

## **Are males and females still portrayed stereotypically? Visual analyses of gender in two Hong Kong primary English Language textbook series**

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### **Abstract**

The present study examines how gender is represented in the visuals (or illustrations) of two English Language textbook series used in most primary schools in Hong Kong. Instead of conducting frequency counts of the occurrence of male and female characters in illustrations or the spheres of activities they engaged in as in previous textbook studies, this study involves qualitative analyses of how visualised male and female characters are represented in the selected illustrations of the analysed textbook series in terms of their hair length and clothing. The results show that human females were more often portrayed having long hair than short hair and wearing dresses than trousers in both line drawings and photographs. For the colour of clothing, although blue and pink are generally considered ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ colours respectively, less than half and only a small percentage of the human males and females were portrayed wearing blue and pink respectively. For non-human characters, again, colour is not always a reliable cue to their sex. Yet, they can be recognised as males and females by the generally accepted ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ colour and clothing items.

**Keywords:** gender representation; visuals/illustrations; English Language; textbooks; Hong Kong; human and non-human characters

### **Introduction**

Gender stereotyping in textbooks is an issue in many different countries (Davis, 1995; see also Blumberg, 2007, 2008). In Hong Kong, though there is a statutory body, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), with its responsibilities to implement the Sex Discrimination Ordinance to promote the attitudes and behaviour of “equality” and “equal opportunities for all” (Equal Opportunities Commission, n.d.), gender stereotypes still exist in Hong Kong people’s minds (see Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997; Women’s Commission, 2009).

Law and Chan (2004) argue that people’s internalised views of gender stereotypes are formed by different socialisation agents (e.g. schools) and other social processes. Though different contemporary media (e.g. television, films, and Internet) may play a role here, in schools, textbooks “represent the everyday for children” (Kereszty, 2009, p. 3). They may be

an important socialisation agent that shapes people's view of gender in society (Kereszty, 2009). Scott (1980) claims that books may have a considerable impact on children's attitudes, values, and behaviour as children spend a great deal of time reading them at school. Kızılaslan (2010) also claims that gender stereotypes which exist in textbooks may impact on children's affective and cognitive development. More strongly, Kereszty (2009) suggests that gender-specific expectations, norms and behaviours portrayed in textbooks may contribute to social inequalities in the society. Lastly, children's reading materials are more broadly a widely available resource through which children can learn about how a male or a female should be like (Jackson & Gee, 2005). Nowadays, while some primary schools in Hong Kong use storybooks as English Language teaching materials (e.g. the CECES (Hong Kong Council of Early Childhood Education and Services) stories for children), textbooks are still used in a majority of English classrooms and hence are the focus of this study.

### **The Aim of the Study**

Gender stereotypes were found in children's books and textbooks in the 1970s and were under strong criticism by feminists who upheld equality between males and females (Brugeilles, Cromer, Cromer, & Andreyev, 2002). The purpose of this study is to examine how gender is represented in the visuals (or illustrations)<sup>1</sup> of two English Language textbook series used in most primary schools in Hong Kong. English Language textbook series were chosen for analysis in this study because of the important role and high status of English in Hong Kong and because it is one of the core and major subjects in Hong Kong schools, with pupils having at least one English lesson (of about 35 minutes) every day. In Hong Kong, although the majority of the population are ethnic Chinese who speak Cantonese (a Chinese dialect) and Chinese is used in a range of domains in Hong Kong such as family and social activities (Bolton, 2000), English is seen as an essential tool for study, career and economic success (Education Commission, 1995), and a 'lingua franca' for cross-cultural communication. Visuals were focused on in this study because almost all language textbooks include visuals since illustrations play an important role in textbooks, especially primary textbooks, presumably to enhance students' learning interests (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003; Lee & Collins, 2010), and picture books act as the significant agents in children's sex-role development as the societal values about males and females are presented in the illustrations (Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1972). To achieve the aim of the study, the following research question will be answered:

How are male and female characters represented in the selected illustrations of the analysed English Language textbook series in terms of hair length and clothing?

### **Literature Review**

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<sup>1</sup> Visuals and illustrations are used interchangeably in this article.

Representation occurs (and can be seen) in spoken, written and visual texts, and gender representations are often based on stereotypes (Sunderland, 2004, 2006). Gender stereotypes are identified as “beliefs about the characteristics and behaviour of each sex” (Manstead & Hewstone, 1995, p. 256) which are “widely shared” among members of a culture (Etaugh & Bridges, 2010, p. 28), and people from different cultures tend to have different gender stereotypes. According to the ‘kernel of truth’ theory, gender stereotypes “exaggerate” real differences between males and females in their behaviours (Basow, 1992, p. 9). In other words, gender stereotypes not just simply reflect but also overemphasise the existing differences between males and females.

