

## Gender Stereotyped Images of Occupations in Malaysian Primary English Textbooks: A Social Semiotic Approach

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### Abstract

A number of researchers in the past have highlighted on portrayals of stereotyped gender roles in textbooks, but little has fully explored on how social semiotic meanings are used for identifying occupational gender roles. Social semiotics places an importance in this current research of images on textbooks due to how it visualises the existing society. The main objective of this study is to uncover images of gender-stereotyped occupations from primary school English textbooks and uncover gendered attributes from these images. Images in the textbooks are investigated based on how images with agentic and communal qualities reveal representational, interpersonal and compositional meaning. This activity of collecting images involved framing the gender with visual elements through connecting or disconnecting them to the illustrations. This study found 126 images represented in professional occupations and 81 images represented in non-professional occupations. Results showed that occupational images of males were linked to more self-assertive and agentic qualities while females were portrayed with more caring, communal qualities. Social semiotic analysis revealed that more males were shown as professionals such as architects, and doctors, whereas females were more portrayed with professional occupations such as nurses and teachers. Non-professional males were also included with agentic qualities, portrayed by farmers and firefighters. The implication of the study adopts a gender perspective to semiotic theory through tying meaning with gendered images, culminating semiotic and gender inclusivity in educational materials.

**Keywords:** *agentic, communal, gender-stereotyping, social semiotics, textbooks*

## Introduction

Research in gender representations and stereotyping in the past, have suggested for gender balance to be included in textbooks. This did not exclude textbooks that were used apart from the English language textbooks. A study of sex bias in physics textbooks (Walford, 1981) found that male characters appear more frequently in illustration as well as in text. In the 1980's sexism among Malaysian children was prevalent with males and females being described as total opposites. Males were perceived as strong, cold and intelligent while females were perceived as weak, warm and unintelligent (Ward & Williams, 1985). With this pattern of sexism in the past, there is no wonder that the sexist approaches towards textbooks curriculum persisted in the 1990's until a decade after the millennium.

This research concurs with Lakoff's (1975) 'dominance' approach on male domination and female subordination which is prevalent in gender-differentiated linguistic behaviour. This move has been addressed in the Western sphere, and it must be noted that any changes towards gender equality in Malaysia still needs new approaches. This is particularly true especially when gender characteristics of Malaysian males and females still remain strongly influenced by traditional beliefs and practices (Bahiyah, Mohd. Subakir et al., 2008; Mohamad Subakir, Bahiyah, Yuen et al., 2012; Rosniah & Bahiyah, 2013; Ward & Williams, 1982). Many related studies on textbooks analysis conducted in Malaysia (e.g. Bahiyah et al., 2008; Liew, 2007; Saedah, 1990), have shown researchers' concern towards equal treatment for both genders in children's textbooks. Both analysis of gender in linguistics and visual analysis have been previously examined taking into account the nature and amount of frequencies these gender representations appear stereotyped. This would raise the concern among educators especially when children's understanding of gender is stereotyped since childhood when on the other hand, children need a positive representation of males and also females (Smith, 1995) at this early formative years until adulthood.

The first research problem is that females have been stereotypically portrayed in the domestic sphere as homemakers. This portrayal has previously been biased, highly one-dimensional. Such as treating women as uninteresting and irrelevant, and making them subordinate to males (Rosaldo, 1974). This is because some portrayals have shown women being depicted indoors, through orienting women in the domestic sphere while on the other hand; males are shown in the bigger, 'public' domain (Bahiyah et al., 2008; Bahiyah, Yuen et al., 2013; Jariah, 2002; Saedah, 1990; Yuen, Mohd. Subakir et al., 2008). In view of this earlier finding, what needs to be examined is whether females who are portrayed as housewives, are not only being stereotyped into their roles, but also being shown as inferior, weak and unimportant. It is rarely highlighted that it is through the strength of the mother in bringing up her children that it is possible to build the progress of a nation in generating a productive work force, and it is not possible if one is weak.

