

Gender Portrayal on Cover Pages of Pakistani English Children’s Literature: A Visual Semiotic Analysis

Abstract

This article aims at investigating the portrayal of gender in Pakistani English children’s literature. The gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in Pakistani culture which greatly affect children’s psychology and are impetus to shape stereotypical world view that males are dominant and superior to females. The cover pages of five children’s books published in last 10 years have been conveniently selected and analyzed. The framework of Kress and Leuween (2006) regarding the visual grammar which includes representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning analysis, has been applied to the decoded hidden meanings behind the images. A shift regarding gender portrayal has been analyzed as the female characters are depicted in heroic roles or as leaders and males as weaker than females which may be considered odd in Pakistani society. This shift may positively eradicate gender stereotypes among our future generations who may, until then, be normalized to witness gender equality.

Keywords: *Visual grammar, Gender discrimination, representational meaning, compositional meaning, interactive meaning*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis emerged in the early 1970’s and, since that time, its study has focused primarily on language and its forms consequently ignoring semiotic resources such as images, space and architecture. Multimodality is defined by Kress & Van Leuween (2011) as “the phenomenon in texts...whereby a variety of ‘semiotic modes’ (means of expression) are integrated into a unified whole”. Through more than one modes of communication i.e of language, symbols, spatial design, image etc, the multimodal artifact is analyzed (Martin & Rose, 2008). However, recently there has been a shift in such discourse giving importance to these modes of communication of meaning making. Use of images in visual communication is one such mode that has received the greater attention than other modes and has been studied from different perspectives as content analysis (Bell, 2001), from cultural dimensions

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(Stoic, 2015), political dominance (Lilleker et al., 2019) psychoanalysis (Diem-Ville, 2001) and gender power (Berberick, 2010).

Gender and its interaction with identity, power, work and politics has gained a lot of interest in recent studies. The result of these studies shows that gender affects our self-image consciously or unconsciously. This is reflected in our “architecture, socialization, economics, psychological credentials, body identification, clothes, etc (Felderer, 1997). In this regard, gender makes people’s identity and in society assigns certain expectations regarding social and verbal behavior to its male and female members (Christie, 2000). Ruggiero & Weston (1985) analyzed that in professional settings, women are rarely shown as influencer while mostly they are depicted as involved in lower scale jobs as clerical, service type etc. Men are located in workplace with full potential growth and dominance (Mirza & Iftikhar, 2016). Picture books also have a particular influence on gender identities because they are viewed at a time when children are in the process of developing their individual identities (Allen et al., 1993).

Socialization into expected gender roles is one of the most important lessons that young children learn. Weitzman et al., (1972) drove the attention towards the importance of analyzing the gender representation and gender stereotypes in children literature. They learn their specific gender roles from the teachings of their parents and teachers as well as from mass media which includes television, magazines, newspapers and books and these endorse learned patterns of behaviour, cognitive exposure about the real world (Huston, 1998).

Pictures in the books play significant role in defining the gender roles. They provide the children with cues about life that which social norms and goals are available and appropriate for them and their prescribed sex (Paterson & Latch, 1990). Children learn and remember more from what they hear and see. Human mind is inclined to retain visual information for more time than oral or textual content (Paivio, 1971). If the literature of children displays stereotyped gender roles, presents restricted role models for children and shapes their behavior in stereotyped directions then it will surely endorse, among them, a stereotyped world view regarding gender. Hamilton et al., (2008) found an underrepresentation of female characters in both the award-winning and top-selling children's books.

To specifically analyze the previous trends regarding gender portrayal in Pakistani English children’s literature, certain research studies have been taken into account. Mirza (1999) observed that only 12.7% of the occupational and professional characters were allocated to females in the textbooks from Punjab province of Pakistan. He analyzed that the characters assigned to the female characters were mostly passive, which do not demand individual’s creative or intellectual potential like cooking, sewing, house chores etc. Whereas the roles assigned to male characters were active and creatively and intellectually demanding like indulging in business, fighting wars, selling, driving, boating, flying, earning money etc. Ullah & Skelton (2012) investigated the gender portrayal in 24 children’s textbooks from class 1 to 8 and concluded that these textbooks are ideologically invested and tend to contribute in perpetuation of gender inequality.

In Pakistan, literature in English language has started gaining popularity in all dimensions. To explore literature in English language and how it affects the ideologies, challenges the prevailing mind sets and brings western ideologies to Pakistani readers, has been a wide area of interest for the researchers. Pakistani English children's literature has not yet explored much and is still a mystery to be resolved. Pakistani children's English literature is not much enriched as compare to its development in other dimensions.