Gender stereotypes and differential gender representations exist in children’s books (including picture books). For instance, Jackson and Gee (2005), in analysing illustrations in children’s early readers used in New Zealand, found that there was not much change across 50 years (from 1950 to 2000) in the way males and females were represented, with boys being visually positioned mainly “within a discourse of traditional masculinity” (p. 126) as adventurers or sportsmen, despite the significant social changes of the past 50 years. In another study, Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, and Young (2006), in their analysed Caldecott award-winning books, found that female main characters were more than three times more likely than males to be pictured performing nurturing and caring behaviours, and more female than male characters (59% and 41% respectively) were found in indoor scenes. Regarding occupations, both female and male characters were usually portrayed in stereotypically feminine and masculine occupations, but it was the female characters who were significantly more likely than the male characters to be shown with no occupation outside home.

Visual analysis was also conducted in several EFL/ESL textbook studies to analyse gender representation. In general, males and females have been shown as engaging in different activities or in different spheres. First, Giaschi (2000) analysed the visuals in two selected ESL textbook series, *Headway* and *4<sup>th</sup> Dimension*, by using the technique of critical image analysis, an adapted version of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In the 35 analysed images, males were generally portrayed as the managers, leaders, or protagonists, while females were usually depicted in the sphere related to fashion. Also, males were portrayed in an active role and females in a passive role in 76% and 75% of the images respectively. In the analysis of an EFL textbook for senior high school students in Japan (*Expressways A*), Otłowski (2003) found that men were included in twelve of the seventeen illustrations depicting working situations but women were included in only five. Lastly, males were portrayed as more active and sporty than females (Lee & Collins, 2008, 2010), and engaging actively in work and social activities (e.g. outdoor activities) (Lee & Collins, 2009) in their analysed Hong Kong and Australian English Language textbooks.

The present study is original and hence can contribute to the study of gender representation in textbooks. Contrary to previous studies of males and females in illustrations

which mainly focused on frequency of occurrence of male and female characters (Amini & Birjandi, 2012; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Kobia, 2009; Lee & Collins, 2008, 2009; Levine & O’Sullivan, 2010; Mukundan & Nimehchisale, 2008) or the spheres of activities they engaged in, this study involves detailed analyses of how visualised male and female characters are represented in the illustrations of the selected books of the two analysed textbook series. I analysed how males and females are represented in the illustrations in terms of hair length and colour of clothing for human characters, and skin colour for non-human characters, because gender stereotyping can be identified with certain physical images (including hair length) or dressing in certain ways (including colour of clothing) (Women in EFL Materials, 1991; see also Sunderland, 2011). Intons-Peterson (1988) suggests that hair length is an important cue children use to identify the sex of the characters of drawings, and it is likely for them to identify those figures with long hair as female and those with short hair as male. Lloyd and Duveen (1990) also point out that clothing is a category which functions as a sign of gender.

## Methodology

In this study, I focused on analysing selected visuals of two English Language textbook series that are used in most primary schools in Hong Kong. I first identified all the ‘currently published’ English Language textbook series available by referring to the *List of Recommended Primary School Textbooks in English* published by the Education Bureau. Here, ‘currently published’ textbooks are defined as those published since 2005 because *The English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 - 6)* was published in 2004, an updated edition of the syllabus for English Language (Primary 1 - 6) in Hong Kong schools, which aims to provide details of the Learning Targets and Objectives at primary level and elaborate on pedagogical principles to facilitate students’ English Language learning (Curriculum Development Council, 2004). Based on this criterion, I identified eight different textbook series. Instead of analysing all eight textbook series, I decided to analyse two series which are used in most primary schools in Hong Kong because a research project needs to be manageable. To identify these, I sent out questionnaires to fifty-three primary schools selected by using a ‘systematic sampling’ approach in which every tenth school on the list of the Primary School Profiles 2010 was chosen to find out which textbooks were used in these schools at different grade levels. The two textbook series, *Step Up* published by Educational Publishing House in 2005 and *Primary Longman Express* published by Longman Hong Kong Education in 2005, were then chosen to be the data of this study because these two series were used in most local primary schools in Hong Kong I surveyed.

