

A Critical Discourse Study of a German Children's Book Series: Representation of Social Actors and Construction of Legitimation

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Abstract

Among practitioners of critical discourse studies (CDS), German storybooks for children are relatively unexplored in comparison with storybooks targeted at the Anglophone communities. In this study, I investigated a German children's book series called *Siggi Blitz*. Containing a total of 23 639 words, this series comprises twelve storybooks which were released between 2013 and 2014. Focus was given to the discursive representation of characters and the legitimation strategies used to convey ideologies. Specifically, I would like to explore how female and male characters are represented. To this end, two analytic frameworks from van Leeuwen (1996, 2007, 2008)—the Social Actor Theory and the discursive construction of legitimation—were employed. The findings indicate that gender stereotyping is pervasive in the storybooks. For instance, on the dimension of “categorization,” female characters tend to be represented by reference to their physical appearance (viz., “physical identification”) while male characters are regularly associated with their occupations (viz., “functionalization”). Analysis of the legitimation strategies used demonstrates that “rationalization” is the most frequent form of legitimation. “Rationalization” has two functions in the storybooks: (i) to justify acceptable and/or unacceptable behaviors; (ii) to mark the utility of common artifacts. Furthermore, it was found that “role model authority” is exclusively applied to male characters, echoing the findings regarding gender stereotyping in the earlier part of the study. Given the “socializing” nature of storybooks for children, the present study reveals that awareness in relation to the representation of gender has to be increased among story contributors.

Keywords: Children's storybooks, Gender stereotyping, Social Actor Theory, Construction of legitimation, Critical discourse studies

1. Introduction

Storybooks represent a genre which children commonly encounter. Owing to their prevalence, numerous scholars have conducted research on storybooks throughout the years. Some researchers (e.g., Dickinson et al., 2012; S é́eéal et al., 1996; Waxman et al., 2014) have looked into the pedagogic values of storybooks with respect to children's cognitive and linguistic development. Others (e.g., Crabb & Marciano, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2006; Stephens, 1992), however, have taken a critical lens and have examined the ideologies which storybooks embody. By nature, the present study will be one of the latter. Given the relatively large amount of published research concerning the Anglophone communities, I will select a speech community (namely Germany) which has not been so widely examined to be my study target.

One may wonder why it is important to study the ideologies embedded in storybooks. To answer this question, I would like to make use of the notion "socialization." As Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012, p. 162) defined, "socialization" refers to the "process of learning how to be human beings." This process starts once a person was born and continues until the end of this person's life. There is a distinction between "primary socialization" and "secondary socialization." While the former denotes a child's early stage of learning to become a member of the society through the family, the latter corresponds to the stage where the child moves away from the family and learns via schooling (p. 163). Although storybooks can be teaching materials in school, they constitute an essential part of a child's pre-school life (viz., "primary socialization") in many parts of the world as parental storybook reading is not an uncommon activity at home (Golombok, 1994, p. 30). As remarked by Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012, p. 164), social behavioral patterns are subject to a "firm cast" amid "primary socialization." Those patterns experienced by children during "primary socialization" have a substantial effect on the later phase of their life. The significance of storybooks in shaping children's behaviors and molding their thinking thus renders research on ideologies in storybooks worthwhile.

One of the two main focuses of this study is gender representation. The present research is intended to examine whether stereotypical gender roles are salient in a contemporary German children's book series. In fact, many prior researchers (e.g., Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Peterson & Lach, 1990; Poarch & Monk-Turner, 2001) have noted that gender stereotyping is ubiquitous in books for early learners. This can have a huge impact on children as what they read from the books would "socialize" them into certain gender-oriented behaviors. Butler (2011) described this process as "'girling' of the girl," for example. Early formation of gender roles in children's mind is an issue which should be taken seriously because a restrictive conception of gender may be formulated by the children and this can result in bias and prejudice.

Another focus of this study is the construction of legitimation. From a sociological perspective, legitimation (or legitimacy) represents a process by which specific ways of organizing a society come to be recognized as suitable and mostly embraced by those belonging to it (Johnson, 2000, p. 173). As Turner (2006, p. 332) elaborated, legitimation

gives “meanings” to people’s life by providing reasons for “social arrangements.” Within the realm of discourse analysis, van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) has developed a framework to analyze how ideologies are discursively legitimized. More details about the framework will be given in the next section. Since storybooks for children are bound to contain ideology-driven elements which stimulate the development of children’s character, I believe that studying how such elements are legitimized and delivered will broaden our existing knowledge of storybooks for children.

