



The Gender Roles in Chinese Textbooks: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: *How to integrate the gender roles into education has become a hot topic in the field of educational research. Textbooks play an important role to educate the gender equality, especially in the lower grades of primary school. Therefore, this paper uses visual grammar which is proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen to analyze the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of primary school. Observing the illustrations in the first-grade Chinese Textbooks, this paper finds that the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the illustrations are respectively 105/115 and 57/64; the frequency of material process and verbal process are 42/24 and 39/19; the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the verbal process are 14/17 and 9/13; the frequency of demand and offer are 9/57 and 8/53; the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the demand are 2/7 and 1/7; the frequency of social distance are 0/11/59 and 1/19/42; the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the medium shot are 11/6 and 14/13; the illustrations in the first-grade Chinese textbooks represent in oblique and eye-level angle; the female roles always wear pink or red dresses and male roles always wear in blue and the female and male role in the selected pictures always strongly framed. In conclusion, gender stereotypes and gender biases still exist. But the compilers of the textbooks intend to attach importance to both of female and male. This paper analyzes the causes: the acceptance of the developed thinking and the laws to protect female roles in society; and put forward some feasible suggestions to the education of gender roles in the textbooks.*

Keywords: Visual grammar; Chinese textbook; Gender roles.

Cited as: Liu, D. (2024). The Gender Roles in Chinese Textbooks: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Linguistics*, 1(2), 1–8. Retrieved from <https://woodyinternational.com/index.php/jtpl/article/view/118>

1. Introduction

With the development of social opening and pluralistic values, gender equity has become an important issue concerned by the international community today. In China, the education of gender equality has always attracted people's attention. The State Council passed a Program for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010) which called for including the primary objectives of women's education in the state's education plan and incorporating social gender awareness into teacher training courses and methods in May, 2001.

Textbooks play an important role to educate the gender equality, especially in the lower grades of primary school. The first reason is that children in the lower grades are lack of literacy skills so they need the illustrations as a supplement to words to help them understand the meaning of the text. The second reason is that the textbooks in the lower grades of elementary school have presented conspicuous multimedia characteristics, especially in the layout of textbooks and the design of the images in textbooks. The third reason is that the content in the textbook is not as neutral and objective as people usually think. In the contrary, it is value-loaded and ideology-penetrated to shape the perceptions of learners towards the underlying ideology of the texts.

Therefore, this paper uses visual grammar which is proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen to analyze the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of primary school. It is intended to achieve the following: Firstly, summarizing the features which are related to gender in the illustrations of the Chinese textbooks; Secondly, exploring the underlying causes behind the phenomenon; Thirdly, trying to put forward some feasible suggestions to the gender education in textbooks.

2. Literature Review



Scholars generally believed that there are gender prejudices and gender stereotypes in textbooks, but they systemically analyze the gender roles in textbooks in the late 1970s.

Since the 1970s, many scholars demonstrated the different gender roles in textbooks by calculating the frequency of illustrations, titles and protagonists in different textbooks. The general view is that males appear more often than females.

In addition, the researchers also analyzed the professional roles of males and females in textbooks. It is generally believed that males have a wider career and higher social status, but the majority of women are housewives and mothers (Liu, 2019).

What's more, the researchers conducted an analysis of the gender-based content in the textbooks and found that the roles of males and females in the textbooks were unfair, and even the images of females were distorted.

After reading the previous studies on the related topics, this article finds out that most of the previous studies are only from the perspective of text analysis, studying the gender role in textbooks. They rarely analyze the characteristics of illustrations which are related to gender roles. In addition, in the analysis of the gender roles in the textbooks, the research materials have their own features of the ages, which are not similar to the characteristics of today's textbooks.

Therefore, this paper attempts to explore: a) What are the gender roles' characteristics of the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of elementary school? b) Why do the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks for the first grade of elementary school have such characteristics? c) What are the feasible suggestions to the gender education in the Chinese textbooks for the first grade of elementary school?

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Social Semiotic Multimodality

As an inter-disciplinary approach that understands representation, communication and interaction as something more than language, the term "multimodality" is used to highlight that people use multiple means of meaning making together. There are three approaches within multimodality: social semiotic multimodal analysis, a systemic functional approach (SF-MDA) and multimodal interactional analysis.

Social semiotic multimodality is used frequently. The aim of social semiotic multimodality is to recognize the agency of social actors and social/power relations between them, to understand the social dimensions of meaning, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its implication and to reveal how processes of meaning-making shape individuals and societies. The empirical focus initially was artefacts, especially print media, film and games, and then it began to account for social interaction recorded on video through fieldwork. The method to do social semiotic multimodality is to analyze the selected small fragments in a detailed way.

