

## **The Representation of Social Actors in Top Notch Textbook Series: A critical discourse analysis perspective**

Safoura Davari, English Department, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran  
*Sa\_davari@yahoo.com*

Mohammad Raouf Moini, English Department, Kashan University, Kashan, Iran  
*eltmoini@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate how English language teaching textbooks portrayed male and female social actors according to their social roles and gender identities. To examine the linguistic representation of male and female social actors and construction of gender identities in ELT textbooks, *Top Notch* series was selected. To do so, attempts were made to analyze the series in terms of the features introduced in two analytical models: Van Leeuwen's (1996) framework and Halliday's transitivity model (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). All of the sentences in reading passages and conversations were counted and analyzed critically through discursive features of these two models. The findings of this study revealed significant differences in representation of male and female social actors in some discursive features. Male social actors were described as more autonomous, successful, and active compared to female social actors.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, ideology, ideology and Language, gender, textbooks, social actors

### **Introduction**

An important part of culture of any society lies in its oral and written literature. Socialization is done through educational institutions with a pre-determined schedule and with educational aids, the most important of which are textbooks. It is through these books which the greater part of the values, behavior, knowledge, and skills is transmitted from one generation to another and even it can be the reason of the transformation and development of a society. According to Litz (2005), textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching/learning process. As a matter of fact, they are the primary agents of transmitting knowledge and information to the learners. Also, textbooks represent the important part of any ELT program which offers substantial benefits for both the students and the teachers.

According to Richards (2001), one of the important elements of most language programs is the textbook. Much of the language input which learners receive and the language exercises provided to the learners in the class, are based on textbooks. They are useful in the sense that they provide the content of the lessons, practice language, train skills, and supplement teachers' instructions. On the other hand, textbooks can be the source of training for teachers who are less experienced as well. They provide the idea and format which direct teachers to plan and teach their lessons.

The importance and place of textbook in the process of learning is emphasized by different researchers, e.g. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) who believe "The textbook is an almost universal element of [English language] teaching. Millions of copies are sold every year, and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce them in [various] countries...No teaching-learning situation, it seems, is complete until it has its relevant textbook" (p. 315). Ellis (1997) expressed that

evaluating textbooks helps teacher to pay more attention to the details and it helps them to have an accurate, useful, systematic and contextual understanding of the whole nature of textbooks materials

In more recent years, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been the method which is utilized to investigate the quality of textbooks. CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse, which views "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 20) and concentrates on the ways social and political domination is reproduced by text and talk.

In accordance with Van Dijk (2006), the social states of discourse, and more definitely the inquiries of power and power abuse are the fields which CDA is occupied with. Moreover, Van Dijk (2008) expressed that CDA is a kind of discourse-analytical enquiry that fundamentally concentrates on the investigation of social power abuse, dominance, and imbalance in which text and talk in the social and political connection authorized, reproduced, and opposed. Critical discourse analysts hold on to a clear position and need to comprehend, uncover, and lastly contradict social disparity.

CDA as an exploration technique, hence, focuses on understanding the ideological machinations of discourse and plans to produce an evaluation of how discourse works to influence certain agendas.

The concept of social actors used here is indebted to Van Leeuwen's (1996) taxonomy of social actor representation, which is combined with a description of other linguistic features such as evaluation, process types and, modality. The list of these parameters can be modified and extended but their use as additional features that reinforce social actor representation stresses the importance of social actors in any analysis of identity in discourse. In short, social actors as a discourse analytical category are seen as the textual instantiations of models of the self and others, both individual and collective.

This study took a critical discourse analysis approach to investigate the linguistic representation of male and female social actors and construction of gender identities in the *Top Notch* series. To do so, attempts were made to identify the principal ways through which social actors are represented in the texts under study and reveal the possible hidden discursive structures. So the present study aimed at answering the following research questions:

Q1: Are male and female social actors represented differently in *Top Notch* textbooks?

Q2: What ideology do male and female social actors represent?

