

Beyond Pink and Blue: A Content and Discourse Analysis of Gender Representation in Visuals and Texts of Bilingual Thai-English Children's Books

BANDITA SANTIKUL

Faculty of Management Sciences

Kasetsart University Sriracha Campus, Chonburi, Thailand

bandita.s@ku.th

ABSTRACT

While gender representation has been extensively explored in international contexts, there is limited understanding of how multilingual literature, especially in Thailand, where gender roles are strictly defined, may influence young readers' perceptions of these roles. The present study addresses that unexplored area by investigating gender portrayal in bilingual Thai-English children's books, focusing on gender patterns, examining verb types associated with males and females, and determining if these books expand or confirm traditional gender norms. The qualitative content analysis was employed to examine key gender patterns in the books using Reform's (2016) gender analysis strategies for children's books. As for the quantitative analysis, verb element types and their frequency were identified using Johnson and Young's (2002) verb taxonomy. Both methods lead to the conclusion of whether the books reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms. Regarding the visual analysis, the illustrations exhibited some diversity by presenting genders in varied ways. They predominantly depicted traditional gender roles for women and men. However, the findings of the text analysis revealed that girl-oriented conversations occurred more frequently than boy-oriented and boy-and-girl-oriented ones. In all cases, action verbs were used the most, followed by limited activity verbs and feeling and nurturing verbs. The findings highlighted a positive trend in gender representation in children's books and encouraged educators, authors, and curriculum developers to be aware of gender stereotyping in the books.

Keywords: gender representation; gender role; content analysis; critical discourse analysis; children's books

INTRODUCTION

The term "gender" is defined as individuals' psychological characteristics and behaviour (Money et al., 1955). According to Berkowitz et al. (2010), it is shaped by cultural and social factors through human interaction and interpretation rather than resulting from biological differences. Gender representation appears in numerous contexts, such as books, media, and advertisements.

Nowadays, there is a growing expectation for gender equality. Various contexts have developed their content to portray genders more equally by using gender-neutral language and other modern approaches. Studies on gender representation are currently seen as interesting and challenging because they question traditional norms and social expectations regarding the roles of men and women.

Several researchers have examined gender issues in children's books internationally, as they are considered a primary source for conveying societal values to young children and play a significant role in influencing social and cultural learning through their content and illustrations (Arbutnot, 1984). This is supported by Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) and Narahara (1998) that exposure to language and visuals in children's books daily can shape children's understanding of gender roles, affecting their perception, identity, and self-esteem. Moreover, according to Turner-Bowker (1996), the language used in books can either promote or eliminate children's gender stereotypes.

Despite extensive research on gender representation in an international context, most of the studies focus solely on either the literary or linguistic aspects (Filipović, 2018; Mokrzycki, 2020; Raza et al., 2022). Few studies have integrated both literature and language. Additionally, existing studies on gender representation in the Thai context typically focus only on school textbooks (Assawasirisilp, 2019; Bhattarachaiyakorn & Pimprajit, 2023; Khanunthong et al., 2021), so there is a significant gap in studies on children's books for under six-year-old kids. Therefore, this study seeks to fill those gaps by exploring gender representation in bilingual Thai-English children's books using both literary and linguistic frameworks: Reform's (2016) gender analysis strategies of children's books and Johnson and Young's (2002) verb taxonomy to determine whether these books reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms, providing insight into their possible impact on young readers' perceptions of gender.

There are three purposes of the study. First, to investigate the gender representation patterns in children's books. Second, to analyse how gender is portrayed through the use of verb types commonly associated with males and females in children's books. Finally, to determine whether the children's books examined expand or confirm traditional gender norms. The findings of this study could provide valuable insights for educators, book authors, and curriculum developers by encouraging them to avoid gender bias and stereotyping in their work by representing both genders equally and utilising gender-neutral language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GENDER

"Gender" is defined as male and female identities, particularly concerning social and cultural differences rather than strictly biological differences. According to Butler (1990), gender is culturally constructed and serves as the mechanism through which a natural sex is created. As mentioned by Yule (2006), the concept of gender emphasises that sex roles are learned through a process in which individuals acquire traits considered masculine or feminine. It is also used when judging masculinity and femininity in a particular context (Manstead & Hewstone, 1995). Also, Mills and Mullany (2011) highlight the expectations in various contexts regarding the characteristics and behaviours appropriate for men and women. For example, within families, men are often expected to provide financial support, while women are frequently expected to nurture children and manage household tasks.