The method of data analysis used in the present study is visual analysis. In order to conduct detailed analyses of the illustrations, four textbooks from the two textbook series were selected by systematic sampling: every fifth book was selected from a list of

twenty-four books, twelve books from the whole series of *Step Up* and twelve from *Primary Longman Express*. At the end, *Step Up 3A* and *5B* and *Primary Longman Express 2A* and *4B* were chosen. The coding categories for visual analysis are the hair length of the male and female characters ('long' and 'short') and the colour of their clothing. In this study, I defined a person's hair as 'short' if it just reaches the neck or above, and 'long' if it is either tied up, or at or below the shoulder. Some visuals were drawn in a way that made it difficult for me to determine the hair length were excluded from the analysis. Each occurrence of each visualised character (i.e. the number of 'tokens') was counted because most illustrated characters in the analysed textbooks were not given names. The results of this study for answering the research question 'How are male and female characters represented in the selected illustrations of the analysed English Language textbook series in terms of hair length and clothing?' will be presented in the following section.

## Results

### Hair length

Firstly, the analysed 131 and 115 human males and females portrayed with 'long' and 'short' hair in the four selected textbooks of the two series can be found in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Books	No. of Males With Long Hair		No. of Males With Short Hair		No. of Females With Long Hair		No. of Females With Short Hair	
	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs
<i>Step Up 3A</i>	0	0	66	0	68	3	8	0
<i>Step Up 5B</i>	0	0	61	4	32	0	4	0
Total	0	0	127	4	100	3	12	0

Table 1 The number of human males and females portrayed with long or short hair in the line drawings and photographs in the selected books of *Step Up*

In both line drawings and photographs of the analysed books of *Step Up*, all the males were portrayed with short hair. Females in contrast were almost always illustrated with long hair. In the line drawings, 100 'tokens' of females (i.e. 89.29%) have long hair.  $\chi^2(1, n = 112) = 69.143, p < .05$  and thus it is strongly significant that more females were portrayed with long hair than with short hair, even if the chi-square value is substantiated with  $p < .001$ , and  $\phi = 0.786$  has produced a large effect size. All the three females in the photographs on page 33 in *Step Up 3A* have long hair. (One, the Japanese woman, has her hair tied up and the other two have their hair below their shoulders; see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Hair length of females in *Step Up*

The number of human males and females with long or short hair in the line drawings and photographs in *Primary Longman Express* is presented in Table 2.

Books	No. of Males With Long Hair		No. of Males With Short Hair		No. of Females With Long Hair		No. of Females With Short Hair	
	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs
<i>Primary Longman Express 2A</i>	0	0	135	13	41	12	40	0
<i>Primary Longman Express 4B</i>	2	0	163	6	68	12	66	14
Total	2	0	298	19	109	24	106	14

Table 2 The number of human males and females portrayed with long or short hair in the line drawings and photographs in the selected books of *Primary Longman Express*

Again, females were illustrated with long hair more often than short hair in the line drawings. 109 'tokens' of the females (i.e. 50.70%) were drawn with long hair and 106 'tokens' (i.e. 49.30%) with short hair. Interestingly the differences were negligible compared with that in *Step Up* and not significant. In the photographs in *Primary Longman Express 2A*, all 12 females have long hair, although in *Primary Longman Express 4B*, the number of females illustrated with long hair and short hair is similar. Adding up the total, more than half of the females in all the photographs (63.16%) have long hair but only 14 female 'tokens' (36.84%) have short hair. All 19 males in the photographs were portrayed with short hair. Nearly all of

the males in the line drawings have short hair. Only two (from *Primary Longman Express 4B* p. 3 and p. 11) have long hair. Tellingly, one is a pop singer and the other is a man from ancient China, with his hair tied up (see Figure 2 below).

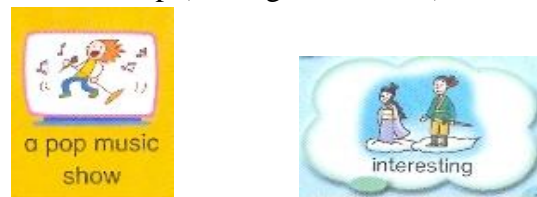


Figure 2 Males portrayed with long hair

Apart from human characters, non-human characters were also analysed in this study. The sex of non-human characters is not as distinguishable by hair length as the human characters. Rather, the non-human characters were identified as female by their accessories (a bow-knot), clothing items (e.g. a handbag (of Twinkle's mum)) or colour (see the section below). Non-human male characters are also not distinguishable by hair length but by their clothing (see below). Among the 70 and 17 non-human female characters in *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express* respectively, 51 and 11 of them (i.e. 72.86% and 64.71% respectively) were drawn with a bow on their heads (see, for example, Twinkle from *Step Up* 2A p. 46 in Figure 3).

