published between the 1950s and the beginning of the 1980s in order to represent different historical perspectives. We have also taken into account different methodological approaches, from grammar-translation (Strand 1) to the first changes towards a notional-functional syllabus (Strand 2, *Shifting Methodology*), until the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (Strand 3). In Italy, it is the shift to the Notional-functional approach that mostly influences FL textbooks in the 1970s as a preliminary step to the Communicative approach that fully develops in the 1980s, with a new syllabus organization mostly based upon the sets of functions and notions that underlie real communication. The proposed stretch in time to the 80s is thus aimed at highlighting the most relevant shifts occurring in ELT course-books as a consequence of the influence of gender studies as well as in teaching methodology. It was indeed between the 1970s and the 1980s that the most outstanding innovations in FL teaching methodology took place in the Italian FL scene, thus creating a shift not only in the types of approach adopted, but also in terms of the contents and of the representation of the emerging changes in the societal conditions.

As we will see, some methodological approaches span over different decades, particularly in Italian-based textbooks, and often present a more traditional view also in the representation of women. In methodological terms, the traditional grammar-translation method in particular has more or less markedly characterised most manuals since the beginning of the twentieth century up to the 1970s, and at times into the 1980s with revised versions of older manuals, proving one of the hardest to change in the history of ELT methodology.

3.2. Research questions

The research design was aimed at responding to the following questions:
1. Is the representation of women in ELT course-books gender-biased?
2. Is the language used in the course-books to represent women gender-biased?
3. Has the representation of women in ELT course-books changed since the 50s?
4. Have changes in ELT approaches affected the representation of women?
5. Have changes in societal conditions in Italy, affected the representation of women in ELT course-books?

The method used was predominantly qualitative on the basis of a selection of main coursebooks and categories. The main categories used to analyse the ELT materials and course-books have been:
•   the representation (as well as the omission) of women and their roles in texts and

illustrations;

- the language used to refer to women and its role in maintaining, diminishing or reinforcing sexist values;
- the time period and the teaching approaches used in those periods.

3.3. Criteria and investigation procedure

The following four main categories to detect gender bias have been identified in relevant literature (Schmitz 1975, 1984; Sunderland 1992, 1994, 2000a; Sunderland *et al.* 2002; Wright 1985):

1. *exclusion* (invisibility, under-representation);
2. *subordination* (tendency to report women in positions of inferiority or dependency);
3. *distortion* (stereotyping of intellectual abilities, personal characteristics and appearance, domestic and professional roles);
4. *degradation* (condescending derogatory generalisations).

Within this general framework, the following set of more specific categories, deriving from the ones in relevant literature (Rifkin 1998; Sunderland 1994; Porreca 1984; Schmitz 1975, 1984; Hartman, Judd 1978), were also identified:

a) family roles (mother/father, wife/husband, girl/boy, girlfriend/boyfriend, etc.)

b) domestic roles: distribution of housework

c) occupational roles

d) social roles: sporting, heroes/celebrities in different fields (science, technology, history, politics, etc.)

e) leisure time/hobbies (e.g. shopping, gossiping, etc.)

f) physical appearance

g) intellect/ability, education

h) emotions – emotionality – state of mind

These more specific categories have been employed to select and categorise the representation (as well as the omission and under-representation) of women and their roles in texts and illustrations, instances of sex stereotyping or degradation (Sunderland 2000a, 2000b; Wright 1984) and the tendency to gender dominance (Mustedanagic 2010) – that is, the role language and pictures have in maintaining, diminishing or reinforcing sexist values.

Studies on gender imbalance in textbooks have been either text-driven, stereotype-driven or, more recently, criteria driven (Rifkin 1998). This study is criteria-driven (cf. e.g. Schmitz 1975, 1984; Sunderland 1994), since it is primarily aimed at examining the degree of women inclusion/exclusion/invisibility, subordination, distortion, stereotyping in gender roles (Sunderland 1992), as well as degradation, in the textbooks under analysis.

All course-books have been manually scanned in their textual sections (texts, dialogues, narratives, realistic/fictional characters, exercises and activities) as well as illustrations and pictorial representations, in order to allow a qualitative analysis of

findings.[2] The following sections will provide linguistic examples that are representative of findings for each category of analysis.[3] Although some of the textbooks were meant for international distribution, we have deemed it interesting to focus on the connections with Italian society in particular, since the course-books under investigation were adopted and used in this educational milieu. Each Strand, in fact, contains at least one textbook written by Italian-based authors and published in Italy. As it will be seen, traits of the Italian society of the time are traceable in the representation of women in these textbooks in particular – though not only.

3.4. Materials and strands

The above criteria have been applied to fourteen course-books published from the 1950s to the 1980s, which were selected as representative samples of secondary school/adult general English teaching course-books across the different decades; a balance as to Italian/British authors and publishers has also been taken into account in the selection process. The materials were grouped into three main Strands, which correspond diachronically both to the development of teaching methodologies, and to the societal modifications in the role of women along the decades taken into consideration. The Strands and the corresponding materials are the following:

1. *Traditional grammar-translation methodology and women as "the angel in the home" across decades:*

Hazon M. 1956, *Corso di Lingua Inglese Moderna* (renewed 2nd ed.), Garzanti, Milano.

Parish A. 1964, *Inglese* (2nd ed.), Industria Italiana Lingue Vive nel Mondo, Milano.

Marinoni Mingazzini R., Grassi S. and Pozzi L. 1964, *English*, Vallardi, Milano.

Milesi G. 1983, *English at Work*, Minerva Italica, Bergamo.

2. *Shifting methodology*

A) From the 50s to the 70s/ resistance to change

Hemming J. and Gatenby E.W. 1958, *Absorbing English* (Book 2), Longman, London.

Ridout R. 1959, *International English* (Vol.2), MacMillan, Houndmills Basingstoke.

Peroni M. 1970, *Discovering English*, Fratelli Fabbri, Milano.

B) The 70s/changing roles

Alexander L.G. 1967, *Practice and Progress*, Longman, London.

O' Neill R., Kingsbury R. and Yeadin T. 1971, *Kernel Lessons Intermediate*, Eurocentre/Longman, London.

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[2] One potential limitation of our study is the fact that, although the criteria taken into consideration cover quite a broad range of aspects, a more comprehensive number of course-books, together with a quantitative analysis of the activities and of the visuals (pictures, drawings, cartoons etc.) could have reinforced the survey and further sustained findings.

[3] Although some studies include also firstness, markedness, gender pronouns and generic nouns in their categories of analysis, in this study we have focussed on elements emerging from the categories outlined above.

Coles M. and Lord B. 1975. *Access to English – Starting Out*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

3.   *CLT – starting to communicate/shifting roles*

Abbs B. and Freebairn I. 1980, *Developing Strategies*, Longman, London.

Abbs B., Freebairn I., Iantorno G. and Papa M. 1980, *Communicating Strategies*, Zanichelli, Firenze.

Di Giuliomaria S. 1982, *Springboard English through Communication*, La Nuova Italia/Oxford University Press, Firenze.

Swan M. and Walter C. 1985, *The Cambridge English Course. Level 2*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

4. Findings

The research questions were used for each time period and for each category and the resulting findings provided very interesting insights into the areas under investigaton besides answering most research questions. The following sections deal with the main findings for each Strand following the criteria illustrated in § 3.3.