In literature, gender refers to the roles, behaviours, and characteristics that a society considers appropriate for men and women, which are often explored through character depictions, themes, and narrative structures. It explores how societal norms shape and are reflected in literary works, addressing the representation and dynamics of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1990; Showalter, 1981). In terms of linguistics, gender is categorised into three types: lexical, grammatical, and social. Lexical gender involves using distinct nouns, such as "father" and "mother". However, grammatical gender influences article and adjective agreement in certain languages. Lastly, social gender reflects societal roles and is often highlighted in the pronoun choices used for different occupations (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001; Yule, 2006).

GENDER REPRESENTATION

“Gender representation” is how gender roles, identities, and relationships are constructed and depicted through characters, narratives, and language. In literary studies, gender representation concentrates on how gender roles are portrayed through characters’ actions, colours, conversations, and interactions within a text. These demonstrate underlying cultural implications of power, agency, and identity (Butler, 1990; Showalter, 1981). In linguistics, it refers to how language is employed to reflect, support, or challenge established gender norms and expectations. Language plays a crucial role in expressing gender roles, identities, and stereotypes, influencing both societal perceptions and individual self-conception (Hall, 1997; Montgomery, 2008). This is evident in the use of linguistic elements, such as nouns, noun phrases, and verbs, to depict males and females, reflecting underlying gender dynamics (Montgomery, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008). Together, these perspectives show how literature and language shape societal perceptions of gender and influence individual self-conception and broader cultural discourses regarding gender norms.

RELATED STUDIES

STUDIES ON GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Over the past decades, issues of gender equality have received increasing attention from society internationally. Many researchers have been concerned with the depiction of gender roles in various contexts, including education, media, art, and professions. In the literary works, gender studies have primarily focused on literature (Filipović, 2018; Mante-Estacio et al., 2018; Mokrzycki, 2020; Raza et al., 2022) and textbooks (Ebrahimi Tazangi & Mahdavi-rad, 2023; Huang & Liu, 2024; Shamsuddin & Hamid, 2017). Some study findings tend to confirm traditional gender roles. For example, Mokrzycki (2020) studied family conventions in Australian picture books, focusing on their structure, culture, gender, and sexuality. The findings showed that the main characters were predominantly male. Likewise, Filipović (2018) examined children’s books in Ireland using content analysis and found that there was an underrepresentation of female characters and instances of gender stereotyping. Although traditional gender norms remain prevalent, subtle changes in representation are beginning to emerge.

Some studies on gender roles are progressing positively. For example, Mante-Estacio et al. (2018) explored children’s literature by Filipino authors and concluded that although action verbs were more commonly assigned to male characters, gender roles in these texts were not totally traditional as male characters occurred in traditionally feminine roles. This indicates a shift towards more diverse and flexible gender representations. This is supported by Ebrahimi Tazangi and Mahdavi-rad (2023), who investigated gender portrayal represented in EFL reading textbooks. The researchers pointed out that male characters were still assigned more active roles but were also placed in traditionally female roles, which shows some flexibility. A few more recent studies have suggested changing roles for women, indicating that both women and men can move beyond traditional roles. For example, Raza et al. (2022) emphasised the potential to transform societal power and gender norms through literature and highlighted that these norms are fluid. Also, Huang and Liu (2024) studied gender stereotypes in English textbooks in China and found that the depiction of women in non-traditional, male-dominated jobs reflected gradual shifts in social roles.

STUDIES ON GENDER REPRESENTATION IN THAI CONTEXT

Thailand is recognised for its well-defined gender roles. Traditionally, men were expected to be leaders, while women were seen as supporters. However, the impact of globalisation has emerged a greater awareness of gender diversity, with a shift towards valuing individual abilities over traditional gender expectations. Consequently, many studies have been focused on gender orientation across various fields, particularly in education. In contrast to international works, most of them are based on textbooks (Assawasirisilp, 2019; Bhattarachaiyakorn & Pimprajit, 2023; Khanunthong et al., 2021). A small amount of research focuses on literature (Buaphet, 2023).

Assawasirisilp (2019) examined gender representation in Thai textbooks and found that women held a lower status than men in many areas. Men were more frequently represented in positions of leaders, intellectuals, and famous individuals, whereas women were stereotyped with household responsibilities. Similarly, Khanunthong et al. (2021) investigated gender stereotypes in the EFL textbook used in Thailand and concluded that males were more represented than females, with the highest representation in characteristics, followed by activities and social roles. Buaphet (2023) also explored the images of girls in educational comics in Thailand. The findings showed that female gender roles still reflected societal norms, and they were often portrayed as passive or dependent. Bhattarachaiyakorn and Pimprajit (2023), who investigated genders through pictorial illustrations in health and physical education textbooks, also agreed that females were mostly shown in traditional roles, while males were depicted in more challenging activities and high-paying careers. However, it was surprising that female characters appeared more frequently than male characters, indicating a positive trend towards increasing the importance of females.