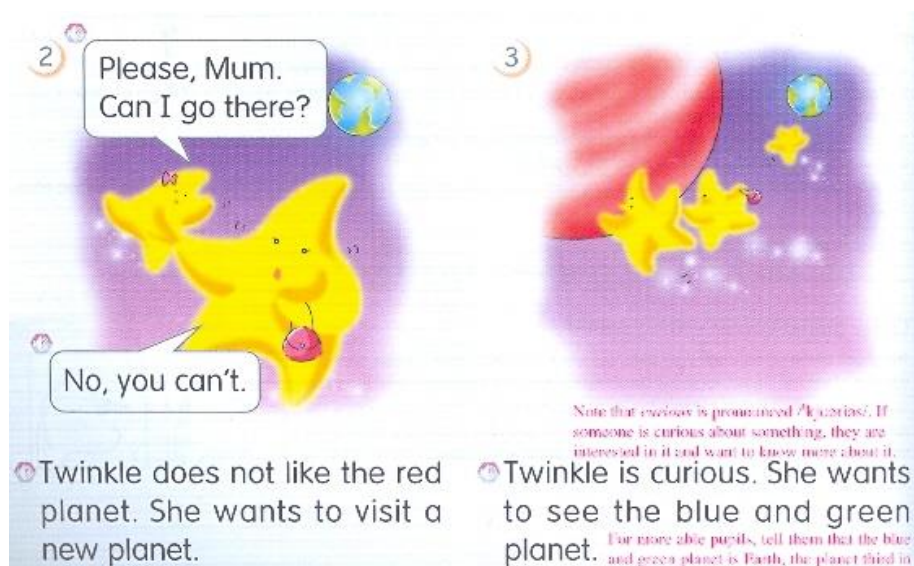


Figure 3 Appearance of non-human female characters in *Step Up*

## Clothing

Regarding the male and female characters' clothing, I counted the number of instances (as 'tokens') of human females being portrayed wearing dresses or skirts, or trousers, and of females and males wearing pink or blue. The colour of clothing was examined because children have been found to have gender-stereotyped colour preferences (LoBue & DeLoache, 2011). The reason for focusing on these two colours is that pink is more generally accepted as

a ‘feminine’ colour (Koller, 2008) and blue a ‘masculine’ colour. LoBue and DeLoache (2011), in two experiments, also found that by the age of 2.5, girls have a significant preference for pink over other colours. To count the number of line drawings and photographs in which human males and females in the coloured illustrations of the four selected textbooks wear blue and pink, all blue and pink clothing items of shirt/T-shirt, skirt/trousers/shorts, hat/cap, tie (if any), and shoes worn by a character were counted, no matter how many pieces he/she is wearing. For example, a pink T-shirt and a pair of blue shoes worn by a male were counted separately. The clothing items could be plain, with blue or pink stripes. These were also counted. The number of instances in which 460 ‘tokens’ of human males wear in blue or pink can be summarised in the following Table:

Books	No. of Males (‘tokens’)		Instances of Males Wearing Blue		Instances of Males Wearing Pink	
	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs
<i>Step Up 3A</i>	62	0	31	0	3	0
<i>Step Up 5B</i>	61	0	25	0	10	0
<i>Primary Longman Express 2A</i>	133	13	55	10	0	0
<i>Primary Longman Express 4B</i>	182	6	66	5	3	0
Total	441	19	177	15	16	0

Table 3 The number of instances in which human males wear blue or pink in the selected books of *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express*

In the selected books of *Step Up*, of the 123 human males in the line drawings, 56 (i.e. 45.53%) were drawn wearing blue, but only 13 (10.57%) wearing pink. In other words, slightly more than half were drawn wearing either blue or pink. No males illustrated in the photographs are wearing blue or pink. In the line drawings of the selected books of *Primary Longman Express*, of the 315 human males, again, less than half, 121 (i.e. 38.41%), were portrayed wearing blue. Only 3 human males (in *Primary Longman 4B*), that is, less than 1% (0.95%) were drawn wearing pink. Of the 19 human males in the photographs of *Primary Longman Express*, 15 (i.e. 78.95%) are wearing blue, but none in pink. In fact, the blue clothes worn by all the human males in the photographs are their school uniform.

Tables 4 and 5 below show the ‘tokens’ of human females who were illustrated wearing blue or pink, and the number of instances in which human females were portrayed wearing dresses and trousers. As regards whether females are wearing dresses or trousers, sometimes I



could not determine this because only the upper part of the body was drawn. Also, in a few instances, this was not clearly drawn. All these instances were excluded from analysis.

