GENDER REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S STORIES: A TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The overriding purpose of this study is to examine the features of gender representation in the English stories for children by analyzing the transitivity system, which is a component in the ideational meaning of systemic functional grammar, associated with the internationally influential linguist M.A.K Halliday. The data were collected from the website https://www.bedtimeshortstories.com and analyzed at the levels of clause and word group. The results show that all the six types of transitivity processes are found, with material processes having the highest frequency and followed by verbal, mental, relational, behavioral and existential processes. Besides, both genders are represented in a relatively equal manner in terms of occurrences as participants in different process types, though some gender bias still perpetuates. This may present a tangible challenge for those who attempt to use stories for children for educational purposes.

Key words: gender representation, children's stories, transitivity, Systemic functional grammar

1. Introduction

Children's literature is widely considered a potent medium through which young readers absorb the long-standing cultural heritage (Bettelheim, 2010). These handed-down cultural values are preserved and disseminated through stories for children - through their 'messages about right and wrong, the beautiful and the hideous, what is attainable and what is out of bounds - in sum, a society's ideals and directions' (McCabe et al. 2011, p. 199). By orienting and shaping how children should reflect on themselves and society, this form of literature is, beyond doubt, endowed with enormous social power (Smith, 1987). Moreover, Lazar (1993) points out that given its widespread popularity as a reading source

for most age groups, children's literature is normally utilized in the educational context as reading input for ESL students. It is this unwavering influence of children literature that captured the attention of linguistic scholars (e.g., Davies, 1993; Nazari, 2007; Skelton, 1997). Driven by this same direction, this study is aimed to contribute to the practice of exploiting this genre in the teaching of English as a foreign and/or second language literature; it also aims to contribute to the literature on language and gender, 'which has been moving from seeing language as reflection of gender towards language as construction of gender' (Nguyen, 2017, p. 156). This study focuses on the gender features in the English stories for children and determines whether any

gender bias exists. The research questions to be answered are: (1) how are female and male characters presented in terms of participant roles in the stories under study? and (2) is there any significant gender bias in the stories?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar describes and explains the organization of '*meaning-making resources*' used to communicate meanings and perform multiple functions in various contexts of our everyday lives. This framework divides the functions of language into three types. These are *the ideational meta-function* - language is used to construe our experience of the outer world and our inner world; *the interpersonal meta-function* - language is used to enact our personal and social relationships, and lastly *the textual meta-function* - language is employed to organize discourse and create continuity and flow.

The ideational meta-function encompasses logical function (language describes logical relationship between two or more meaningful units) and experiential function (language expresses our experiences with external and internal worlds). The experiential function is chiefly construed by a configuration of a process, participants involved and any attendant circumstances.

2.2. Transitivity

'The transitivity system construes the world of experience into a manageable set of PROCESS TYPES.' (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 170). Transitivity includes six kinds of processes: (a) material process, (b) mental process, (c) relational process, (d) behavioral process, (e) verbal process and (f) existential process.

- *Material* processes construe the 'doing' and 'happening', 'a quantum of change in the flow of events as taking place through some input of energy' (p. 179). Prototypically, these relate to perceivable, concrete changes in the material world. They also cover abstract processes. The main participants in the material process are Actor and Goal: The Actor is 'the one that does the deed' — that is, the one that brings about the change. (p. 179), and the Goal is the one 'to which the process is extended.' (p. 181)

- *Mental processes* construe participants entangled in conscious processing, including processes of perception, cognition and affection. The main participants in this process are Senser and Phenomenon. Senser must be endowed with consciousness because it is 'the one that 'senses' — feels, thinks, wants or perceives' (p. 201). On the other hand, what 'is felt, thought, wanted, or perceived' is named Phenomenon (p. 203).

- *Relational* processes are processes of being, becoming, in which a participant is characterized, identified or circumstantially situated. The English system operates with three main types of relation – *intensive, possessive* and *circumstantial*, and each of these comes in two distinct modes of being – *attributive and identifying*. (p. 215). The items and participants involved are variously termed Carrier, Attribute, Identifier, Identified, Possessor, Possessed, Token, or Value.