Compared to international studies, it is obvious that studies on gender representation in Thailand appear to lack diversity. Most studies focus on textbooks used in primary schools and higher education. There is very little attention given to children's books, which are essential for early learning. Furthermore, most research findings tend to confirm traditional gender conventions rather than introduce new perspectives or issues. To fill such a gap, this study aims to examine gender representation in the Thai context by focusing on bilingual Thai-English children's books to analyse the evolving trends of gender roles that may be increasingly conveyed in the present era.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

Since this study combines children's literature analysis with linguistic analysis, a mixed methods approach was employed as a research design to provide the most comprehensive data analysis. A qualitative research approach was used for a detailed examination of colours, illustrations, characters, roles, behaviours, and gender identity, which can shape gender values in young readers. This approach allows the author to explore the research purpose of gender patterns effectively. To complement the analysis of gender patterns, a quantitative research approach was added to support the linguistic data analysis and gather frequency statistics on verb types as part of understanding gender representation in children's books. To address the final study objective, whether the children's books expand or confirm traditional gender norms, both findings on gender patterns and verb types were integrated for a thorough conclusion.

CORPUS

In the present study, the book series “สร้างเด็ก 2 ภาษา สอนลูกพูดอังกฤษ” (Translation: Raising Bilingual Children: Teaching Your Child to Speak English) written by MIS Publishing editorial department was chosen as the corpus. The book series comprises four books: กิจวัตรประจำวันของหนูน้อย (Translation: My Daily Routine), วันแห่งความสุข (Translation: Happy Days), กิจกรรมในครอบครัว (Translation: Family Activities), and กิจกรรมนอกบ้าน (Translation: Outdoor Activities). The contents of the book series are presented as follows.

The first book, “กิจวัตรประจำวันของหนูน้อย”, includes 12 topics that are related to children’s daily routines such as waking up, showering, dressing, eating breakfast, going to school, doing homework, eating dinner, reading, and going to bed. The second book, “กิจกรรมในครอบครัว”, comprises 16 topics that are related to family activities such as watching TV, using the computer, helping mom do housework, helping dad wash the car, watering the plant, and washing the dog. The third book, “กิจกรรมนอกบ้าน”, includes 16 topics about outdoor activities such as taking an extra tutorial class, shopping at the department store, going to the dentist, going to the bookstore, exercising, making merit at the temple, and going to an amusement park. Lastly, the fourth book, “วันแห่งความสุข”, consists of 10 topics about various holidays and festivals, both celebrated in Thailand and foreign countries, such as New Year’s Day, Children’s Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and Christmas.

The selected books suit the frameworks utilised in this study (Johnson & Young, 2002; Reform, 2016) for three main reasons. First, this study focuses on literary analysis to explore gender roles in the Thai context. In the book series, the stories, plots, and characters are deeply embedded in Thai culture, which reflects the lifestyle of Thai people. Also, the target audience is Thai children. These factors provide a foundation for a qualitative exploration of gender stereotypes and expectations in Thailand. Second, the book series contains stories that address various aspects of life, such as daily routines, family roles, social roles, careers, culture, and traditions. These books serve as effective representatives for studying gender roles across different contexts in Thailand. Both of these reasons support the analysis of children’s books using Reform’s (2016) gender analysis strategies. Third, these books are presented in two languages, Thai and English, making it easy to analyse English linguistic choices using Johnson and Young’s (2002) verb taxonomy. When the literary analysis is integrated with the linguistic analysis, the findings provide a more comprehensive understanding and yield broader insights.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

This study integrated two frameworks: Reform’s (2016) gender analysis strategies for children’s books and Johnson and Young’s (2002) verb taxonomy. The first one provides a way to understand gender patterns, while the latter focuses on the types of verbs in the text. By combining these two frameworks, the determination of whether the book confirms traditional gender norms was completely established.

REFORM (2016) GENDER ANALYSIS STRATEGIES OF CHILDREN’S BOOKS

The gender analysis strategies of children’s books used for qualitative analysis were retrieved from <https://genustest.no/the-analysis-strategies>. These strategies were developed by Reform, Norway’s resource centre for men. The reason why these strategies were selected as a framework is because

they are considered the most suitable framework for analysing data as they provide concise methods and are appropriate for children's picture books aged one to six years. There are six strategies mentioned on the website: the counter, the norm critic, the picture reader, the queering researcher, the child researcher, and the fortune teller. Out of these six strategies, only the first three were employed because of their relevance to the study. The selected strategies are described as follows.

