

# The Representation of Animals in Ethiopian Child Story Books and Its Implications for Gender Stereotyping

Alebachew Mohammed Legas (Med)

Lecturer at Department of psychology, Debre Tabor university, Ethiopia

## Abstract

Child story books can and do play an important role in understanding Diversity and gender parity by reading of child, teachers, parents, television and or radio journalist. which in ether way child story books are influential in home or at school, but it is given less or no attention in our country context. Thus, the general objective of this study is to assess the representation of Animals and their sex in Ethiopian child story books. To conduct a content analysis 30 teacher in 6 preschools rated the story books they mostly used to read or refer for story telling for children. Through this method the top rated 12 books were selected for analysis which contain a total of 97 stories. wild animals are largely presented 109(67.28%) followed by Domestic animal 44(27.16). Aquatic animals are less represented 1(0.6%) of the story. The finding for gender responsiveness indicates 90 (73.78%) of people 101(62.34%) of animals are presented as male in the story. Lion and Hayna are the most frequently presented animal only as male and Monkey and Bird as only female. Finally, the finding indicates 65(67%) and 32(33%) of the story are male and female protagonist respectively. From the above finding it is possible to conclude the story books are found to be less gender responsive since in many way males' depiction is predominant as animals and humans.

**Keywords:** Child story book, gender responsive, diversity, semiotics

## 1.1 Introduction

Since the beginning of time, adults have entertained children with stories and fables. From these folktales developed an elaborate tapestry of children's literature (Kristin Masters, 2012) Children in every culture learn to adopt certain roles and behaviors as part of the socialization process. Many of these behavioral roles are based on identification with a sex. The development of gender role identity is important to children's self-perception, and it influences the way children are treated by adults and peers, affecting the expectations that others have for their behavior (Carole M. Kortenhaus and Jack Demarest 1993)

Ethiopian children's literature, as part of world children's literature, originated from the tradition of telling stories to children. Elder people have been narrating tales around the fire place in the house and under three or at any place where it is convenient. But the publications of children's books in Amharic has started in the beginning of the 20th century tough the format and contents were not properly designed to fit the psychological and intellectual capacity of the children (Simret Wondirad, 2009 and Ellene Mocria, et al. 2003)

Many people believe that sexual development does not become an important issue until puberty and adolescence. However, children begin showing sexual behavior and interest in their sexual functioning starting in infancy. Development of gender identity and sexuality cuts across physical, cognitive, social, and emotional developmental dimensions (Angela Oswalt 2015)

Books for children contain gender stereotypical behavior, for instant Ernst (1995) cited by Kira Isak Pirofski, (NA) surveyed the titles of books written for children to determine if boys or girl's names were more frequently included in the title. His findings were that boy's names appeared twice as many times as girl's names.

Fox (1993) cited by Kira Isak Pirofski, (NA) noted that eighty-five percent of children books published in 1973 had a male as the main character. In addition, Florida State University (2011) cited by Firas Ali Suleiman Zawahreh (2012) study found that just 7.5 percent of nearly 6,000 picture books published between 1900 and 2000 depict female animal protagonists; male animals were the central characters in more than 23 percent each year. No more than 33 percent of children's books in any given year featured an adult woman or female animal, but adult men and male animals appeared in 100 percent of the books. The paradox is that children's literature as we know it was largely created by women (Jennie Yabroff, 2016).

Knell and Winer (1979) noted that after reading stories in which characters were depicted in traditional roles—females as care takers of children, librarians, or secretaries and males as firefighters, doctors, and other similar masculine careers—girls preferred to play with a nurse's kit than a doctor's kit.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Ethiopian children's literature is an area that has not been given much attention. Researching this area started in 1994 for the first time. Although children's literature in book form is a relatively recent phenomenon in the context of Ethiopia, it has been an important part of the culture of the diversified ethnic groups in the country in its oral forms (folk tales, fables, legends, etc.) (Simret Wondirad, 2009)

By looking this growing number of children's books demand many individuals are writing and translating child story books from foreign languages but as Ellene Mocria, et al. (2003) indicated that this book either reflect the culture, tradition and thinking patterns of the society nor nurture the coming generation nor impart fundamental skills and know how.

Furthermore New York State Association for the Education of Young Children (NYSAEYC) (2003) indicate that;

*Unfortunately, not all children's literature conveys the messages that we want young people to learn. Books often contain the same stereotypes and biases of other media, and because children are interested in a story's plot and characters, it is unlikely that they will know or consider whether a book includes racist, sexist or other stereotypical messages. If young children are repeatedly exposed to biased representations through words and pictures, there is a danger that such distortions will become a part of their thinking, especially if reinforced by societal biases.*

Animals are often used in story books for their 'cute factor', but also because most children can relate to them very easily But according to Misrak Tenna (2012) no serious literary criticism is undergone in the area and most books for children are limited to sketchy preschool story books in our country particularly . Therefore, a greater analysis of child story books to uncover gender responsiveness is needed.