4.1. Strand 1 - Traditional grammar-translation methodology and women as "the angel in the home" across decades

> Traditional proverbs:
> *A woman's place is in the home*
> *A man's home is his castle*

a)   Family roles

Women are predominantly depicted as wives and mothers, rarely with a job outside the home, while the father is the head of the family and usually hard-working. The family is portrayed traditionally, with a mother, a father and two or three children, usually one or two boys and a girl. Stereotypical roles are applied also to children: girls have dolls and horses, they are nice, play the piano or tennis, while boys have cars and books; children sometimes help their mother in the housework.

Women are usually defined "good mothers" ("*non vi è nulla di più bello che vedere una madre vicino alla culla del suo bambino*", Hazon 1956, p. 239, translation exercise) and wives, they usually take care of the house, and sometimes have a maid who helps them. Mothers are patient and sweet, and happy when they contribute to a successful marriage ("she is very happy; she must have made a very good marriage", Hazon 1956, p. 215; "*felicità immensa, un ottimo marito, dei bellissimi bambini e lunga vita: tutto scritto sulla tua mano!*", Hazon 1956, p. 447). The home is the centre of life, and work is a founding value, together with happiness for the family.

Despite the father being sometimes described as "severe but patient" (Hazon 1956, p. 81) and "fond of playing with his children" (*ibid*., p. 97), he never contributes to housework except for gardening. Women love shopping, and their husbands pay for it "She is happy when she buys a new hat, but not her husband as he has to pay for it, Parish 1964, p. 67). The house is a 'real mess' when the wife leaves for a few days, and she is pleased to feel needed in her role of indispensable angel of the home, as in the following

exemplifications of findings: Mr Brown on the phone: "Life is hell without you dear!" Mrs Brown was very surprised and pleased to hear that. Mr Brown had never been so passionate on the phone" (Milesi 1983, p. 180). In this Strand there are usually no pictures (Hazon 1956; Parish 1964), but mostly drawings.

b)   Domestic roles: distribution of housework

In all textbooks the mother and wife sees to the house, does the shopping (food for the family, Parish 1964, p. 67), cooks, prepares excellent cakes (Marinoni Mingazzini *et al*. 1964, p. 166) and picnic baskets. She buys clothes for herself and the children, either alone or accompanied by her mother or friends. She looks after the children, reads them stories; in the case of Cinderella, this role is then repeated by her daughter who reads the story to her small cousin (Parish 1964, p. 38). Only in one case a husband unwillingly does the dishes after a meal (Parish 1964, p. 99). The mother is always a perfect hostess, and in one case busy packing for the whole family, though exclaiming to herself: "oh! Dear me! I hope I've finished!" (Hazon 1956, p. 24); girls – but not the son - are expected to see to their own toilet articles, and the husband is described as "hard to please about his things" (*ibidem*).

When the father comes home from work, he generally sits reading the paper smoking a pipe or a cigarette (Parish 1964, p. 30) and the mother asks the daughter to make him a cup of tea (Marinoni Mingazzini *et al*. 1964), or the servant brings him his slippers.

These values, largely Victorian, can be said to well mirror the role of women in the 50s and early 60s, who were still seen as the 'angel of the home', and a 'true lady' who is in the first place wife and mother. Similar representations could be largely found also in magazines and advertisements of the time, promoting the image of a woman-wife-mother who is the 'queen of the home' and happy in a house equipped with a fridge and other electric appliances (Boneschi 2002, p. 18).[4]

c)   occupational roles

Occupations assigned to women mirror traditional representations, as in domestic roles, with an incredibly evident difference both in the number and in the range of jobs portrayed (cf. Gaff 1982, p. 73). A woman can at best be an actress, a musician (pianist), a singer or a secretary; in one case Miss F. "writes stories for children" (Parish 1964, p. 38). A few derogatory examples can also be found, as in: "it does not require much trouble to learn dress-making" (Hazon 1956, p. 311); "she cannot [even] sing" (*ibid*., p. 143).

d)   social roles - heroes/celebrities in different fields

Women dance, are good, nice, well-dressed, while gentlemen are distinguishable; girls get married or are marriageable (Hazon 1956, p. 215), play the piano, are of the right age to have a boyfriend, while men go to the library as they are bored by parties, love sports, go to races, buy cars; boys love cars and know everything about engines (Parish 1964, p. 178; cf. Gaff 1982, p. 74). Worth noticing that in Italy in the 1950s women doctors represented only 3% (Boneschi 2002, p. 21); in Southern Italy women who had a job outside the house were looked at warily, particularly in terms of marriageability (Boneschi 1996, p. 138).

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[4] In 1965, 55% Italian families possessed a fridge, 23% a washing machine, 12% a hoover or a floor polisher, and 49% a TV set (Boneschi 1996, p. 97).

A few derogatory examples going beyond stereotypical representations can also be noticed as in: "where is your mistress?" "she is feeding the pigeons, she does nothing but gossip all day long" (Hazon 1956, p. 381).

As to famous characters, two textbooks mention women: Joan of Arc (Milesi 1983, p. 419, historical section), Queen Elizabeth the 1st, a 'woman in power', although referring to her physical appearance rather than her intellectual abilities, (Milesi 1983, p. 573); another includes references to female writers such as Jean Webster and Katherine Mansfield (Marinoni Mingazzini *et al*. 1964, p. 138, p. 231).

e)   leisure time and hobbies

Across all four textbooks women see friends and men have no time "for social gatherings as their business detains them" (Hazon 1956 p. 246), visit one another or their mothers, have tea, gossip, organize and go to parties, entertain guests as perfect hostesses, look at shop windows, go shopping ("*non la vediamo mai che non stia facendo delle compere*", Hazon 1956, p. 390; cf. Hartmann, Judd 1978, p. 386) and talk about the latest fashion, and "perhaps of the servant problem" (Hazon 1956, p. 99), as in:

> […] first he called Mary, the maid, and told her to bring him his slippers. The Browns are very lucky people, they have a maid. Maids are disappearing in England, as everybody knows. (Milesi 1983, p. 78)

In one instance a girl accompanies a male friend to the pub, but she only has soft drinks or a cider as she "has no thoughts or worries"; men, on the contrary, go to the pub to have a laugh with friends, and have a pint to "generally evade from the thoughts and worries of life" (Parish 1964, p. 157).

The following passage well summarizes how women are portrayed in relation to hobbies: "Women love talking, or looking at the shop windows, or going to have a cup of tea with their friends. However few women have much free time. Young girls only think about dancing or 'flirting', many of them also have hobbies" and they are usually "good at sailing boats or swimming" (Parish 1964, pp. 107-108). This well mirrors the fact that in the 1960s, in the economic boom period, Italian women's aspirations can be described as "to live in a house full of household appliances, happy to meditate on the colour of nail polish and to play canasta with her friends" (Boneschi 2002, p. 18, our translation).