Books	No. of Females ('Tokens')		Instances of Females Wearing Blue		Instances of Females Wearing Pink	
	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs
<i>Step Up 3A</i>	78	4	15	0	12	0
<i>Step Up 5B</i>	37	0	14	0	12	0
<i>Primary Longman Express 2A</i>	74	12	11	0	19	1
<i>Primary Longman Express 4B</i>	142	29	15	0	24	0
Total	331	45	55	0	67	1

Table 4 The number of instances in which human females wear blue or pink in the selected books of *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express*

First, regarding the colour of the clothing items, while human males were not always illustrated wearing in a 'masculine' colour (blue), human females were not always portrayed wearing pink. In the line drawings of the two *Step Up* textbooks, of the 115 analysed females, females were portrayed wearing pink and blue in 24 and 29 instances respectively (i.e. 20.87% and 25.22% respectively). In the photographs, none of the four females were portrayed in either pink or blue. Of the 216 human females in the line drawings of *Primary Longman Express*, only 43 are wearing pink but 27 are wearing blue, that is, 19.91% and 12.04% respectively. Of the 41 human females in the photographs, only one (2.44%) is in pink and none in blue.

Books	No. of Females ('Tokens')		Instances of Females Wearing Dresses		Instances of Females Wearing Trousers	
	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs	Line Drawings	Photographs
<i>Step Up 3A</i>	78	4	43	1	16	1
<i>Step Up 5B</i>	37	0	11	0	10	0
<i>Primary Longman Express 2A</i>	74	12	43	6	11	1
<i>Primary Longman Express 4B</i>	142	29	58	22	4	0
Total	331	45	155	29	41	2

Table 5 The number of instances in which human females were portrayed wearing dresses or trousers in the selected books of *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express*

While none of the males were illustrated wearing dresses, Table 5 shows that in the two selected *Step Up* textbooks, females were portrayed wearing dresses more often than trousers in both line drawings and photographs. Of the 80 analysed females in the line drawings, 54 are wearing dresses (10 of these are school uniform) and only 26 are wearing trousers (i.e. 67.5% and 32.5% respectively). Only one female in a photograph in *Step Up 3A* was illustrated wearing trousers (together with a parka, a thick jacket), and one wearing a sari, a dress from India (The other two females were illustrated wearing a kimono and a sarong respectively) (see Figure 1 above). The line drawings in the two *Primary Longman Express* textbooks are similar. In the 116 analysed pictured females, 101 wear dresses (18 of these are school uniform) but only 15 wear trousers (87.07% and 12.93% respectively). In the 29 photographs, again, females were nearly always illustrated wearing dresses: 28 are wearing dresses (all school uniform), with only one wearing trousers (i.e. 96.55% and 3.45% respectively).

Non-human characters were also analysed, but the number would be too small if only four selected textbooks were analysed. Therefore, all the personified non-human characters in the two textbook series were analysed. The sex of the non-human characters was determined by their clothing items and accessories. If the non-human characters were not drawn wearing clothes, I analysed to see if the non-human females were always drawn in pink and blue for non-human males.

In the whole series of *Step Up*, among the 71 'tokens' of non-human females in the line drawings, 23 (32.39%) were portrayed wearing dresses (see, for example, Figure 4 from *Step Up 1B* p. 41), but none in trousers.



Figure 4 Non-human female characters in *Step Up* drawn wearing dresses

On the other hand, one non-human male character (Mr. Hare's boss) and 11 'tokens' (4 'tokens' of Mr. Tortoise and 7 'tokens' of Mr. Hare) in *Step Up* 4A Unit 8 (on p. 47) were drawn wearing a shirt and a tie, and trousers respectively (see Figure 5 below).