### 1.3 Leading questions

1. What looks animal representations in the story books?
2. To wat extent child story books are gender responsive?

### 1.4 Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to assess the diversity and gender responsiveness of Amharic child story books published from 2007-2008 E.C. More specifically it will attempt:

- To assess the extent to which child story books address diversity of animals in the story
- To investigate child story books gender responsiveness

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This research will be helpful for; -

- ✚ Those who are interested to engage themselves in writing children's story books (child literature) will consider accurate representation regarding diversity and gender parity in their story themes.
- ✚ It is supportive for the teacher, parent, child program journalist on television and radio and child story columnists in different newspapers and magazines to carefully select child story books to their child, schools and to mass medias accordingly
- ✚ The significant stack holder (ministry of women, children and youth and ministry of culture and ministry of education) will take a notice the value inherited by children through story book and so as will take appropriate measurement in awareness creation, training and appropriate measurement.
- ✚ Preschool, NGOS and other organizations and Institutions working with children will properly concenter diversity and gender responsiveness to the types of books they are going to buy, publish and or distribute for the children to their school/organization/institution or donation to other school/organization/institution.

### 1.6 Scope of the study

The study was delimited to children's story books that are folk tales, heroic stories, historical/ realistic fiction, (but Songs, pictures and poetry can be found in the story) published in Amharic from 2015-2017 either translated or original Ethiopian authoring. Children's story books can raise a number of values or issues, but the study is not concerned with other values or issues raised in the narratives unless they have significance relation animal sex and gender responsiveness. Furthermore, this study not take all child literature unless they are story books (exclude non-story-based child literature like academic books, song books, poetry books, picture story books and alphabet books etc.)

### 1.7 Definition of terms

**Child story book;** it can be broadly defined as anything that children read or spoken narrative which is Folk tales, Heroic stories, Biographies, Historical/ realistic fiction, picture books intended for and used by children.

**Gender responsive;** the story that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women/girls and men/boys that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges. That is not "stereotype" or oversimplified generalization about a group that creates the idea that we know something about an individual person based on the person's perceived membership in that group.

**Semiotics;** study of signs and sign processes (semiosis), indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication.

## **2. Research Method**

### **2.1 Study Design**

As it is an exploratory research the study uses the combined descriptive and textual analysis as basic methods. Much focus was given on the assessment of the representation of diversity and gender parity in the narrations. Attempts was made to uncover the symbols within the narratives that produce meaning about the representation diversity and gender parity using semiotics.

### **2.2 Sample and sampling techniques**

This study analyzed 12 selected child story books (97child stories) written in Amharic from 2007-2009 E.C. The story books for analysis was selected by rating of randomly selected 30 teachers in 6 preschools about the story books they mostly used to read or refer for story telling for children.

#### **2.2.1 Inclusion Criteria**

12 Amharic child story books written or translated and published from 2015- 2017 selected and rated by preschool teacher as their source of story.

#### **2.2.2 Exclusion Criteria**

This study excludes Amharic child story books published before the 2007 E.C, non-story child books, child story books written in other language and Amharic child story books written from 2015-- 2017 E.C but not rated in top 12 books by preschool teachers.

### **2.3 Variables of the Study**

The variables of study employed in this research are the diversity and gender responsiveness child story boos.

### **2.4 Criteria of Analysis**

The researcher used a list of criteria concerning evaluating stories books selected. The criteria are Sex of character represented, Animal portrayed only with one sex, Protagonist and Antagonistic presentation of the character.

In doing so the following area of the story are critically analyzed to uncover meaning for the above-mentioned criteria a) the title, b) the story, c) characters, d) the theme e) the illustrations and f) word

### **2.5 Procedures of analysis**

Since The study is an exploratory with the units of analysis on children's books. The study will attempt to analyze focusing on what is presented in the text and or pictures and the overall them of the story by using Semiotics.

Textual analysis of the selected books has been conducted based on such signs, and both pro and anti-indicators of issues, themes, animals and person identified and described within the context of the story in line to the variable to be study.

### **2.6 Data Analysis**

The data is analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) to describe the representation of animal representation, Sex of character represented, animal portrayed only with one sex, Protagonist and antagonistic presentation of the character. The qualitative analysis focus on narration of the representation of the above-mentioned criteria through words.

### **2.7 Ethical Consideration**

Since this study primarily analyzed the content of child story books the researcher and the data collector/ Enumerators try to be free from biases through sticking with the criteria and interpreting the meaning without being subjective with referencing page number and quoting words, statements or pictures if appropriate from the story. Furthermore, in the process of selection the Amharic story books, the information sheet will prepare which included the purpose, objective, benefit of the study to the preschool, book store and teachers to appropriately select.