- *Behavioral* processes are processes of 'physiological and psychological behavior', like breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring. The only participant in this process is Behaver, a prototypically conscious being (p. 248).

- *Verbal* processes are processes of saying, such as telling, stating, informing, asking, querying, demanding, offering, threatening,

suggesting, and so on. The major participants are Sayer and Target.

- *Existential* processes function to introduce an existence into the text, as a first step in talking about it. The

existence may relate to an entity or an event, which is simply labelled Existent.

Table 1 summarizes the process types, their meanings and participants.

Table 1

Process Types, Their Meanings and Participants (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 260)

PROCESS TYPE	Category meaning	Participants, directly involved	Participants, obliquely involved
material:	'doing'	Actor, Goal	Recipient, Client; Scope; Initiator; Attribute
action	'doing'		
event	'happening'		
behavioral	'behaving'	Behaver	Behaviour
mental:	'sensing'	Senser, Phenomenon	
perception	'seeing'		
cognition	'thinking'		
desideration	'wanting'		
emotion	'feeling'		
verbal	'saying'	Sayer, Target	Receiver; Verbiage
relational:	'being'	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identifier; Token, Value	Attributor, Beneficiary Assigner
attribution	'attributing'		
identification	'identifying'		
existential	'existing'	Existent	

Another component of the clause as representation is the circumstance. This is the name given to those elements which carry a semantic load but are neither Process nor Participant. Circumstances, in some respects, are more peripheral than Participants. They occur freely in all types of processes with essentially the same significance wherever they occur. Semantically, circumstantial elements refer to such matters as the settings, temporal and physical, the manner in which the process is implemented, the people or other entities accompanying the process. There are nine types of circumstances: *Extent*, *Location*, *Manner*, *Role*, *Cause*, *Contingency*, *Accompaniment, Matter,* and *Angle.* Of the types of circumstances, those of Behalf, Accompaniment, Role, Angle may involve

an entity which is gender selected. In this study, we chose to take into consideration only the processes. This is an analytical decision, far from a claim that circumstantial elements are not associated with gender.

2.3. Relevant Studies on Gender Representation

Given the potential effects of children's literature on the social development of the young generations, these types of discourse have withdrawn the attention of many researchers, such as Acevedo (2010), Esen (2007), Helleis (2004), Mathuvi et al. (2012), Ullah (2013), to name just a few. For example, Mathuvi et al. (2012) conducted research on gender displays in 40 picture storybooks which were used as supplementary reading texts for

elementary students in Kenya. Based on Goffman's model of decoding gender displays and visual sexism, the findings indicated that though females were painted in both positive and negative images, they were largely portrayed as subordinate to men in function ranking. These conclusions corroborated with previous studies on children's texts (Acevedo et al., 2010; Helleis, 2004). Gender display was also examined in the light of proper names, nouns and pronouns. Studies in different children's books revealed that male characters were given more culturally specific names, nouns and pronouns than female counterparts (Esen, 2007; Ullah, 2013).

Some recent studies have applied the Transitivity system in the systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004) to explore gender representation in English learning materials. For instance, Sari (2011) investigated the representation of males and females in a series of Indonesian primary English textbooks and found that male characters are given higher visibility than females in terms of their occurrence frequency and the participant roles. Likewise, Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) examined four currently used Iranian highschool English textbooks and concluded that males outnumber their counterparts in almost all participant roles, except for the Senser role.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Sampling

The source of the data is the website https://www.bedtimeshortstories.com/, which offers a diverse collection of widely known and captivating stories for children. Therefore, the stories are usually exploited as a resource for English language teaching in foreign contexts. Due to the length of each sample and the depth of the analysis, the number of samples is restricted to only ten stories deemed as well-known and

commonly read, totaling 3,285 running words. The criteria to be chosen were accessible and sizable. The titles, along with their word-count, are shown in Appendix and coded as [S1]-[S10].