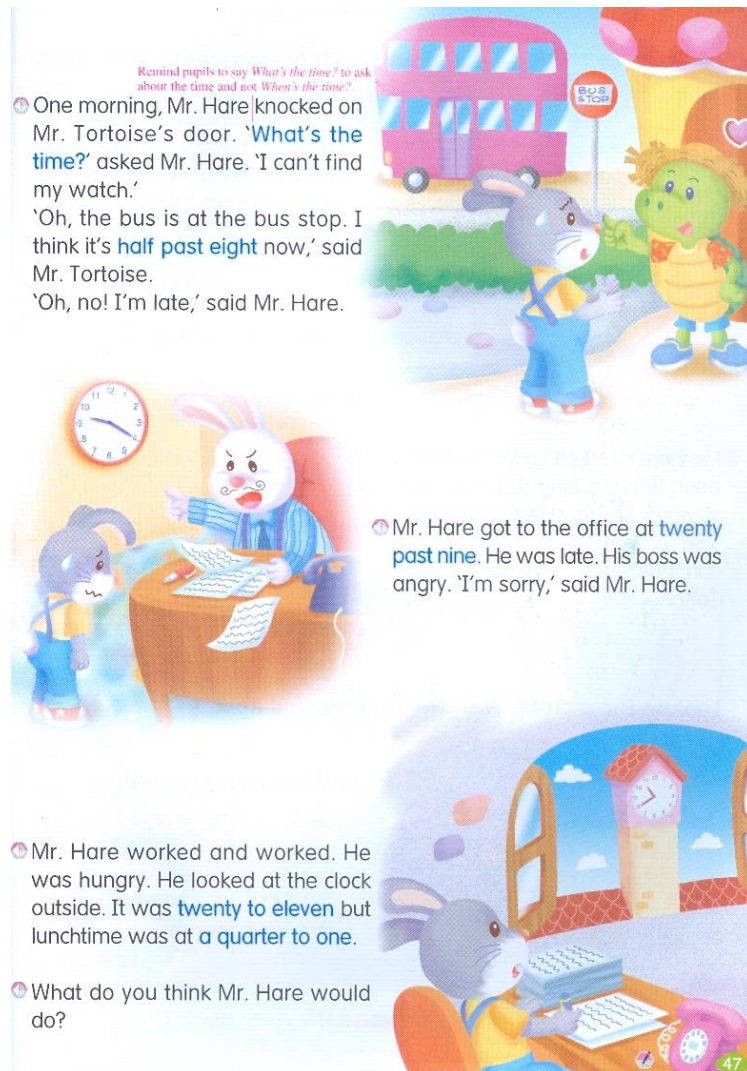


Figure 5 Non-human male characters in *Step Up* drawn wearing a shirt or trousers

The remainder of the non-human males and females can be distinguished by their skin colour. All 3 non-human female 'tokens' in the photographs were identified as females with their bows in their hair. In fact, they are all Twinkle, a star-like non-human female character, shown in three different photographs (see, for example, Figure 6 from *Step Up 4B* p. 37).



Figure 6 Twinkle portrayed putting a bow on her head

In *Primary Longman Express*, among the 85 non-human female ‘tokens’ in the line drawings, 18 (21.18%) were drawn wearing dresses but, again, none in trousers. Of the non-human male characters, 5 ‘tokens’ were drawn wearing a tie and a shirt, and 2 ‘tokens’ are wearing trousers, but they are all Bobby the town mouse, drawn in different illustrations on page 18 in *Primary Longman Express 3B Unit 3* (see Figure 7). (No non-human characters can be found in the photographs of *Primary Longman Express*.)

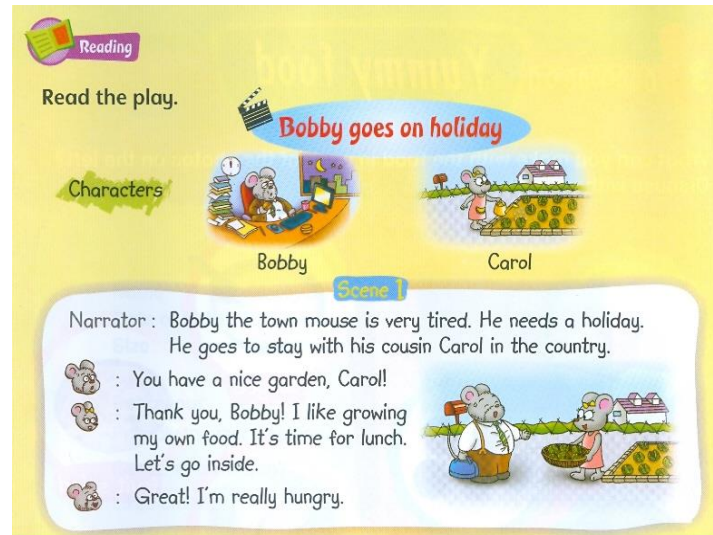


Figure 7 Non-human female characters in *Primary Longman Express* drawn wearing dresses

As regards colour, among the 145 non-human male ‘tokens’ in the line drawings of *Step Up*, unexpectedly, male characters were drawn in pink more often than blue: 50 and 35 instances respectively (i.e. 34.48% and 24.14% respectively). This is however because Puffy, a non-human male monster, was drawn in pink and he appears very frequently (49 instances) (see, for example, Figure 8 from *Step Up 1A* p. 17).





Figure 8 Puffy illustrated in pink in line drawings of *Step Up*

In the photographs, non-human males were also illustrated in pink in 30 instances, but in only one instance was a male illustrated in blue (96.77% and 3.23% respectively). Again, this is because Puffy appears in the photographs in all 30 instances (see, for example, Figure 9 from *Step Up 1B* p. 20).

