De/Construction Of Gender Roles: A Semiological Discourse Analysis Of Primary Level Textbooks In Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Semiotic discourses are more powerful means of communication and have long-lasting effects on viewers' memory. Images are iconic signs mainly used to convey multiple meanings, which affect human consciousness indirectly. The present research decodes the semiotics discourses carrying the concept of gendered roles in Urdu and English textbooks (based on Single National Curriculum 2021-2022) from grades 1 to 5, taught in Pakistan. The data for the present study has been collected purposively. It employs Fairclough's (2003) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Barthes (1974) model of Semiological Discourse Analysis (SDA) to analyse linguistic and visual data. The levels of linguistic analysis include representation, metaphor, simile, lexicalisation, in-group and out-group, and backgrounding and foregrounding. At the same time, the semiotic analysis comprises iconic, identical and indexical levels. The dominant emerging themes about gender representation include the role of women in professional fields, in domestic affairs and women as role models. The observance of stereotypical gendered roles in the selected Urdu textbooks is 36%, and the element of challenging gender stereotypes through semiotic discourses is 64%. At the same time, the frequency of occurrence of the same concepts in the selected English textbooks is 33% and 67%. The study contends that deconstruction of gendered roles implies the idea of change strange through the data. Hence, semiotic discourses of primary textbooks play an essential role in disseminating desired gendered ideologies.

Keywords: Gender, Discourse, Primary English Textbook, Ideology, de/construction of and Gender Stereotype, Semiological Discourse Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks'contents are purposely designed to make the target audience behave in a particular manner and win their consent about specific issues (Gilborn, 1990). A particular ideology is imparted to the learners and hence is socialised accordingly. The contents included in the textbooks, to a great extent, enable the students to develop communal relationships with their peers and institutions. What appears in the textbooks is never ideology-free, and different visual and verbal practices are employed to disseminate desired ideologies about religion and cultural gender stereotypes. Word-picture conjunction effectively makes ideological messages more persuasive about confirming or challenging gender stereotypes at the primary level.   Eco (1976) asserts that a picture speaks more than thousands of words. The use of visual imagery makes the underlying message more long-lasting.   Elkins (2010) states that visual literacy is becoming essential in modern-day life, starting from a person's first attempt at learning by entering school. It is believed that graphics designs supplement linguistic messages to enhance the primary level's learning process. The semiotics appearing in the textbooks are ideologically loaded and reflect the dominant trends about existing tendencies about gender roles in a particular society.

  Asrar (2017) argues that changes in the curriculum are deliberately made because the process of ideological investment is dynamic. It is often observed that besides some fundamental ideologies, others are revised through textbooks from time to time. Similarly, the study investigates de/construction of gender roles through the semiotic discourses of primary Urdu and English textbooks based on the Single National Curriculum (SNC) from 2021 to 2022.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

 Elkins (2010) researched the stereotypical representation of males and females in Pakistani textbooks. He collected data from the Sindh textbook board at the primary level. The content that the researcher analysed is taken from the stories published in Urdu textbooks for grades 1-5 for 2011- 2012. The research findings revealed that these stories highlight the masculinities and femininities and gender discrimination in the selected books.

 Jabeen (2014) studied the transformation of gender roles through the curriculum taught in Punjab, Pakistan. The data for the study comprised national language textbooks. The main focus was on exploring gender disparity and making the target audience gender sensitised. The study revealed that textbooks should be designed in such a way to educate the readers about the concept of gender sensitisation.

Mahmood (2015) researched language and gender relations depicted in Pakistani Textbooks at the secondary level. It focused on the concept of gender construction and representation through the English textbooks taught at the Secondary level in Punjab and Balochistan provinces. It was an attempt to know gender differences in culturally diversified provinces. Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model was used to analyse the data. The selected data analysis revealed that gender

inequality is tactfully propagated through the loaded discourses, rendering women invisible from the main power domains.