3.2 Visual Grammar

Social semiotic multimodality is used frequently, especially the visual grammar which is proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen. The theoretical foundation of visual grammar is Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. Therefore, in visual grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen apply Halliday's concept of metafunctions which are ideational metafunction, interactive metafunction and textual metafunction. Just like the metafunctions proposed by Halliday, representational, interactive and compositional meaning in the visual grammar occur and project their meanings simultaneously.

In visual grammar, the representational meaning describes the ways that various kinds of visuals organize and represent their meanings representationally. Representational meaning includes narrative representation and conceptual representation. When analyzing the narrative representational meaning in the images, the involved events, participants and circumstances where they occur should be mentioned. Narrative representation also has several processes, such as material process, reactional process, verbal process and mental process. But the conceptual representation contains classificatory process, analytical process and symbolical process.

In addition, the interactive meaning explicates the ways that visuals attempt to address their potential viewers in interpersonal terms. When analyzing the interactive meaning in the images, contact, social distance and attitude should be analyzed so as to describe the relationships between the viewer and what is viewed. When analyzing the contact, demand and offer should be distinguished which is based on whether participants in the image gaze at the viewers. When analyzing the social distance, close shot, medium shot and long shot should be distinguished which show the personal, social and impersonal distance between the participants in the images and the viewers. Lastly, when analyzing the attitude in the image, angle of the image should be concerned such as the frontal angle, oblique angle, high angle, eye-level angle and low angle which describe the relationships between the viewer and what is viewed.

What's more, the compositional meaning expounds the ways that visuals organize their meanings on the page in compositional or layout terms. When analyzing the compositional meaning in the images, information valuation, salience and framing should be concerned in order to analyze the information value of the visual elements in an image. Informational valuation is realized by the placement of the images. If the image is put on the left, the given information is provided; if the image is on the right, the new information is provided. If the image is placed on the top, it is the ideal one; if it is on the bottom, it is the real one. If the image is in the center, it is more important; if it is on the margin, it supplies the information.

Representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning are the crucial factors to analyze the images. Based on the visual grammar, it is exhaustive to analyze the illustrations related to gender roles in the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of primary school.

4. Analysis on Gender Roles in Chinese Textbooks

4.1 Data Description

This paper analyzes the Chinese textbook edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of the primary school. That means those Chinese textbooks are authoritative and have the wide range of application for the Chinese textbooks for the primary school is edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education and have been used all around the China since September, 2017. In addition, in those two Chinese textbooks, there are many beautiful illustrations which are used to help children understand the meaning of the text.

4.2 Procedure of Analysis

When analyzing the illustrations related to gender roles in the Chinese textbooks for the first grade of the primary school, the first thing this paper does is to select the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks based on the standard which is related to the gender role.

Secondly, this paper counts the total number of the illustrations which relate to the gender roles, male or female who appears in the illustration, process, contact, social distance, attitude, color and dressing, and framing of both genders in the illustrations and calculates their percentage.

Thirdly, based on the statistical data, this paper summaries the gender roles' characteristics of the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of elementary school, explores the underlying causes behind the phenomenon and tries to put forward some feasible suggestions to the gender education in the Chinese textbooks for the first grade of elementary school.

4.3 Illustrations Analysis

4.3.1 Illustrations Analysis on the Participants

In the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of the primary school, there are 192 pieces of illustrations in the first volume of the first-grade Chinese book and 151 pieces of illustrations in the second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook. Among the illustration in the first volume, 72 pieces of illustrations are related to the gender roles and among the illustration in the second volume, 61 pieces of illustrations are related to the gender roles.

Table 1: The number of the illustrations related to the gender roles

	The number of the illustrations	The number of the illustrations related to the gender roles	The percentage of the illustrations related to the gender roles
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	192	72	37.5%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	151	61	40.4%

Based on the Table 2, it is obvious to find that the gap between the number of the female and male is very small (nearly 5%). That means in the Chinese textbooks for the first grade of the primary school the number of female and male characters is relatively average. But overall, the number of male characters is still greater than the number of female characters.

Table 2: The number of female and male

	The number of Female	Percentage	The number of Male	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	105	47.7%	115	52.6%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	57	47.1%	64	52.9%

4.3.2 Illustrations Analysis on the Process

Observing all the illustrations related to the gender roles in the first-grade Chinese textbook, there are only material process and verbal process.

Table 3: The number of process

	The number of material process	Percentage	The number of verbal process	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	42	63.6%	24	36.4%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	39	67.2%	19	32.8%

Comparing the number of material process with the number of verbal process, material process appears frequently that is because the illustrations in the Chinese textbooks are used to represent the text by the images.