3.2. Data Analysis

The unit of analysis is the clause. Given the aims of the study, only the linguistic-gendered clauses were analyzed in terms of the features under focus. Linguistic-gendered clauses are those that involve one gender – male (M) or female (F). Since the samples are stories for children with elements of fantasy and imaginary worlds, various animals are endowed with human characteristics, among which are verbal, mental, physical abilities and, of course, gender identity. It is therefore justifiable to take such human-like characters into the analysis. Gender identification was based on the nominal groups. Some are inherently either males, such as 'King', 'Prince', 'brother', 'son', 'father', or females, such as 'Queen', 'Princess', 'sister', 'daughter', 'mother'. The personified animals were based on the pronouns referring to the antecedents, either 'he'/ 'him' or 'she'/ 'her'.

As regards the compound word groups, we counted only the obvious males or females (e.g., *the Stepmother and the two Stepsisters*), which can then be referred to by '*they*' or '*them*', '*we*' or '*us*'. The participants involving both genders (e.g., '*a good, kind King and his Queen*', '*the ant and the dove*', '*the prince and Belle*' etc.) were excluded from the quantification of frequency. Besides, the nominal groups which are not referring expressions (i.e., those used to refer to a particular character) were also excluded (e.g., *The Prince visited every house in the Kingdom, but he could not find one girl who could wear this shoe.*').

The analyses of each clause in terms of process and of each nominal group realizing a participant in terms of role were manually undertaken because both are

heavily dependent on the meanings in context. The analyses were independently performed by the two researchers, and then compared between the two analyzers. The fusing, indeterminate cases were agreed upon based on discussion; these mostly involved the behavioral processes, as "the least distinct of all the six process types" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 248).

In the following section, the source of each example is referred to by the number of the story as listed in the Appendix, enclosed in square brackets.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Frequency of Process Types

The analysis reveals that 407 linguistic-gendered clauses are used across ten chosen children's stories. These gendered instances were categorized in terms of process types. Material processes dominate the picture with 177 instances

(tantamount to 43.48% of all gendered instances found), followed by verbal, mental, and relational processes, each of which occupies a relatively equal share (18.18%, 15.72%, and 14.98%, respectively). The dominance of material, mental and relational processes is no surprise, since Matthiessen (1999) generalizes that material, mental and relational are the main process types in the English transitivity system. However, the frequent presence of verbal processes, which account for approximately one-fourth (18.18%) is worth noting, given its status as one of the three marginal processes in the transitivity system. This deviation can be justified by the nature of children's stories: Talking characters and their verbal exchanges are extensively used to ease young readers' understanding process. At the other end of the scale are behavioral and existential processes (5.89 and 1.71%, respectively). The distribution of these process types is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of Process Types

Process	Material	Verbal	Mental	Relational	Behavioral	Existential	Total
No. of occ.	177	74	64	61	24	7	407
%	43.48	18.18	15.72	14.98	5.89	1.71	100

4.2. The Frequency of Gender Representation in Transitivity Processes

As seen from Table 3, all the ten chosen stories have both male and female characters and the total proportions of the two genders are roughly equal, with the figure for males being insignificantly above that of females (51.02 vs. 48.97). The nominal group realizing the participants are mostly simple, hardly modified, such as *the prince, the stepsister, his wife, the baby, the princess, the Queen, the King, Belle, her father, the beast, the flounder, his first son,*

the poor man, etc. A closer look reveals that there are more male characters than females in most stories, except for S6, S7 and S8. What seems intriguing here is that most animals endowed with human traits are taken as males, especially ones that embody potent entities, such as the flounder in S5 or noble personalities such as the monkey in S1, the frog in S2 and the beast in S10. There are also female animals like the ant in S9 and the baby horse in S3, yet none of them are endowed with any paranormal or social powers.

Table 3

Number of Male and Female Characters

No. of characters by gender	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	Total No.	%
Male	4	2	4	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	25	51,02
Female	2	2	3	2	1	5	4	3	1	1	24	48,97

Table 4 summarizes the frequencies of each participant role across gender in the six process types.