Waqar and Ghani's (2019) research on exploring gendered issues in secondary level ELT textbooks revealed that the concept of gender and gender sterotypes is context-based in Pakistan. This concept is practised differently in different provinces of Pakistan. The study focused on linguistic and semiotic texts to locate disparity in gender representations through the textbooks taught in Pakistan. The study recommended that the concept of equal gender representation should be propagated through these textbooks.

Akbar and Malik (2020) worked on gender representation in English textbooks of Punjab Textbook Board from the perspective of those responsible for designing and compiling books of Punjab Textbook Board. They interviewed the officers of the Punjab textbook board to explore the level of sensitisation regarding gender and its representation. The present study is different from the mentioned research as it decodes the semiotic discourses current critically in the textbooks based on Single National Curriculum. To the best of researchers' knowledge, perhaps no research has been conducted on the selected data with the de/construction of gender roles.

IV. Research Questions

The following research questions have been answered through the analysis of the selected data by employing the devised research methodology:

1. According to Barthes' (1964) image theory, how have gendered ideologies been represented discursively through the semiotic discourses of Urdu and English textbooks based on the 'Single National Curriculum'?
2. How do Urdu textbooks (2021-2022) vary in representing gendered ideologies compared to English textbooks through semiotic discourses?

V. Methodology

Barthes (1964) argues that images are layered and carry interpretations at the surface and deep levels. He further names these two levels denotative and connotative levels. In this regard, symbolic messages are naturalised through different visual and verbal practices. Barthes' (1974) semiotic theory is interpretive and decodes signs at explicit and implicit levels. It argues that signs range from speech to Morse code/s and carry much information. They are often culturally oriented, and our senses are culturally trained to extract meanings from these semiotics. According to Barthes (1964), signs have a signifier, the sign's physical form as we perceive it through our senses and the signified or meaning interpreted. Barthes' (1964) SDA develops meanings from lower to complex levels of language and semiotic, respectively. The three levels mentioned by him are as under:

1. The iconic level is the first level on which meanings are self-contained. It can be seen in the photographs of world leaders, celebrities and infamous criminals and semiotic

discourse of the newspapers. The framing of text is highly ideological and plays a significant role in imparting the desired message through visual and verbal practices.

2. At the second level, order society assigns values and meanings to the semiotic discourses. According to him, semiotics is culturally oriented and carries a plethora of interpretations. Moreover, our senses are culturally trained to decode the signs.

3. The third level deals with the life of signs in a particular society. Here socially constructed meanings in semiotic discourses become common sense with social representation and the point at which they generate power and become associated with the dominant belief patterns of the time.

Barthes (1974) contends that particular connotations and myths combine to develop social meanings at linguistics and semiotic levels. Similarly, semiotics and language are both socially constructed, and different myths and cultural connotations are associated. These meanings then become synonymous with social representation. In this way, they generate ideologies with the dominant belief patterns of the time. This study critically decodes semiotic discourses related to gender representation from the selected data by applying Barthes' (1964) theory of semiology, and the levels of analysis include Iconic, Identical and Indexical levels.

VI. Data Collection

The data for the current research has been collected purposively from the semiotic discourses of the mentioned Primary textbooks published in 2020-2021.

VII. Data Analysis Procedure

Lacey and Luff (2009) maintain that no single way is sufficient to analyse a multimodal text comprehensively. Instead, one must draw upon multimodal research techniques to analyse the data at linguistic and semiotic levels. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is conducted differently. The first data is categorised according to the emerging themes and analysed qualitatively/quantitatively. The content analysis technique is also used as a supporting tool to validate qualitative findings quantitatively. Similarly, this study has analysed gendered ideologies' data by applying Barthes' (1974) theory as an analytical tool to lay bare explicit and implicit ideologies at work.

VIII. Data Analysis

The dominant emerging themes from the data include the role of women in professional, social and domestic domains. Besides, women have also been represented as role models in the selected data. These mentioned categories have been analysed in the section that follows. The coded images have been studied under the three thematic categories i.e.

