

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background knowledge concerning gender problems arising from the process of socialization, especially during the schooling period. The study focuses on the influence from children's literature and textbooks which play an important part in forming gender behavior: boys and girls behave differently because literature and textbooks show that boys and girls possess different characteristics through visual and verbal language. The objective of the study is to find out whether or not *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks are inscribed with the element that can cause gender bias. The objective of the study is pointed out clearly again in the research question. After that the theories which are related to the study are generated such as discourse theory, literary, linguistic and ideological analysis. In the scope of the study section, the framework, methodology and definitions of the important terms are introduced so as to provide the overall image of the study. The chapter ends with the educational advantages explaining how the study can benefit this field of study or society in general.

#### 1.1 Statement and Significance of Problem

It has been observed that women in many countries have held subordinate positions in society since the early days. Traditionally, while the majority of men take the roles of economic security providers, women take care of the well-being of the family (Brittman and Pixley, 1997; 117). In other words, men are bread winners while women are home makers. Biologically, a male can produce an unlimited number of offspring whereas a female can produce only a maximum of about twenty in the case of humans (Bem, 1993; 16). Emotionally, a man is believed to be a more perfect leader since left brain dominance is said to lead men to be more "rationale" while their relative lack of brain lateralization in women is thought to make them more emotional (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; 12). Professionally, men hold

more prestigious, highly-paid jobs than their female counterparts because of the belief that they are better leaders, decision-makers and negotiators. Men are sought after for CEO positions while very few women have the opportunity to reach these positions ([www.news.uiuc.edu](http://www.news.uiuc.edu)). Viewed from these perspectives, a man is perceived by society to be more valuable than a woman.

As yet, Simone de Beauvoir's statement, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," ( de Beauvoir, 1993; 281) is a counter assertion that a woman's submissive position is the outcome of the way the society treats her, making her believe that her role is naturally inferior in the world, that males are superior in every aspect. At home, a girl sees that while her father gets dressed and leaves for work, her mother remains at home with her to take care of the household matters. She is further introduced to the world of male superiority by her schooling. Through stories, tales and books, she learns that Eve was created from Adam's rib and that great heroes such as Hercules and Achilles conquered the world by their own might, but that a heroine such as Joan of Arc still needed help from the hero, Archangel Michael. Having been instilled the idea that the world is controlled by man, a girl learns to accept her passive role of becoming a wife, a mother and a grandmother, leaving it to a boy to explore the world (de Beauvoir, 1993).

According to Shelly E.Taylor, Letitia Anne Peplau and David O. Sears (2003: 101), gender difference or gender dichotomy is the result of socialization. During childhood we are treated in particular ways by parents, teachers, and friends, and we participate in religious, ethnic, or cultural activities that later come to be significant aspects of ourselves. By participating in activities that are important to our families, we come to regard these activities as important to ourselves as well. Growing up, we learn that males and females are different and that our society has different expectations and standards for the behavior of males and females. Penelope Ekert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (2003: 35) observe that, once the doctor announces "it's a boy or it's a girl", the baby is no longer an individual. He or she becomes just male or female. Then adults buy blue clothes for boys and pink ones for girls since pink is considered to be a more delicate color than blue. When they grow up, they are

exposed to other socializing agents which also play important roles in forming gender behavior. As reported by Elizabeth A. Rider, in American schools, male students often gain more academic encouragement such as help and criticism from the teacher whereas female students get the compliments from the neatness of the way they present their work. Plus, the differences are emphasized since the staffing pattern and subjects are stereotypically divided; female teachers often teach language or home economics to students at kindergarten or primary level whereas male teachers often teach science or math to students at higher levels in the U.S.A. (Raider, 2004; 133-134). Textbooks are another very powerful conditioning factor in the school. The study of Majorie U'Ren (1971) finds that in grade-school textbooks used in America; male characters are not only given more space in the stories, but are also presented with more potentiality than female ones. In Thailand, Nidhi Eoseewong (1995) conducted research on the construction of nationalism in textbooks at primary levels: grades one to six. He found that textbooks serve to socialize students to become decent Thai citizens. His work shows that nationalism, just like gender, is constructed at the schooling level, and children's behaviors can be shaped through textbooks.

Children's literature also influences the forming of children's gender behavior. From the research by Sorani Wongbiasaj et al (2004), male and female characters are stereotypically portrayed in children's books: male as active and female as passive. It should be noted that we have been exposed to the gender ideology which assigns differences to a fixed fundamental quality of males and females in a set of oppositions: men are strong; women are weak; men are rational; women are irrational through language. This is what we call gender discourse. Gender discourse is embedded in all linguistic activities in our society. For example, girls are always called *nuu* (little) in picture books for Thai children whereas boys are given names such as Big, Great, Top. These names show masculinity. Such language implies passivity, softness and smallness for girls and greatness for boys.

From these previous studies it seems reasonable to conclude with a statement from Valerie Walkerdine, “At the primary school level, young girls are confronted with, and inserted into, ideological and discursive practices that position them in regard to specific patterns of meaning and regimes of truth serving to produce and reproduce femininity” (cited in Broughton, 1987; 87).

Part of these ideological and discursive practices that children are confronted with in school is textbooks used in and out of classroom. Therefore the motivation of this study is to study the process of socialization through gender discourse in Thai school textbooks in order to see the effect of socialization in the schooling period and accumulate the knowledge about gender discourse in Thailand.

