

The Process of Characterization and the Production of Gender Stereotypes in Children's Fiction: a Critical Discourse Analysis of Nine Short Stories

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Abstract

Within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the exploration of the description of the social actors is very important since the words used to make them known to the reader, contribute to their categorization as passive or active, beautiful or ugly, strong or fragile, important or insignificant. This study is devoted to the exploration of the part that language takes in the representation of gender in children's fiction. My objective is to demonstrate the ideological signification of certain representational choices.

Keywords: *children's fiction, critical discourse analysis; gender; representation; stereotyping*

Introduction

The discourse of fiction is considered as a powerful vehicle for perpetuating gender stereotypes as it takes a major part in the socialization of individuals in general and children in particular.

Researchers that concern themselves with investigating the production of stereotypes in children's fiction are wondering why writers and publishers still produce books that stereotype females or leave them out of stories altogether. Although, in contemporary societies females are no longer limited by their gender or stuck to traditional roles due to a lack of options, recent studies on books written for children, have continued to show stereotypes that demean female characters (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Diekmann & Murnen, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2006). Although there is slight improvement in the representation of female characters, in terms of presence and characterization, it cannot be assumed that this problem is completely resolved. Gender discrimination in children's books is still worth fighting. It is almost impossible for young children, especially in early childhood, not to internalize stereotypes related to gender roles in these books.

It is worth noting that the study of gender stereotypes, in various forms of children's literature, is not a new research problem. The topic was studied extensively in the 1970s and 1980s and less so in

the 1990s. It is important, however, to continue to examine gender issues in children's books. Many of the investigations of gender stereotypes in children's literature are based on the gender schema theory framework which originated with Bem in the 1970s. This theory states that "every society prescribes roles to men and women based on their sex, and adults, whether consciously or unconsciously, anticipate this allocation in the socialization of their children"(Bem, 1981, p. 354). Several studies have also approached the notion of gender construction in children's fiction from a poststructuralist approach. Hubler (2000) examined a selection of children's texts and used this approach to demonstrate the subtle ways in which fiction allows readers to identify social structures. Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996: 69) focused on the role of language in children's literature and insisted particularly on the role of 'collocation' to maintain and legitimize certain assumptions. Levorato (2003) in her study of the role of language in the fairy tale tradition, attempted to reveal reciprocal relationship tying any text to the social reality that produces it. Sunderland (2011) conducted a linguistic analysis of certain texts for children to investigate gender representation.

These researchers share the common idea that the frequent use of certain lexical and grammatical structures may contribute to the maintenance of certain identity chains and eventually, these linguistic habits will contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of negative gender stereotypes. A proper understanding of the representation of gender in children's fiction requires a better understanding of the relationship between gender and language. The investigation of the linguistic choices has constituted the core of most of the studies influenced by the body of theory provided by critical discourse studies. Researchers started by problematizing the use of certain linguistic features which have previously been taken for granted.

The Production of Gender Stereotypes in Children's Fiction

In spite of the various political and cultural measures to mainstream gender at all levels and promote gender equality and freedom, much of the traditional practices based on binary thinking still prevail. The difficulties that the human organizations and academics encounter are much more massive in under-developed countries.

According to Best (2003), "Gender stereotypes refer to the psychological traits and behaviours that are believed to occur with differential frequency in the two gender groups."(p.11). Stereotypes are often used as reference to traditional sex roles (e.g., women are teachers, men are engineers) and may be used as models for teaching children.

Categorizing females and males is said to be based on cultural and ideological assumptions. Many of people's stereotypical assumptions reflect cognitive beliefs about differences between women and men. These beliefs are culturally and socially shared and reflected in discourse. Best (2003) believes that stereotypes are not necessarily pernicious and may contain some elements of truth. They help predict others' behaviours, but they also fail to recognize individual differences and overlap between groups. Best illustrates with an example by saying that if one considers men to be more aggressive than women, this ignores individual differences and variation in aggression found in both gender groups. Some women are more aggressive than some men. "Stereotypes make no allowance for variability and, when believed uncritically, they justify treating all men as more aggressive than all women". (Best, 2003, p.11).