The second research problem is how more females are stereotyped in teaching and nursing roles while males are given more decision-making roles. Based on this study by UNESCO (Sundal-Hansen, 1984), the findings reported that more females were identified as teaching in primary schools, while more males were in the leadership positions (headmaster, principal). The patterns tended to reflect what people did in daily life, and this resulted in a guide to identify and eliminate sex stereotypes through intervention in schools. The study identified

schools as socializing agents and the changes in the roles of men and women had to be acknowledged in order to fit the new norms and behaviour (Sundal-Hansen, 1984: 11). Based on social role theory, Eagly & Steffan (1984) classified this as applying social structural analysis to people's beliefs about gender. This follows the stereotyped belief that males have the urge to lead or master (agentic quality) while females are thought to be selfless and concerned with others (communal quality). Or as previously stated by Epstein (1976), women's roles are regarded as expressive, nurturant, service and ancillary as opposed to male roles that are instrumental, dominant, and goal-oriented.

The third problem addresses how females are usually portrayed in more restricted roles than males (Bahiyah et al., 2008; Bahiyah et al., 2013; Mohamad Subakir, Bahiyah, Zarina et al., 2012; Rosniah & Bahiyah, 2013). In an effort to investigate depictions of male and female images in textbooks, a corpus linguistic analysis of nine primary school textbooks has contributed to textbooks research through investigating the occurrence of linguistic sexism in lexical items (Nadia, 2010). Through linguistic analysis, this study also confirmed that the occupational roles assigned to females were more restricted and less varied compared to males. Males were given more roles (such as shoemaker, mayor, fisherman, headmaster, policeman, scientist, driver, and cobbler) compared to females (model, florist and nurse).

This paper reports on a study undertaken to uncover the semiotic modes that are in play and the interpretations that are revealed from the primary school textbooks. The research objectives for the study are as follows:

1. To explore images in occupations that are represented in gender-stereotyped roles.
2. To identify how images of professional males and females are portrayed the semiotic acts that they are performing (*representational meaning*).
3. To identify how male and female occupational images are represented in social interactions (*interpersonal meaning*).
4. To identify how male and female occupational images are arranged in the semiotic space in the textbooks (*compositional meaning*).

### **Gender Stereotyping In Textbooks**

In the 1980's sexism among Malaysian children was prevalent with males and females being described as total opposites (Bahiyah et al., 2008; Mohamad Subakir, Bahiyah, Zarina, et al., 2012; Rosniah & Bahiyah, 2013). Males were perceived as strong, cold and intelligent while females were perceived as weak, warm and unintelligent (Ward & Williams, 1985). With this pattern of sexism in the past, there is no wonder that the sexist approaches towards textbooks curriculum persisted in the 1990's until a decade after the millennium. Mills (2008) also added that this kind of stereotyping is a noticeable form of behaviour which may have occurred within a community and is afforded prototypical status (2008:126). Mills also argues that these assumptions that society holds at times clash with our own perceptions of ourselves (2008:127). These are stereotypes that have been affirmed within a society and is 'mapped out' within the household walls and into the workplace and is still maintained actively within society (Sunderland, 2006).

Earlier studies on gender stereotyping have expressed worldwide concern towards equal access to education and equal representations of males and females in textbooks (Bahiyah et al.,

2008; Jariah, 2002; Saedah, 1990). Furthermore, there has been a decline in education for women in countries across the world. This decline in education includes a high drop-out rate among girls and a low percentage of girls entering and graduating from higher educational establishments. Moreover, with low levels of literacy among women in India, and with lack of female teachers that encourage girls to attend school (Velkoff 1998), women continue to be marginalized. Related studies on textbooks analysis conducted in Malaysia (e.g. Bahiyah et al., 2008; Liew, 2007; Saedah, 1990), have shown researchers' concern towards equal treatment for both genders in children's textbooks. Both analysis of gender in linguistics and visual analysis have been previously examined taking into account the nature and amount of frequencies these gender representations appear stereotyped. This would raise the concern among educators especially when children's understanding of gender is stereotyped since childhood when on the other hand, children need a positive representation of males and also females (Smith, 1995) at this early formative years until adulthood.