2. Theoretical Background

As the title of this paper suggests, the present research will follow the principle of critical discourse studies (CDS). CDS, which used to be called critical discourse analysis (CDA), is a research paradigm featured by an interest in the deconstruction of ideologies and power via methodical and transparent analysis of semiotic data including written texts, conversations and visual materials (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 4). As van Dijk (2011, p. 399) noted, CDS is a movement in academia against power abuse and control. Despite this common goal, CDS researchers do not have a prescribed approach or method. Fairclough (2010, p. 7) maintained that the method utilized for a specific study is dependent on the research topic in question.

As for the theoretical position behind the present research, I chose Althusser’s (1976) “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISAs) and the concept of “social constructionism.”

In a nutshell, ISAs are the various social institutions by which ideologies are generated, endorsed and/or condemned. When talking about ISAs, Althusser (1976, p. 17) excluded institutions which “function by violence” like the military, the police and the like. In other words, ISAs are reminiscent of what Nye (2004) called “soft power,” as opposed to “hard power.” Althusser (1976, p. 17) identified specific examples of ISAs (e.g., religion, school, family, culture and mass media). According to him, the most compelling effect of ISAs is to “hail” or “interpellate” people so that they behave in a certain way—viz., being the “subjects” of ideologies (pp. 44–51). By definition, storybooks are part of the cultural ISA since they are literary works. At the same time, they overlap with other domains such as family and school due to their widespread use.

Althusser’s (1976) notion of ISAs emphasizes the passivity of individuals. Nevertheless, people in society are simultaneously involved in producing or reproducing ideologies. This is actually what “social constructionism” is about. As Elder-Vass (2012, p. 4) put it, the underlying assumption of “social constructionism” is that how human beings jointly think and communicate about the world impinges on the way in which the world appears to be. Undeniably, discourse is a means of communicating about the world. Following this line of thought, it can thus be argued that the storybooks examined in this study are creating a “social reality” into which the readers are “socialized.”

Two of van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2007, 2008) frameworks will be used in the analysis of the present research. The first one is called the Social Actor Theory, which was developed to reveal how social actors are represented in discourse and the ideological effects of such representation. Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) argued that there are drawbacks of a purely

syntax-driven analysis on the grammatical “agent” and “patient.” For instance, the noun group “my punishment” essentially suggests that the social actor “I” is the party being punished but such interpretation would be unavailable if a researcher just focused on the syntactic location of the noun group in a sentence. Based on this observation, van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) put forward the Social Actor Theory, which specifies the various representational choices that social actors in discourse are subject to. Given the space limit of this paper, it is not possible to offer a comprehensive review of all these representational choices. Instead, I will only elaborate on “categorization” and “nomination.” These two representational choices will be the focus of the present study. Information about the reason why these two are selected will be given in the next section “Data and methodology” of this paper.

As van Leeuwen (2008, p. 40) asserted, social actors can be “nominated” on the basis of their “unique identity” or they can be “categorized” on the basis of their identities and functions which they and other people have in common. “Nomination” can be divided into “formalization” (the use of surnames like “Merkel”), “semi-formalization” (the use of given names and surnames like “Angela Merkel”) and “informalization” (the use of given names only like “Angela”). Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 41) separated the use of titles such as “Dr.” (i.e., “honorification”) from “formalization.” “Categorization” can be further classified into “functionalization” and “identification” (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 42–45). “Functionalization” means that social actors are represented in terms of their occupation (viz., what they “do”). “Identification” happens when social actors are represented on the basis of what they “are.” To be more specific, “identification” can be in the form of: (i) “classification” (social actors being identified by means of somewhat stable features such as age, gender, race and nationality which are not related to occupations; (ii) “relational identification” (social actors being identified by means of kinship, personal connection or work relations); (iii) “physical identification” (social actors being identified by means of physical characteristics).

Van Leeuwen (2009) applied the Social Actor Theory in a study of two British newspapers—*The Sun* and *The Times*. He found that in *The Times* (which is a conservative newspaper geared towards the middle class) ordinary people (not politicians, celebrities, etc.) tend to be “nominated” less frequently as compared to *The Sun* (which is a newspaper for the working class). By contrast, ordinary people are “categorized” more often (particularly being “functionalized”) by *The Times* than *The Sun* (pp. 286–289). The differences identified can be related to the ideological orientations of the newspapers.

The second framework from van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) is one that concerns legitimation. According to him, legitimation basically involves four components: (i) “authorization” (legitimation by appealing to the authority of custom, ritual, tradition, law or people with institutional authority like teachers and political leaders); (ii) “moral evaluation” (legitimation by appealing to the value systems through the use of evaluative adjectives, for instance); (iii) “rationalization” (legitimation by appealing to the purposes and uses of social actions and to the knowledge which has been created by society and is given cognitive weight); (iv) “mythopoesis” (legitimation constructed in the form of storytelling where legitimate behaviors are rewarded and non-legitimate behaviors are reprimanded). It should be noted

that “rationalization” can be either “instrumental” or “theoretical.” The former means the construction of legitimation by referring to the purposes, usage and results of specific social practices while the latter means that legitimation is grounded in some sort of truth—viz., “a natural order of things” (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 113–117).