Table 4

Distribution of Types of Processes

Type	M	F	Total
MATERIAL			177
Actor	89	84	163
Goal	03	26	29
Recipient		04	04
VERBAL			74
Sayer	38	36	74
Receiver	14	11	25
RELATIONAL			61
Carrier	26	35	61
MENTAL			64
Senser	38	26	64
Phenomenon	06	05	11
Recipient		01	01
BEHAVIOURAL			24
Behaver	08	16	24
EXISTENTIAL			07
Existent	02	05	07

4.2.1. Material Process

The most frequently occurring participant in the material process is Actor, with 89 featuring male characters and 84 female characters. Seven out of ten stories see higher occurrences of males as Actor. Actor is the performer of the process of doing, or undertaker of the process happening. That males corner a significantly high proportion of material processes portrays them as active, powerful and autonomous. Moreover, males are frequently described in physically demanding actions like '*riding', 'taking'* (catching or grabbing something), '*going', 'catching', 'getting',* or *'finding'.* A point to note is that in S7 and especially S6, females constitute a higher number of Actor roles, which seems to be conflicting with the overall trend of male dominance. However, this difference must partly result from a significantly higher number of females in these two stories, as introduced in Table 3 (5 vs. 3 and 4 vs. 3).

Female characters show a higher inclination to Goal participation (as summarized in Table 4), at whom the actions are directed. This result echoes with what has been found by Sari (2011), who discovered the dominance of male as Actor and female as Goal in the English textbooks. Such representations may perpetuate the stereotypes of females as passive, dependent, and simultaneously cement the image of males as being active, independent.

Another noticeable result is the interaction between females and males in material processes. When males take the position of Actor, they tend to direct their action at females, who can be Goals or Recipients (e.g., *'till he met a kind girl'* [S2]; '[*The Prince*] *accompanied her in'* [S6]; '[*He*] *trying to bring his daughter back to life'* [S8]; '*he had found a real princess'* [S4]). In contrast, female Actors are more

likely to aim their actions at other females (e.g., '[*the old Queen] allowed her to rest*' [S4]; '*The old Queen led the princess to the bed*' [S4]; '*The Prince met her at the door*' [S6]).

Another interesting observation relates to a common process in children's stories, the act of becoming the husband and wife. This act can be linguistically realized in two ways. It could be put as "A marries B", which is a material process with A as Actor and B as Goal. Otherwise, we could say "A and B get/are married", which is a relational process with A and B as Carriers (equal participants). What captures the researchers' attention is that the material pattern "A marries B" is more frequently used, and mostly realized with a male character as A (Actor) and a female as B (Goal) (e.g. '*The King marries a beautiful princess*' [S1]; '*The King marries a new Queen*' [S6]; '*The Prince took her for his wife*' [S6]; '*The Prince then asked if he could marry the Princess*' [S7]. An exception is found in S6, where the prince asked Cinderella: '*Will you marry me*?'. Here, for the first and only time across ten stories under investigation, a female is positioned as the Actor of the process 'marry'. Nonetheless, it should also be noticed that this clause is projected by a male character in which he is the Sayer.

4.2.2. Mental, Relational and Verbal Processes

Mental processes constitute about 16% (15.72%), and male Sensers outnumber their female counterparts (59.37% vs 40.62%). Phenomenons appear in well under one-fourth of the mental processes (17.18%) and only one Recipient is found ('*He only wanted the rose for his daughter Belle*' [S10]). Some surprising findings arise from a detailed analysis of the mental processes (Table 5). Firstly, males have larger proportions in three sub-processes cognitive, perceptive and emotive, especially with a

significant margin in the cognitive group, roughly 3 times higher than females. Meanwhile, females enjoy a higher frequency in desideration sub-processes, particularly with processes like '*crave', 'wish', 'hate*' (e.g., *But as she craved for more, one sleepless night she wished the ultimate wish - she wanted to be like a god.* [S5]).

Table 5

Distribution of Subtypes of Mental Processes

	Male	Female	Total	%
Cognition	15	6	21	32,81
Perception	11	7	18	28,12
Desideration	5	7	12	18,75
Emotion	7	6	13	20,31
Total	38	26	64	100

Secondly, the process verbs seem to be distributed in a gendered manner. Some processes can be used for both males and females (such as *hear, know, love, realize, see, think, want*); however, many others accompany males only, such as *believe, decides (x3), find, forget, like, overwhelm, stun, devastate, alarm* (e.g. '*He was so overwhelmed by her beauty*' [S7]; '*The King is stunned by the little girl's answers.*' [S3]; '*He was devastated and started crying and trying to bring his daughter back to life* [S9]'; '*The dove was alarmed by the voice of the hunter* [S9]').