First, the counter identifies and records the gender statistics depicted in the picture book. This strategy answers the question, “What gender does the main character and the subordinate characters of the picture book have?” Second, the norm critic examines the gender patterns in the book to determine whether they confirm or contradict traditional gender norms. The strategy offers insights into the question, “Which gender norms does the picture book have?” Third, the picture reader interprets the pictures in the book to show how they represent genders, as pictures often express gender patterns and norms through visual cues such as colours and styles. The strategy provides insights into the question, “How is the main character’s gender and environment presented?”

These strategies offer a broad analysis of illustrations and text, but they lack depth in textual content. Therefore, language aspects require further exploration. To address this, the verb analysis framework was employed to enhance the findings. The details are provided in the following section.

JOHNSON AND YOUNG (2002) VERB TAXONOMY

Johnson (2000) stated that verbs carry semantic notions referring to cultural and ideological meanings developed through their usage in different contexts over time. Verb taxonomy was then originated by Johnson and Young (2002) to examine how verb elements contribute to establishing a gender identity in advertisements for children and was used as a framework for analysing verbs found in various written works. There were five types of verb elements that might be relevant for gender identity: action verb elements, competition and destruction verb elements, agency and control verb elements, limited activity verb elements, and feeling and nurturing verb elements:

- (1) Action verb elements refer to verbs that involve physical motion performed by an agent, such as run, eat, go, and dance. For example, she **goes** to school by bus every day.
- (2) Competition and destruction verb elements are action verbs that are associated with competitive actions or destructive behaviour such as crush, slam, fight, smash, and break. For example, they **smash** their toys on the floor.
- (3) Agency and control verb elements are used to imply that the person has the power to influence others or events or that they act as a cause or catalyst for change, such as control, rule, cope, beat, and ban. For example, the dictator forcefully **controlled** the people.
- (4) Limited activity verb elements include state verbs and verbs that do not involve direct physical movement. However, some motions may still be involved in these cases, such as get, know, understand, ask, believe, and look. For example, I **know** my way home from here.
- (5) Feeling and nurturing verb elements are related to emotions, desires, needs, and caring. These elements belong to the subset of limited activity verb elements such as love, like, hate, take care of, cuddle, and miss. For example, Mom **takes care of** her sick child.

This study's novelty lies in its integrated frameworks. It employs a qualitative analysis of illustrations and texts in children's literature while also considering cultural elements. It additionally analyses verb patterns in the books, unlike previous studies that often focus on a single aspect of literature or language. This comprehensive approach enhances the validity of the findings in the study.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In order to collect the data, several procedures were used as follows. To explore gender patterns, the qualitative content analysis of children's books was conducted using the gender analysis strategies derived from a Nordic website for the promotion of gender equality in children's literature and daycare (Reform, 2016). Only the first three out of the total six strategies were selected: the Counter, the Picture Reader, and the Norm Critic. This is because these three strategies are the most relevant for the present study. To obtain the illustrations that support the analysis, the sexually explicit ones from the book were scanned using a scanner and saved as a compiled .jpg format.

To examine verb types, the text was gathered by scanning the QR code on the book's cover to access the corresponding audio files. The excerpts from the books were then converted into .txt files using Transkriptor, an online A.I. transcription software that converts audio to text. After that, the .txt versions were reviewed for verification and analysis. A verb analysis form was created to systematically identify five different verb types according to Johnson and Young's (2002) verb taxonomy: action, competition/destruction, agency/control, limited activity, and feeling and nurturing, along with their frequencies during the data analysis process. This classification of verb elements is conducted to reach further understanding and a more comprehensive analysis. After analysing all the book series, the findings from the content analysis were used to achieve the third purpose of the study, focusing on whether the sampled children's books expand or confirm traditional gender norms.

FINDINGS

GENDER PATTERNS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Gender representation patterns observed in the children's books were presented below using Reform's (2016) gender analysis strategies for children's books.

THE COUNTER

The Counter is related to the gender of the main character and the subordinate characters. In the book series, a girl named Bo is the main character, while her parents, older brother, teacher, grandmother, cat, and dog are the subordinate characters. This girl is the most frequently appearing character in every book. She also has the most lines of dialogue. On the cover of every book, she is the most prominent and the largest character.

Considering the ways that the characters dress, their clothes also indicate a person's gender. The female characters are often dressed in pink or brightly coloured clothing. Also, they often wear hair accessories such as hair clips or bows. The mother character usually wears an apron around her waist, indicating that she is a housewife. On the other hand, the male characters tend

to dress in blue tones and wear pants. The father character sometimes wears long-sleeved shirts, long slacks, and a tie, carrying a briefcase, indicating that he is the head of the family or a breadwinner who has to go out to work.