These gender ideologies are prevalent in educational resources and they existed in these school textbooks. Studies from other countries reported some discriminatory results towards gender portrayals in textbooks. Abeer (2005) studied on gender stereotyping in textbooks in Jordanian high schools. It was found that more males (70%) were represented in the textbooks as compared to women (25%). Na Pattalung (2008) also conducted a similar study and found sexist language being used and supporting patriarchy in Thailand. These ideologies may be reinforced in each of these types of books through gendered behaviour patterns and characteristics (Stewart, Cooper et al., 2003). Such examples of these depictions have presented distorted representations of gender and reinforced gender stereotyping.

Evidence of these sexist portrayals have persisted some of these gender gaps, whereby girls still consider a narrower set of careers than boys and girls continue to experience risks to their health and development such as sexual harassment and abuse pregnancy, substance abuse and delinquency (Stewart et al., 2003). This finding from children's artwork had concluded that in the boys' schemes, they associated girls with stereotyped indoor activities (*dancing, playing with dolls, shopping*), associated girls with stereotyped objects (*flowers, butterflies, unicorns, bunnies*) and with specific behaviours such as (*love, romance, love for shopping*). Generally, the boys viewed girls as passive or static, objects of gaze rather than doers (Kress & vanLeeuwen, 1996). This study found that "boys saw girls as objects of beauty with interests in love and romance while girls saw boys as doers" (Albers, Frederick & Cowan 2009: 253).

### **Images in Textbooks**

Using the semiotic perspective in the teaching and learning of language means children learn how signs are represented, and that any possible change in representation makes new insights possible (Hoffman, 2006). This also implies that to consider interpreting images from a semiotic perspective means to take a genuine interest in the meaning of signs and its representations. The famous semiotician, Charles Sanders Peirce has termed the otherwise known as generic function of sign (Greenlee, 1973) as 'signification' and adopts the 'sign' to designate anything which signifies. The study of images have been researched within varied function of signs, whether it is in websites or online documents (Harrison, 2003), an advertisement (Beasley & Danesi, 2002) or an architect's house design (Kress & vanLeeuwen, 2001).

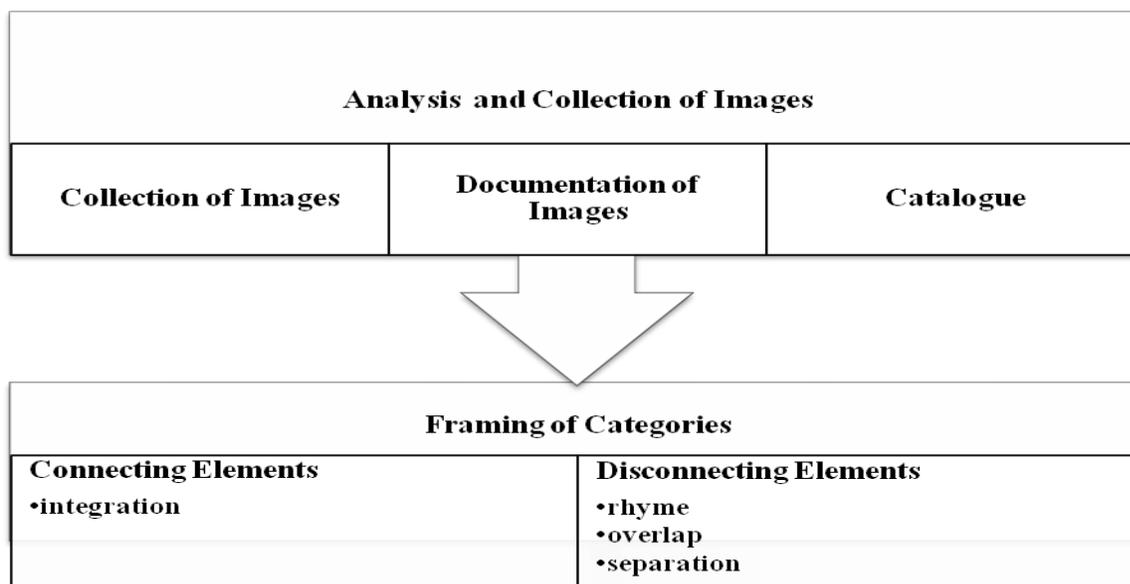
Other theorists have argued for a social semiotic theory in contrast to the traditional semiotic theory (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Jewitt & Kress (2003) states that social semiotics view the agency of socially-situated humans as central to sign-making. From a social semiotic perspective, people use the resources that are available to them in the specific sociocultural environments in which they act to create signs, and in using them, they change the resources. In other words, signs are viewed as constantly newly made, in a process in which the signified (what is to be meant) is realized through the most apt signifier (that which is available to give realization to that which is to be meant) in a specific social context (10).