Significance of the study:

The significance of this study lies in its exploration of hidden gender ideologies in Pakistani English children's literature and its impact in shaping their world views. The practice of gender equality has been embedded under the dense culture and ideologies of gender stereotypes and patriarchy, so there comes a need to revise the sources which promote or support such biased ideologies. Since children's literature plays a vital role in developing the world views and ideologies of young generations, thus its review may help to determine where our future lies and what changes are needed to shatter the biased ideologies. The attribution of social power to females has been observed which can be a result of shift in cultural practices led by arising feminist movements. This dimension in Pakistani children's literature has not been widely explored yet, so this study would be a meaningful contribution in existing literature.

Theoretical Framework:

Kress and Leeuwen's in their book *Reading Images; The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006), devised a comprehensive visual grammar framework. It follows Halliday's theory of metafunction, according to which the language follows three metafunctions, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The visual grammar framework implies that the semiotic systems as images, music, and sound also realize three metafunctions. This framework underlies that the elements of images can be decomposed when we analyze its meaning and decode its grammatical elements. To explore the underlying research questions, representation of both gender has been investigated with reference to theoretical framework of visual grammar which includes three dimensions and further sub-dimensions which construct gender identities, their power relations and gender roles in context of Pakistani literature. The decoding of gender construction through this framework would lead to obtain research objectives and required conclusion.

Representational Meaning

This metafunction follows Halliday's ideational metafunction. It refers to the way experiences are encoded visually which can be either through narrative or conceptual structures. Narrative structure presents process of change, unfolding of events or action or transition in spatial arrangements. They always include a depicted line element, called vector, which forms oblique line and indicates directionality (Stoian, 2015). Several kinds of narrative processes can be involved as action, reaction, speech, mental and conversion depending upon the types of vectors and participants included. Action processes contain a vector formed by a depicted element or an arrow, departing from a participant i.e Actor. If there are reaction processes, the vector is formed by the direction of glance of one or more participants' i.e Reactors. In the case of speech processes, the dialogue balloons appear to

connect the sayers to their utterances. In case of mental processes the thought balloons appear to connect the thinkers to their thoughts.

Secondary participants are also involved in narrative structure, known as circumstances, which are connected to the main participants by other ways than vectors. The circumstances in visuals can be of several types: ‘Locative’ if the main participants is connected to setting, ‘Means’ which connects the participants to the tools involving in actions, and ‘Accompaniment’ which connects the two participants not linked by vectors (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Conceptual structures represent the participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning. They can be of several types: Classificational processes associate the participants to one another, as one is subordinate to the other who is superordinate. Analytical processes connect the participants in terms of part-whole or whole/carrier structures. The symbolic processes depict what a participant is, it can be attributive (when two participant, a carrier and a symbolic attribute, are involved) or symbolic (when there is only one carrier) (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

Interactive Meaning

This metafunction is represented through the interactive strategies among the participants and is equated to Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction. This metafunction involves three dimensions, namely image act, social distance and point of view. The image act is concerned with the gaze direction of the involved participants, which can be directed at the viewer (demand) or not (offer). If there is direct gaze at viewer, an imaginary relationship with the viewer is assumed as he is addressed directly. The image act also considers the facial expressions and gesture (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

The second dimension under interactive metafunction, social distance, is influenced by different sizes of frame which can be close-up, medium or long. They can lead to different relations among represented participants and viewers. The frame sizes can not only be applied to human beings but also to objects, buildings and landscapes (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Point of view or perspective is the last dimension of this metafunction which is based upon the type of image. Image can be of two types: subjective which presents everything from a particular perspective usually dictated by image producer, or objective which depicts all there is to know about the subject (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006). Participants can be depicted from various angles and each angle indicate a different relation as horizontal angle (if frontal) indicate involvement or detachment (if oblique) while the verticle angle (if high) assign power to interactive participants, assign more power to represented participants (if low) or eye level depicts equal relations.

The concept of modality is related to the reliability of the message as “visuals can represent people, places and things as though they actually exist in this way or as though they do not (as imaginary)” (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006, pg #177). Modality is constructed through the interplay of markers such as color, saturation, differentiation, contextualization, depth, representation, illumination and brightness (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Compositional Meaning

The last step of visual semiotics is the compositional metafunction (equated to the Halliday's textual metafunction) which is related to "the way in which representational and communicative acts cohere into the kind of meaningful whole we call "text" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996, pg #30) At this level, the meaning is relied at three interrelated levels as information value, salience and framing.