Men read intellectual books, newspapers and smoke pipes; they are busy in the garden as "gardening is his hobby" (Marinoni Mingazzini *et al*. 1964, p. 65), while women read their favourite magazines. Men's and women's tastes are also gendered in terms of cinema and literary genres: men usually like historical or western films, and women tend to prefer comedies and detective stories.

f)   physical appearance

Representations of women in this Strand can be summarized by "*lo specchio è il tormento delle donne*" (the mirror is a woman's agony), (Hazon 1956, p. 27; cf. Gaff 1982, p. 74). Young women are represented as angels with golden blond hair and blue eyes, they are good-looking, tall and beautiful (e.g. "my sister is the pride of the family because she is a very beautiful girl", Hazon 1956, p. 81). If they are not beautiful – too thin with a long nose, or fat – they are sweet, good (*buona*) and afraid of becoming fat (Hazon 1956, p. 92; cf. Gaff 1982, p. 74). In some cases vanity or following the latest fashion is not seen as a positive trait, as the following extract shows:

> I suppose the girls will see to their toilet articles themselves – their face cream and powder, tooth-paste, scents and perfumes, lotions and nail polish! They always find room for some of their things in their vanity-bags! And   they will use that horrid rouge and the

lip-stick! In my times girls were much less vain! (Hazon 1956, p. 264)

The fact that this comment is made by a mother unveils a generation conflict – as it will also be shown below – between 'good old values' and the new lifestyles characterising the 1960s, which in Italy saw the first pret-à-porter collections, and hair spray and hair curlers fashion, hair removing, and rubber gloves imported from the USA (Boneschi 1996, pp. 103-105).

g)   intellect/ability, education

Books are generally 'his books'; she can at best study music, singing and fine arts: "*è brava e spero che farà bene*" (She's good and I hope she'll succeed, our translation, Hazon, p. 216); in another case, a girl does not pass an exam as it was too difficult for her, but "would succeed in studies if she worked hard" (Hazon 1956, p. 97). In only two cases, we find a reference to intellectual interests ("She reads history books, books about the wars, about the Middle Ages, about the Romans and the Greeks, studies English, writes letters to her son in France", Parish 1964, p. 20), and intellectual abilities ("I see she is a beautiful girl and I am told she is very clever", Hazon 1956, p. 252).[5]

In two cases we find a derogatory stereotypical reference (cf. Gaff 1982, p. 74, p. 76): a woman character is described by her husband as "unable to drive cars" and deserving the two fines she got, with the following comment: "another policeman that hates women driving cars! You are impossible as a driver Pamela! Two fines in one day. Thank goodness you decided to return home!" (Milesi 1983, p. 57); in another example, the husband denies permission to use 'his' car "[f]or the simple reason, my dear, that you are not a good driver!" (Marinoni Mingazzini *et al*. 1964, p. 166).

Men are described as clever, reading 'intellectual books" (Parish, p. 54), hard workers and strong; negative judgements include "leads a wild life" (Hazon 1956, p. 344), "brainless fellow all muscle and no brain", "lazy" (*ibid*., p. 446) and sometimes "greedy". These representations – mostly found in Italian-based textbooks – seem to largely confirm the co-existence of tendencies of change in Italian society, with a predominance of traditional, conservative views about women, both in their intellectual abilities and in educational terms.

h)   Emotions – emotionality – state of mind

In general emotions are not mentioned and, when they are present, they refer to qualities a woman should have in the family (patience first of all, "mothers are mothers", Hazon 1956, p. 81), or to family models (e.g. Cinderella, Parish 1964, p. 83); talking too much is seen as a negative characteristic. In one textbook the woman, while packing for the whole family to go on holiday, talks to herself, though expressing no emotions apart from negative comments on the vanity of girls wearing lipstick and her final relief ("Oh! Dear me! I hope I've finished", Hazon 1956, p. 24), though not openly saying she is tired. Indeed, not expressing one's feelings openly, together with silence, was seen as a positive attribute for women in Italy as elsewhere.

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[5] In Italy Middle School was made compulsory in 1963; in 1960 42% of women attended lower secondary school, and 37% upper secondary school, with prevalence in the art sector. Of the 27.7% who attended university, slightly higher than in 1950 (26.7%), the majority did so in faculties leading to the teaching profession (Valentini 1997, p. 20).

Lingue e Linguaggi

4.2. Strand 2 – Shifting methodology A) from the 50s to the 70s/ resistance to change

Traditional Proverbs
A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.
A man doesn't want a woman smarter than he is.

In this Strand we find very few differences from findings in Strand 1 throughout all the categories, confirming that the representation of women in the textbooks analysed tends to be oriented towards traditional values – despite the changes that were taking place in society. Since the 1960s an increasing number of women asked for respect and equality in rights, in Italy as in other countries, but the representations in this Strand do not take this potential unrest into account, and correspond more to the views of the 'conventional thinkers', who believed that women should 'stay in their place'. According to a 1967 Doxa survey 89% of Italian women thought it was more proper not to have any political opinion (Boneschi 1996, p. 120, our translation), and 86% still deemed that the most important thing was marriage. The influential Italian leader writer 'Donna Letizia' stated that "every woman aspires above all to marriage, and in conclusion getting a woman married is absolutely necessary, it has to be done at all costs", as reported in Boneschi (1996, p. 120, our translation). However, younger women increasingly believed they should do things their own way; there was a contrasting situation, where new ideas coexisted with values from past times, and the 1960s were thus characterized by a paradox: on the one hand women were told to be a productive and creative force, and encouraged to be masters of themselves; on the other hand, the model was that of the "angel of the washing machine", of a lady with polished nails, who could choose a hat and gloves appropriately, and who conveyed proper and true values to children (Boneschi 1996, p. 125).

a)   *Family roles*

In this Strand women are still associated with the role of mother ("Is Mrs Smith a mother? Yes, she is", Ridout 1959, p. 30), defined in terms of someone's wife, whose natural setting is in the home (cf. Gaff 1982, p. 73) and more often the kitchen, preferably wearing an apron (Ridout 1959; Peroni 1970). These roles are also applied to girls (Hemming, Gatenby 1958; Ridout 1959). When portrayed outside the house, a woman is usually going shopping for her family or buying clothes for herself. Men are not defined in the role of fathers but of husbands, differently from Strand 1.

b)   *Domestic roles: distribution of housework*

There are few differences from findings in Strand 1, although more limited in frequency. Fathers and husbands still relax after work and smoke (Peroni 1970, p. 168; Ridout 1959, p. 46, cf. Figures 1 and 2), while women and young girls still do the shopping for the family and cook (Hemming, Gatenby 1958, p. 19; Ridout 1959, p. 46, cf. Figure 2); for example, we see a mother talking to her daughter as follows: "Please go to the butcher's and buy some meat. Then go to the baker's and buy some bread and then to the grocer's and buy some cheese", Peroni 1970, p. 275). However, in two textbooks we find the first examples of men performing tasks which were previously solely attributed to women: "*Il Sig. Brown andò dal fornaio e comprò del pane, poi andò dal droghiere e comprò del formaggio*" (Mr Brown went to the butcher's and bought some bread, then he went to the greengrocer's and bought some cheese, our translation, Peroni 1970, p. 287); in one case we have a male character helping to prepare a cake (Hemming, Gatenby 1958).

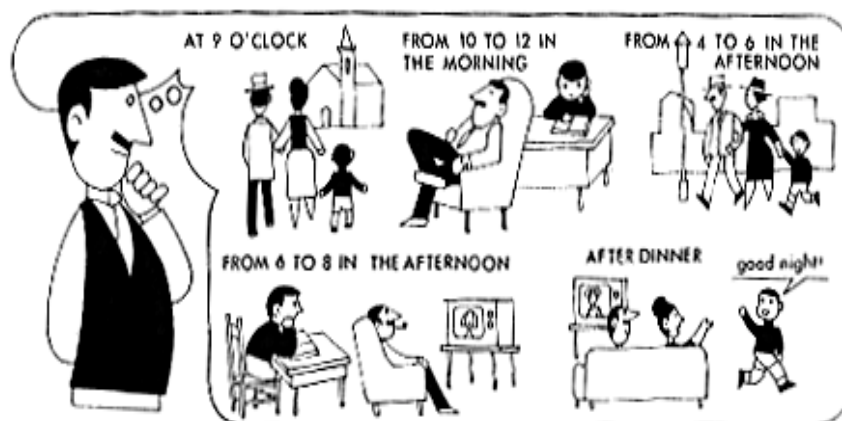Jack's father is thinking: "Tomorrow I'll...".