One key concept with social semiotics involves the consideration of the role of the sign maker as well as the reader of the signs. Within the classroom that advances the idea of social semiotics, students, for example, read the world and name the world based on the understanding of particular concepts in relation to their own lives. The self-creation of linguistic or visual representations can bear greater meaning for the students as they bring the internal world of their own knowledge and understanding together with the outer world through self-representation and communication through self-selected modes of expression. Although the chosen sign might be pre-existent, the intention of the sign maker is the relevant issue as the sign represents the agency, albeit a restricted agency, of the sign maker. Only a few have analysed children's books and the analysis of images in the texts.

### **Methodology**

This research procedure firstly involves collecting and gathering the textbook data through making an inventory of textbook images. This comes from van Leeuwen's (2005) explanation on what semiotic inventory – collect, document and systematically catalogue semiotic resources. The first activity involves identifying the gender of these male and female images. The semiotic potential of these images included 'inventorizing the different material articulations and permutations' (van Leeuwen 2005: 4), such as identifying the kinds of clothes and attire that these images are shown in. After this is identified, the images are described its semiotic potential, which indicates the types of meanings that these images afford. The stages in identifying gender-stereotyped images consisted of semiotic inventories that were taken from the concept of social semiotic multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress & vanLeeuwen, 1996).

This activity of collecting involved framing the visual elements through connecting or disconnecting, segregating or separating to look at its similarity and contrast (van Leeuwen 2005). The disconnected elements included elements of visual composition such as frame-lines, empty spaces between the images and colour discontinuities, whereas the connected elements that were identified included images that showed similarities of colour, shape and also any compositional elements that belonged to the image. The disconnected elements are read as separate and independent, while connected elements are understood as belonging to each other. Van Leeuwen (2005) described 'framing' in visual composition as semiotic work when the image has semiotic potential, including seeing their meanings as similar and different. Framing in these images has the potential to make parts of the images more connected or disconnected to the picture than other parts.



**Figure 1. Stages in Identifying Images**

The images collected are analysed based on meanings about gender stereotyping, through looking into the representation in semiotics through the identification of modes (Kress, 2001). Three metafunctional meanings are examined to distinguish stereotyping of gendered occupations. Representational meanings are distinguished by appearance, behaviour, and attire of represented participants (RPs henceforth) based on grammatical system of images. These images are shown in classificational representations that place the RPs as sharing a certain commonality and are shown in a classification or group. On the other hand, when two characters represent the RP in the image, it would involve dominant and subordinate RPs known as a transactional structure. This involves a ‘reactor’ as a subordinate and a ‘phenomenon’, shown as a superior.

Images of RPs are also depicted through interpersonal meanings that portray males and females images through elements such as focus and distance in close and long shots. A system that conveys RPs through gazes and smiles is identified through ‘image acts’ and ‘gazes’ that allows viewers to relate to the communicative function and imaginary relation that exists between the reader and the RP in the image. Images that are investigated in compositional meanings are based on three interrelated meanings to express the involvement of the RPs – informational value, salience and framing.

After identifying the RPs within the aforementioned three metafunctions, the first stage involved examining male and female roles in the occupational structure in these textbook images. The analysis is determined through the characters in the images. The images were identified, codified and classified based on social semiotic framework, and involves occupational images that are classified as based on the Malaysian Standard of Occupations (MASCO 08).

**Findings**

***Analysis of Representational Meanings***

This section aims to answer the first research question, which is, how are male and female images portrayed in their visual element of occupational roles?