The first system in compositional metafunction is information value. The information in visuals can be given or new, ideal or real, important or less important. Basically, the information value is associated with the three visual areas, left and right, center and margin and top and bottom. The left side is associated with the given information, which is assumed to be familiar and accepted as a point of departure by the audience. On contrary, the right side is specified for new information, or something unknown which requires audience's special attention (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). At the top, essential or ideal information is placed whereas at the bottom, the product is itself depicted by real or more specific and practical information. The image which is aligned at center-margin, the center comprises the nucleus or core of information while the margins are subservient to the centre.

The second system under compositional metafunction is salience, which is ascribed to differentiate to analyze which of the elements are more significant and attractive than others. Salience of an image can be achieved through size, color, tone, focus, perspective, overlap and specific cultural factors (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Another system of compositional metafunction is framing. Framing is regarded as a tool to connect representational metafunction to the interactive one. The elements presented in visuals can be connected or disconnected by framing lines, discontinuity of shape and empty space between elements (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006).

Research Questions:

Q1: Does Pakistani English children's literature represent the traditional role of gender on the cover pages of short stories and comic books?

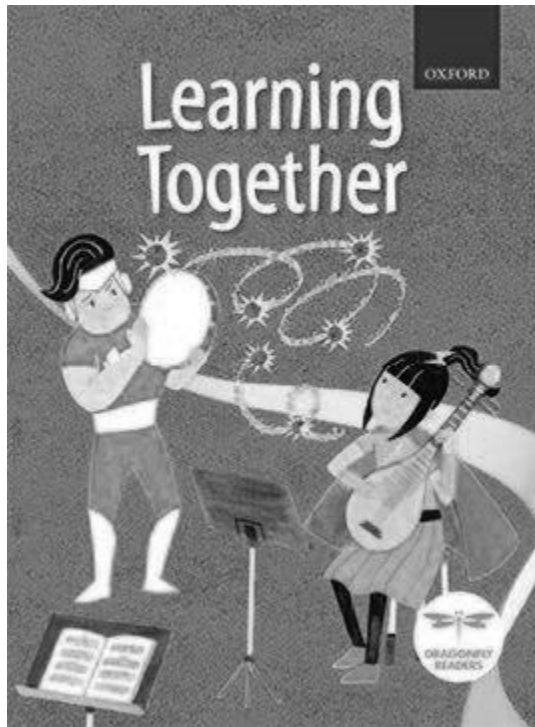
Q2: How do the book covers hinder the gender stereotypes existing in Pakistani English children's literature?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. The sample taken for this research comprises of five Pakistani book covers sourced from internet. They all belong to children literature i.e three textbook stories covers and two comic book covers. The targeted audience of the selected sample varies from 6-12 years old children which successfully accomplishes the underlying research objectives to determine the gender ideologies promoted in children. The cover pages of five children books published in last 10 years have been conveniently selected. At first 12 book covers from Pakistani children's literature were selected by internet surfing but seven of them were excluded from the sample as they represent only one gender or gender with huge age difference which can diverge the research from main objectives. The images have been analyzed by adopting Kress & Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar.

RESULT & ANALYSIS:

Figure 1: Learning Together (2018)

**Representational Meaning:**

This narrative representation depicts an academic world of unity and learning where the represented participants are teaching and learning from each other irrespective of gender. There are two represented participants in this picture. Both participants are depicted as transactional reactors, directly looking towards each other, thus playing role of phenomenon for each other. The transactional action processes also occur in this image as the male participant is beating tambourine while the female participant is playing guitar, both playing the role of actor and goal. This reinforces the world of unity, togetherness, education and gender equality. This narrative implies that both are incomplete without support of each other and need unity to make progress through learning.