### **Literature Review**

Some instructional textbooks are dominated by the unnoticed and stereotypic role of male or female social actors. Investigating gender bias in EFL textbooks has recently brought much enthusiasm. Ansary and Babaii (2003), for instance, investigated the status of sexism in two English language teaching textbooks: *Right Path to English I* and *Right Path to English II* (Birjandi & Soheili, 1999) taught to Iranian students at secondary schools. They concluded that these two textbooks could be regarded as sexist, in that they would expose Iranian EFL students to a partial and unjustifiable representation of women. Additionally, Amal Saleh, Sajjadi, and Yarmohammadi (2006) scrutinized how language was used in the EFL high school textbooks in Iran. The results of their study showed that females were ignored in these EFL textbooks. Moreover, it was found that the occurrence and the kind of activities, which males and females were involved in, were significantly different in the sense that females were mostly associated with the traditional roles of doing household chores and care giving. Recently, Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010) examined the linguistic representation of male and female social actors

and construction of gender identities in the texts of *New Interchange* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2005) from the CDA viewpoint. The results revealed that women were depicted as more important, energetic, autonomous, eloquent, and confident in *New Interchange*. In a similar study, Karimaghai and Bagherzade Kasmani (2013) scrutinized how the linguistic representation of male and female social actors differed in the texts of *Top Notch 2A* and *2B*. The results showed that female social actors were represented as less successful than males. The present study was a continuation of the above-mentioned study and used two models of analysis and examined the whole series.

## Methodology

### Corpus

The textbooks under investigation included 8 books, all of which were included in the analysis. *Top Notch* is a eight-level communicative course that prepares adults and young adults to interact successfully and confidently with both native and nonnative speakers of English. The series is used in various educational institutes in Iran. These 8 level textbooks include *Fundamental*, *Top Notch 1*, *Top Notch 2*, *Top Notch 3*, and *Summit*. Each textbook is divided into two parts i.e. *Top Notch 1A* and *1B*, *Top Notch 2A* and *2B*, *Top Notch 3A* and *3B*, *Summit 1A* and *1B*, *Summit 2A* and *2B*. The series was developed by Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher, and was published in the United States of American by Pearson Longman Incorporation in 2006. *Top Notch* series was chosen among other ELT books because it was currently used in many language institutes.

### Models of the study

#### Discursive features of the models

### Van Leeuwen's Framework

In order to analyze the ways through which social actors were represented in *Top Notch* textbooks, the researchers applied a critical discourse analysis, and 2 analytical models. One of them was Van Leeuwen's framework (2008), a comprehensive framework in CDA that is based on a socio-semantic inventory. In Van Leeuwen's framework (2008), deletion, rearrangement, and substitution are three main types of transformation this framework is based on. According to these main types of transformation, social actors can be represented, verbally or visually. The network he proposes consists of three main types of transformation: deletion, rearrangement, and substitution. In other words, the network shows whether the social actors were excluded or included; whether through rearrangements different roles were assigned to different social actors; and whether any substitutions were used in their representation.

#### Deletion

Deletion is a central concern of critical discourse analysis and consists of the process of inclusion and exclusion. As Van Leeuwen's framework (2008) expressed "representation include or exclude social actors to suit their interest and purposes in relation to the readers for whom they are included." (p. 28)

#### Exclusion

Exclusion is one of the processes of deletion. It means that social actors can be omitted by some linguistic mechanisms. Van Leeuwen believes that a significant aspect of critical discourse analysis is exclusion (2008, 28). Exclusion is a common phenomenon in newspaper texts and

political speech. In terms of exclusion, social actors and their activities and in some cases the actors involved in action were excluded.

#### *Inclusion*

Another process of representation in terms of deletion is inclusion. Inclusion of social actors is used to suit the needs and purpose of both the text producers and the readers.

#### *Role Allocation*

According to Van Leeuwen's framework (2008), rearrangement is one of the three main types of transformation. Rearrangement or role allocation tries to identify what role is allocated to which social actor through features such as activation, passivation, participation, etc.

#### *Activation*

Social actors can be activated as a result of represented social actors as the active dynamic forces. Since social actors assigned in their roles these roles or actions would be more meaningful when these action are identified, based on some features such as activation, passivation, participation and ,etc. So rearrangement aims to recognize what role is allocated to which social actor or on the other hand which social actors allocates what role.

#### *Passivation*

When social actors are represented as experiencing an activity, or as being the recipient, passivation occurs. Passivation involves another distinction: 1) Subjection, and 2) beneficialisation.

#### *Subjection*

Social actors which are subjected are handled as objects in the representation.