Gender stereotypes are (re)produced in a wide range of practices of representation, including scholarship, literature, television situation comedy, newspaper cartoons, animated cartoons and so many other practices. The investigation of gender stereotypes in children's fiction have resulted into astonishing findings. Many studies have shown the idealized depictions of the female characters. They are generally associated with idealized qualities of beauty, innocence, humbleness, caring, love. According to Welter (1978) "Purity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine. Without it she was, in fact no woman at all, but a member of some lower order." (p.315). As a response to existing beliefs and ideas about gender, Welters (1978) argues that "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (p. 313). These representations reflect women in a patriarchal society where they are reduced to house wives functioning only within private spaces and not allowed to engage in public life, whereas men's activities are depicted as restricted to outdoor activities such as fighting, hunting, trading, or ruling the country. Women are presented as passive characters, as victims who are unable to resist the actions or decisions of others, very submissive as they accept their destiny. Stories such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White* give the impression that nothing could happen unless a man intervenes. The half-dead heroine needs a man's kiss to awaken.

According to Netto (2000), men are active agents of the gaze and women are passive objects of the gaze. Furthermore, dolls are 'mindless', consequently women can be easily subjected to the male desire. The most known example is *Snow White* who is constantly

considered as an object. When she first meets the seven dwarfs, she is asleep and therefore she becomes vulnerable to their gaze. When Snow White and Sleeping Beauty are supposedly dead, the glass coffin/bier highlights their beauty, and again they become objects which are put on aesthetic display, as if their main occupations are being beautiful and inert, waiting for the 'active observing subject' to undo the spell. It is not the first time when the woman's body, by being constituted as an object for the male gaze, is sexualized and fetishized. Women are generally depicted to lead a dull, meaningless and static existence before meeting their prince. 'Helpless' seems to be the attribute of most fairy tale heroines, as they are always dependent on men and in need of their protection. However, although the female protagonists follow the rules of the patriarchal order, they sometimes show emancipatory signs of rebellion and independence: when treated unfairly by their antagonists or accused of things they have not done. The heroines try to find a solution to their problems or ask for help: Cinderella addresses the magic hazel-tree to seek help.

Readers would notice such patterns, in the majority of fairy tales. Love at first sight, the charming prince, the white horse and so on, are traditional messages transmitted by children's literature. Children are misled into believing that a happy marriage is the reward of any good person. Marriage is presented as the rightful gift offered to women for having endured different hardships, pressures and constraints. This state would be the perfect chance for women to evade social isolation, as they have always been restricted to private spaces. The heroines seldom transcend the boundaries of the private sphere, and when they do, they have a specific purpose: the encounter with their future husband. Women are not allowed to show any other higher ambitions, they are rarely offered the chance to rule a community or fight with dragons. Most fairy tales suggest that protagonists go on a quest, or pursue an objective. For women this quest does not require leaving home, but the fulfilment of their wish/dream. Marriage is defined as a dream particularly feminine, in contrast with the masculine yearning for adventure. These messages about marriage restrain female characters from pursuing ambitious plans.

Although the female characters outnumber the male ones, most of them are of little importance and their function is not vital for the plot. While the mothers are absent or dead, the female protagonists are orphans as in the case of such heroines as Snow White, Cinderella and sleeping Beauty. The mother figure is the least developed character in fairy tales, and it reflects the woman's position in the patriarchal society, symbolizing her complete dependence on the husband; the motherly concern for the daughter merely represents an effort to sustain

tradition and patriarchal order. The female character that proves to be as important as the heroine is the stepmother, usually depicted as the villain of the fairy tale, who acts in a cruel manner towards the stepdaughter and who is generally jealous of her beauty and prospects.

Many researchers believe that gender bias is still prevalent in contemporary children's and young literature and "continues to fuel hot debates" (Sunderland, 2006, p.77). Gender stereotyping still persists because some of the social practices tend to reproduce them. For instance, a great number of teachers tend to employ picture books, chapter books, and fairy tales because they think these teaching materials can help students get more familiar with the past narratives and experiences on the one hand and on the other hand this familiarity with the genre would help them create their own narratives. According to Francis (2000), children's literature needs to acknowledge in some way social change and challenges. Fox (1993) believes that the teachers should have a sense of responsibility. They need "to be sensitive to their teaching materials or they will easily fall into a passive acceptance of everything literature presents to us" (Fox, 1993, p. 86). They should: Rethink what and how they should teach in the 21st c classroom, promote critical thinking and literacy and empower children with a further understanding of gender notions in their lives. The focus, in this study, is on the connection between the process of characterization and the reproduction of gender stereotypes. The way the writer positions and represents the social actors and their actions, in their narratives, may reflect existing attitudes and assumptions about gender and contribute to the (re) production of gender stereotypes.