In addition, the number of female and male characters in the verbal process is relatively average. But overall, the number of male characters is still greater than the number of female characters.

Table 4: The number of female and male in the verbal process

	The number of female	Percentage	The number of male	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	14	63.6%	17	36.4%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	9	67.2%	13	32.8%

4.3.3 Illustrations Analysis on the Contact

The way to distinguish demand and offer is to check whether the participants in the illustration gaze at the viewers. If the participants gaze at the viewers, that should be labeled as demand; if not, that should be labeled as offer. In all the illustrations related to the gender roles, the participants always do not gaze at the viewers. Therefore, offer appears frequently which seeks to be read as a piece of objective and factual information. In this way, the illustrations offer the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation.

Table 5: The number of contact

	The number of demand	Percentage	The number of offer	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	9	13.6%	57	86.4%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	8	13.1%	53	86.9%

In addition, male in the first-grade Chinese textbook always creates a visual form of the direct address and demands something from the viewers and to enter into the imaginary relation. In this way, the producer uses the male image to do something to the viewer.

Table 6: The number of female and male in the demand

	The number of female	Percentage	The number of male	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	2	22.2%	7	77.8%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	1	12.5%	7	87.5%

4.3.4 Illustrations Analysis on the Social Distance

Observing all the illustrations in the first-grade Chinese textbooks, long shot appears frequently, which shows the public distance between the participants in the illustration and the viewers.

Table 7: The number of social distance

	The number of close shot	Percentage	The number of medium shot	Percentage	The number of long shot	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	0	0%	11	15.7%	59	84.3%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	1	1.7%	19	30.6%	42	67.7%

In addition, there are several medium shots in the first-grade Chinese textbooks. Medium shot shows the social distance between the participants in the illustration and the viewers which is closer than the long shot. In all the medium shot, female appears frequently.

Table 8: The number of female and male in the medium shot

	The number of female	Percentage	The number of male	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	11	100%	6	54.5%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	14	73.7%	13	68.4%

4.3.5 Illustrations Analysis on the Subjective Attitude

Based on the Table 9 and Table 10, among all the illustrations in the first-grade Chinese textbooks, oblique angle and eye-level angle are always used to show the readers is not belonged to the world in the illustrations but they are at an equal status.

Table 9: The number of the horizontal viewing angle

	The number of involvement	Percentage	The number of detachment	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	29	42.6%	39	57.4%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	8	12.7%	55	87.3%

Table 10: The number of the vertical angle

	number of viewer power	Percentage	The number of equality	Percentage	The number of represented participant power	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	1	1.5%	65	98.5%	0	0
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	14	20.9%	40	59.7%	13	19.4%

4.3.6 Illustrations Analysis on the Color and Dressing

Observing the illustrations in the first-grade Chinese textbooks, female likes to wear the clothes in pink and red and male likes to wear the clothes in blue. And white is the color which both female and male will dress. What's more, female in the illustration always wear dress, especially the pink or red dress. Therefore, from this perspective, it is obvious to see that the producers of the first-grade Chinese textbook have the stereotypes for female.

Table 11: The Kind of the Female Dressing

	The number of pants	Percentage	The number of dress	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	13	25.0%	39	75.0%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	11	30.6%	25	69.4%

4.3.7 Illustrations Analysis on the Framing

The stronger the framing of an element, the more it is presented as a separate unit of information. In the illustrations of the first-grade Chinese textbooks, elements of the composition are strongly framed, especially the female and male. In this way, readers will know the difference between female and male.

Table 12: The Number of the Framing

	Absence of framing	Percentage	Maximum framing	Percentage
The first volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	28	42.4%	38	57.6%
The second volume of the first-grade Chinese textbook	15	24.6%	46	75.4%

5. Discussion

5.1 Findings

This paper firstly uses visual grammar which is proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen to do the illustration analysis on the participants, process, contact, social distance, subjective attitude, the color and dressing, and the framing in the Chinese textbooks edited by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the first grade of primary school. Secondly, from the perspective of CDA, this paper analyzes the differences of gender roles in illustrations of the textbooks.

The analysis results show that:

(1) The frequency of female and male roles appeared in the illustrations are respectively 105/115 and 57/64. On the whole, the number of male characters in the two volumes of the first-grade Chinese textbooks is more than that of female characters. However, the number in each volume is relatively average and the gap is not very large. So, the difference between the two genders can almost be ignored, which can reveal that the compilers of the textbooks intend to attach importance to both of female and male.

(2) The frequency of material process and verbal process are 42/24 and 39/19 and the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the verbal process are 14/17 and 9/13. On the whole, male characters always appear in the verbal process. But, the number of female and male roles is relatively average and the gap is small. Therefore, female roles have the equal status with the male roles in the first-grade Chinese textbooks.