#### *Beneficialisation*

It occurs when social actors benefit from an activity positively, or negatively. Beneficialisation may be realized by participation, in which the beneficialised participant is recipient or client in relation to a material process, or receiver in relation to a verbal process (Halliday, 1985).

#### *Substitution*

There are some different discursive features through which social actors are represented that are analyzed under substitution: functionalization, identification, personalization, personalization, classification, relational identification, nomination, individualization, assimilation, association, etc.

#### *Functionalization*

It occurs when social actors are referred to an occupation or a role. In other words in terms of an activity or what they do.

#### *Identification*

It occurs when social actors are defined in terms of what they, more or less regularly, or unavoidably, are ,including: age, gender, provenance, class, wealth , ethnicity, religion, and so on.

### *Personalization*

When social actors are represented as a human being or not, that is realized by proper names or nouns and personal or possessive pronouns.

### *Impersonalization*

It occurs when social actors are represented by concrete nouns or by abstract nouns that semantic feature human is not involved in their meaning. In general impersonalization has 2 subcategories: 1) Abstraction, and 2) Objectivation.

### *Abstraction*

When by the representation, an attribute is assigned to social actors, abstraction occurs.

### *Objectivation*

It occurs when social actors are represented by means of reference to a place or thing closely associated as being with their person or with the activity they are represented as being engaged in.

### *Nomination*

It occurs when social actors are represented with proper nouns. These proper nouns might be informalization (given name only), semi-formalization (given name and surname) and formalization (surname only, with or without honorifics).

### *Categorization*

When social actors are represented with (by) unique identity (nomination), and functions they share with others, categorization occurs.

### *Genericization*

It occurs when social actors are represented as classes or as specific, identifiable individuals.

### *Indetermination*

It occurs when social actors are represented as unspecified, anonymous individuals or groups. Indetermination is typically realized by indefinite pronouns ('somebody', 'someone', 'some', 'some people') used in nominal function.

### *Individualization*

It occurs when social actors are referred to as individuals.

### *Collectivization*

It occurs when social actors are referred to as groups which are realized by plurality, by a mass noun or a noun denoting a group of people but not treated as statistics.

## **Halliday's transitivity model**

The second model utilized in the current study is Halliday's transitivity model (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The reason for using this model is that, based on Halliday's transitivity model, the different type of male and female social actors' activity can be analyzed.

## **Procedures**

In this study, data came from all sentences, clauses, words, and phrases that described and introduced the actors in texts of eight-level textbooks of *Top Notch* series. They were critically analyzed based on features in Van Leeuwen's (1996) model and Halliday and Mathiessen's transitivity model. To determine whether the differences were significant, chi square test was used. To estimate inter-coder reliability of data, 20 percent of the whole data was given to 2 analyzers to analyze texts in terms of categories identified in both Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) and Halliday's (1985) transitivity models and then the inter-rater reliability was calculated and found to be  $r = .87$ .

## Results

### Deletion

To analyze the data, the frequency of the words, phrases, clauses, and sentences which introduced the social actors in terms of deletion were calculated. Table 4.1 below displays the frequency of the words in terms of deletion, including inclusion and exclusion.

**Table1.** Inclusion and Exclusion of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

Inclusion/Exclusion	Male	Female	Total
Inclusion	1638 58.33%	1170 41.67%	2808
Exclusion	49 41.88%	68 58.12%	117

As shown in Table 1, male social actors are included with more frequency. In Table 2 below, chi square results were calculated in order to examine whether the difference between observed frequencies of both social actors was significant in terms of deletion (inclusion and exclusion).

**Table 2.** Chi-Square Results for Inclusion of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

Inclusion	No.	$X^2$	$df$	Sig.
Male	1638	78	1	0.0001
Female	1170			
Total	2808			

The  $p$  value is  $< 0.0001$ . The result is significant at  $p < 0.05$

As can be seen in Table 2, for inclusion the difference was statistically significant. Since the  $p$  value in Table 2 was less than the significant level (i.e.  $0.0001 < .05$ ), it could be concluded that there was a significant difference between the representation of male and female social actors in terms of inclusion. It shows that male social actors were included with considerably higher frequency in comparison with female social actors. Table 3 below illustrates chi-square results for exclusion.