A number of researchers (e.g., Kedves, 2016; Pinton, 2013; Reyes, 2011) have made use of van Leeuwen’s (2007, 2008) framework in their research. For instance, Kedves (2016) investigated how legitimation is constructed in discourse of “online crowdfunding” (i.e., raising funds for projects by getting in touch with prospective sponsors via the Internet and persuading them to make contributions). Kedves (2016) discovered that in “online crowdfunding” discourse for projects promoting human rights, “rationalization” and “moral evaluation” tend to be used more often than “authorization” and “mythopoesis.” While “rationalization” is regularly used to legitimize the effect of the projects, “moral evaluation” is employed to describe not only the project initiators, but also the potential supporters (pp. 55–56). Kedves (2016) argued that the findings can inform us of the social practice of “crowdfunding.”

3. Data and Methodology

In the present study, the data came from a children’s book series published in Germany. Since the storybooks were written in German, it is assumed that they are targeted at German-speaking children. The title of the book series is *Siggi Blitz* and the publisher is Karl Müller Verlag based in Langenfeld, a town in Germany. The book series consists of twelve storybooks (23 639 words in total) which are suitable for children above the age of three, as declared by the publisher. These storybooks were published between 2013 and 2014. No information about the author(s) is provided by the publisher. The twelve storybooks share the same protagonist called Siggi, a boy who is not yet old enough to go to kindergarten. He has two elder brothers called Hansi and Christoph. Other regular characters in the stories include Siggi’s parents and grandparents. In each story, there are usually few ad hoc characters (e.g., farmers, the police and construction workers) as well. Table 1 specifies the details of the twelve storybooks.

The first step to analyze the data was to divide each story into various scenes so that I could determine in a quantitative manner how often a specific character appears in the book series. For instance, in how many scenes does Siggi’s mother/father appear? In this study, a scene means a particular physical setting. In other words, a change in physical settings (e.g., from home to the supermarket) is regarded as a change in scenes. As Table 1 shows, there are 86 scenes in total. This means that each storybook contains around 7 scenes on average. During this first step of data analysis, I also paid special attention to how female and male characters are discursively represented in the stories.

Table 1. Details of the twelve *Siggi Blitz* storybooks

Title	Abbreviation	Number of words	Number of scenes identified	Number of characters
<i>Siggis Teddy muss ins Krankenhaus</i>	G1	2019	8	8
<i>Siggi auf dem Campingplatz</i>	G2	2014	10	7
<i>Siggi auf der Baustelle</i>	G3	1964	8	12
<i>Siggi hilft der Polizei</i>	G4	1939	6	7
<i>Siggi beim Arzt</i>	G5	2147	7	8
<i>Siggi verläuft sich</i>	G6	1970	7	6
<i>Siggi und die Feuerwehr</i>	G7	2019	9	8
<i>Siggi im Zoo</i>	G8	1908	6	8
<i>Siggi findet einen Schatz</i>	G9	2033	5	8
<i>Siggi hat Geburtstag</i>	G10	2070	6	11
<i>Siggi auf dem Bauernhof</i>	G11	1594	7	5
<i>Siggi und das große Rennen</i>	G12	1962	7	15
Total		23 639	86	

To offer a more in-depth analysis vis-à-vis the representation of the characters, I employed van Leeuwen's (1996, 2008) Social Actor Theory. As mentioned in the literature review of this paper, van Leeuwen's model contains numerous dimensions. It is rather unrealistic to examine all of them within a single study. I chose "nomination" and "categorization" to be my focus. The reason why I made this decision is that "nomination" and "categorization" are the two representational choices which concentrate on how social actors are named and described on the basis of occupations, gender and physical characteristics. Hence, they are better fits for the current study which aims to see if gender stereotyping exists in the storybooks.

Since the construction of legitimation is another research issue of the present study, I adopted one more framework proposed by van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) to further explore the data. Details of the four main forms of legitimation ("authorization," "moral evaluation," "rationalization" and "mythopoesis") laid down by van Leeuwen (2007, 2008) have been given earlier in this paper. These four forms of legitimation were the focus of the second part of my analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this section, I am going to discuss the representation of social actors in the twelve stories. After that, I will talk about how legitimation strategies are used to justify specific ideologies embedded in the stories.