Interactive Meaning:

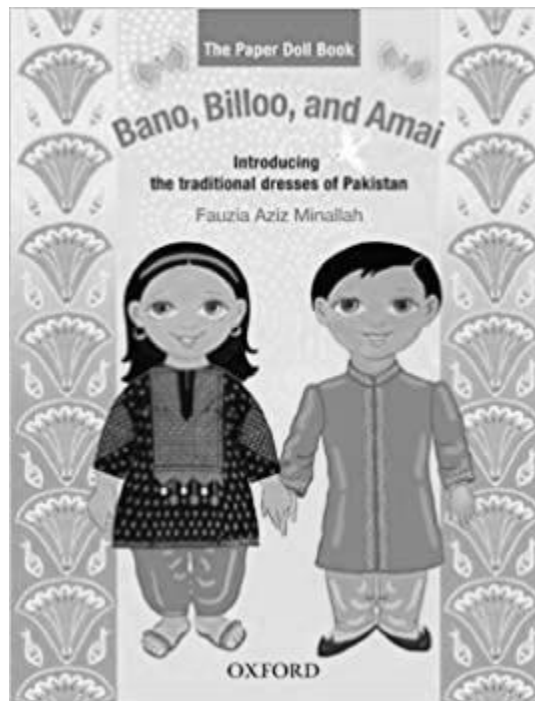
The gaze of both participants is directed away from the viewers, thus depicting this cover as an offer picture. It depicts that the participants are indifferent to the viewers and are objected to viewer's inspection because the represented gender roles are different from the traditionally assumed gender roles and offer a lesson of unity to audience. The horizontal angle is oblique so detaching the participants from the outside world. The vertical angle depicts the equality of power among the participants. This cover is drawn from the long shot which reinforces the interpersonal relationship between the participants and the viewers.

Compositional Meaning:

This book cover follows the Ideal-real structure. The text at the top of the cover is an ideal subject while the represented participants at the bottom are near to reality. The male participant is more salient in the cover due to large size of his image.

The female on the right side implies that viewers are already familiar with her and depicted as given information. While the male, represented as new information, is grabbing special attention and unfamiliar to the viewer as he is in supporting role which is uncommon in Pakistani culture. The framing lines have been created through the sound waves producing from the musical instruments which connect the participants to each other. It implies that the stereotypes which have specified gender roles are shattered and both gender are capable of learning and adopting any role together.

Figure 2: Bano, Billoo, and Amai: Introducing traditional dresses of Pakistan (2014)

**Representative Meaning:**

The participants represent the reflection of Pakistani traditional dress code. Both of the participants are depicted as non-transactional reactants as their phenomenon are absent and the participants are looking beyond the image as addressing the viewers to contemplate and follow ideology of gender equality. This image represents the unity in Pakistani culture as participants are holding hands of each other. This narrative implies the gender equality in Pakistani culture.

Interactive Meaning:

There is a direct gaze by both represented participants which reinforce a relation with the viewers as they are directly addressing them. So, this forms a Direct picture. This picture is taken in a long frame which emphasize an impersonal relationship among the represented participants as well as with the viewers as the targeted audience is Pakistani children and represented characters also belong to Pakistani culture. The horizontal angle is frontal, depicting the close intimate relationship of participants as both represent Pakistani culture while the vertical angle depicts the equality of participants and promotes gender equality.

Compositional Meaning:

The structure of Given- New has been adopted for information value. The male participant is represented at the right side supposing as given information that viewers are already familiar with him while the female at the left side is pictured as new information, needs to have special attention. The female participant is more salient due to the high saturation and dark color of her dress against light color background which gives prominence to female. There are no framing lines rather the represented participants are connected by joining hands which depicts the closeness of their relationship.

Figure 3: The Protectors of Shireen Jinnah Colony (2016)



Representative Meaning:

This narrative discourse represents the world of gender equality, women leadership and the world where the woman is breaking stereotypes. There are two participants in this image. The representational meaning comprises of two non-transactional reactants as the male makes vector towards the viewers while the female makes vector with something beyond the image. The reactors are the participants and no phenomenon has been depicted. The male is depicted in traditional role while the female defies the traditional role and becomes a super-woman by modifying cultural elements as using scarf (duppatta) as wings. Thus this narrative attempts to bring a shift in gender representation.

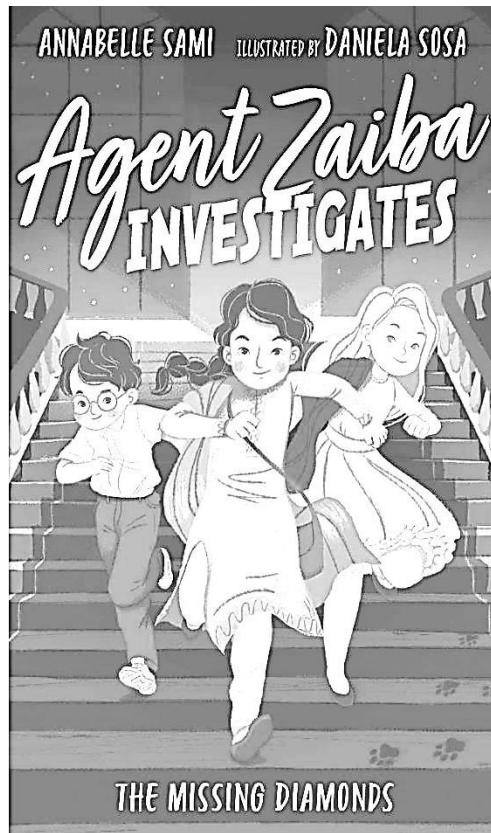
Interactive Meaning:

There is a direct gaze by the male participant thus establishing a direct relationship with the viewer. So, it forms a Demand Picture. While the female represents the Offer picture by looking away from the viewers at something suspicious not visible to the audience. This is a long shot which indicates the close intimate relationship among the represented participants as well as the viewers. The vertical angle shows the dominance of female character as depicted as much powerful to fly which implies that this female character is breaking gender stereotypes that female are weak, subservient and home-bound. The horizontal angle is frontal which depicts the connection with the viewers and suggests that the characters belong to viewer's own world.

Compositional Meaning:

This book cover has adopted the Ideal-Real structure. The information given at the top of the cover is ideal while the represented participants at the bottom are near to reality. The male depicted at the right side is someone the viewers already know about while the female pictured at the right side is someone new for the viewers and needs special attention. This character of super-woman, having furious expression, seems alien as females are expected to be polite and kind always in Pakistani society, thus this character requires special contemplation while it is normal conception about male as rigid and strict. The female figure in this book cover is more salience due to the dress color contrast with the background and the larger image. The female is depicted in the traditional cultural outlook as the long scarf (duppatta) represented as wings of female in this image which implies that women are empowered by adopting the cultural values. It suggests the lesson to females to adopt cultural norms (as wearing duppatta) to empower themselves rather not to suppress.

Figure 4: Agent Zaiba investigates: The Missing Diamonds (2020)



Representational Meaning:

This narrative discourse represents the world of adventure, women leadership and authority. There are three represented participants in this cover image. The participants represented here are non-transactional reactants because there are no defined phenomenon present for any participant in this image. The leadership and dominance of female character in the presence of other male character seem strange in Pakistani culture and defy patriarchal ideology that is how these characters are breaking gender stereotypes which assume male as always in power and expect females to be always in supporting roles.

Interactive Meaning:

There is a direct gaze by all the participants towards the viewers, which forms it a Demand picture. The characters are portrayed as they are directly addressing the audience, and inviting them to join their adventurous world. This is a long shot which reinforces an impersonal relationship between the participants and the viewers. The horizontal angle for the central figure is frontal which suggests the inclusion of the viewers in the represented world. While the horizontal angle for the marginalized figures is oblique which suggests their exclusion from the outside world but attachment with the central figure. It implies the dominance of female not only over the supporting characters but also over the viewers for

whom this female character would be alien in Pakistani context. The vertical angle suggests that the image is illustrated at eye level which represents the equal relationship among the participants.

Compositional Meaning:

This story book cover has followed the Center- Margin structure as far as information value is concerned. There are two females and one male participant represented in this image. One of the female is placed at center, dominating over the other two. The male and the other female is placed at the margins, depicted behind as following the leading character. The leadership qualities are stereotypically associated only with the males in Pakistani society, that's how this picture plays a role in changing traditional narratives. The female character, centered in the picture, is more salience than male due to her larger image and dark color of her clothes. Considering framing lines, these are absent in this picture which emphasize the intimate and close relationship between the represented participants.

Figure 5: SOS Crew (2016)



Representational Meaning:

This narrative has set an academic world where the students are involved in some co-curricular activities. The participants represented in this image are non- transactional reactants because the phenomenon are absent for both participants. This illustrated image

depicts the world of gender equality where the male and female both are involved in co-curricular activities without any discrimination. The character of male as magician is depicted only through appearance while the role of female is depicted as doing certain action as playing flute. Traditionally, the perception of involvement of females in music industry is not generally accepted in Pakistani society whereas the males can be accepted in any dominant role. Thus, this picture is promoting the narrative of gender equality by discarding female's subservient roles.