Figure 1
Peroni 1970, p. 168.

Figure 2
2.1, 2.2 Hemming, Gatenby 1958, p. 64; 2.3 Ridout 1959, p. 46.

c)   *Occupational roles*

We find considerably fewer references to occupational roles than in most textbooks from the previous Strand. However, the range of professional roles referring to men is still broader than for women; the latter are referred to as teachers (Hemming, Gatenby 1958; Peroni 1970), baby sitters, hostesses, stars, and nurses (Peroni 1970), both in Italian-based textbooks and in international ones. As Stern well summarises, "mothers go to work throughout the world, but textbook writers do not accept this reality" (1976, p. 297).

d)   *Social roles: heroes and celebrities in different fields*

Women are still portrayed inside their homes-castles and in the related roles, or going shopping (Ridout 1959), while men drive sports cars (Ridout 1959; Peroni 1970), smoke or read books, and are rich; a brave young boy is represented putting out a fire (Hemming, Gatenby 1958, p. 56).

We also find the first examples of references to famous Italian women in the society of the time (Rita Pavone, a singer, and Sofia Loren, Peroni 1970, p. 12) and in history; however, Elizabeth 1st is described as "not beautiful, [she] had reddish hair and a somewhat dark complexion. But she was tall and had a very regal bearing". was learned and could speak languages (Peroni 1970, p. 364). The same textbook defines Mary Stuart as "a young and attractive woman" who, despite being "learned and intelligent" was not as politically cunning as Elizabeth.

e)   *Leisure time/hobbies*

Two textbooks depict men who are just relaxing: they go running, play football, sleep, smoke pipes, and young boys go camping, while mother and daughter together bake cakes, watch boys play football or at best go swimming (cf. Gaff 1982, p. 74); girls stay at home and play with dolls, while boys study or play football. It is worth noting also that women are usually described with static verbs.

f)   *Physical appearance*

Despite these textbooks containing drawings, the latter are only sketched. In one case (Hemming, Gatenby 1958, p. 24) we have a young girl represented with the face of an attractive woman recalling a stereotyped 'advertising' image, and women continue to be beautiful and elegant. As mentioned above, Queen Elizabeth and Mary Stuart are described in terms of their physical appearance, and adjectives such as *nice*, *beautiful* and *elegant* are used for girls, while boys are defined as *clever*, *strong*, *rich* and *honest* (Peroni 1970; cf. Macaulay, Brice 1997, p. 803, p. 808; Stern 1976, p. 296). An old woman, describing the picture of herself when she was a young girl, comments that she was beautiful, with nice pink skin, big blue eyes, a nice mouth, small ears and nose, blond hair (Peroni 1970, p. 69).

g)   *Intellect, ability and education*

Few differences are found in this section, too; boys are *clever* and girls are *nice* (Peroni 1970).

h)   *Emotions, emotionality and state of mind*

The only two references to emotions are both quite stereotypical and ascribable to "traditional female instabilities" (Hartmann, Judd 1978, p. 386): a mother and daughter faint at the sight of a tiger's skin, and a man gets a glass of water for them (Peroni 1970, p. 240), and a girl is afraid of a noise in the house in the evening, and is reassured by her young brother (Hemming, Gatenby 1958, p. 32).

4.3. Strand 2 – Shifting methodology B) the 70s: changing roles?

<div align="right">

Traditional proverbs
Man's work is from sun till moon.
A woman's work is never done.
A good housewife is the key [variant: the crown, jewel] of the house.

</div>

a)   *Family roles*

On the one hand women's roles are still defined as housewife and wife, the latter at times stereotypically bossy (a man goes to the fortune teller, and when he comes out his wife commands him to follow her home immediately, Alexander 1967, p. 149) or compared to an older generation 'good' woman's skills, as in the following examples: "Mrs Harrison: Arthur's going to miss my cooking. I wonder if Mary can cook. Mr Smithers: Yes, I don't know how he'll manage" (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 140); "Mrs Newton isn't making the dinner; Jennifer is. I wonder if she can cook as well as Mrs Newton (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 142; cf. Stern 1976, p. 297). In another case we find a female character represented both textually and pictorially as a slim attractive young blonde, who wonders whether to marry a much older rich man, and a "very young wife" leading "a very easy life" and always getting up late as her husband is a rich businessman (O' Neill *et al*. 1971, p. 3).

On the other hand, we also find a few elements of innovation in positive terms: in one case the young sister is presented as intelligent, learned, ironic; in another case (Alexander 1967, p. 103), a conversation on equal terms between husband and wife on what they usually love buying, is narrated from the man's point of view, turning the discussion into general stereotypical statements as in: "a man can never have too many ties", and "a woman can never have too many hats".

Figure 3
O' Neill *et al*. 1971, p. 38.

Figure 4
Coles, Lord 1975, p. 37.

b)   domestic roles: distribution of housework

Women are described performing tasks almost solely related to housework[6] – they go shopping, cook meals and often enjoy their role (cf. Gaff 1982, p. 77), which is still portrayed in traditional terms – cooking, for instance, is considered a fundamental skill for a young wife (cf. also Figure 4). A first-person narration by a housewife describing her morning is quite telling: she sends the children to school, goes to the market, comes back to her quiet home, decides to prepare tarts for tea; she is preparing the dough but she gets interrupted by a woman who wants to have a chat (playing on the stereotype that women like talking on the phone, cf. Hartmann, Judd 1978, p. 386), and then she opens the door to the postman ringing the bell with sticky fingers (Alexander 1967, p. 137).

As for men, they clean and mend the car, mix the punch or pour drinks (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 37); when they cook, they burn everything and then go to the restaurant (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 12), and they hate housework chores (e.g. Tom "had to do the dishes" because his wife is not there, he "does not like washing dishes. In fact, he hates washing them", O' Neil *et al*. 1971, p. 99).

These findings appear to mirror the 'mystique of the house' that was still well alive - in Italy as elsewhere - in the 1960s; even though, particularly through television, other possible worlds than that of being a happily secluded wife and mother were available (Boneschi 1996, p. 100); sociological surveys showed that Italian women were happy to stay in the house, helped by their electric appliances (Valentini 1997, p. 17).

c)   Occupational roles

There is a clear imbalance in numerical and variety terms, and jobs women perform do not show much difference from Strands 1 and 2. Men are still seen as head of the family, bread winners, successful as they work hard, and are largely portrayed in work situations, also pictorially (O' Neill *et al*. 1971; Coles, Lord 1975; cf. Figure 3). Women have lower-status jobs and are mainly secretaries, receptionists, shop assistants or fortune tellers (Coles, Lord 1975; Alexander 1967, p. 149; cf. Porreca 1984, p. 719; Stern 1976, p. 295; Hartmann, Judd 1978).