As shown in Table 2, the characters (viz., social actors) appear in the stories with varying frequency. In the present study, I focus on the representation of Siggi's parents and grandparents, as well as the other grown-ups. In other words, Siggi's brothers and friends are excluded. The major aim of this part of the analysis is to investigate whether there are gender-related patterns with respect to the portrayal of familial and other social roles.

Table 2. Number of scenes in which the characters appear

Gender	Character	Number of scenes
Female	Siggi's mother	53
	Siggi's grandmother	15
	Twelve other grown-ups	17
Male	Siggi's father	26
	Siggi's grandfather	12
	Eighteen other grown-ups	35

Table 2 reveals that the two female characters within the family (i.e., Siggi's mother and grandmother) appear more frequently than their male counterparts. However, the reverse is identified outside the family. Not only are more male characters represented (18 men versus 12 women), but they also appear more often (35 scenes as opposed to 17 scenes). It can thus be inferred that in the fictitious world constructed and imparted by the author on children, females tend to prevail in the domestic domain while males play a more significant role in the non-domestic domain.

Now let me present some concrete evidence from the data. First of all, Siggi's father is not found at all in five of the twelve stories. In four other stories, his involvement in Siggi's life is rather marginal. For instance, in the story *Siggi und die Feuerwehr* [Siggi and the fire brigade], Siggi's father appears only in the first scene (during breakfast) and the last scene (after returning from the excursion in the city center with Siggi's brothers, which is not the plot of the book). By contrast, Siggi's mother is regularly included in the stories. She takes on the role of Siggi's chief caregiver (e.g., bringing Siggi to the clinic for vaccination as in *Siggi beim Arzt* [Siggi by the doctor], taking Siggi's teddy bear to the dressmaker for repairs as in *Siggis Teddy muss ins Krankenhaus* [Siggi's teddy has to go to hospital], etc.).

In the stories, both parents of Siggi have a job. While Siggi's father is a *Busfahrer* [bus driver], his mother is a *Krankenschwester* [nurse]. The fact that a prominent female character is presented as a nurse in children's books coincides with the finding of Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus and Young (2006), who labeled this phenomenon "occupational stereotyping." What particularly strikes me is that despite being depicted as a working parent, Siggi's mother still manages to participate intensively in his life.

One further pattern identified from the data which underpins stereotypical familial roles is the tendency of Siggi's mother to be the source of emotional support for Siggi. In three of the twelve stories (namely *Siggi auf dem Campingplatz* [Siggi on the campsite], *Siggi hat Geburtstag* [Siggi has his birthday] and *Siggis Teddy muss ins Krankenhaus* [Siggi's teddy has to go to hospital]), Siggi directly seeks attention from his mother (rather than his father) in the middle of the night. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

- (1) *Dann macht er die Tür zu Mamas und Papas Schlafzimmer auf. Siggi hört ein leises: „Chrrrr—Chrrrr“. Papa schnarcht mal wieder. „Mama! Mama!“, flüstert Siggi.* (G10, p. 5)

Then he opens the door to mama and papa's bedroom. Siggi hears a gentle „Chrrrr—Chrrrr“. Papa snores once again. Siggi whispers, "Mama! Mama!"

(2) „Mama”, flüstert er leise. „Ich kann nicht schlafen.” (G2, p.13)

He [Siggi] whispers quietly, “Mama, I cannot sleep.”

Conversely, Siggi’s father is portrayed as emotionally distant from Siggi. In two of the stories (*Siggi auf dem Campingplatz* [Siggi on the campsite] and *Siggi’s Teddy muss ins Krankenhaus* [Siggi’s teddy has to go to hospital]), Siggi’s father *hat geschimpft* [has scolded] the children. Also, he is the authoritative figure within the family, as the following examples demonstrate:

(3) *Ihm fällt ein, dass er seine elektrische Eisenbahn nicht mitnehmen darf. Und die Bauklötze auch nicht. „Das Auto ist voll bis unters Dach”, hat Papa geschimpft.* (G2, pp. 3–4)

It strikes him [Siggi] that he is not allowed to bring his railway. And the building blocks also not allowed. Papa has blustered, “The car is full to the roof.”

(4) *Papa sagt nämlich, dass die Blitzkiste am besten in der Garage steht. Neben dem Auto. „Och nee”, sagt Siggi. „Darf ich sie nicht mit ins Zimmer nehmen?” Papa will schon antworten: „Das geht auf keinen Fall.”* (G10, p.29)

Then papa says that the racing toy car is best to be in the garage. Near the car. Siggi says, “Oh nooo. Am I not allowed to take it to the room?” Papa already wants to respond, “That is no way.”