1. Role of Women as Professionals
2. Role of Women in Domestic and social affairs
3. Women as Role Models for the Society

The selected images from the mentioned primary level English and Urdu textbooks have been analysed in the following section. The themes of the selected semiotic discourses include women as professionals, women in domestic and social affairs and women as role models by applying Barthes' (1964) theory which states that the photographic paradox is, therefore, the coexistence of two messages the one without a code (the photographic analogue) and the one with a legend (the 'art' or treatment of the subject, the rhetoric of the photograph)

Image 1. Urdu Book 3, Lesson 5: Sb Hain Khas page 34

Image one (01), as a photographic analogue, shows the picture of a woman who is a lawyer by profession. If the rhetoric of the image under analysis is considered, it is evident from the picture that the woman shown in the semiotic belongs to a significant profession in society. The coat of black colour she is wearing is one of the identity markers of her profession. At the iconic level, the image contains some implications in it. The very colour (black) connotes elegance and power. It is a good contrasting colour. Here, in the picture, it contrasts with the white colour of her dress. It implies that she is quite ready to face any challenge in her professional domain. Advocacy is all about competing discourses manifested in the law courts before honourable judges to prove one's stance. At an identical level, the very semiotic under analysis implies social and cultural associations about the profession, which mainly used to be males' domain. The smile on her face illustrates her confidence as a lawyer. It connotes that she has overcome the hurdles she came across and now visualises a bright future ahead, as is evident from her standing posture, and she is eying at the target audience and offering them to be steadfast and determine her to be like her. At the indexical level, the picture conveys the meaning that, though slowly but gradually, women are challenging the constructed gender stereotypes. The time is not far away when it will become common sense that a woman can become a competent lawyer like a man. She may be taken as a person who can be used as a state metaphor. It connotes that she represents all the women her age, challenging the constructed gender stereotypes. The combination of colours of her dress code strikes a balance between the opposite colours. It implies that by being educated and confident, she can keep balance among different domains of her life. On the one hand, she is pure, innocent

(as is connoted by the white colour of her dress), and on the other, she embodies elegance and power (as connoted by the black colour of her coat). The overall message imparted by the semiotic is that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Image 2. Urdu Book 3, Lesson 9: Allah ka Inam page 66

Barthes (1974) contends that particular connotations and myths combine to develop social meaning at linguistic and semiotic levels. Signs are culturally oriented, and their essence lies in context. These meanings then become synonymous with social representations. This is how they generate power with the dominant belief pattern of the time. He argues that a social semiotic theory of truth cannot claim to establish the absolute truth or untruth of representations.

Similarly, the semiotic selected from unit 09 titled" **Allah ka Inam (blessings of Allah)** carries a bundle of interpretations at explicit and implicit levels if decoded from gender and division of roles perspectives. The semiotic at the iconic level depicts that gender stereotypes in any culture are never absolute but rather dynamic. No truth or absolute finality can be had about them. It also deconstructs the established myth about male dominance where women were considered the weaker sex and unable to step into male's domains like being commercial and fighter pilots. If decoded at similar and indexical levels, the coded message implies that gone are the days when myths about women being the weaker sex and marginalised portion of society were very much in vogue. The semiotic under analysis connotes that women have made their presence felt in various domains of life, including being pilots.

Language (visual and verbal) is social semiotic and reflects the prevailing tendencies in a particular context. Likewise, the composed posture of the woman depicted in the picture illustrates that she is very much confident, determined and focused on performing her duty parallel to a male. On the one hand, she is managing things on a computer screen, and on the other, she is holding the control of the aeroplane and looking straight in front of her as the male pilot. The element of change in breaking the myths is evident through the semiotic. The impression that today's woman claims equality at all tires.

Image 3. English Book 5, Unit 6: A Fit and Healthy Life page 55

Rusher (2005) stated that females are expected to be dependent, weak, naïve, incompetent, nurturing, caring, and possess a higher moral and esthetic sense than males. Similarly, the iconic level's semiotic (image 07) is self-explanatory and contains much information. At a similar level, its impression is correlated with the existing body of knowledge in the viewers' minds about gender stereotypes that often follow patriarchal norms. At the indexical level, cultural myths and models assign meaning to the image under analysis that it has been common sense in Pakistani culture that women are fit to play a supportive role. This image can also be a continuity of constructed gendered norms about male dominance.