The final revelation is concerned with the equal treatment of Phenomenon: Males and females alike are heard, seen, loved (e.g. '*heard the princess crying*' [S2]; '*seeing the ant in trouble*', '*loved his daughter more than anything*' [S8]; '*loves him*' [S10]; '*saw the beautiful dove sitting on the tree*' [S9]; '*loved the beast*' [S10], '*hears of the two brothers.*' [S3]).

Relational processes account for approximately 15% (14.98%), which were

further analyzed in terms of the three sub-processes. The findings are shown in Table 6. There are only three instances of circumstantial sub-processes, tantamount to a marginal proportion of 4.91% (e.g., '*You are at the Ball?*' [S6]; [two brothers] '*are off to the market.*' [S3]; '*the boy is not there!*' [S1]). Regarding possessive sub-processes, 7 out of 12 Carriers are female; moreover, from a semantic viewpoint, three of these female Carriers possess items related to '*baby*' (e.g., '*the Queen had a baby girl'; 'The King's wife soon has a baby boy'; 'The new wife has a baby boy'.* [S1]), while the other instances involve material, concrete items (e.g., '*Cinderella instantly had a lovely dress and shoes', 'We must get new dresses'* [S6]).

On the contrary, the items possessed by males are varied, ranging from abstract entities like 'dream', 'idea', 'opportunity' (e.g., '*One night, the teacher has a dream.*' [S1]*; 'The poor man has no ideas.'*[S3]*; 'he had an opportunity'* [S8]), to concrete, touchable things like horse or castle (e.g., '*The rich brother has a big, strong stallion.*' [S3]; '*The castle belonged to a hideous beast'* [S10]*, 'The poor brother has a young mare.'* [S3]). One cannot ignore the different natures of the concrete items possessed by the two genders: while males are entitled to things traditionally attached with long-term, stable values like cattle - useful for transportation and farming, or castles - permanent accommodation and a token of social status, females are often conjured up within the image of frivolous, short-valued possessions like dresses or shoes.

Table 6

Distribution of Subtypes of Relational Processes

	Male		Female		Total	
	No. of occurrence	%	No. of occurrence	%	No. of occurrence	%
Circumstantial	2	3,27	1	1,63	3	4,91
Possessive	5	8,19	7	11,47	12	19,67
Intensive	19	31,14	27	44,26	46	75,40
Total	26	42,62	35	57,37	61	100

The intensive group has the biggest figure across the table (75.40%). Given its high percentage, closer analysis was undertaken with its instances being put into 2 modes: attributive and identifying (Table 7).

Table 7

Distribution of Two Modes of Relational Processes

	Male		Female		Total	
	No. of occurrence	%	No. of occurrence	%	No. of occurrence	%
Attributive	8	17,39	19	41,30	27	58,69
Identifying	11	23,91	9	19,56	19	41,30
Total	19	41,30	27	58,69	46	100

As regards Attributor, a significant number of male Carriers are described in a positive light. For instance, '*The King is very happy with the wise little girl.*' [S3]; [He] '*to become richer*' [S8]; '*the Beast was very good natured and not vicious*' [S10]; '*I am*

an enchanted prince!' [S10]. Only four negative cases were found (*'the Prince was very unhappy'*[S6]; *'his first son is lost '*[S1]; *'The teacher is very sad.'* [S1]; *'he got blinded by the shiny new towers of the palace.'* [S5]).

This favorable representation of male characters throws female portrayal into sharp relief: The numbers of positive and negative words for females are roughly equal. Here are some examples of positive and negative portrayal of females:

Negative: *'his wife wasn't happy at all.'*[S5]; *'she was forever indebted to the dove'* [9]; *'the wicked fairy in disguise'* [S7]; *'they were always terrible to poor Cinderella'* [S6]; *'who was mean and wicked but very powerful'* [S7]

Positive: *'She was like a god.'* [S5]; *'She looked wonderful!'* [S6]; *'she was delighted to see it.'* [S9]; *'The Stepmother and the two Stepsisters were so excited.'* [S6]; *'We get new dresses and look our very best'* [S6]

A redeeming point is the values attached to both genders are mostly positive. For instance: *'She became the emperor and soon enough, the pope'* [S5]; *'she turned into a gold statue'* [S8]; *'The monkey changes into the King's older brother.'* [S1]; *'the rat into a coachman'* [S6].