In addition, some animals have clear gender characteristics. For example, the dog is described as male using the pronoun “he”. Surprisingly, he displays feminine characteristics and colour, being tiny and entirely pink. The cat is identified as female using the pronoun “she”. In contrast, she displays masculinity as she is a tiger-striped cat. Also, she appears playful and strong. Some subordinate animal characters have feminine eyelashes, such as the cow, the deer, and the sheep. This signals to readers that they are girls. Apart from the animals mentioned, the other animals appearing in the books do not have clear gender characteristics.

In conclusion, the characters in the book series have clear gender characteristics that tend to confirm traditional gender norms. However, from a gender equality perspective, the findings still suggest a positive trend as the main character, who stands out the most and appears most frequently in the story, is a girl.

THE NORM CRITIC

The norm critic analysis strategy concentrated on examining texts and illustrations to identify traits assigned to main characters and their activities. These traits include physical appearance, behaviour, and emotions exhibited by the characters. The findings showed that some gender patterns were depicted in the books, and they tended to confirm traditional gender norms in many aspects.

In terms of parental job roles, there is a belief that tasks and duties differ based on traditional gender roles. Women often do household activities such as housework, cooking, and taking care of children, while men often do outdoor activities such as washing cars, repairing items, and going out to work. In this study, male and female characters engage in different activities that align with traditional norms. For example, the mother character usually cooks, hangs clothes, takes care of her children’s school preparations, sends and picks her children up from school, and goes shopping. She often appears with the daughter, teaching her household skills, as society expects women to manage the home. As for the daughter, she often helps her mother with various household chores. She also helps take care of her grandmother when she is sick. She looks after herself, following her mother’s guidance. She is interested in art and drawing and likes playing with various dolls. Moreover, she enjoys learning about culture. She dreams of becoming a doctor so she can help other people. This demonstrates a woman’s kindness and tenderness.

In the male role, the father’s activities shown in the book are often sitting and reading books or newspapers, demonstrating calmness and knowledge. The father frequently volunteers for household tasks that require physical strength, such as fixing mechanical issues and washing cars. He frequently appears with his son to teach him manners and how to navigate the world outside their home. He teaches his son train etiquette and subway manners. He also takes his children on trips and makes merit outside the home. He is an iconic figure of masterfulness. Many times, the children admire him for being very smart and want to be as good as him. He often teaches his children how to do homework and exercises with them in the evening. As for the son, he is always interested in learning about active things such as vehicles. His favourite activities are playing games, reading comics, and playing with toys such as toy cars, toy guns, and robots. Moreover, he is fascinated by science, technology, and government. His dream job is to be a policeman because he can carry a gun and chase criminals, which he views as a symbol of bravery and strength.

As for the careers mentioned in the books, the characters of teacher, doctor, vet, and dentist are portrayed by women who are kind, positive, and open-minded. These characters appear only in a few chapters. They are depicted as the caregivers for the children at school, in the hospital, or at the dental clinic. Furthermore, as previously mentioned about the children's dreams, the boy wants to be a policeman, and the girl aims to be a doctor. The illustrations also reflect this, depicting the policeman as a man and the doctor as a woman.

Lastly, in terms of the expression of thoughts and emotions, female characters are typically described as kind, beautiful, and supportive. Sometimes, they show fear in unusual situations, such as when encountering scary animals. However, it is surprising that male characters tend to express their emotions and describe what they are thinking and feeling almost as much as female characters do, which is considered not significantly different. For example, the boy frequently shows his bravery in expressing what he wants when talking to his parents or teachers.

In summary, according to the norm critic, the gender patterns in the picture books tended to confirm traditional gender norms in many aspects. However, in a few aspects, such as the expression of thoughts and emotions, they somehow contradicted these norms.

THE PICTURE READER

Considering the cover pages of the book series, as stated earlier, the book covers depict both male and female characters, including humans and animals. As illustrated in Figure 1, the clothing style and symbols of the characters are highly traditional in their depiction of femininity and masculinity. For example, men are shown wearing trousers while women wear dresses and skirts. The father is portrayed reading newspapers, handling repairs around the house, and washing cars, while the mother is depicted taking care of the family, cooking, and doing housework. The illustrations are rendered in vibrant colours, such as pink, blue, green, and orange. The girl who is the main character is predominantly portrayed in pink and red. She is depicted as larger and more dominant compared to the other characters. All characters are painted in soft colours. They have bare skin, large eyes, and broad smiles, which creates a sense of closeness and intimacy with the readers.



FIGURE 1. Gender representation in cover designs of the book series

In summary, applying Reform's (2016) gender analysis framework revealed that the portrayal of gender roles predominantly reflected traditional norms and conservative ideas. However, some aspects indicated emerging changes in these roles. In the next section, the texts, particularly the verb forms used, were analysed for further linguistic analysis.