Examples 3 and 4 show that Siggi’s father rejects Siggi’s requests. His power over Siggi stems from his role as a father. The power of a father is unquestionable in a patriarchal society, although there is no evidence suggesting that the society in which Siggi lives is one of patriarchy. Of course, Siggi’s mother, being a parent, would have legitimate power over her child. Nevertheless, she does not exercise such power as visibly as Siggi’s father does. Instead, she is always portrayed as a caring mother. The behavioral differences between Siggi’s mother and father are reminiscent of the dichotomy proposed by Tannen (1996)—while men are inclined towards the display of power in daily interactions, women tend to emphasize solidarity.

The other two family members—Siggi’s grandmother and grandfather—also replicate the stereotypical images of men and women within the family. There are two stories in which one of the two characters is the major companion of Siggi. For Siggi’s grandmother, the story is *Siggi findet einen Schatz* [Siggi finds a treasure]; for Siggi’s grandfather, the story is *Siggi auf dem Bauernhof* [Siggi on the farm]. In these two stories, the grandparents engage in an activity with Siggi. While Siggi bakes cake and goes to the grocery store with his grandmother (viz., an activity geared towards the domestic domain), he and his grandfather help the farmer whose seed drill is out of order (viz., an activity beyond the sphere of home).

Apart from the characters within Siggi’s family, the portrayal of other characters exhibits gender-related patterns as well. I made use of the sub-system “nomination and categorization” of van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2008) Social Actor Theory to analyze the representation of these characters and the findings are reported in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Instances of “nomination” of characters in the stories

Type	Female		Male	
	Number of instances	Examples	Number of instances	Examples
Formalization	5	<i>Frau Siegfried</i> [Ms. Siegfried], <i>Frau Honrath</i> , <i>Frau Dieter</i> , <i>Frau Ackermann</i> , <i>Frau Beck</i>	2	<i>Bauer Tölkes</i> [Farmer ¹ Tölkes], <i>Doktor Riedel</i> [Doctor Riedel]
Semi-formalization	0		0	
Informalization	1	<i>Malina</i>	1	<i>Thomas</i>
Honorification	0		1	<i>Doktor Riedel</i> [Doctor Riedel]

Table 3 shows that when the characters are named in the stories, “formalization” (viz., the use of surnames regardless of titles) is applied more often to female characters. At first sight, it seems that the use of “formalization” to refer to women in the stories is a sign of respect, especially when four of the five female characters who are “nominated formally” do not play a major role in the respective stories, rendering “nomination” technically unnecessary. However, what is worth noticing is that these female characters tend to have jobs which are either conventionally dominated by women (e.g., the governess, the caregiver and the cashier) or subsidiary by nature (e.g., the clinic assistant). On the other hand, the doctor that appears in the series is a man and is “nominated formally” with the title “*Doktor*” [Doctor].

“Occupational stereotyping” is prevalent in the stories as we can see from Table 4 how the characters are “functionalized.” Similar to the female characters discussed above, the male characters are referred to in terms of the occupations traditionally dominated by people of their own sex. These occupations tend to be physically demanding (e.g., the construction worker, the police and the firemen) or they correspond to the supervisory level (e.g., the zoo manager and the maintenance supervisor). What is more, males appear to enjoy a broader repertoire of occupations than their female counterparts (8 instances versus 4 instances of “functionalization”).

Table 4. Instances of “categorization” of characters in the stories

	Female		Male	
	Number of instances	Examples	Number of instances	Examples
Functionalization	4	<i>die Erzieherin</i> [the governess], <i>die Betreuerin</i> [the caregiver], <i>die Frau an der Kasse</i> [the woman at the cash register], <i>die Bäuerin</i> [the farmer (feminine form)]	8	<i>der Bauarbeiter</i> [the construction worker (masculine form)], <i>Bauer</i> [farmer (masculine form)], <i>Polizei</i> [police], <i>die Feuerwehrmänner</i> [the firemen], <i>der Zoodirektor</i> [the zoo manager (masculine form)], <i>der Tierpfleger</i> [the animal attendant (masculine form)]

¹ The word *Bauer* [Farmer] here is not a standard title.

				form)], <i>der Baggerfahrer</i> [the excavator's operator (masculine form)], <i>der Hausmeister</i> [the maintenance supervisor (masculine form)]
Identification (Classification)	3	<i>eine alte Dame</i> [an old lady], <i>eine junge Frau</i> [a young woman], <i>eine Frau</i> [a woman]	2	<i>ein älterer Herr</i> [an elderly gentleman], <i>ein Mann</i> [a man]
Identification (Relational identification)	0		0	
Identification (Physical identification)	3	<i>die nette blonde Frau</i> [the nice blond woman], <i>eine Frau mit ganz roten Haaren</i> [a woman with whole red hair], <i>eine Frau mit dicken Lockenwicklern in den Haaren</i> [a woman with thick rollers in the hair]	3	<i>der Mann mit dem Presslufthammer</i> [the man with the air hammer], <i>ein Mann mit einer dicken Brille</i> [a man with thick glasses], <i>einem Mann mit einem schwarzen Bart</i> [a man with a black beard]