The Process of Characterization/Positioning

The list of typical fairytale characters is well known: Kings, Queens, Princesses, Princes, Dragons, Witches, Fairies, Dwarfs, Giants, Beasts and so on. The language used in fairy tales, according to Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996), serves to bridge the natural and the magical fairy tales through the use of the similes "which serve to link the magical world to the observable, everyday world" (p.163). In fantasy fiction, the writers tend to incorporate magical elements to impress and entertain and sometimes to shock the reader.

Within CDA, the study of the positioning or the representation of the female and male characters in the various narratives addressed to children is very crucial in tracking gender stereotypes. The process of characterization can be closely tied up with the processes of production and interpretation of discourse. According to Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) characterization includes building both social actors and social actions. Sunderland (2011) explains that characterization can refer either to how a reader makes sense of characters in a novel, or how a

writer 'construes' them. In this sense, characterization can be explored in relation to the notions of transitivity, and mood, lexicalization and so on. For Sunderland what is worth considering is the fact that "when it comes to positioning, or representing point of view and opinion, authors do not generally construe the speech/thought of male characters and, female characters in the same way." (p.70).

Many questions arise while dealing with characterization: How does the author depict female and male characters? Which verbs, adjective and clauses are associated with male and female characters? Which psychological and social needs are associated with which characters? Which settings are the characters related to?

This study seeks to investigate, from a socio-semiotic approach, the portrayal of the characters in nine stories addressed to children. we will rely on the textual features that provide information, to see how the characters are built. We will also analyse the short stories from a socio-cognitive to explore how the gender representations in the texts affect the social cognition. A range of theories and a set of tools will be used to conduct both content and linguistic analysis.

Analysis of the Representation of the Social Actors

Our aim is to evaluate the writer's insertion of the variable of gender within his network of linguistic choices, and to investigate whether such a process has led to the creation of any gender asymmetries. The main purpose is to shed light on those instances where language can be used in different ways to ensure a better configuration of gender in the discourse for children.

The socio-semiotic investigation of the representation of the female and male characters will be achieved through the study of the lexical and grammatical choices in relation to the social context. The concepts of mood and transitivity will be employed to explore the ways the characters reflect their experiences of the world and interact with one another through, verbal processes, formality degree, pronouns and clausal mood.

Texts Selection

The book¹, from which the nine stories have been taken, was written by the Algerian writer of short stories, Wahid Sekkoui. It was published in 2006. In the preface, the writer informs his audience that the stories are both realistic and fanciful. All the stories are accompanied by colourful illustrations designed by Bechkit Karim.

The nine texts appear in the following order:

¹ - وحيّد سكوي، (2006)، قصص عجائب وعبر، الجزائر، دار المعرفة

1. The Blue Mountain (P10)
2. The Lost Family (P50)
3. The Price of Silence (86)
4. Tears and Joy (P148)
5. The Challenge (P186)
6. The Deadly Lie (P210)
7. The Unfaithful Woman (P236)
8. The Curse of Destiny (258)
9. The Price of Loyalty (P284)

The Male Social Actor

Surprisingly, in eight stories, the protagonist is always a male character. According to Halawa (2003) "It is a mistake to make the story revolve around one hero."¹ (p.46). The reason is that this may create asymmetries since the opposite gender is certainly going to be backgrounded. The choice of the hero is also a form of representation of the social actor, in terms of patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

The Son

In the 'The Blue Mountain', the name of the protagonist is mentioned for 38 times. The writer uses many forms of address to refer to Zachary when the proper name is not mentioned (the young man (19) the young (29) and unique son (2), the son (10)) So, this male character is mentioned for 98 times. The only time when the writer describes Zachary explicitly is when he uses the adjective 'well educated'. However the other adjectives are implied by a series of actions connected to him. The other adjectives that can be identified through the analysis of lexical characterization, might be curious, brave, courageous, responsible, loving and smart. The items that are frequently associated with this character are: defeated (5), run (6), returned (4), came (4), courage (6), run (7), trick (4), was seduced (5) liked (8), adventure (7).