FREQUENCY OF VERB ELEMENT TYPE BY GENDER ORIENTATION FROM BILINGUAL THAI-ENGLISH CHILDREN'S BOOKS

In order to analyse how gender is portrayed through the use of verb types commonly associated with males and females in children's books, the frequency of verb element type by gender orientation was recorded in Table 1 employing Johnson and Young's (2002) verb taxonomy.

TABLE 1. Frequency of verb element type by gender orientation from bilingual Thai-English children's books

Verb Element Type	Boy-Oriented	Girl-Oriented	Boy & Girl Oriented
Action	78 (51.32%) ***	141 (47.80%) ***	41 (52.56%) ***
Competition and Destruction	1 (0.66%)	5 (1.69%)	1 (1.28%)
Agency and Control	4 (2.63%)	6 (2.03%)	3 (3.85%)
Limited Activity	42 (27.63%) **	86 (29.15%) **	29 (37.18%) **
Feelings and Nurturing	27 (17.76%) *	57 (19.32%) *	4 (5.13%) *
Total	152	295	78

Table 1 presents the frequency of verb element types by gender orientation from bilingual Thai-English children's books. From the table, all the types occurred most frequently in girl-oriented conversations, followed by boy-oriented and boy-and-girl-oriented ones. It is worth noting that all-gender-oriented dialogues share the same pattern. First, action verbs were the most frequently occurring verb type in the conversations, with 78 units (51.32%) in boy-oriented conversations, 141 units (47.80%) in girl-oriented conversations, and 41 units (52.56%) in boy-and-girl-oriented conversations. Limited activity was the second most frequently occurring type in the conversations, with 42 units (27.63%) in boy-oriented conversations, 86 units (29.15%) in girl-oriented conversations, and 29 units (37.18%) in boy-and-girl-oriented conversations. Next, feeling and nurturing verb elements were the third most frequently occurring type in the conversations, with 27 units (17.76%) in boy-oriented conversations, 57 units (19.32%) in girl-oriented conversations, and four units (5.13%) in boy-and-girl-oriented conversations. Then, agency and control verbs were found as the fourth most frequently occurring type, with four units (2.63%) in boy-oriented conversations, six units (2.03%) in girl-oriented conversations, and three units (3.85%) in boy-and-girl-oriented conversations. Finally, competition and destruction verbs were the least frequently occurring type, with only 1 unit found in both boy-oriented and boy-and-girl-oriented conversations (0.66% and 1.28%, respectively) and five units (1.69%) found in girl-oriented conversations.

EXAMPLES OF VERBS CLASSIFIED BY VERB ELEMENT TYPES

For a more comprehensive analysis of verb types based on gender orientation, the examples of verbs classified by each type found in the book series were investigated as presented below.

An example of action verbs in the book series is:

Example 1: Chapter 2, "Let's Go Shopping at the Mall", in “กิจกรรมนอกบ้าน (Outdoor Activities)”

Mother: This one is too expensive. Let's **get** the white one instead.

Girl: Aren't you going to **buy** me a new blouse, Mommy?

Mother: Next time, dear, I will **get** you a new one.

An example of competition and a destruction verb in the book series is:

Example 2: Chapter 1 “Get Up” in “กิจวัตรประจำวันของหนูน้อย (My Daily Routine)”

Mother: You will be late for school, and your teacher will be very displeased with you.

Girl: Will the teacher **punish** me? Mother: If you are very late, you **will be punished**.

An example of agency and control verbs in the book series is:

Example 3: Chapter 15, “Share the Toys” in “กิจกรรมในครอบครัว (Family Activities)”

Boy: Don't come here playing where I'm playing. I'm close to my last round.

Girl: I'm going to **tell** you to Mom.

Boy: Joey won't **let** me play any of the games with him.

An example of limited activity verbs in the book series is:

Example 4: Chapter 9, “Have Dinner” in “กิจวัตรประจำวันของหนูน้อย (My Daily Routine)”

Girl: I'm so hungry. What do we **have** to eat today?

Mother: We **have** fried chicken and that mild curry soup.

Girl: What about dessert?

Mother: We **have** a banana in coconut milk.

An example of a feeling and nurturing verb in the book series is:

Example 5: Chapter 1, “New Year's Day” in “วันแห่งความสุข (Happy Days)”

Father: The day after tomorrow is New Year's Day. Where do you **want** to celebrate it?

Girl: I **want** to go to the beach.

Boy: But I **want** to go to the mountains.

To summarise, applying Johnson and Young's (2002) verb taxonomy revealed that girl-oriented conversations were more common than those focused on boys or both genders. Action verbs were the most commonly used, followed by limited activity verbs, feeling and nurturing verbs. This indicated a positive change in the use of linguistic choices and challenged the traditional belief that women should only occupy passive roles and men should avoid expressing feelings.