The image below reveals the classificational representation of professional occupations through working people in uniforms. There are images of 5 males than 2 females, with only the nurse greeting with a smile. The officer, nurse, doctor, architect, police officer, soldier and firefighter represent working people in uniforms and formal attire. In this case, all RPs are classified as working people that share a commonality, which is, being helpful but at the same time, sharing agentic qualities with their male counterparts. This process according to van Leeuwen & Kress (1996) tends to relate the participants to each other in a certain classification or relation to the same category. For instance, in the figure below, the RPs are arranged in a classification, as professionals with the neutral background and are understood to belong to members of the same class or social structure.



**Figure 2. Classificational Processes**

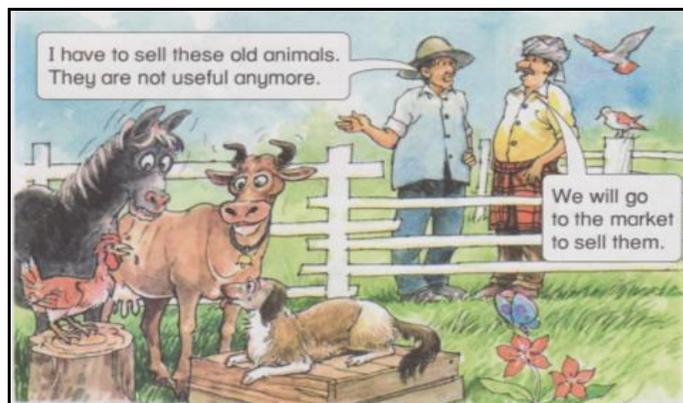
(Source: English Year 3, 2004: p. 73)

A similar character of the RPs in Figure 2, is that the subordinates are of the same size, standing at an equal distance. From the images, classificational structure places the RPs as equals. The RPs that are put in the same syntagm and is identified as being in the same classification and are judged to belong to the same group.

As reiterated by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) there is symmetry between how the images are arranged and the way the viewer/reader must relate to them. The point of view is imposed upon the RP for the viewers to react towards these portrayals. From Butler's argument that gender is not something a person has, but rather something a person does, therefore, this image of nurse and police officer as working people has pigeonholed females as working alongside their male counterparts, and having of equal importance. The ability for females to be of equal importance concurs with Maccoby & Jacklin's (1974) argument that there is no clear evidence that women are more nurturing than men. However, this is not to conclude that females have equal importance, as shown in Figure 2, as females are only portrayed by a nurse and a police officer. As reiterated by Levy, Sadovsky & Troseth (2000) and Blakemore (2003), nurses are perceived as a female profession.

Non-professional occupational roles analysed included the most portrayed occupation in this category such as the farmer, the lollipop man, grocer, stall keeper, garbage collector and firefighter. The images analysed show agentic qualities that portray characteristics with analytical behaviour and having good problem solving skills. One male farmer says to the other, "I have to sell these old animals. They are not useful anymore." While the other farmer replies,

“We will go to the market to sell them”. Such engagement with business deals are linked to the images of males as being assertive, independent, competitive and self-confident (Eagly 1987) in which they are often associated with. The farmers are shown in displays of self-assertion (Eagly & Steffen, 1984) and decision making, such as discussing about selling livestock (farmers) in Figure 3. These discussions are commonly associated with males as farmers, whereby men have commonly been linked to decision-making abilities. This concurs with Eagly & Steffen’s (1984) argument that beliefs about men resemble employed persons, whereby decision-making abilities are closely related with agentic qualities that are more stereotyped with male attributes.



**Figure 3. Farmers**

(Source: English Year 3, 2004: p. 44)

This also presupposes that males are more assertive and confident due to males being given more portrayals as farmers and simultaneously, being depicted in negotiations. This image acts as a socializing agent (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) for children, as an indication of overt sexism (Mills, 2008) that can be directly identified through males being given more agentic qualities.