Last but not least, a noticeable gender-related difference can be found on the basis of how the characters are “physically identified.” As Table 4 reveals, the three instances of “physical identification” for female characters concern their hair (viz., *die nette blonde Frau* [the nice **blond** woman], *eine Frau mit ganz roten Haaren* [a woman with whole **red hair**] and *eine Frau mit dicken Lockenwicklern in den Haaren* [a woman with **thick rollers in the hair**]). On the contrary, the male characters are “identified” by the tools which they use (i.e., *der Mann mit dem Presslufthammer* [the man with the **air hammer**] and *ein Mann mit einer dicken Brille* [a man with **thick glasses**]). One instance is related to the man's *schwarzen Bart* [black beard], which is a distinctive characteristic of men.

The analysis vis-à-vis the representation of female and male characters indicates that there is insufficient “gender sensitivity” in this German children's book series. Such a finding deviates slightly from what Ott (2015) discovered in her research on German mathematics textbooks. Although Ott (2015) noted that in her corpus, professional jobs are reserved for men, women and men are portrayed to share evenly household chores and there are signs of circumventing gender stereotyping such as men cooking and women purchasing apparatuses. The deviations between the findings of the present research and those of Ott (2015) can be attributed to the fact that textbooks for core academic subjects in Germany have to be endorsed by the education authority and one established criterion for endorsement since the mid-1990s is the avoidance of stereotypical gender representations (Ott, 2015, p. 54). This rule does not apply to storybooks, however.

Ideologies in relation to gender can be unfolded by examining the representation of male and female characters in the stories. Now I am going to proceed to a closely related social research issue, i.e., how ideologies are discursively legitimized. Again, I employed the framework stipulated by van Leeuwen (2007, 2008). Table 5 captures the overall results.

Table 5. Strategies of legitimation in the stories

Strategy	Number of instances
Authorization	49
Moral evaluation	8
Rationalization	94
Mythopoesis	3

Among the four major strategies, “rationalization” is the most prevalent one. A closer look at the instances of “rationalization” shows that “theoretical rationalization” (N=60) is more popular than “instrumental rationalization” (N=34). Examples of “theoretical rationalization” identified from the stories are:

- (5) *„Siggi!“, ruft Mama, „machst du bitte auf?“ „Wieso ich“, denkt Siggi. Sonst macht er die Tür ja auch nie auf, wenn es klingelt. Das darf er gar nicht. Nur weil heute dieser doofe Geburtstag ist.* (G10, p.21)

Mama shouts, “Siggi, open [the door] please.” Siggi thinks, “Why me?” He never opens the door when the bell rings. He is not allowed at all. Only **because** today is this stupid birthday.

- (6) *[...] sagt Mama: „Weißt du noch, warum du den Toaster nicht allein bedienen sollst?“ [...] „Weil ein Toaster mit Elektrizität funktioniert. Und die ist gefährlich. Zum Beispiel kann es brennen!“* (G7, p.4)

[...] mama says, “Do you know why you should not handle the toaster alone?” [...] **“Because** a toaster functions with electricity. And it is dangerous. For example it can burn!”

- (7) *„Wenn man etwas abgeben möchte, geht man ins Fundbüro“, erklärt Oma. „Da werden die Sachen aufgehoben und Menschen, die etwas verloren haben, können dort fragen und ihre Sachen abholen.“* (G9, p.20)

Grandma explains, “If a person wants to hand in something, the person goes to the lost-and-found office.” “The things are picked up there and people who have lost something can ask there and fetch their things.”

In Examples 5 and 6, the sub-strategy “explanation” is utilized (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 116). This legitimation strategy is mainly triggered by the conjunction *weil* [because]. In Example 5, *weil* is used to introduce the clause of reason which justifies why on that specific occasion Siggi is allowed to open the door, which is normally forbidden. In Example 6, the reason why Siggi cannot use the toaster alone is given. It should be noted that the sub-strategy “prediction” (*kann es brennen* [it can burn]) is evident in Example 6 as well. Example 7, on the other hand, involves the use of “definition.” The concept of *Fundbüro* [lost-and-found office] is defined.