As regards *verbal process*, the analysis shows a higher frequency of males as both Sayer and Receiver, which contrasts sharply with the common belief that females are more of a talker. However, the margin is relatively narrow; therefore, no fundamental judgement should be made here. A qualitative analysis points out that both male and female participants frequently *'say'*, *'tell'*, *'ask'*, *'call'* or *'shout'*, among which *'say'* and *'tell'* (27 and 8 instances respectively) have the highest frequency and are equally paired with both genders. Another finding is that certain processes are exclusively used for females or males. Only

male characters *beg, croak, explain, speak, thank* (e.g., *'The prince thanked her and explained that a witch cursed him'* [S1]). Meanwhile, only female characters *admit, answer, argue* (x 5), *reply, mock, question, curse, scream* (e.g.: *'The stepsisters mocked her'* [S6], *'The Queen questioned the Princess'* [S4]; *[They] screamed* [S6]). That the process 'curse' is female-only speaks volumes about the unbalanced choice of gender for certain characters: the evil, insidious powers are mostly represented by witches (females) rather than wizards (males).

4.2.3. Behavioral and Existential Processes

Only 24 instances of *behavioral process* are found, accounting for merely 6% (5.89%). The number of female Behavers double that of males (16 against 8). Small as the number of instances is, further analysis of behavioral processes does yield unexpected outcomes. While both males and females *'cry', 'die', 'sleep'* and *'smile'*, other behavioral processes are exclusively used for one gender. Only males *'look'* and *'kiss'* (e.g., *'he kissed her gently'* [S7]; *'the teacher looks back'* [S1]), whereas *'laugh'* and *'wake up'* are solely found with female Behavers (e.g., *'You are at the Ball? Don't make us laugh'* [S6]). This finding certainly provides some food for thought; for example, one may wonder why the process of 'kiss', which involves high levels of agency on the part of the doer, is solely assigned to a male Behaver. Another interesting result is that only one instance of male 'crying' is found, while this figure for females amounts to 5. For instance,

(1) He was devastated and started crying and trying to bring his daughter back to life. [S8]

(2) A frog nearby heard the princess crying. [S1]

(3) She cried thinking the water was too deep for her to find the golden ball. [S2]

(4) Cinderella sat down and cried. [S6]

(5) They [the stepsisters] pushed and pulled and screamed and cried but … [S6]

(6) She held the Beast and cried. [S10]

Existential process is normally used at the very beginning of the stories to introduce characters; as a result, this process is scarcely featured. The results, however, point out that more male characters are introduced this way, even if the males play a secondary role in the story's plot. Instances of existential process at the beginning of the tales include:

(7) Once upon a time, there lived a King. [S1]

(8) Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful princess. [S2]

(9) Once upon a time there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess [S4]

(10) Once upon a time, there lived a beautiful girl called Cinderella that lived [S6]

(11) Once there lived a greedy man in a small town. [S9]

(12) There once was a merchant who got lost in a storm… [S10]

5. Conclusion and Implications

This paper is aimed to contribute to the research on language and gender with reference to children literature. Based on systemic functional grammar as a tool of discourse analysis, we have a detailed account of how males and females are represented in the English well-known stories for children.

Some noticeable findings are worth restating here. First, verbal processes have higher occurrences than mental and relational processes, which can possibly be attributed to the nature of children's stories. Second, females surpass males in the Carrier, Behaver and Existent roles. This result was not anticipated since in some similar research (e.g., Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Sari, 2011), males were consistently found to dominate all the Participant roles. This relatively balanced representation

between male and female characters in the investigated stories should, therefore, be seen as a positive outcome. Third, repetitive instances of word choice, such as 'crying' females and males 'marry' females, are some obvious indications of gender stereotypes embedded deep within the stories.