### 3. Data analysis

#### 3.1 Background information of book reviewed

**Table 1. Type of book reviewed**

Author sex				Type of book			
Male		Female		Local authored (Ethiopian)		Translation (from other country)	
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
10	83.33	2	16.67	7	58.34	5	41.66

As indicated in table 1 the general characteristics of the book reviewed indicated that 10 (83.33%) of the book translated or authored by male the remaining 2 (16.67%) of the book are translated or authored by female. Regarding the local and translation nature of the story around half 7(58.34%) of the story books are locally authored whereas 5 (41.66%) of the books are translated. Thus, from this it is possible to conclude male are predominantly participate in writing child story which is against of many country practices of dominated by female. Secondly translated books are getting almost near to half of the selected books which contain the culture, value and aspiration of their nation which impact Ethiopian children to be less familiarize about their society and culture and become victim of globalization early

#### 3.2 Sex of animal and human character portrayed in the story

**Table 2 Characters sex representation**

	Sex of people in the story	No	%	Animal sex depiction in the story	No	%
A	Male	90	73.78	Male	101	62.34
B	Female	32	26.22	Female	61	37.66

As indicated in table 2 the general characteristics of the book reviewed indicated that 10 (83.33%) of the book translated or authored by male the remaining 2 (16.67%) of the book are translated or authored by female. Regarding the local and translation nature of the story around half 7(58.34%) of the story books are locally authored whereas 5 (41.66%) of the books are translated. Thus, from this it is possible to conclude male are predominantly participate in writing child story which is against of many country practices of dominated by female. Secondly translated books are getting almost near to half of the selected books which contain the culture, value and aspiration of their nation which impact Ethiopian children to be less familiarize about their society and culture and become victim of globalization early.

Table 2 above indicate that the representation of male and female in the story book found that 73.78% of people represented in the story is male and 26.22% are female. However slightly better representation of animal sex was found in reviewed story with 62.34% of male and 37.66% of female animals portrayed in the story. This finding is similar with Janice McCabe, which Reviewed made on 6,000 children's books published between 1900 and 2000, found that males are central characters in 57% of children's books published each year, with just 31% having female central characters. Male animals are central characters in 23% of books per year, the study found, while female animals star in only 7.5% (Alison flood, 2011). So that the still fair sex representation in the story are lacking both in representation of animal and human in child story book.

#### 3.3 Domestic and wild Animal sex representation

**Table 3 animal sex representation**

	Animal category	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
A	Wild animal	71	65.13	38	34.86	109	67.28
B	Domestic animal	35	79.54	9	20.45	44	27.16
C	Birds	3	37.5	5	62.5	8	4.93
D	Aquatic	0	0	1	100	1	0.67
	TOTAL	109	67.28	53	32.72	162	100

Lori Friesen (2009) children embrace and value pets. despite the expense and inconvenience, many family's rare domestic animals particularly dogs and cats are most common in many homes in rural and cities in Ethiopia. Thus, children have a better chance of having fun and closer relationship. However, majority of the stories 109 (67.28%) are relayed on wild animals and less than one third 44 (27.16%) of the story character are based on domestic animals. Birds and Aquatic animals were less emphasized with representation 4.93% and 0.67% respectively in the story as a result kids will be less familiars about this animal.

Regarding the sex representation of the character more than half of the story 109(67.28%) are male and 53(32.72%) of them are female. However domestic animal is slightly higher representation of male character 35(79.54%) than wild animals' character which is 71(65.13%), on the opposite wild animals are slightly better in representation of female animal 38(34.86%) than domestic animal which is 9(20.45%). Thus, male animal was predominantly represented in the character in domestic and wild animals.

Children in the town as reported by Turley (2001) estimates that children account 37% of all visitors to such wildlife settings even near wilderness areas such as national forests report that they see more animals on television and in movies than in the wild. All children experience wild animals on the symbolic plane, in stories, toys, and other artifacts. This symbolic plane, termed as "a vicarious view of nature," is now the most dominant form of engagement with wild animals and with wilderness more broadly (Nabhan and Trimble, 1994 cited by Gail F. Melson, 2013)

Even Children's books about wild animals shifted from the 19th century themes of heroic killings of savage, threatening beasts, such as bears and wolves, to wild animals as hapless victims of now savage humans (Oswald, 1995 cited by Gail F. Melson, 2013). In line with this argument wild animals are easy to create fantasy story's and characters since they are far from children.