(3) The frequency of demand and offer are 9/57 and 8/53 and the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the demand are 2/7 and 1/7. On the whole, the number of male characters in the demand is more than that of female characters.

(4) The frequency of social distance are 0/11/59 and 1/19/42 and the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the medium shot are 11/6 and 14/13. On the whole, the number of female characters in the demand is more than that of male characters. But the number of female and male roles is relatively average and the gap is small. Therefore, female roles have the equal status with the male roles in the first-grade Chinese textbooks.

(5) The illustrations in the first-grade Chinese textbooks represent in oblique and eye-level angle. In this way, the illustrations could objectively offer the information.

(6) In the selected pictures, the female roles always wear pink or red dresses and male roles always wear in blue. From this perspective, it is obvious to see that the producers of the first-grade Chinese textbook have the stereotypes for female.

(7) The female and male role in the selected pictures always strongly framed. In this way, readers will know the difference between female and male.

In conclusion, all the statistical data show that the gap between the number of female and male roles is small and female roles have an equal status as male roles in a gradual way. But some points more or less indicate that gender stereotypes and gender biases still exist.

5.2 Reasons

On the one hand, gender stereotypes and gender biases still exist. That is influenced by the social traditional cultural factors. Based on the long feudal society, the mainstream ideology of the society with Confucianism that expects woman to be a good wife and mother who is confined to family life is deeply rooted. In today's society, there are still obvious phenomenon showing the gender unfair. The second reason is the ideology permeated by the producer of the textbooks. When the producers edit the textbooks, they will show their own opinions

unconsciously.

On the other hand, the female roles have an equal status as the male roles in a gradual way. That is influenced by the developed thinking. Nowadays, more and more people are willing to learn the new ideas and accept the new thinkings. Therefore, the female roles have an equal status as the male roles. In addition, the government publishes many laws to protect the right of the female characters. With the protection of laws, the status of female roles will be equal as that of the male roles.

5.3 Suggestions

Gender bias and stereotypes in traditional social gender culture cannot be corrected easily. What we can do is to integrate gender equality into the curriculum reform of the country, enhance the awareness of gender equality and pay more attention to the education administrations.

1) China should draw on the advanced experience and practices in other countries and regions, formulate relevant standards for the examination of textbooks, strengthen gender supervision and examination of existing textbooks, identify problems in a timely manner and promote the revision of textbooks;

2) Textbook publishers, editors and illustration designers should raise the awareness of social gender equality, balance the frequency of occurrence of female and male in the textbook layout and design, weaken the difference of images and status between female and male, and make female and male present equal status in textbooks.

5.4 Limitation

There are still many shortcomings, specifically in the following aspects:

First, due to its limited knowledge level, this study is only a tentative study on gender roles in primary school Chinese textbooks from the perspectives of MDA and CDA. It is necessary to conduct more in-depth research on this direction, such as enriching the researching data.

Second, because of the gender of some illustrations is difficult to identify, the process of counting characters may cause the inaccuracy and miscounting of a few characters. Those mistakes might lead to a little weakness in the quantitative analysis of the number of roles of two genders. In the further study, the technologies to mark the multimodality should be used to improve accuracy.

Third, this study analyzes the gender roles in this set of textbooks. Due to the limited space, only the illustrations which related to the gender roles are analyzed by multimodal discourse analysis. Other aspects such as typography, background, listening, audio and video are not involved. In the further study, the textbooks could be analyzed in multi-dimensions.

6. Conclusion

By observing the illustrations related to the gender roles in the first-grade Chinese textbooks, this paper finds that the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the illustrations are respectively 105/115 and 57/64; the frequency of material process and verbal process are 42/24 and 39/19; the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the verbal process are 14/17 and 9/13; the frequency of demand and offer are 9/57 and 8/53; the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the demand are 2/7 and 1/7; the frequency of social distance are 0/11/59 and 1/19/42 and the frequency of female and male roles appeared in the medium shot are 11/6 and 14/13; the illustrations in the first-grade Chinese textbooks represent in oblique and eye-level angle; the female roles always wear pink or red dresses and male roles always wear in blue and the female and male role in the selected pictures always strongly framed.

On the whole, the number of male characters in the two volumes of the first-grade Chinese textbooks is more than that of female characters. But, the gap between them is small. Therefore, it is glad to see that the compilers of the textbooks intend to attach importance to both of female and male.

Nowadays, more and more people accept developed thinking and the government integrates gender equality into the curriculum reform of the country and publishes the laws to protect the female roles in the society. In this

gradual way, the female roles will have an equal status as the male roles.

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