In 'The Challenge', the same pattern can be identified. Just like Zachary, Samir lives with his mother and has a great sense of adventure. He has to face a great challenge in order to win the treasure. In 'The Lost Family' the writer represents a family with five sons. The way, he crafts his story is characterized by the depiction of the courage and the bravery of three of them ; Hasan's name is mentioned for 13 times, Mehieddine, 8 times and Mahmoud's name is mentioned for 7 times. The three 'heroes' are linguistically portrayed very positively through literal and implied use of adjectives and verbs such as: courageous (4) run away(5), left (5), defeated (5), came back (4) , gold and silver (6) , adventure (5)

¹ (MOT)

In 'The Price of Silence' the identity of the protagonist is difficult to discern. It could be either the father or the son. Adlan, the son is depicted as brave and mature. The narrator describes him very positively: "Though he is very young, he is very mature. He is as audacious as the lion, as fast as the tiger and as attentive as the falcon. (P94). The father, after being arrested by the governor's soldiers, asks his son Adlan to take care of his mother. The boy, on the other hand, insists to be imprisoned instead of his father. In terms of lexical representation, we can notice that the writer uses more adjectives with males than with females. The use of positive adjectives such as brave (4); soldier (7); loyal (6) keep

brilliant; (4) strong (5) courageous (4) to describe the male characters will lead the reader to associate maleness with strength, bravery and toughness.

The Father

This social actor is completely suppressed in 'The Blue Mountain'. However the patriarchal presence is achieved by the son Zachary who is, right from the beginning of the story, assigned the role of the protector « I am sure that one day I will make my mother happy and proud of me. She has suffered so much" (p12).

In 'The Lost Family', the father is emphasized in the first section of the story. He is described as 'proud and noble'. He is the decision maker; he even makes the most important decision when he asks his sons to leave the village, each one on his own. His name is mentioned for nine times, and for two times, he is referred to as the 'owner of the house', a very common idiom in Algeria to refer to the father or the husband. In 'Tears and Joy' the father is depicted as tough, aggressive and dominant but at the same time he is portrayed as a hard working person and a brilliant hunter. In the 'Price of Silence', the writer uses the adjective 'poor' to describe the father, "poor father" (P100), however, this adjective does not create the same atmosphere of weakness as is the case, when it is used with female characters. It is used here to call for the reader's empathy toward the character that has to go through a hard time.

Relationship Father-Children

The syndrome of the invisible father clearly characterizes the writer's story line. The father is absent in most of the stories. The most plausible reason that stands behind the writer's choice is the need to make the stories sound more adventurous by making them revolve around a young character, the son. The analysis of the texts demonstrates that the relationship father-daughter is not represented in the stories selected. The only exceptions are presented in two stories. In 'The Lost Family',

the father-daughter interaction is represented in two scenes only: when he asks her to help him trap the gangsters (P62), and when the king offers his daughter's hand for marriage. In 'Tears and Joy' the father is portrayed as rough, rude, and distant. All what he does is ordering his children to do this or that. "He calls his children with a rough and sharp voice" (p149)

As regard father- son relationship, there is only one occurrence. In 'The Price of Silence' the writer evokes a kind of intimate relationship between father and son but only to prepare the reader for the absence of the former. "The son looked at his father with hope and pain; he wished he could take him away" (P94). 'The curse of Destiny', is the only story in which the writer shows a kind of affection among the members of the family.

The representation of the relationship father –children translates the writer's choice to make use of the social cognition as a mediator between discourse and society. In other words, the writer uses his knowledge about his society, in terms of relationships and interactions between fathers and their children, to produce the texts in a way that would even lead to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes in society. The readers are more likely to absorb much of these stereotypes, since they share much of the writer's knowledge, as they are members of the same community. The fact of not recognizing the important role fathers play in the development and welfare of their children, is a strong marker of the writer's unawareness of the part that children's fiction takes in the emotional and psychological development of children.

Relationship Brother-Sister

In the Blue Mountain this relationship is depicted very negatively. The following passage demonstrates the extent to which the writer's linguistic choices sustain existing gender stereotypes. The sister is expected to be obedient and powerless where as the brother is depicted as superior and dominant

"They (the brothers) accepted to refuge him in their village but provided that she (their sister) continues to serve them like usual', they all agreed and everybody seemed relieved' the girl was finally relieved." (P43).

In 'Tears and Joy', the sister replaces the mother. Instead of portraying her as more intelligent than her brother, since she is older than him, the girl is associated more with emotional description than with cognitive capacities.

No physical or emotional contact is shown between brother and sister. The only story where the sister is offered three opportunities to hug her

brother is in 'Tears and Joy', but this is because the sister plays the role of the mother.