### 3.4 Top frequently mentioned animals in the story

Table 4 most frequently mention animals

	Domestic animal					Wild animal				
	Animals	Male	Female	Total	%	Animals	Male	Female	Total	%
A	Sheep	8	1	9	20.45	Fox	11	12	23	21.1
B	Donkey	6	2	8	18.18	Lion	21	0	21	19.26
C	Ox / cow	6	1	7	15.9	Rat	3	9	12	11
D	Got	6	0	6	13.63	Hayna	9	0	9	8.25
E	Cat	3	2	5	11.36	Chimpanzee	8	0	8	7.33
	Total	29	6	35			52	31	83	

Popular animal depicted in the story are differ among country to country for instance kangaroos (Australia), kiwi bird (New Zealand), panda (china) bald eagles (USA) etc. even some country use animals to their national flag for instance Spain (lion), Croatia (got). However, the above mentioned most frequently presented animals does not include the national icon of Walia ibex, Chillida baboon or red fox even the most pet animal (Dog) in Ethiopia in rural and urban.

As indicate in table 4 above Sheep, donkey and Ox / cow from domestic animal and fox, lion and Rat from wild animal are the top three animals mentioned frequently in the story. Furthermore, the table indicate more than half of the most frequent animals are depicted as male, but domestic animals largely presented as male 29(82.85%) than wild animals 52 (62.65%). Even as indicated below in table --- some animals depicted only as male or female

Table 5 animals depicted only as male or female

	Presented Only as Male	Frequencies in the story	Presented Only as female	Frequencies in the story
A	Lion	21	Monkey	6
B	Hayna	9	Bird	3
C	Chimpanzee	8		
D	Got	6		
E	Dog	4		

One story might not represent all animal with all sex, but a collection of many books expected to represent diverse sex of animals however as indicated in table 5 Lion, Hayna, chimpanzee, Got, and dog are represented in all story books reviewed as male. Whereas Monkey and Bird are presented as female. This create children to think some animal as only male or female. More importantly when animal is presented as male or female their role in the story also shifts depend on their sex for example lion is represented as powerful and king in most story's, but no female animal represented as prince. Thus, its impact on gender stereotype is high.

### 3.5 Protagonist and Antagonistic presentation

Table 6 Protagonist and Antagonistic presentation

	Protagonist		Female protagonist representation of Antagonistic			Male protagonist representation of Antagonistic		
	Male	Female	FF	FM	FMF	MM	MF	MFM
1	65	32	6	24	2	46	15	4
%	67	33	18.75	75	6.25	70.76	23	6.15

MM= male protagonist with male antagonistic

FF= female protagonist with female antagonistic

MF= male protagonist with male antagonistic

FM= female protagonist with male antagonistic

FMF= female protagonist with male and female antagonistic

MFM= Male protagonist with male and female antagonistic

The gender representation protagonists in the story indicated in table 6 shows two third of the story 65(67%)



of them are male and the rest 32(33%) of the story protagonists were female. When we see the protagonist and antagonistic representation, female protagonist is largely represented with male antagonistic 24 (75%) whereas male protagonist is largely represented with male antagonistic 46(76.76%). Thus, males are highly represented in the story as protagonist and antagonistic in the story. This finding is quite higher than the finding of Rachel Swanson (2016) state content analysis was conducted for 22 New York Times Middle Grade bestsellers. Character counts and dialogue counts were coded for each book. Male characters outnumbered female characters with a ratio of 1.4:1. Male characters spoke more than female characters with a ratio of 1.7:1. Whereas the finding in this research shows 2:1 ratio male appearance in story than female which is higher than the finding of other country.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

##### 4.1 Conclusion

The gender responsiveness of Amharic child storybook two third of animal and more than half of the human was male character, thus female character is less represented. In the stories reviewed lion, Hayna, chimpanzee, got and dog are represented as male, whereas Monkey and Bird are presented as female. Finally, the finding indicates two third of the story male protagonists. In addition, female protagonist is largely represented with male antagonistic and male protagonists are with male antagonistic. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the child story books publish from 2015-20017 and sampled in this study are less gender responsive

##### 4.2 Recommendation

- ✚ It is important to raise the awareness of teacher, parent, child program journalist on television and radio and child story columnists in different newspapers and magazines to carefully select child story books to their child, schools and to mass medias accordingly
- ✚ The significant stakeholder ministry of women, children and youth and ministry of culture should take appropriate measurement like training of author, give them tour in the country etc
- ✚ Preschool, NGOS and other organizations and Institutions working with children will properly consider diversity and gender responsiveness to the types of books they are going to buy, publish and or distribute for the children to their school/organization/institution or donation to other school/organization/institution.
- ✚ Preparing yearly award/recognition for best child story books published.
- ✚ Ministry of education as big stockholder set criteria about type of book when schools buy for their library and for their teachers

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