The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the elements of gender discourse in Thai children’s textbooks. The hypothesis is that gender ideologies and gender bias are inscribed in textbooks making them one of the most powerful socialization agents. This study aims to investigate in particular the construction of these ideologies and bias through the content and language used in stories selected from *Wannakadee Lamnam*, a series of contemporary Thai literature textbooks used at primary levels: pratom two, three, five and six. A discourse analysis will be conducted using both visual and verbal languages to demonstrate how language discriminately portrays male and female characters.

## **1.2 The Objectives of Study**

To investigate if *Wannakadee Lamnam* is inscribed with gender ideologies and gender bias and how they are constructed through verbal and visual language.

## **1.3 Research Question**

1. Are selected stories in *Wannakadee Lamnan* textbooks inscribed with gender ideologies and gender bias?
2. If so, what are they and in what way are these gender ideologies and gender bias constructed through verbal and visual languages?

## 1.4 Theories

**Discourse Theory** is a study of language in verbal communication or in a piece of writing and how it relates to the society in which it is used. A discourse itself is a string of sentences put together in a meaningful, coherent and effective way. In order to account for discourse of stories in textbooks such as in this study, three aspects have to be brought to attention (Cook, 1989: 15).

### **Literary Analysis**

Textbooks are in a certain way similar to children literature. In order to study literature, some literary elements such as point of view, character, plot, theme, setting and focalization are examined. They sometimes relate to and affect each other, even though they have their own separate role. By understanding each of these elements individually and collectively, we can find coherent, purposeful meaning and even gender ideologies embedded in literature (Nodelman, 1996: 49).

### **Linguistic Analysis**

There are two ways to approach language. The first one is verbal analysis, the formal links not only allow us to understand how a sentence functions, but also function across sentences to account for the ways they are put together in a meaningful, coherent and effective way. Word choices, sentences and structures must be considered when verbal language is analyzed. The second one is visual analysis. It is important because visual language can convey messages beyond verbal language in children's literature, as well as in textbooks. The conventions of color and point of view cooperating with verbal language will provide readers a better understanding of the meaning and purpose of the messages.

### **Ideological Analysis**

Ideologies are sets of ideas or beliefs existing within society reflecting the social needs and objectives of an individual, group, class or culture. Ideologies also mirror condition of each society since they are accepted as common beliefs. To analyze gender ideologies, the visual and verbal have to be examined to see how gender ideologies are constructed.

Language is believed to control as well as reflect social ideologies and social condition. Therefore this study aims to critically apply discourse analysis in order to detect gender ideologies through the use of verbal and visual language.

## 1.5 Scope of Study

### 1.5.1 Framework

The study uses qualitative analysis based on a discourse study framework to examine both visual and verbal elements in the stories selected from content part of *Wannakadee Lamnam* textbooks.

### 1.5.2 Methodology

*Wannakadee Lamanm* is part of *Pasa Peuchivit* which is a set of fundamental textbooks and practice books used in the elementary school level. It is used by students from grades two, three, five and six. It consists of both required and optional lessons. The required lessons aim to develop students' potential and skills in language and literature. The optional lessons provide students extra knowledge in language and literature, aiming to help students develop critical thinking skills. *Wannakadee Lamnam* is composed of two parts: the content part and the activity part.

- **The content part** consists of stories with educational benefits. It includes characters and events which lead to the classic Thai literature content. Students are expected to enjoy and learn through studying the literature at the same time.
- **The activity part** consists of the following:
  1. Background knowledge of the literature regarding the objectives, the author, the patterns and methods, as well as the aesthetic value of literature.
  2. *Chaunkid Chuan Kui*: the practical understanding of literature.
  3. *Chaunarn Chuankid and Arnserm Permkuaarmru*: additional in-depth knowledge for better understanding of literature.
  4. Suggested activities aimed at helping students practice the skills of thinking, listening, speaking, observing, writing and reading to enhance the appreciation of literature.



From the introduction, the objective of *Wannakadee Lamnam* is that the learners gain the language skills from the beauty of the language including the analytical and synthetical skills which can be developed through self-study. In addition, the content of this book provides knowledge about Thainess, cultural beliefs and the teaching on how to be a good citizen both in Thai society and in the world. It is designed to provide basic knowledge from which students can use and apply to other areas of study.

In this study, twelve chapters with twelve stories will be chosen from all four books in Pratom two, three, five and six (see Appendix). There is no book for pratom four since it had not been released yet during the time of this study. The study includes 1. Number of characters 2. Character traits and mannerisms 3. Activities, interests and allocation of space 4. Social relationships and interaction with other characters 5. Learning experience.

### **1.5.3 Definitions**

Discourse is a continuous stretch of language including more than one sentence such as conversations, narratives, arguments, speeches. Discourse analysis is the social and linguistic explanation of norm governing such productions, and may include focus upon the social and political determinants of the form discourse takes; for example, the hidden presuppositions that the persons addressed are of a certain class or gender.

Gender Ideologies refer to ideologies or an organized collection of ideas, beliefs, values or thoughts concerning gender which are normally accepted in society as the appropriate characteristics or the “facts” about gender.

Gender Bias is a social phenomenon in which men and women are treated differently, or a prejudice in action or treatment against a person, on the basis of their being men or women. For example, the unequal treatment in employment opportunity such as, promotion, pay, benefits and privileges, and expectations can be due to the employers’ attitudes based on the gender of an employee.

Socialization refers to the process by which people, especially children, are made to behave in a way that is acceptable in their society.

### 1.6 Educational Advantages

It is hoped that the results of the study will create an understanding of how gender ideologies and gender bias can be inscribed in a discourse as well as raise an awareness of the influences of verbal and visual languages on the socialization of children. Furthermore, the findings can broaden the perspectives of interdisciplinary knowledge of discourse analysis, education, and gender issues in Thailand.



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