The Female Social Actor

Surprisingly, 'Tears and Joy' is the only story which includes a female protagonist. The writer depicts the heroine and the other female characters in a very stereotypical way through the use of certain grammatical and lexical items. Indeed, the frequent use of the same lexical items such as 'cried', 'poor', 'upset, fortune teller', to describe her or speak about her, may well strengthen the identity chains such as the identity chain of the mother as being always poor, and superstitious, and the identity chain of the girl as being frail, and emotional. There is no doubt that most of the items cited in the table above, explicitly or implicitly, denote negative assumptions about women and girls. The young readers being exposed to these texts do not see any association between being female and being brave. This would certainly affect negatively the young girls' development.

The Girl

The writer chooses to perpetuate the image of a young girl. In 'The Blue Mountain' this character does not show up until the middle section of the story, on page 31. The writer describes her indirectly by transmitting certain messages through the narrator who starts by telling the reader about male character's admiration for her beauty. So right from the beginning, the female character is associated with two traditionally and frequently used adjectives: 'young' and 'beautiful', which are considered by feminists as stereotypical when put in certain clauses. The reader is told that the girl's voice is so sweet and her face is so good-looking. The other adjectives implied are prudish. "A cloud of prude appeared on her face" (P33). What is also worth mentioning is the fact that in most of the stories the girl is nameless. As it has been mentioned so far, the fact of not naming the characters is considered as a type of suppression or backgrounding. In 'The Lost Family', the female character 'Nossaiba' is almost suppressed. Though she is given a name, it is mentioned only for two times. In 'Tears and Joy' this character is depicted in a very negative way. Though Maria is polite and obedient, her father is very tough with her. In the story she is given the leading role but a very traditional one indeed. When she leaves home with her little brother, she plays the role of the protective mother. Surprisingly the female protagonist is backgrounded in the middle section of the story when the prince appears on the scene as the rescuer.

The Mother

From time to time, the writer allows this character some space but she is never referred to as a specific social actor and she is never referred to

individually. She is never represented in terms of physical characteristics. She is always connected to the main characters such as the son or the husband. When the father is dead, it is the mother who is exclusively in charge of the family. Except in "The Lost Family" and "The Unfaithful Woman", this character is never given a proper name or an autonomous life; she is always represented in terms of her kinship relation to the other characters present in the stories. Surprisingly the writer uses 'his mother' for 13 times, even in the clauses where the mother is the doer of the action. "His mother cried and sobbed so painfully..." (p16). According to Levorato (2003), this type of categorization where a character can be categorized through relational identity only, is to show that the character is socially less significant and when another character is categorized through functionalization, it is to show what the character is capable of doing. In most of the stories analysed, the mother appears only at the beginning of the story, and then she is completely backgrounded.

The lexical environment, to which this character is connected, supports traditional views of female figures. In 'The Blue Mountain' most of the words used are connected to mental processes, where verbs such as 'felt' 'sent', 'hugged' are used. The two adjectives used explicitly to describe the mother are 'poor' and 'affectionate'. The frequent use of such adjectives maintains certain ideologies concerning female characters. In 'The Lost Family', the mother is associated mainly with words that belong to home life and stereotypical gender roles such as, 'prepared', 'meal', 'food', 'baked', 'home', but also 'promised', 'obedient' and 'forbidden', perpetuating sexist stereotypes. In 'The Blue Mountain' the mother stays at home and it is her son who leaves home, in search of adventure and wealth. In fact, the mother is backgrounded whenever her son is away.

The mother is never represented in terms of physical characteristics which identify her as unique. The reader is never told anything about her physical aspect, or about her age or her personality. In 'The Blue Mountain' the focus is rather on the emotional side and the words used in this case are numerous: 'felt' 'was astonished', 'got confused', 'begged' 'cried' 'screamed'. The following extract from 'The Blue Mountain' illustrates the writer's intention to depict this character in the most fragile image possible 'She had never been happier in her life than she was when Zachary and his little family came back home "She almost fainted with happiness" (p 35). In 'The Price of Silence', in addition to the adjectives 'poor, kind and obedient', the two other stereotypical attributes mentioned explicitly and implicitly are 'patient' and 'superstitious'. The latter can be identified through the frequent connection of the mother to the fortune teller (6times). "The

mother knew that her son's bravery made everyone in the village envious. She decided to see a fortune teller to protect him from the evil eye." (P88)

Relationship Mother-Son

The relationship mother-son is the most exposed relationship. Concerning this representation, the writer chooses to respond to stereotypical assumptions. When the father is deceased or absent, the son is expected to take the place of his father. The reader will probably internalize the idea that such a relationship is a form of domination when the son is assigned the task to look after his mother. Such a relationship is emphasized in 'The Blue Mountain' in which Zachary's life is reduced, for so many years, to keeping his mother company. In spite of zachary's young age, the writer gives him the chance to leave home. Zachary is motivated by the need to help his mother. "I will make my mother happy... she has always lived in poverty..." (P12).