**Figure 4. Female as a Farmer**

(Source: English Year 4, 2004: p. 40)

Nevertheless, only one image of a female farmer is found in the textbook. The image of this female farmer, however, does not have a speech bubble, and the female farmer is shown selling fruits. The involvement of females as farmers is only identified with the headscarf, and articulated on the women’s body (Talbot, 2010), as a depiction of the female form. The female form shows that the farmer is a female, but at the same time, this image can also be regarded as

androgynous, by being feminine and at the same time masculine at work (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Portrayals of masculinity are also prevalent among the images of fire fighters.

### *Analysis of Interpersonal Meanings*

The second research question is; how do male and female images portray occupational roles through communicative semiotic acts?

The interpersonal meaning of these images are identified through patterns of experience, encoded as representation (Guijarro & PinarSanz, 2008) and with the processes that the RPs are associated with.



**Figure 5. Professional male and female**

(Source: English Year 3, 2004: p. 82)

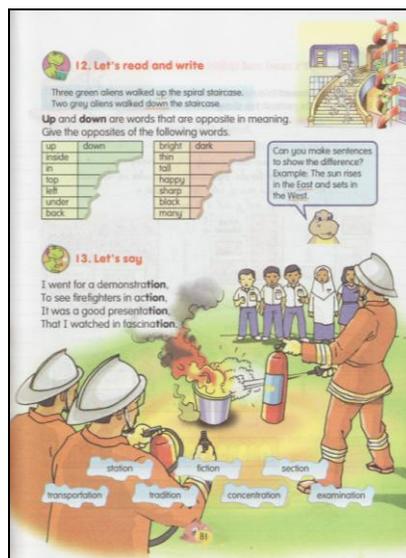
In the images of the female doctor, the presence of females as doctors shows that females can also be doctors as much as their male counterparts. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p. 122) stated that these images that are drawn in illustrations are “to be read as a piece of objective, factual information and set into motion the actual process of learning”. These images that represent occupations have an important role to represent the society within the community. The visual images that signify meanings between the signifiers are analysed for how the images are communicated through relations between the represented participants or RPs. The way the images represent social interactions needs to be made explicit through the image acts and gazes that imply focus and distance. The communicative function of these images would tend to communicate related functions such as the visual form and the image act that demands a reader to react.

It can be seen from figure 5 that the image of the “professional” female is often shown to be working among males, while the image of the male “professional” is also often shown to be working among females. The images of females working among males can be seen from Figure 5. These images are categorised under helping and aggressive behaviour (Eagly, 1987).

- a. being in a supportive surrounding (helping)
- b. carrying or portrayed with object/gadget/things (aggression)

When both female images are portrayed in the same professional roles, it is represented with images that are supportive and caring for another. These images are derived from the data

exploration technique that produces output files to show the images that are from the selected quoted codes. Female images as doctors are classified as professionals due to their respected position in society. These images of female doctors are shown treating patients and tending to their needs. The following image in figure 6 is discussed and arranged based on the illustrations of images that are featured as non-professionals.



**Figure 6. Firefighter with Bravery**  
(Source: English Year 4, 2004: p. 81)

A similar sign of courage is also shown in images of fire fighters. The image of the fire fighters in Figure 6 is given higher modality, emphasizing their uniforms and actions of putting out the fire during a school demonstration. The colour of the fire fighter's orange uniform is given more value that in return, become 'motivated signs' (Kress & vanLeeuwen, 1996, p. 154). The sign of the fire fighter has become the image that is given more emphasis than the image of the pupils. The pupils have become less realistic in comparison with the fire fighters, and this tends to give the image of fire fighters higher modality. The image of the fire-fighters are given a masculine physical attribute, with the pants and the fire extinguisher in their hands, the image is presumably male. The symbol of the RP in pants is mostly understood to be associated with the male image. The image is also identified through agentic qualities by its ability to use the extinguisher. This is also one of the determining beliefs about gender stereotyping based on Eagly and Steffen's argument that men are given agentic and women communal qualities. The display of bravery and self-assertion gives out the agentic quality, which are ascribed to men.