The predominance of “theoretical rationalization” in the data can be explained by the fact that one chief purpose of the storybooks is to “socialize” children into certain behavioral patterns. As remarked by Horst and Houston-Price (2015), storybooks reproduce and may even educate children about the norms and values of a specific social group. These norms and

values essentially entail permissible and/or non-permissible behaviors. As seen from the above examples, the use of “theoretical rationalization” can be an explicit means of offering justifications for specific behaviors, thereby facilitating the process of “socialization.”

My discussion regarding the contribution of “theoretical rationalization” to the process of “socialization” is not intended to diminish the importance of “instrumental rationalization.” While “theoretical rationalization” is adopted in order to justify acceptable and/or unacceptable behaviors, “instrumental rationalization” is mainly used in the stories to legitimize the practical values of particular objects, as the examples below show:

- (8) „[...] *Wenn die Sonne scheint, trägt er ein Tuch auf dem Kopf, damit er keinen Sonnenbrand bekommt [...]*”, sagt sie. (G9, p. 29)

“[...] If the sun shines, **he wears a cloth over his head** so that **he gets no sunburn [...]**,” she says.

- (9) *Sie läuft zum Gerätehaus und holt die Bambusstangen, die sie bis vor kurzem für die Befestigung der Tomatenpflanzen benutzt haben.* (G3, p. 21)

She runs to the utility shed and gets **the bamboo sticks** which **they have used for the fixation of the tomato plants** until recently.

Example 8 is a form of what van Leeuwen (2008, p. 114) identified as “goal orientation,” i.e., the “purposeful action” (wearing a cloth over the head) and the “purpose” (getting no sunburn) share the same agent (he). By the same token, in Example 9, the “purposeful action” (using the bamboo sticks) and the “purpose” (fixation of the tomato plants) share the same agent (they). Both examples illustrate how “instrumental rationalization” is employed to mark the utility of objects.

Now let me return to Examples 6 and 7 above. As van Leeuwen (2008, p. 110) stated, the various strategies of legitimation sometimes combine with one another when ideological thoughts are delivered. Echoing this statement, Examples 6 and 7 contain instances of not just “rationalization,” but also “authorization.” In both cases, the source of justifications (viz., “theoretical rationalization”) is attributed to a senior family member (i.e., the mother and the grandmother respectively). Within van Leeuwen’s (2007, 2008) framework, this is regarded as “personal authority” because the authority is derived from people’s status in specific institutions such as family and school.

Given that storybooks for young children usually relate to the readers’ immediate living environment which is likely to be the family, occurrences of “personal authority” like the ones in Examples 6 and 7 are quite common. Apart from “personal authority,” cases of “role model authority” are frequently found in the stories (N=20). Examples are:

- (10) „*Wir bauen nicht, wir reparieren*”, *antwortet Siggie wie ein richtiger Bauarbeiter.* (G3, p. 16)

Siggie **responds like a real construction worker**, “We do not construct; we repair.”

(11) „*Ich bin die Feuerwehr*“, sagt Siggi. „*Ich helfe dir, wenn du nicht allein runterkommst.*“ (G7, p. 24)

“**I am the fire brigade**,” Siggi says. “I help you if you do not come down on your own.”

In both examples, Siggi is inspired by the characters (construction workers and firemen) whom he has met earlier in the stories. Example 10 happens during a “make-believe” play with his friends after his encounter with construction workers. He imitates what one of the construction workers has said to him. Example 11 is taken from a scene where Siggi would like to rescue a kitten trapped on top of a tree. Apparently, this is one of the tasks of the fire brigade that appears at the beginning of the story. I have to admit that it can be difficult to clearly differentiate between “role model authority” and “expert authority” because one can argue that construction workers and firefighters possess expertise in their profession. But here I classified Examples 10 and 11 as cases of “role model authority” as Siggi follows the behaviors of the construction workers and the firefighters. In other words, they are people whom Siggi looks up to. Based on this reason, “role model authority” would be more appropriate. Another remark which I want to make is that both role models in the examples are men. In fact, the twenty instances of “role model authority” in the stories concern male characters. This means that there is marked under-representation of women as role models.

“Moral evaluation” is a complex category. As Fairclough (2003, p. 99) commented on an earlier version of van Leeuwen’s model,² all the legitimation strategies can theoretically be said to incorporate “moral evaluation” because they all are drawn from certain value systems. In light of this, I have adhered to Fairclough’s (2003) advice and have included in the category “moral evaluation” only the cases which do not fall into the other three categories. Instances of “moral evaluation” in the stories tend to be located in the narrator’s descriptions of Siggi’s feelings, as the examples illustrate:

(12) *Siggi berührt das Pflaster vorsichtig mit dem Zeigefinger. Tut gar nicht weh. Er ist ein kleines bisschen stolz, dass er so tapfer war.* (G5, p. 24)

Siggi touches the plaster carefully with the index finger. It does not hurt at all. He is a little bit **proud** that he was so **brave**.