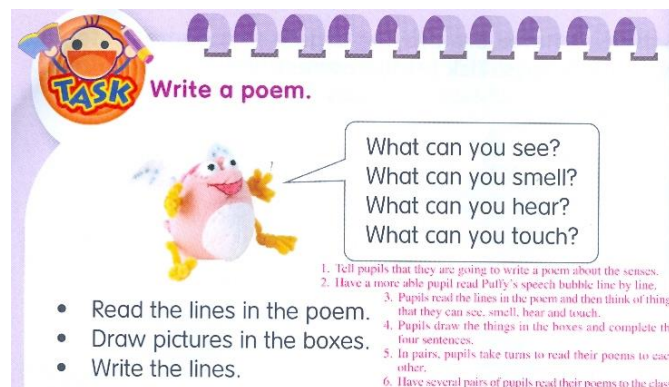


Figure 9 Puffy illustrated in pink in a photograph of *Step Up*

On the other hand, among the 71 non-human female ‘tokens’ in the line drawings, 13 ‘tokens’ were drawn wearing pink but only one wearing blue (i.e. 18.31% and 1.41%

respectively). Twinkle, the only non-human female character shown in three different photographs of *Step Up*, is neither in pink nor in blue. Rather, she is in yellow. Apart from the colour of their bodies, among the 71 non-human female ‘tokens’ in the line drawings, they were drawn in pink bows in 39 instances and a blue bow in one instance, and carrying a pink handbag in 3 instances. In the line drawings of *Primary Longman Express*, among the 34 non-human male ‘tokens’, slightly more than half, 19 ‘tokens’ (i.e. 55.88%), were drawn in blue but none is in pink. On the other hand, among the 85 non-human female ‘tokens’, 54 ‘tokens’ (i.e. 63.33%) were drawn in pink but none in blue (see, for example, Figure 10 from *Primary Longman Express 1A* p. 42).



Figure 10 A non-human male character drawn in blue and a female character drawn in pink in *Primary Longman Express*

Overall, for non-human characters, one way to determine their sex is based on their clothing. Non-human males and females were illustrated wearing ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ clothing in only less than half of all instances. However, their skin colour is not a reliable sign of their sex either. In *Step Up*, though it is more often for females to be drawn in pink than blue, the non-human male Puffy was drawn in pink but not in blue. On the other hand, in *Primary Longman Express*, more than half of non-human males were drawn in blue and none in a ‘feminine’ colour pink, and the opposite occurs in non-human females.

## Discussion

Based on the findings presented above, regarding visual representation of males and females in terms of their hair length, overall, the human females in the analysed books of the two English Language textbook series were more often illustrated with long than short hair in both the line drawings (209 and 118 line drawings respectively) and photographs (27 and 14 photographs respectively). In other words, in 63.91% of the line drawings and 65.85% of the photographs, human females were portrayed to have long hair. Gender differences were exaggerated in *Step Up*, with nearly 90% of females in the line drawings and photographs with long hair but all males with short hair. However, the textbook illustrators of *Primary Longman Express* have shown attempts to portray the characters in a way that reflects the reality because in Hong Kong (as in western countries), many people think that females having long hair are beautiful and therefore, many actresses and models have long hair. Nonetheless, some females in Hong Kong do not have long hair and prefer short hair, though based on my informal observation, there are more females having long hair than short hair in Hong Kong. On the other hand, it is considered as unusual and feminine for a man to have long hair and therefore, males in Hong Kong nearly always have short hair. This phenomenon can be reflected in the illustrated males in the analysed books of the two textbook series. Hair length however seems less relevant to non-human female characters, whose sex is determined rather by their accessories or clothing, because they look alike as their male counterparts except for the bow on their heads or a handbag.

When representing males and females in illustrations in terms of their clothing, females were more often portrayed wearing dresses than trousers in both the line drawings and photographs of the four selected textbooks of *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express*, 184 compared with 44 respectively ( $\chi^2 (1, n = 228) = 85.965, p < .05$  and thus it is strongly significant, even if the chi-square value is substantiated with  $p < .001$ , and  $\phi = 0.614$  has produced a large-sized effect). This aspect contrasts the reality because in real life in Hong Kong, except for school uniform, females wear trousers (especially jeans, or leggings in recent years) more often than dresses, in particular on less formal occasions. Whereas females were more often portrayed wearing dresses than trousers, males were never drawn wearing dresses, because males in Hong Kong (and also in other cultures) do not wear dresses. In terms of colour, less than half the males in the line drawings of the selected books of *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express* (45.53% and 38.41% respectively) were portrayed wearing blue, but many males in the photographs of *Primary Longman Express* (78.95%) were wearing blue because this is the colour of their school uniform. This is very interesting because, in reality, males' uniform in many primary schools in Hong Kong is a white shirt (together with white or grey shorts). In some contrast, given the cultural association of the colour pink with femininity suggested by Koller (2008), surprisingly, human females were not always or even usually portrayed dressing in this feminine colour, with only a small



number (20.87% and 19.91% in *Step Up* and *Primary Longman Express* respectively) wearing pink. However, pink is used for both non-human male (Puffy, a monster in *Step Up*) and female (Coco, a monster in *Primary Longman Express*) characters. This aspect can be explained by the fact that the colours of the clothing items of the illustrated human characters and the skin of the drawn non-human characters are determined by illustrators' choice and preference. On the other hand, the illustrators may just represent the non-human males and females differently and unconsciously.