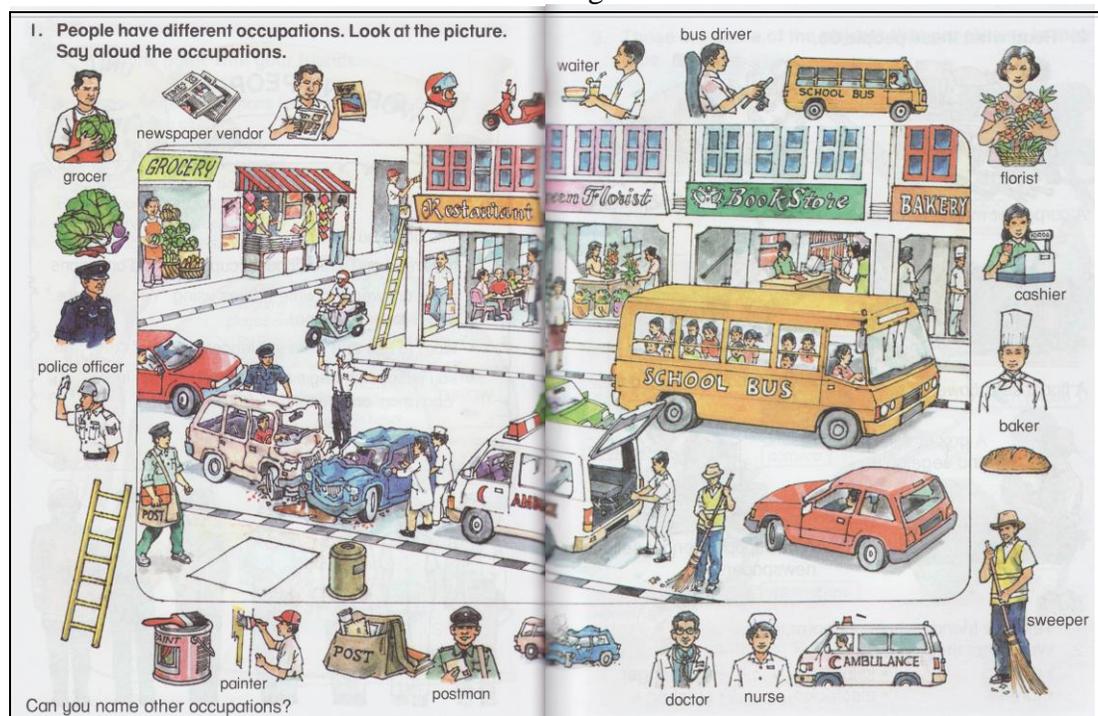
### ***Analysis of Compositional Meanings***

The third research question is; how are male and female images arranged in the visual spaces that are represented within their occupational roles?

*Compositional* meanings in these images are also aimed to reveal aspects such salience, framing, which indicates involvement and/or absence of social distance between the RPs. The image of the doctor in Figure 7 shows a doctor attending to a patient in a clinic or a hospital. The male doctor, who is in a white coat, is pictured as being helpful, and caring while treating his patient. The doctor on the left looks down on his patient, portrayed by the boy lying down on the



The non-linear text in Figure 8 reveals a different reading path than what is commonly used as linear text in the textbook. In this pattern, the pupils are free to choose their own way of reading the given incident, which means that they can navigate the text to their own liking. These non-linear texts, according to van Leeuwen & Kress (1996) impose a paradigmatics. This means that readers would tend to select some elements and present them based on a 'paradigmatic logic'. The illustration shown above decodes a reading path that is not chronological but is structured in the dimension of centre and margin.



**Figure 8. Non-linear text**

(Source: English Year 3, 2004: p. 74-75)

The image makes emphasis on the centre, through making significant use of the centre with the margin consisting of guides for learners to use as a guide to the occupations shown in the centre. The centre of the image that portrays an accident that is appearing to be in progress has a few occupations that are gender stereotyped along sexist concepts of social roles. The female role in this non-linear text that is also a book spread, suggests that the female role agrees with the aspect of helpfulness (nurse) and sex-typed skills (florist, cashier) (Eagly, 1987). This explains how the image construction is drawn around social roles that are acceptable among society's expectations and appropriate behaviour even when depicting occupational roles.