The dress code of the male doctor and female nurse is the same. Both are wearing white colour, which connotes safety and goodness. It means that people related to the medical profession are a symbolic representation of safety and integrity. Whenever someone suffers from any disease s/he can feel safe if under the observance of a doctor and nurse. The three persons in the picture can be taken as metaphors for his or her respective professions and age groups. It implies that doctors and nurses have different good qualities, as is evident from their white dresses and black shoes. They are meant to play their roles in their respective domains. The very posture of the doctor is confident while checking the child patient whose dress code implies passion, life and vitality. The doctor stands one step ahead of the female nurse, which means the male doctor's superiority compared to the nurse standing one step back and waving her hand to make the child happy. The semiotic message can be correlated with a linguistic message, "A Fit and Healthy Life". It means that the male doctor and female nurse are the people who can keep us fit and healthy. The picture under analysis reinforces the myth that woman is made to look after others. All the professions of nurturing are specified for women. The implied message of the picture is the observance of patriarchal norms.

Image 8. Eng. Book 5, Unit9: Do what Right p. 75

Image 9. Eng. Book 5, Unit 3: Role Model p. 25

Barthe (1971) contends that images are culturally oriented, and dominant myths of a particular culture assign them meanings. He also argues that the life of signs is time-dependent. Same signs may take different interpretations in a different context. On the one hand, language may reflect the change-taking place in society, and on the other, it may confirm some existing stereotypes. Similarly, the images under analysis illustrate that though women have challenged the established gender stereotypes, the observance of some of the norms is also evident through the semiotic discourses of the selected data.

Usually, women are considered more suitable to teach students at a lower level (primarily primary). The two female teachers shown in the pictures confirm the same gender stereotypes. In semiotics 08 and 09, it is shown that females can be good teachers where teaching at a lower level is concerned. Perhaps, it is believed that they have more patience than men and can handle the young students more effectively. At the semiotic level, it is evident that red and blue colours are prominent in the dress code of the female teachers shown in images 08 and 09. These colours connote trust, wisdom, intelligence and passion. When applied to the semiotics under analysis, this concept implies that women being passionate and trustworthy are more suitable to teach the nation's tomorrow. They can make quick decisions and know how to handle the difficult task of teaching at lower levels. The entire background of the images connotes peace, calm and harmony. Everything will happen accordingly when female teachers are there to teach the young ones. The different postures of the young students illustrate that they are peacefully and attentively engaged in their learning activities. The overall impression of the images is that the teachers are engrossed in teaching activities and imparting knowledge to the young learners in the best possible manner.

c. Women as Role Models for the Society

Image 6. Eng. Book 5 Unit3: Role Model p. 27

Barthes (1974) opines that semiotics represent the world it should be, and meanings create myths of a particular culture. Similarly, image 20 deconstructs myths about gender stereotypes, which used to focus on the patriarchal norms that male members of a society could only perform great deeds. The very title of the semiotic," women as role models for society," challenges the constructed gender stereotype that only males could be role models. Here, in the semiotic under analysis, the two women are obvious instead of any male member. One of them is Arfa Kareem, the youngest software engineer who won fame because of her expertise. The white-yellow colour of her dress and the confident posture illustrate that genius has nothing to do with age. She is eying at the audience and imparting the message that if you want to be famous like me, work like me by challenging the existing gender stereotypes. The semiotic background implies that she has made her mark despite hardships in the past by working hard. The smile on her face is an emblem of her success and determination.

Similarly, the other picture of Dr Ruth carries a plethora of interpretations. She has made history by serving the suffering of humanity. The very posture of Dr Ruth is suggestive. It embodies confidence, elegance and determination. She is also eying at the audience and inviting them to come out of the vicious cycle of gender stereotypes so that they can become an icon like her. Her semiotic suggests what the world should be like. Her eye gaze is demanding from the viewers that the only way to be satisfied is to serve humanity irrespective of geographical boundaries. Her dress code is highly symbolic and suggests that one can adjust oneself in any context provided one is determined to work for a noble cause. Including these two semiotics in the primary English textbook connotes that the element of change concerning gender stereotypes has been made apparent deliberately because these books are now meant for government and non-government school systems. The two school systems have observed different gender stereotypes. This attempt might be to strike a balance between the two systems.