One character gives up her job when she has a baby in 1950, and her husband is described as a successful industrialist (he bought a house, started his own factory, worked hard, earns £ 4000 a year; when she dies, his sister comes to look after the children (O' Neil *et al*. 1971, p. 21). The idea of giving up a job is also portrayed in another textbook: the character, who is pregnant, after discussing things she would need to do with her mother, notes in her diary: "Money – probably give up job?" "Manage A. [her husband]'s money alone? ask [for a] rise?" (Coles, Lord 1975 Level 3, p. 44).

In one case we have a picture of a female police officer (Coles, Lord 1975 p. 102), and in another Mary's role as a typist is taken over by Arthur with the comment "I wonder if he can type as well as Mary" (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 142) – implying that typing is a typical female job.

In the 1970s a number of Commissions and networks (ONU-EU) at an international level aimed at creating more equitable access to work for women, and important reforms were promoted in Northern Europe. In 1975 in Italy 33% of women were employed, 35.7% were either employed or looking for work – ten points below

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[6] As for example: a woman goes to the shops, washes the clothes, sometimes cleans the house, dusts the furniture, types letters, puts books on the shelves, does the housework, makes the beds, collects dirty glasses, cooks breakfast, lights the fire, pours tea, brings in the milk, cleans shoes, irons shirts, washes socks, works in the kitchen (Coles, Lord 1975).

Lingue e Linguaggi

figures in Europe (Valentini 1997, pp. 137-138). Between 1970 and the end of the 80s female employment in Italy grew as much as 50% for women aged 20-24, and 200% for women in the 25-39 age span. However, they still took care of the family – children and the elderly (Vidotto 2005, p. 14). A law on equal wages was passed in Italy only in 1977, though the 1956 law stated that difference in wage between men and women should not be higher than 16%, and since 1963 the 'spinsterhood clause' was not any longer present in work contracts (Boneschi 2002, p. 21; 1996, p. 123). In the 70s women, in Italy as in Europe, had started to go out of the house to do politics, look after themselves, their rights and wishes, also to work again, after the economic and baby boom years, when many had happily gone back to the family (Valentini 1997, p. 17). Between 1978 and 1985 women's employment in Italy increased reaching 17.4% in 1985 (Eurostat), the highest figure in Europe.

d) social roles, heroes and celebrities in different fields

In two internationally-produced textbooks (O' Neil *et al*. 1971; Coles, Lord 1975) females are still traditionally represented as beautiful, playing the piano or tennis and speaking "French and German perfectly" (O' Neil *et al*. 1971, p. 39, cf. Figure 3), or in family roles ("she has to learn to cook now as she is getting married soon" (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 67). When a rich man (defined as an "old millionaire", O' Neil *et al*. 1971, p. 105) asks a beautiful young blond girl to marry him, she is described as a social climber: "She can't make up her mind. 'Will you give me some of your money if I marry you?'"; when he gives her a "little present", it is a large diamond ring (O' Neil *et al*. 1971, p. 117). It should be mentioned that this female character has been harshly criticised in terms of sexist representations (Rees-Parnell 1976). The textbook author's defence (O'Neill 1994) was mainly based on the grounds that the characters were intentionally created as stereotypical (e.g. factory workers, successful industrialists), but not intended "to be unflattering, least of all to women" (*ibid*., p. 68). The author underlines that the main concern of textbook writers should be to create believable and authentic characters and backgrounds "to make the language presented more memorable and more interesting, […] clearer", and to "reflect the problems people in the real world have […] to be used as windows which we open on the real conflicts of real people" (*ibid*., p. 69) - in a few words, to "present natural English" (*ibid*., p. 71). On the one hand, a broader representation of society is taken into account in this textbook: for instance, a day in the life of a family of a lower social status is represented with men having a break at work, and in the evening the family, with the father watching a football match on TV, the mother writing and the daughter reading a book and then talking on the phone with her boyfriend (O' Neill *et al*. 1971, p. 8). On the other hand, women appear most frequently to be stereotypically sketched.

However, in another textbook women are more than once portrayed as having a strong personality and as quite determined (Alexander 1967, p. 85); for instance, a woman, when robbed by two men, runs after them and manages to retrieve her handbag catching them by surprise and frightening them with her reaction, thus taking revenge on male unjust and socially stereotyped ill-treatment (*ibid*., p. 109); in another case shoplifting is performed by mother and daughter (*ibid*., p. 143); finally, at a dinner party an unpleasant woman dismisses the man sitting next to her, who tries to have a conversation, with very blunt comments (*ibid*., p. 101).

Men are seen in traditional activities and roles: they are often rich and good-looking, able to repair engines, go to football matches, political meetings and demonstrations (O' Neil *et al*. 1971, p. 98, p. 104) and juries (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 116) are mainly composed of men.

e) Leisure time/hobbies

Women still play tennis, but also sail boats or cross the Channel swimming; men watch football matches. In one case a woman's full day is organised around morning coffee with friends, talking about husbands, and wearing strange ("ridiculous") hats (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 140), ending the day at the theatre with her husband (O' Neill *et al.* 1971, p. 8, cf. Figure 3). As Boneschi reminds us, an Italian dishwasher advert of the time portrayed women as able to get organized in their housework so that they can then have free time to look after themselves, their children and their education, their husband, and cultivate 'certain' intellectual interests; their day should start at 7.30 a.m. by undoing the beds and polishing shoes, and finish at 9.30 p.m. by clearing the table and doing the washing up (Boneschi 1996, p. 99).

In these textbooks women also like going shopping, talking on the phone and gossiping. The almost grotesque pictorial representation of a landlady as fat, always wearing an apron and as a heavy smoker (Coles, Lord 1975) could be seen as a derogatory example.

f) Physical appearance

Women and girls are described as wearing pretty clothes, and as having to take off their aprons when guests arrive. Attractive; beautiful slim young girls (cf. Gaff 1982, p. 74), who have made or are trying to make a marriage with a rich man, wear short skirts (O' Neil *et al.* 1971; Coles, Lord 1975); one becomes Miss Europe since she "plays the piano and tennis very well. She is a very good cook and swimmer. She speaks French and German perfectly. She is beautiful, too" (O' Neil *et al.* 1971, p. 39) – a conglomeration of qualities combining new and traditional stereotypes.

When described in negative terms they are "plain and fat" also in pictures (Coles, Lord 1975, pp. 64, 134) – indeed, girls attend keep-fit courses to lose weight, or to learn to cook in order to get married (Coles, Lord 1975, p. 67); a male character comments on her friend's diet wondering "whether she was serious when he saw her eating the cream doughnut but he didn't say anything" (*ibidem*). In one case old age is explicitly associated with ugliness ("both of these women are ugly. Neither of them is beautiful. They are both old. Neither of them is young, *ibid.*, p. 64) or carelessness (O' Neil *et al.* 1971, p. 147).

g) Intellect, ability and education

Apart from the aforementioned courses to learn to cook or to keep fit, there are no references to women's education. It is worth noting that in Italy the 1970s marked mass schooling for women; according to 1977 data, it was increasingly difficult for women with a primary school level of education to find a job, while opportunities proportionally increased with higher levels of education, reaching its peak for women with a degree (Valentini 1997, p. 20).