As shown earlier in Figure 8, non-professional occupations were also depicted in a non-linear text that suggested different events shown on one centrespread page. The occupations that are portrayed in this double-page spread show the various occupations that function in the portrayal. The gender display in this type of framing shows two scenes divided with lines, supposedly disconnecting the two elements. The elements of the image are shown through the display of occupations through *informational value of centre and margin*. While reading of texts in the English language adheres to the basic left-right structure, the pictures in this non-linear text uses central composition through portraying the accident in the centre margin of the spread. The doctors and nurses in the centre show them helping the victim of a car crash with the

ambulance standing by. The image of the doctor is shown as male and nurse as female, in addition to the traffic police and policeman portrayed as males. This gender stereotyping of the occupations seem to repeat the stereotyping of those portrayals – providing the image of females as florist and cashier, while males are shown as bus driver, newspaper vendor, waiter, baker, sweeper and postman. To generalize, this gives more credence to males as employed workers while subconsciously marginalizing females.

### Discussion

From the results of the findings, this study confirms Eagly's (1987; 2000) theory that stipulated the role behaviour of men and women shape gender stereotypes through evidence that the portrayals of males and females in occupations are represented in gender-stereotyped behaviour. The results revealed that the images of occupational roles in the textbooks were gender stereotyped and that the representation of the professionals favoured males. In addition, the results also revealed that when the non-professional images were shown, the male images were shown with more objects and gadgets while the females were portrayed with animals and children. Moreover, the non-professional roles also depicted males with more challenging, brave and dangerous roles, and while some portrayals of professional females were present, they were illustrated in more masculine features.

The results showed that the images of RPs in textbooks not only favoured showing more males in more occupational roles, but also leaned towards portraying more males being more professional than females. On the other hand, more females were shown in more maternal and compassionate social roles, through suggesting that a woman's domain is rooted in the household. Indirectly, this supports stereotypic differences in gender roles because it fits into society's expectation about male and female behaviour and characteristics (Eagly, 1987). These expectations of different gender roles implicate social roles to normative behaviour (ibid 31). In the attempt to create an egalitarian environment in the school system, it has somehow failed to recognize some features of gender equality particularly in the materials that the pupils study. The textbooks that serve as guidelines are not helping to promote the full potentials of young boys and girls.

A more gender-equal solution would be to give children a wider range of portrayals of men and women in order to communicate gender norms to children (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004). Males and females are not randomly distributed across this social life, and recognizing these differences would shape children's experiences (Wharton, 2012) and expose children to the actual roles that adults are ascribed to.

### Conclusion

This social semiotic analysis is able to unveil how meanings are made in this visual representation. The results of this analysis can be useful for textbook publishers, textbook designers and illustrators through understanding how to create representational, interpersonal and compositional meanings in texts. This study revealed that the English language textbook images that are used in school contain gender-stereotyped images. Implicitly, the representation of these gender-typed images that are shown from the textbooks do affect behaviour (Cameron, 2008). The readers can emulate images that show gender-stereotyped behaviour. This finding needs to

be challenged and cannot be ignored. Findings have shown how gender stereotyping is still prevalent. Thus, this implies that gender stereotypes should be minimized or hopefully eliminated and how a more equal treatment of gender should be inculcated and expressed through illustrations presented in the textbooks. Though guidelines for sex role stereotyping in the Malaysian textbook curriculum may include substantial reminders for eliminating gender, cultural and racial discrimination, the curriculum still needs research and clearer guidelines towards achieving gender-neutral goals in curriculum in which could serve as an exemplary guideline for future efforts on curriculum change nationwide. An addition to setting up a gender-fair curriculum, is also adding to a semiotics-based curriculum as championed by Suhor (1984). Suhor suggests that semiotics provides a useful framework for conceptualizing curriculum in the language arts and that it can be embedded in specific instructional activities. If it is possible for a semiotics-based curriculum to be conceived through including a gender-fair curriculum in this model, this requirement for such model would include a clearly constructed semiotics-based programme that would involve a range of linguistic skill that would take into account gender sensitivities. In other words, it would involve a constellation of interdisciplinary study that would, in return, produce better-rounded pupils who are critical and independent in their thinking.

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