In terms of methodological implications, this work has reconfirmed the huge potential of Systemic Functional Grammar as a tool for discourse analysis. However, if the researchers applied this framework to quantitative analysis only, the results would have been a list of closely-valued numbers with no significant margins; therefore, the researchers may have found it more challenging, or even have failed to draw any major findings. This is to highlight the importance of qualitative analysis in the application of SFG, especially in studies where the focus is not on making hypotheses or generalizations, but on examining whether the presumed problems exist.

This study has also gone some way towards enhancing our awareness of the issue of gender representation in children's literature. It is advisable for teachers to keep an open eye for any sexist ideologies subliminally embedded. However, it does not necessarily entail that stories that carry gender stereotyping should be avoided altogether; there are some possible ways to turn these writings to good use. Learners at elementary levels can practice English by retelling a story with the given clues such as pictures or flashcards, with which the teacher can make small twists to discard the gender bias. For example, the princess is brave and confident (instead of beautiful and caring); the prince and the princess could get married (instead of '*The prince could marry the princess*'), or she held the crying beast (instead of '*She held the beast and cried*'). For learners at a higher proficiency level, besides story telling or acting out activities, teachers can engage them in a critical

discussion of the way the male and female characters are portrayed in the original version. Offering learners such a non-pedagogical goal of examining a social problem could probably raise their interest and reduce boredom.

A tangible weakness of this study lies in the data scale, but such intentional restriction on the samples did allow the researchers to thoroughly probe into the matter on a wider range of levels - text, clause and word-group. However, future studies on a larger scale are required since our findings might not be transferable to other short stories for children.

The research is theoretically based on systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), but the in-depth analysis was carried out exclusively with only the transitivity system. An analysis of nominal groups and verbal groups realizing the processes and the participants from the angle of Appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) may be a very fruitful direction to be undertaken to capture insights into the interpersonal meaning in this genre. Besides, these stories are accompanied with video footage (readily available on the website itself) to vividly illustrate the texts; thus, further studies, which take visual modes into account, will be needed to shed more light on the matter of gender representation.

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Appendix: Data Source

The samples were downloaded from https://www.bedtimeshortstories.com/. The selected stories are: 1. The green monkey; 2. The frog prince; 3. The wise little girl story; 4. The princess and the pea; 5. The fisherman and his wife; 6. Cinderella; 7. Sleeping beauty; 8. The golden touch; 9. The ant and the dove; 10. Beauty and the beast.

For easier reference, the ten stories are coded from S1 to S10. Their word counts are as follows:

Table A

Word Counts of Ten Investigated Stories

Story	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Word count	268	257	363	303	327	484	399	194	206	232

THỂ HIỆN GIỚI TÍNH TRONG CÁC CÂU CHUYỆN DÀNH CHO TRẺ EM: PHÂN TÍCH HỆ THỐNG CHUYỂN TÁC

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Tóm tắt: Mục đích chính của nghiên cứu là tìm hiểu những đặc điểm của việc thể hiện giới tính trong các câu chuyện tiếng Anh dành cho trẻ em trên cơ sở phân tích hệ thống chuyển tác - một phần hiện thực hóa nghĩa ý niệm, trong các hệ thống nghĩa của Ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống, gắn liền với tên tuổi của nhà ngôn ngữ học nổi danh thế giới, M.A.K Halliday. Các câu chuyện được thu thập từ trang web https://www.bedtimeshortstories.com và được phân tích ở cấp độ mệnh đề/cú và cụm từ. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy tất cả sáu loại quá trình chuyển tác đều góp phần tạo dựng các câu chuyện, trong đó quá trình vật chất xuất hiện nhiều nhất, tiếp đến là quá trình nói năng, quá trình tinh thần, quá trình quan hệ, quá trình hành vi và cuối cùng là quá trình tồn tại. Bên cạnh đó, tần suất xuất hiện của nam và nữ được thể hiện khá đồng đều ở tất cả các quá trình chuyển tác, mặc dù một vài định kiến về giới tính vẫn còn tồn tại. Đây có thể là một thách thức cho những ai đang cố gắng sử dụng truyện dành cho trẻ em cho mục đích giáo dục.

Từ khóa: thể hiện giới tính, chuyện kể cho trẻ em, hệ thống chuyển tác, Ngữ pháp chức năng hệ thống