EXPANSION OR CONFIRMATION OF TRADITIONAL GENDER NORMS BY THE CHILDREN'S BOOKS

This book series describes the lives and roles of people in the family, emphasising family activities and social roles. To determine whether it expands or confirms traditional gender norms, both the illustrations and the texts must be considered by integrating the findings from both frameworks. In terms of the texts, the books include both masculine and feminine codes, with more feminine ones used, as presented in the previous section (See Table 1).

For the illustrations, according to the gender patterns section, only a broad overview of gender representation in the books was presented. To summarise those findings, the issues identified are categorised into two groups: traditional gender norms and challenging gender norms, each supported by illustrative examples. Examples of elements that support traditional gender norms are listed as follows.

- (1) Boy colours and girl colours are used. Men often wear blue or green outfits, while women often wear pink, red, or orange tones (See Figure 2).



FIGURE 2. Examples of boy colours and girl colours used in the books

- (2) The mother assumes the role of caregiver. She usually does the housework and takes care of her children. However, the father goes out to work. He is a practical thinker who solves problems. Also, he is often perceived as intelligent. He always reads the newspaper or a book (See Figures 3-4).



FIGURE 3. The mother roles presented in the books



FIGURE 4. The father roles presented in the books

(3) The girl likes drawing, painting, and playing with dolls, while the boy enjoys playing games, as well as with toy cars, toy guns, robots, and other technology-related items (See figures 5-6).



FIGURE 5. The girl's interests shown in the books



FIGURE 6. The boy's interests shown in the books

(4) Women prefer graceful or aesthetic activities such as swimming, while men are interested in more aggressive activities such as running (See Figures 7-8).



FIGURE 7. Women's physical activity shown in the books



FIGURE 8. Men's physical activity shown in the books

(5) The girl embraces her feminine side by wanting to buy new clothes, dressing beautifully, or avoiding being teased by friends for being overweight. The boy wants to be cool, have a strong and muscular body, and be tall (See Figures 9-10).



FIGURE 9. Women's perception of appearance depicted in the books

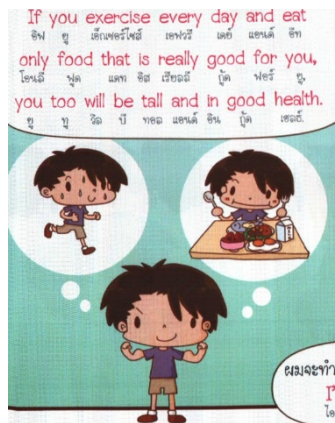


FIGURE 10. Men's perception of appearance depicted in the books

(6) Women are often assumed to be teachers, doctors, vets, or dentists, while men are typically assumed to be police officers or politicians (See Figures 11-12).



FIGURE 11. Examples of occupations for women found in the books



FIGURE 12. Examples of occupations for men found in the books

However, it is worth noting that the illustrations partially challenge traditional gender norms. Examples of the challenges are presented below.

(1) The girl demonstrates that there are various ways to be a girl. For example, she is naughty and mischievous. Sometimes, she runs around, slips, falls and gets hurt. Sometimes, she takes the boy's game. When things don't go her way, she always tells her mother and makes a mischievous face (See Figure 13).



FIGURE 13. The girl's masculine behaviours

(2) The mother often drives her child (the girl) to and from school. This is a task that society might traditionally view as a father's duty (See Figure 14).



FIGURE 14. The mother driving the girl to and from school

(3) The boy occasionally helps with housework such as answering the phone, preparing food for guests, washing a car, and bathing the dog (See Figure 15).



FIGURE 15. The boy helping with housework

(4) The dog in the books is portrayed as a boy, but he has feminine touches, such as a pink colour and a fluffy, cuddly appearance. He often shows his vulnerable emotions and a fearful expression. On the other hand, the cat, identified as a girl, is much more playful and active than the dog. She is a tabby with fangs that give her a more masculine appearance (See Figure 16).



FIGURE 16. Physical and emotional differences between dogs and cats, contrasting with their gender

The findings highlighted the complex portrayal of gender roles in children's books. While the analysis of gender patterns suggested a prominent reflection of traditional norms, with women often portrayed in passive roles, some have started to break away and challenge these conventions. Moreover, the linguistic examination showed positive progress. The use of active verbs by female characters created new images that challenged conservative beliefs. The integration of the two frameworks confirmed that both visual and textual elements consistently represented the girl as the most prominent character compared to others. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that authors are working to create new stereotypes for women by encouraging their engagement in more active roles. This emphasises that children's books not only reflect existing gender values but also have the potential to promote change on both social and linguistic levels. Thus, these findings provide a crucial foundation for understanding how literature contributes to structural gender equality.