Interactive Meaning:

The gaze of the portrayed characters is not directly in the direction of the viewers, which forms this image an offer picture. It emphasizes that the established characters are not related to the viewers and objects of scrutiny and contemplation for them. The conception of gender equality needs contemplation in the context of Pakistani culture. The picture is illustrated in medium long shot which reinforces that there is a social relationship between the represented participants and the viewers as it is implied that represented characters are people of their own world. The horizontal angle for both of the participants is oblique, which emphasizes exclusion of the viewers from the illustrated world. As far as the vertical angle is concerned, the picture is illustrated from the eye level, which depicts the equal relationship among the participants thus adopting the ideology of gender equality.

Compositional Meaning:

This comic book cover follows the Given-New structure in relation to information value. The male participant is illustrated on the right side, supposed to be already known by the viewers (as in the traditionally common role), while the female participant who is illustrated at the left side demands the viewer's special attention because she is depicted as the new information (depicted in uncommon role as musician). The male figure is more salience in this image due to his darker colour of clothes and bigger size. As far as the framing lines are concerned, they are absent which emphasize the close intimate relationship between the represented participants.

In relation to the first research question, it is clear from the analysis that the Pakistani English children's literature is not promoting the traditional roles which are attached with the gender as males are associated with dominance, power and leadership and females as weak, subservient and dependent on males. In figure 3 and 4, the female characters are depicted as leaders, adventurers and brave whereas the male characters are also defying the traditional role by either following the female or being weaker than females. The adjectives, as powerful, brave, adventurous etc, in old and traditional writings are allocated to the male figures only but with the changing trends in west and the east as well regarding to gender treatment, and the emergence of feministic movements, a change in literature in reference to portrayal of gender can also be noticed. None of the picture which was taken into account in this research, referred females as weak, suppressed or subservient and males as more powerful or more dominant than females. They are portrayed either in equal relation to men or females as more powerful than males.

It is to be noted that in all the pictures the narrative processes have been employed and both the participants are portrayed as doing some actions, none of them is portrayed as static figure. Their gaze plays the role of vector which depicts them as proactive and arouse the viewers to explore them. If we analyze the interactive meaning overall, most of the selected images form direct picture as addressing the viewer's directly, which depicts that both of the gender have equal power to impact, influence, lead others or viewers. None of the image uses low angle to depict any gender as weak or powerless and all the images illustrated the characters from eye level to promote the gender equality which answers the first research question and implies that the recent Pakistani children's literature is not representing gender in traditional roles and is promoting the gender equality. In the images where the males are not leading the females rather following them and the females are depicted as flying, playing bassoon or playing guitar, their horizontal angle is oblique which emphasizes that the viewers are detached from their world because in Pakistani culture it is not yet normalized for females to act in these manners and the application of these strategies urges the viewers to break gender stereotypes.

The findings related to compositional meaning suggest that, in relation to information value, two of the images follow the ideal real structure. The text shown at the top of the covers is "The protectors" and "Learning together". These two textual dimensions of the book covers create an ideal world, while the participants represent at bottom are near to reality. The participants include both male and female, which emphasize that they both have the power and ability to control the real world and turning it into the ideal state. Two of the selected book covers follow the given- new structure as far as the information value is concerned. In both of these images, the females have been represented at the right side as the object of attraction and contemplation for the viewers. The females doing such actions are not expected traditionally, thus they are representing new information, new gender roles and thus becoming subject of contemplation for the viewers. In more images, the female participants are more salience, which means they are more in power to grab the attention. It can be noted in figure 4, that the male is running as towards the viewers while the female is depicted as she is flying and her long scarf, playing the role of wings, this picture emphasizes the super power and leadership skills, a woman can owe. So, in relation to the second research question, it is clear that by adopting gender construction strategies the Pakistani English children's literature is hindering the gender stereotypes which are traditionally existing in Pakistani culture.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from this research that the Pakistani English children's literature is promoting the gender equality, as all of the selected images depict both males and females in the proactive roles, none is shown as subservient, weak or fully dependent on the other. All the characters are either in equal power or are supporting each other which implies that gender is not represented in traditional roles in Pakistani English children's literature specifically on the cover pages of short stories and comic books. It is reinforced generally that both male and female have to work to make this world or state a better place. The images, analyzed in this research imply that the children's literature is inhibiting the gender stereotypes which are prevailing traditionally in Pakistani culture and society. The female characters are depicted in

heroic roles or as leaders and males as following females which may be considered as odd in Pakistani society but it can be normalized by promoting it. These strategies are incorporated in book covers to hinder the gender stereotypes so they can positively affect the role in establishing the world view of children that there is no gender discrimination, both have equal power, strength and capabilities. This research implies that our coming Pakistani generations will hopefully be free from the curse of gender discrimination.

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