Overall, as regards hair length and clothing, similar to Kereszty's (2009) analysis of five elementary textbooks used in Hungary in which girls and women were usually found to wear skirts and have long hair, and boys and men to wear trousers, in the two analysed textbook series, females were more often portrayed having long hair than short hair, and more often portrayed wearing dresses than trousers in both line drawings and photographs. These aspects are unsurprising, as Kereszty (2009) suggests that the 'typical' (i.e. traditional) characteristics of the characters are used to make their sex obvious. Nevertheless, children will make "gender-related generalizations" regarding the activities engaged in by characters of textbooks (Scott & Feldman-Summers, 1979, p. 400), and stereotyped portrayals of the sexes in children's books or textbooks can contribute negatively to children's development (Hamilton et al., 2006). Thus, textbook illustrators should represent the characters in a manner that can truly reflect the reality, or in a nonsexist way. Barclay (1974) found that children become less sex-stereotyped after exposing to nonsexist books even if the time period is short. Scott and Feldman-Summers (1979) and Rashad (2015) also expect that a nonsexist representation in books can help the formation of children's egalitarian view of males and females. Although blue and pink are generally considered 'masculine' and 'feminine' colours respectively, less than half of the human males were portrayed wearing blue, and only a small percentage of human females in the line drawings and one female in a photograph of *Primary Longman Express* wearing pink. For non-human characters, colour is not always a reliable cue to their sex. Yet, we can still distinguish non-human females from their clothing and accessories, with non-human female characters wearing dresses, wearing bows on their heads, or carrying handbags in both the line drawings and photographs of *Step Up*. In other words, as the illustrators or publishers want the non-human characters to be recognisably male or female when the characters are not recognisable as male or female from their facial features alone, they may have to resort to stereotypical behaviours or clothing (Graebner, 1972) by using exaggerated gender devices (e.g. a bow in a female's hair).

## Conclusion

This study uses a new perspective of analysing the visuals in language textbooks. Rather than conducting frequency counts of the occurrence of male and female characters in illustrations or the spheres of activities they engaged in as in previous textbook studies, this study

involves analyses of how visualised male and female characters are represented in the selected illustrations of the analysed English Language textbook series. Overall, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of gender stereotyping is not prominent in the illustrations in the selected books of either textbook series because females were not often depicted as wearing dresses or wearing pink, a ‘feminine’ colour. A possible reason for this finding may be the *Guiding Principles for Quality Textbooks* published by the CDC Ad Hoc Committee on Textbook Quality of the Education Bureau in 2003, before the publication of the two textbook series. One principle is that “(t)here is not any bias in content, such as over-generalisation and stereotyping” (Education Bureau, 2003). The guiding principles may serve as a useful reminder to textbook publishers, editors and illustrators about ensuring gender equality in their representations. In fact, all Hong Kong textbooks need to be approved by the Education Bureau before they can appear in the official recommended booklist. Therefore, it is not surprising that extreme examples of gender stereotyping were not found in the analysed books. However, given that the characters in the textbook illustrations are all ‘invented’, colours and the characters’ clothes are determined by the editors, illustrators and publishers according to their choice and preference, which may be influenced by what are considered as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ colours in the culture. For non-human characters, the only way for readers to distinguish their sex must be based on the generally accepted ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ colour (with Puffy in *Step Up* as an exception because he was drawn in pink), or their clothing items (e.g. ties, shirts, or trousers for males and dresses for females), accessories and handbags, and this can be ‘gendered’. Therefore, I would argue that if the purpose of including non-human characters in primary textbooks is to draw children’s attention and arouse their interest, the characters can indeed be gender-neutral, without personifying them as males or females. In classroom teaching, teachers can also discuss gender stereotyping in the textbooks deliberately and explicitly so as to raise students’ awareness. Through explicit instruction, stereotyping of either sex will hopefully not become deeply rooted in learners’ minds. To briefly conclude, as textbooks are an important medium for instructional purposes often targeting young learners and illustrated books can facilitate the internalization of social norms in children’s mind (Brugeilles et al., 2002), textbook writers and illustrators may need to ensure that males and females are represented in a socially realistic manner. In further research, apart from merely analysing how gender is represented in the visuals of textbooks, children’s responses or attitudes towards visual representation of gender (see, e.g. Martin & Halverson, 1983) should also be investigated.

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