DISCUSSION

When examining the frequency of different verb element types, the finding revealed that girl-oriented conversations contained a higher number of occurrences compared to boy-oriented and boy-and-girl-oriented conversations. This indicates that the book series places a strong emphasis on female roles, presenting women as the main characters. When analysing the percentage distribution of each verb type by gender, the findings showed the same clear pattern across all gender orientations: action verbs are the most frequently used, followed by limited activity verbs and feeling and nurturing verbs, respectively. One possible explanation is that the authors believe that there is a distinction between men and women in their ability to express actions or emotions. Therefore, women may have a similar opportunity to perform action verbs as men. Additionally, men might also engage in less active actions and express their emotions more openly.

This finding is contrary to the study of Johnson and Young (2002), which showed that advertisements for boys contained more verb types related to action, competition, and control, whereas those for girls included more verb types related to limited activity, emotions, and nurturing. This finding also differs from that of Mante-Estacio et al. (2018), which investigated gender portrayal in bilingual children's literature by Filipino authors using Johnson and Young's verb taxonomy. The study found that male characters were frequently given more active roles, while female characters were often assigned more traditional roles. Moreover, the present finding does not support the previous study of Ebrahimi Tazangi and Mahdavi-rad (2023), which concluded that male characters frequently dominated the use of action and limited activity verbs, while female characters tended to be associated with less energetic activities. However, the present finding partly agrees with Ebrahimi Tazangi and Mahdavi-rad (2023) by showing that action verbs were the most common for both genders, and male characters also used verbs related to limited activity, feelings, and nurturing, which challenges traditional beliefs.

Regarding the findings on gender representation patterns in children's books, the illustrations showed that the girl appeared most frequently, held the most roles, and was most prominently featured on the book covers. One possible explanation might be that the authors aimed to emphasise the significance and roles of women. This finding is contrary to several previous studies (Assawasirisilp, 2019; Axell & Boström, 2021; Filipović, 2018; Khanunthong et al., 2021; Mokrzycki, 2020) that have suggested that female characters are significantly underrepresented compared to male characters. However, most of the illustrations in the books continued to reinforce traditional gender norms regarding family responsibilities and roles, such as those of fathers and mothers, as well as occupational roles, all of which showed gender bias and normative expectations. This finding is in line with the findings of Bhattarachaiyakorn and Pimprajit (2023) and Buaphet (2023). Only a few illustrations tended to challenge these norms in this study.

To sum up, the findings highlight both supportive and contradictory aspects of traditional gender norms, indicating a positive trend towards more diverse representations of gender roles in children's books. These findings also have significant implications for educational media creators in designing content that promotes more equal and diverse representations of gender stereotypes. Based on the findings, some aspects could be developed. For example, the portrayals of women as solely housewives could be reduced, and instead, the idea that household responsibilities are shared by all members should be promoted. Additionally, traditional career expectations for men and women could be lessened, while the portrayals of women in courageous and powerful career roles should be encouraged.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed significant findings related to gender presentation in Bilingual Thai-English children's books. Considering the texts, the total verb type frequency attributed to female characters consistently dominated that assigned to the male and the mixed gender ones, indicating that the main character in the books is the girl with more lines than the other characters. Moreover, it was revealed that action verbs were the most commonly used category for both female and male characters. This contrasts with the belief that men would use more action verbs to indicate their strength and women would use more limited action verbs to highlight their physical weakness.

Regarding the illustrations, gender appeared traditional or normative in most cases. Men and women could be identified by their clothing, hairstyles, characteristics, and roles. However, in some cases, certain actions challenged traditional gender roles. For example, they showed that girls could be boyish, boys could help with housework, and some duties could be performed by both men and women. As a result, the book series is partly diverse because it presents different genders in various manners. Although the findings of this study do not completely challenge the traditional gender norms, they show a positive trend in gender representation in books, with women being assigned more prominent roles in certain areas.

Children's books serve as essential tools for education. They not only provide language skills but also offer real-life simulations. The findings also suggest that illustrations and linguistic choices used in children's books may influence children's understanding of gender roles. Some diverse and non-stereotypical representations in the books may encourage children to accept a broader range of societal roles. The insight also offers an opportunity for educators, authors, curriculum developers, and publishers to promote more balanced gender representations. However, there are still issues that could be interesting to examine in future studies as this study investigated quite small data sets that might not be able to be generalised to other children's books. This limitation encourages further exploration of gender representation that would broaden the understanding of how illustrations and language in other bilingual literature shape young readers' perceptions of gender.

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