(13) *Endlich einmal weiß Siggi mehr als Hansi, der Tierexperte. Und hatte genau so viel Mut wie Christoph. Er ist mächtig stolz.* (G8, p. 26)

At last Siggi once **knows more** than Hansi, the animal expert. And he had as much **bravery** as Christoph. He is very **proud**.

While Example 12 concerns a scene in which Siggi is inoculated in the clinic, Example 13 arises from Siggi’s visit to the zoo where he is invited by the staff to feed the animals. In the two examples, “moral evaluation” is triggered by the adjective *stolz* [proud], which indicates Siggi’s feelings. Such feelings are linked to the positive evaluation of two qualities: (i) behaving bravely (as in Examples 12 and 13); (ii) being knowledgeable (as in Example 13).

² This earlier version can be found in the work of van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999).

The importance of these two qualities is legitimized via the use of the evaluative adjective *stolz*.

In comparison with “authorization” and “rationalization,” “moral evaluation” is identified less frequently in the stories. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that the children’s book series of the present research lacks moral lessons, which many people would expect to see from storybooks for children. It was found in the data that the moral lessons are manifested through “mythopoesis.” Among the twelve books analyzed, three of them (namely *Siggi und das große Rennen* [Siggi and the big race], *Siggi findet einen Schatz* [Siggi finds a treasure] and *Siggi verlauft sich* [Siggi gets lost]) are cases of “mythopoesis.” The first two are “moral tales” and the last one is a “cautionary tale.” In *Siggi und das große Rennen*, Siggi and his friend Paul are rewarded with an unexpected special prize at the end of a competition because they have helped another contestant. In *Siggi findet einen Schatz*, Siggi is praised for his honesty as he finds somebody’s wallet and has it returned. By contrast, *Siggi verlauft sich* is a “cautionary tale” in the sense that Siggi fails to comply with his mother’s instruction. He does not stay outside the supermarket, as instructed by his mother. Instead he wanders off somewhere and subsequently gets lost. Although he is found by his mother in the end, the story can still be regarded as a “cautionary tale” due to the unpleasant experiences which Siggi undergoes when he gets lost.

5. Conclusion

Among CDS researchers, German storybooks for children constitute a relatively unexplored area as compared to storybooks published for the English-speaking market. With this in mind, I examined a German children’s book series called *Siggi Blitz*. This series consists of twelve storybooks, totaling 23 639 words. Attention was paid to the discursive representation of characters in the stories and the legitimation strategies employed to convey ideologies. In particular, I would like to explore how the storybooks represent female and male characters. To perform the analysis, I capitalized on two of the frameworks suggested by van Leeuwen (1996, 2007, 2008)—the Social Actor Theory and the construction of legitimation.

My findings show that there is a notable unbalanced representation of women and men in the storybooks, which reinforces gender stereotyping. Childcare and other domestic matters continue to be the terrain of women while men tend to be identified with their jobs. Even when women are employed, they are seen in jobs customarily dominated by women (e.g., nurses and cashiers). In terms of their physical appearance (viz., “physical identification”), women are depicted via reference to their hair while men are more often associated with the tools they use. The conservative gender roles were further uncovered during the analysis of the legitimation strategies used in the stories. It was found that “role model authority” is exclusively applied to male characters like construction workers and firemen.

The analysis of legitimation also indicates that “rationalization” is a very common strategy. This may not be a surprising finding, as Fairclough (2003, p. 99) once said that “rationalization” is the most obvious form of legitimation. However, in this study, I found that “theoretical rationalization” tends to be used to justify appropriate and/or inappropriate behaviors whereas “instrumental rationalization” is employed to legitimize the pragmatic values of objects. As far as I know, this pattern has not been documented in the relevant

literature. Furthermore, it was discovered that “moral evaluation” is regularly embedded in the narrator’s account of the protagonist’s emotions. Moral lessons are realized in the form of “moral tales” or “cautionary tales.”

Since Germany is one of the most developed countries in the world, it is natural to expect that gender equality is what the German society would strive for. It has been reported that in the past decades initiatives to promote the status of women in Germany (especially in the area of work) have been put in place (Botsch, 2015). Nevertheless, the present research has demonstrated that gender stereotyping is still omnipresent in reading materials for German children. Given the progress vis-à-vis gender equality in Germany, I do sincerely believe that the storybooks should reflect more accurately the social reality because they can be an important medium of “socialization” for young learners. Though only one series has been examined and caution has to be exercised in order to avoid over-generalization, this study can definitely serve as a useful starting point to related future scholarly works.

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