IX. Quantification of the Data

Berelson (1952) argues that it is a research technique for objective, systematic, and quantitative representation of communication content. He believes that it is objective and systematic quantification of communication. It focuses on what -is said and not on why the content is like that. Similarly, the following section reproduces the findings in terms of several games to support qualitative results quantitatively.

Table 1: Semiotics percentage in primary level textbooks

Textbooks of Primary level	Stereotypical Roles	Challenging Roles	Total	Level
Urdu Textbooks	4 (36%)	**7** (63%)	11	1-5
English Textbooks	3 (33%)	6 (66%)	09	1-5
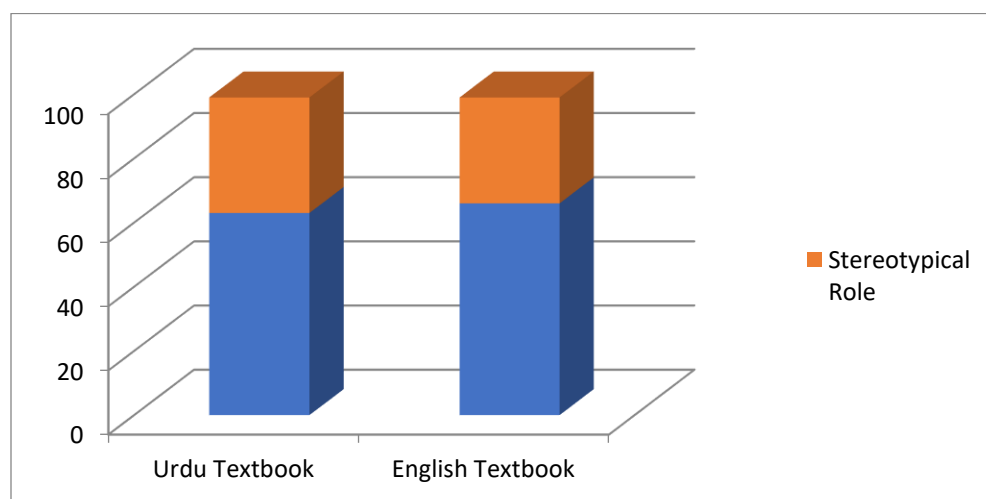
Representation of Challenging and Stereotypical Role in the form of Bar Chart

Hence, the content analysis proves that in Urdu textbooks from levels 1 to 5, 63% of pictures represent women challenging the constructed gender stereotypes. Whereas only 36% of images still confirm the existing gender stereotypes. On the other hand, the situation is similar in English textbooks of levels 1-5. It is evident from the pie chart and bar graph that 66% of images represent the concept of deconstructing gendered norms. At the same time, only 33% of semiotics depict the observance of gender stereotypes. It illustrates that the 'single nation curriculum' attempts to deconstruct the gendered norm through the subtle discourses of textbooks at the primary level.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data reveals that textbooks published under the slogan of Single Nation Curriculum (SNC) represent the element of change about gendered notions through semiotic discourses. The frequency of occurrence of the semiotics embodying the concept of deconstruction in terms of gendered ideology is significantly higher than the frequency of the semiotics

incorporating observance of constructed gender stereotypes. The possible reason behind this change could be that these books are meant for the students of government and non-government school systems. Therefore, the observance of stereotypically gendered ideologies has been deliberately avoided, which remained a feature of previous textbooks designed for the government school system. The study's findings reveal that the frequency of occurrence of the element of change through semiotic discourses is 66% compared to the frequency of occurrence of the semiotic discourses about the observance set gendered norms is 33%. An element of a noticeable change is there, highlighting that language is a social semiotic and reflects the sociopolitical scenario around us. Moreover, the study contends that textbooks discourses are among the best sites for ideological investment and to propagate the desired version of constructed gendered ideologies to young learners at the primary level.

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