For the description of physical contact 'hugging' and 'kissing' are the only items that represents family relationship at the physical aspect. The mothers are the only characters who are associated with affectionate types of interactions such as hugging and kissing. In 'The Blue Mountain', as part of portraying Zachary's mother as affectionate, tender and caring, several instances of kissing and hugging are provided.

The Mother- stepdaughter Relationship

This relationship is one of the most salient relationships in terms of gender stereotypes. The writer's representation of the interactions between the mothers and their daughters-in-law translates his pessimistic view about this relationship.

The mother- in- law, in all the stories, is depicted as mean, jealous and manipulative, where as the daughter-in law is always shown desperate and willing to get rid of her. In 'the Unfaithful', the daughter-in-law is depicted in the most horrible image. She even dares to insult her mother-in law. In 'Tears and Joy', the step mother is so mean that she manages to persuade her husband to expel his own mother. The perpetual representation of the relationship in this way will serve to convey false ideas that the mother and her daughter- in- law can never manage to live with each other in peace and harmony.

The Wife

The wife, in the nine texts, is depicted as dependent. She is generally nameless. The phrase 'his wife' is mentioned for 13 times in 'The Blue Mountain', in addition to other items, 'the wife', 'the poor wife', 'the kind wife' as an exclusive address form.

The wife is backgrounded when her husband, or son are away. That is to say that this character is considered only in relation to the other characters. In 'The Lost Family', the wife is mentioned whenever her husband asks her to prepare the meals. What is worth mentioning is the fact that the writer is never interested in the physical side of the wife. In 'The Lost Family' this character is given a name but unlike her husband, whose name is mentioned for several times, her name is mentioned only for one time. The writer allows her a limited space and refers to her as 'the wife'. And the only adjectives used to describe her are: kind and obedient. "The father, named El Badi El Saleh, was a noble man...He formed with his obedient and kind wife one of the most enviable and respectful families in the village" (p50). The same pattern is present in 'The Curse of Destiny' where the wife is described as kind and obedient. Just like the mother, the wife is also associated with superstition. In 'The Unfaithful Woman', the wife decides to see the fortune teller of the village to get rid of her mother in law. In 'The Deadly Lie', the wife decides to get rid of her brother -in law, with the help of the fortune- teller of the village.

The representation of the relationship husband-wife, shows that the writer seems faithful to one version of what his experience of the world has provided him with. There is indeed, a total submission, on his part, to the gender ideological system which shapes the wife as always kind, submissive, dependent and insignificant. Consideration of the system of transitivity demonstrates the writer's desire to involve her more emotionally than physically. In the 'Lost Family' the relationship between El Badie El Salih and his wife Zahra is represented in a very morose way. The only instances of verbal communication are when he gives her orders or instructions. There is a total absence of any physical contact between any husband and any wife in the stories. According to Hallawa (2003) "The marital relationship should be inculcated to children from early childhood. Children should learn to look at this relationship as a relationship based on stability and security instead of experiencing it as being conflictual and disastrous."¹ (p.199). So, the absence of physical affection, between the wife and her husband, may lead to the reinforcement of children's feelings of frustration and despair.

Conclusion

The analysis has demonstrated that the production of the gender asymmetries could be stimulated by the writer's linguistic choices. In fact, the decisions, that the writer makes when it comes to choosing the lexical items to represent the social actors and their actions or to

¹ (MOT)

allocate roles to them, contribute to the creation of both cohesion and coherence in the texts and lead the readers to construct mental representations, assumptions and identify connections accordingly. The relationship between the words and the world can be identified or interpreted by using the world knowledge besides the literal interpretation. In this process lexical cohesion contributes to the meaning potential.

The study has demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between the representation of the female characters as passive victims, and the male characters as strong doers, and the writer's linguistics choices.

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