The only textbook that takes - once more - a different stance is Alexander (1967), as the following examples show: a brother buys a modern art picture and hangs it upside down; his sister is the only one to realise it (Alexander 1967, p. 73); a woman enters a shop to buy a dress but the male shop-assistant, who doesn't like the way she is dressed, pretends that the dress has already been sold; she gets angry and the following day she dresses up and goes into the shop again, and this time the shop assistant is ready to help, but once he shows her the dress she wanted, she tells him that she doesn't like it, so taking her revenge (Alexander 1967, p. 143). In another instance a woman, the only survivor in a plane crash with her two children, manages to be rescued successfully by cleverly using her survival skills (Alexander 1967, p. 189).

h)   Emotions, emotionality, state of mind

Two textbooks play on stereotypical female emotions: a female character is described as always being late (and her husband is annoyed about it), getting angry if he forgets to buy roses for her mother's birthday, or being unhappy at her son's birthday (O' Neil *et al.* 1971). Fortune telling is shown as stupid nonsense and a waste of money ("Why don't you have your fortune told, Arthur? A: oh, don't be silly! I've got better things to spend my money on. I don't know how you can believe such rubbish", Coles, Lord 1975, p. 126); furthermore, a character resorting to fortune telling is derogatorily addressed with "Don't be silly!" and "Don't be stupid" (*ibidem*). Alexander takes again a different perspective, portraying determined or bossy women, as shown in Figures 5-7. In addition, in this textbook it is a man who consults a fortune teller, and when he comes out he finds his wife who angrily urges him to hurry up home, and he follows her (1967, p. 149).

a large, unsmiling lady

Figure 5
"A large, unsmiling woman", Alexander 1967, p. 101.

The assistant did not like the
way she was dressed

Figure 6
"The assistant did not like the way she was dressed", Alexander 1967, p. 143.

Figure 7
"The men got a fright", Alexander 1967, p. 109.

Overall, in this Strand the textbooks under investigation do not appear to be particularly connected to the new demands that women were already making in the late 60s and early 70s, or to the new roles they were starting to perform in society in Italy as in Europe. Rather, the social gendering stances seem to be oriented at maintaining stereotypical and traditional roles. It can be summarized with Sunderland (1994, p. 5) that

> sexism persists because it is certain groups' and individuals' economic, social, psychological or sexual interests (or perceived interests) that does it so. Most domestic work is done by women, and a woman whose housework includes maintaining her partner in terms of keeping him clothed, fed and content is conveniently helping his employers by releasing them from any need to do this.

And this seems indeed to be the case in our study in the Strands analysed so far.

4.4. Strand 3 – Communicative Language Teaching – starting to communicate/shifting roles

Traditional Proverbs
Women will have the last word.
A career girl would rather bring home the bacon than fry it.

a) Family roles

In this Strand there appears to be an opening to the world outside the family, which is no longer presented as the omnipresent and sole point of reference as in the material in the previous Strands and new roles both for men, women and young people emerge. For instance, one textbook is focused on music and young people, and is set in a youth centre, with a sense of a community, family included (Di Giuliomaria 1982, pp. 24-25), emerging from the meeting of young people, their parents, as well as old people. This sense of an enlarged community is also reflected in language content, whereby the focus is on communication contexts and the relevant linguistic elements. Social changes in terms of young people and contexts of aggregation outside the home are mirrored in Abbs and Freebairn (1980), too: the family still represents a point of departure, but not in traditional terms, in this case mostly because the three characters upon which the book is based are grown-up children (Richard is 27, Sandy is 22, David is 16). We also find a girl writing in her diary that what annoys her most is that "my parents criticize my clothes, don't give me

enough pocket money, always blame me for everything" (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 103) and Mrs Bates complaining about David not telling her when he goes out or when he's having his friends in (*ibid.*, p. 109).

This textbook appears innovative also for social class representation and social issues: the father is a lorry driver, and a milkman becomes a hero. Richard is a widower with a child, who first goes back to his parents' house where his mother helps him with his son; later, however, he finds a small house, and his mother asks him if he has settled with his son (*ibid.*, p. 14). Another aspect is that in family trees we find equality of representation, also in terms of "married to" with both sides represented (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 32), and in one case in a form to fill in the mother's details come first (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 22). In Abbs and Freebairn the son comments about his family by saying that "Dad just bosses mum around, I don't know why she puts up with it" (1980, p. 84).

When comparing these examples with a similar situation in the previous Strand (cf. a) above), a new mother role, based on equality, seems to emerge; this can be perceived also in other family relationships, for instance when the female character Sandy, talking about her family, discusses the relationship with her brothers but does not mention her parents (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 45). Nevertheless, we still find a predominance of male characters and figures, and at times a traditional representation of roles persists, for example when the mother is waiting for the father to go to a meeting, she is leading the exit for the family, and he drives the car (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 28); when the Robinsons travel to Italy with their two young children, the father drives and the mother keeps the children quiet in the back of the car (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 55).

b)   *Domestic roles: distribution of housework*

Three textbooks (Abbs *et al*. 1980; Abbs, Freebairn 1980; Di Giuliomaria 1982) share on a scale some elements of innovation in presenting the roles of men and women, also pictorially, as in Abbs *et al*. (1980 p. 218, cf. Figure 8). A telling instantiation is a family dialogue when, after the weekend, Mr Bell says "now we can relax and watch the telly", and her husband offers to prepare a sandwich and a cup of tea, which is then done by their son ("Now, look, you two sit down and I'll make the tea and sandwiches", Mrs Bell "Oh lovely! My feet are killing me"), and then Mrs Bell and their son cooperatively look at what they have in the fridge for tea (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 74). Another example of 'flouting' roles is when a male character participates with a girl friend in buying the material for the curtains at the youth centre (Di Giuliomaria 1982, pp. 56-57); finally, we also find a comic strip where a woman complains about her husband because, after everybody complimented her on the dinner she had prepared, he reveals to their guests that it was a pre-cooked meal (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 103).

On the whole, however, we can say that the framework in terms of family structure is not wholly innovative. For instance, one textbook presents mother and son making tea and sandwiches at home for the youth centre meeting; or, when the son is himself preparing sandwiches at the youth centre, the father's surprised comment is "He doesn't do that at home!" (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 24); or, in Swan and Walter (1985), it is the mother who puts the baby to bed (p. 46), and a woman who goes to the butcher's (man) and who bakes bread. The portrayal appears however quite realistic for Italian society: ISTAT and survey-research figures in 1990 showed that the housework and house management was still much delegated to women, though in theory there was an understanding of this inequality (Valentini 1997, p. 59).

Swan and Walter's textbook stands apart in that the family plays a very marginal role in the topics of the units, and, when it is mentioned, it offers clues to dialogues

discussing hot issues such as whether housewives should be paid ("Each society also has a division of work based on age and sex. In modern western societies, there is a move to change this last rule because it can be unfair to women, and it will be interesting to see if this succeeds", 1985, p. 59; "everybody else who does a regular job gets a salary", Swan, Walter 1985, p. 60), highlighting that women do "ten jobs" (*ibidem*) and contextualising the issue in time ("in our parents' age anyway, my father was paid enough, um, to pay, to support his wife and children. Nowadays that's not always true" (*ibidem*). Sharing household chores is also mentioned in relation to whether working husbands should help in the housework: in a group discussion, all participants disagree, and one female character comments that "it's not the end of the wife's working day. Otherwise the wife goes on working until midnight, and the husband sits on his backside, you know. If you both share, then perhaps you could both sit down by nine o' clock. I'm talking about the husband who comes home and says. 'Well, that's it, I'll put my feet up, reads the newspaper and that's it'" (Swan, Walter 1985, p. 59).

An ironic view is taken when male and female parental roles are presented through the eyes of children, as can be seen in Figures 9 and 10. Finally, we can also notice a certain degree of light irony in some cartoons, both as to men and women (Swan, Walter 1985, p. 31).

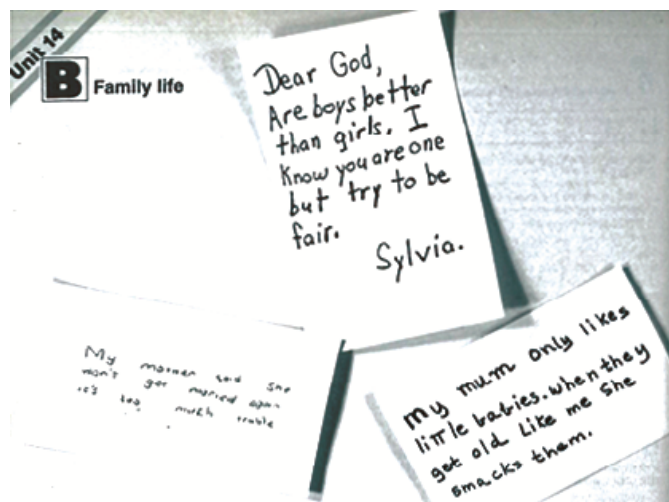
Figure 8
Abbs *et al.* 1980, p. 218.

Figure 9
Swan, Walter 1985, p. 60.

Figure 10
Swan, Walter 1985, p. 61.

c)   *Occupational roles*

Although there still seems to be a broader range of more prestigious positions for men, a different representation of women's jobs appears here for the first time, and coexists with more traditional roles (e.g. housewife, secretary, teacher, nurse, assistant, ground air-hostess, cinema cashier, receptionist; cf. Porreca 1984): women characters are also journalists, film directors, doctors, shop manageresses and TV company managers, architects, chemists and mechanics. One particularly interesting example, in that it portrays a woman-to-woman work relationship going beyond hierarchy, also in terms of aspirations and intellectual skills, is presented in Abbs and Freebairn (1980, pp. 45-46, p. 62): Sandy works as a programme assistant and secretary, and she is a bit disillusioned by her job: "I type, file letters and make tea for my boss, who is a woman"; however, she takes the initiative to talk to her boss about her dissatisfaction with her role, who, after complaining about her non cooperative attitude, understands her dissatisfaction and says

she may be able to offer her a more rewarding job.

In that period in Italy women were employed above all in the tertiary sector and public administration (45% women, 37% in Southern Italy); women also worked as nursery school teachers, nurses, psychologists and social workers. Women no longer left their jobs once they got married (Valentini 1997, pp. 20-21). In 1983 the Ministerial National Committee for equality of male and female workers was set up, but was not a measure as innovative as for example the Ministry National Commission for Equal Opportunities set up in France in 1984 (Valentini 1997, p. 37). Indeed, the Italian Law on Equal Opportunities was passed only in 1991 (after the Anselmi Law in the 80s) (Valentini 1997, pp. 137-138).

To be noticed also is that in some cases jobs are no longer described as permanent, mirroring changes in society in this sense, too. Other hints to such changes can be found in Abbs and Freebairn, with several references to social and political elements, such as, the raising of school age and the provision of day nurseries for very young children (1980, p. 9) (the welfare years) and the Unions and strikes (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 54) (social unrest), with a character demonstrating with a group against fur coats (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 110).

d)   Social roles – heroes and celebrities in different fields

One textbook (Abbs, Freebairn 1980), despite the presence of some traditional representations, includes one character (Sandy) representing the image of a clever working woman, who is capable of elaborating possible proposals to solve the economic difficulties of the firm she works for, as well as finally dealing with her female boss on equal terms. Moreover two young female characters assert their independence from their boyfriends ("You act as if you owned me"; "he takes me for granted", Abbs, Freebairn 1980, pp. 102-103). To be noticed however, that they leave school for a job, and that one male character's comments are not positive ("She's stupid" to think she will make it in her TV job, *ibid.*, p. 85; "a nuisance", Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 86). Negative representations include temperament traits like depressed women (Swan, Walter 1985, p. 26), or old women not being flexible (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 189) and being volatile.

To be noticed that throughout the 1970s several important changes occurred in Italian society: the feminist movement developed, and we see the first feminist collectives, in 1972 the Law on Divorce is passed, in 1973 Gianini Belotti publishes *Dalla parte delle bambine,* in 1976 we have the first woman Minister (Tina Anselmi), and Nilde Jotti is elected President of Parliament; 1981 is the year of the referendum on abortion, and the passing of Law 194.

For the first time women are consistently introduced in textbooks as celebrities in different fields, a trend that started to be a regular feature in the 1980s (Clanfield 2009); examples are Amy Johnson (she flew over the Atlantic alone), Emmeline Pankhurst (campaign for vote to women) (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, pp. 40-43), but also Agatha Christie, (biography, Abbs, Freebairn 1980, pp. 74-75), and Marilyn Monroe (with a question about whether she was kind, gentle, attractive, photogenic, untidy, careless, unhappy, ambitious, unhappy when she died, Abbs, Freebairn 1980, pp. 33-35).

At times the representation of famous people is balanced between male and female characters, as in Swan and Walter (1985) and Di Giuliomaria (1982), where they are largely present in the activities, with hints to Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe, Jane Fonda, Liza Minelli, Romy Schneider, Sofia Loran, Ingrid Bergman, and Margaret Thatcher. Other times this representation favours male characters, as in Abbs *et al.* (1980); this textbook, however, includes descriptions of successful women, who are described in their daily 'ordinary lives, such as Wilma Gibson, champion swimmer (*ibid.*, 1980, p.

186), or a longish passage about a successful career woman. The fact that a woman who is having a particularly successful career could also be linked to the fact that in the 1980s – somewhat abandoning the feminist values – the career-woman/'superwoman' model leads its way, not least in Italy, whether in the position of a secretary or of an entrepreneur leading the family business (Valentini 1977, pp. 33-35).

e)   Leisure time and hobbies

Leisure activities seem to be still devoted mostly to men: women may still do some housework in the evening before relaxing (after putting the children to bed, "she watches TV. She likes detective films. Sometimes she does some housework – you know, ironing and things like that. But usually she reads and watches TV", Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 108); "after supper she goes to see friends or does the housework; she reads, plays records, listens to the radio; she watches TV and does the ironing, Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 115). Men, on the other hand, inevitably relax or go out ("After supper he usually reads the paper and watches television", marks homework/studies, "goes to see friends or the pub for a beer", Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 115). As to hobbies, we find more women represented than in previous Strands, but only in two out of four textbooks; when present, the hobbies and activities mentioned are still rather 'petty' (e.g. skiing, playing tennis).

f)   Physical appearance

In general, there are no specific references in this Strand, apart from a few (e.g. she was "slim and pretty, rather shy and very quiet", Swan, Walter 1985, p. 71), and pictures generally refer to sexy young ladies (e.g. Swan, Walter 1985, p. 43). In one case a typist gets a promotion not only because she types faster and better but also because she dresses well (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 29).

g)   Intellect, ability and education

The representation of men/women appears more balanced than in previous Strands; however, education does not seem to be relevant if not in terms of career advancement: an exemplification can be seen in the passage about Martha Hunt, a doctor at Manchester General Hospital, who "is hoping to become an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist" (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 15). Choices in education by young girls are portrayed in a diminishing way: Jill took "a secretarial course straight after school", since she could not think what else to do (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 32); "Carol, 17, left school to become a hairdresser's assistant" (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 85). In the same textbook, within a list of five most important aims for a secondary school we find "to teach you about different sorts of jobs and careers so that you can decide what you want to do, to teach you things that will be useful in running a home; for example how to bring up children, home repairs, decorations" (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 41) – once more hinting at a coexistence of traditional and more open roles. Noticeable are also the differences in the following description of male and female characters: "Carol works in a computer firm. She is rather shy, and often gets depressed. She is not very interested in sport, but she likes playing tennis. She is very musical, and can play several instruments. Lee is a bus driver. He is a very sociable, outgoing person, optimistic and cheerful. He likes sport, especially ball games. He is interested in science, and he is studying maths at night school. He is not at all musical" (Swan, Walter 1985, p. 26).

The only positive reference to women's intellect and ability appears in one of the previously mentioned characters, the one who was capable of identifying a possible managerial solution to face financial problems/cuts in her firm (Abbs, Freebairn 1980, p. 54).

h)   Emotions – emotionality – state of mind

Men begin to be portrayed as having feelings, even though mostly of anger and irritability; in one case a man in love with two women sends a help letter to "Radio Helpline" (Swan, Walter 1985, p. 97) and talks about his feelings. There are few references to women's emotions (see above for the character disillusioned about her secretarial job); even the description of a character's taxi and plane trip, part of a romantic serial, is quite factual (Abbs *et al.* 1980, p. 270). Two stereotypical examples are a comic strip about a lady changing her mind quite quickly, followed by an exercise where students have to retell the story from her husbands' point of view (Di Giuliomaria 1982, p. 93), and a woman driving a car who, in order to respect driving rules, creates a few problems and is scolded by a policeman (*ibid.*, p. 139) – the implication is women's volubility and lack of flexibility, which are traditionally associated with female characters. On the whole, however, references to women's emotional states appear to be more balanced and less stereotypical than in previous Strands.

5. Conclusions

The findings illustrated in the previous sections have mostly answered the initial research questions. Even if not always, there seems to be a correspondence between gender representations and ongoing changes in society, in Italy in particular, but also in a European perspective; on the whole, apart from the last Strand, the textbooks examined appear to represent more traditional than innovative views on women, both in Italian and in internationally based materials.

Textbooks are mirrors of the times: in our corpus of textbooks, gender representations have certainly improved from the 50s to the 80s, but still contain traditional elements: women generally retain prevalence in housework, with a few exceptions in the last Strand in particular; they are underrepresented and granted less visibility in occupational roles, in line with other studies. Although an opening up can be noticed in the last Strand, similar findings can be seen in Macaulay and Brice (1997), for instance, who show that imbalanced representations span across the areas investigated for gender, covering textbooks from 1969 to 1994, and that "[w]omen's and man roles in society have changed markedly in the last thirty years, yet the role of females and males in syntactic examples have remained largely stagnant, reflecting a perspective on women and men that seems to be based on television shows from the 1950s" (1997, p. 816).

Even in 'changing times', from the 60s to the 70s especially, the textbooks in our corpus of analysis show only timid novelties in the representation of women and related roles, and tend rather to stick to stereotypical gender activities. Deep modifications in society are thus largely not taken into account, and women are not portrayed as self-contained individuals, but rather as adjuncts of men, family and the home. It is only in the 80s, with the implementation of the communicative approach, that changes in society start to enter course-books. To be noticed also that it was only after 1975 (Hartmann, Judd 1978, p. 392) that publishing houses started to produce guidelines to avoid sexist representations in publications, which became consistent since 1991 (Jones *et al.* 1997, p. 481).

As we have seen, in Strand 1 the methodological grammar-translation approach cuts across the decades under examination. As shown in many of the examples provided, the family structure presented is very traditional, centred around the 'home', both in linguistic and in conceptual terms. Traditional roles are portrayed both for male and

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*L*inguaggi

female characters; men are depicted as hard-working and fathers, women as caring wives and patient mothers, very rarely with a job – and, if so, as teachers, nurses, actresses/singers (cf. Porreca 1984), maids, or secretaries. They are good hostesses, give parties, dance, and are nice, good and well-dressed. They visit friends and gossip, but do not generally read books, and only have soft drinks or cider as they do not have thoughts or worries to forget (cf. Hartmann, Judd 1978). A woman can at best study fine arts, music and singing. They should not 'talk too much', and young women should not engage too much in flirting and inconveniently wear lipstick; women also correspond to the 'woman driver' stereotype (cf. Gaff 1982).

Strand 2A) contains very few differences from Strand 1. Boys are clever, rich, honest, sometimes lazy, and girls are nice, beautiful and elegant; women easily faint but get a glass of water from men (cf. Hartmann, Judd 1978). We however find some elements of innovation, with men going shopping for food, and a few famous women in history mentioned.

In Strand 2B) some changes begin to occur. The family and 'sweet home' are no longer the sole contextual focus and the main point of reference in all textbooks, gradually blurring in the background. Domestic roles include examples of men taking care of their children, cooking, doing the housework and chores. We also notice some emerging roles for young people, and a broader representation and range in jobs for women.

In Strand 3 we find an overall more balanced representation of men and women, both in texts and pictures. The family is no longer the central focus, which rather comprehends communities, and a more generalised topical/situational approach is taken. The family remains in the background in the representation of domestic and social roles, as well as of occupational ones. Societal changes and issues appear to be taken into consideration to a greater extent than in previous Strands, alongside a persistence of traditional roles, very likely also mirroring contrasting tendencies in Italian (and European) society. In line with the times (the 1980s), we also find representations of the model of successful career women, as well as of famous women; education, on the other hand, largely remains in the background. A role play included in Abbs and Freebairn – "The Game of Life" (1980, pp. 114-115) – well summarizes this Strand in terms of gender representations. The fictional characters – two men and two girls – are described as follows: Sabrina, who was "born with a silver spoon in her mouth", went to private school and then finished her studies in Switzerland. Sharon is an only child, her father is a doctor, her mother a social worker, and she attended "an expensive public school in Sussex". Kelly Kovacs went to a grammar school, and her parents are hard-working in a delicatessen. Blake Gillespie is black, one of seven children, his father is a railway porter and his mother an office cleaner; he attends the local comprehensive school. The players have five throws, each related to stages in life: "1. at school, 2. at the start of your career, 3. during your first year, 4. in your personal life, 5. in the end". Besides a balanced representation of male and female characters, no distinction is made for male and female roles as to the contexts. This game can thus be said to mirror the changes that were occurring in society, not least in terms of attitudes.

Overall, the findings for the textbooks examined confirm the initial hypotheses that the representation of women in ELT course-books has definitely been heavily gender-biased until the 1980s, only slightly changing during the 40 years analysed. The bias is represented in the lexical and pictorial choices made to represent women and girls as well as in the situational contexts presented. Our findings show that it was only at the end of the 1970s that a new trend emerged, parallel to changes in societal conditions and as a result of a modification in the didactic approaches that favoured communicative exchanges

in a variety of contexts: women and young girls started to be represented as having an interactive as well as equal role in the FL activities proposed. The new focus on effective communicative situations occurring in most dialogues in the above mentioned "Game of Life" well represent the shift in perspective that has taken place in society over the last decades.

Lingue e
Linguaggi

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