**Table 3.** Chi-Square Results for Exclusion of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

Exclusion	No.	$X^2$	$df$	Sig.
Male	49	3.085	1	0.079
Female	68			
Total	117			

The  $p$  value is 0.079017. The result is not significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

As shown in Table 3, this difference was not statistically significant regarding exclusion ( $p > .05$ ).

### Role Allocation

In this part, the way of representation of social actors was investigated with regard to the nature of their action: whether social actors were activated or passivated. Table 4 summarizes the activation and passivation of social actors.

**Table 4.** Role Allocation of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

	Activated	Passivated	
		Subjected	Beneficialized
Male	1339 57.67%	38 49.35%	18 62.07%
Female	983 42.33%	39 50.65%	11 37.93%
Total	2322	77	29

As can be seen in Table 4, both male and female social actors were mostly activated and seldom passivated. Table 5 below shows chi-square results for male and female social actors who were activated in activities.

**Table 5.** Chi-Square Results for Male and Female Activation

Activated	No.	$X^2$	$df$	Sig.
Male	1339	54.58	1	0.00001
Female	983			
Total	2322			

The  $p$  value is  $< 0.00001$ . The result is significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

As shown in Table 5, the difference between male and female social actors was statistically significant in terms of activation since the  $p$  value was  $< .05$ . Table 6 below shows chi-square results in terms of passivation in order to examine whether the difference between the observed frequencies of both social actors was significant.

**Table 6.** Chi-square Results for Male and Female Passivation

Passivated	Subjected	Beneficialized	$X^2$	$Df$	$Sig.$
Male	38	18	1.367	1	0.24
Female	39	11			
Total	77	29			

The chi-square statistic was 1.3674. The  $p$  value was 0.242259.

As shown in Table 6, there was not a statistically significant difference between both social actors in terms of passivation since the  $p$  value was greater than the specified level of significance ( $0.24 > .05$ ).

### Substitution

Table 7 below summarizes discursive features in terms of substitution, through which social actors were represented:

**Table 7.** Substitution of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

Personalization/Impersonalization		Male	Female	Total
Personalization	Functionalization	215 60.6%	140 39.4%	355 100%
	Classification	208 56.2%	162 43.8%	370 100%
	Relational Identification	174 65.2%	93 34.8%	267 100%
	Formalization	183 58.3%	131 41.7%	314 100%
	Semiformalization	408 57.7%	299 42.3%	707 100%
	Informalization	385 42.5%	520 57.5%	905 100%
	Indetermination	385 73.5%	139 26.5%	524 100%
	Impersonalization	Abstraction	22 50.0%	22 50.0%
Objectivation		8 73.5%	10 26.5%	18 100%

As Table 7 shows, personalization was mostly realized by semiformalization and followed by informalization. Moreover, Table 7 shows that both social actors were frequently determined (represented through functionalization, classification, relational identification, formalization, semiformalization, and Informalization). As Table 4.7 shows personalization was mostly realized by semiformalization (females 42.3%, and males 57.7%) followed by informalization (females 57.5% and male 42.5%). Concerning categorization, as Table 7 indicates, females and males were almost inequally functionalized (39% and 60% respectively)

and classified (43% and 56% respectively) statistically. Both social actors were mostly classified in terms of their age and provenance. Table 8 below shows the chi-square results for both social actors in terms of substitution:

**Table 8.** Chi-square Results for Male and Female Social Actors in Terms of Substitution

Personalization/Impersonalization		Male	Female	$X^2$	$df$	$Sig.$
Personalization	Functionalization	215 60.6%	140 39.4%	144.65	6	0.00001
	Classification	208 56.2%	162 43.8%			
	Relational Identification	174 65.2%	93 34.8%			
	Formalization	183 58.3%	131 41.7%			
	Semiformalization	408 57.7%	299 42.3%			
	Informalization	385 42.5%	520 57.5%			
	Indetermination	385 73.5%	139 26.5%			
Zation Impersonali-	Abstraction	22 50.0%	22 50.0%	0.158	1	0.691
	Objectivation	8 44.4%	10 55.6%			

As can be seen in Table 8, the difference was significant since  $p < 0.05$ . As Table 8 indicates, both male and female social actors were impersonalized but the difference between them was not significant since  $p > .05$ . Table 9 below shows the observed frequency of genericization and specifications of social actors in *TOP Notch* series.

**Table 9.** Genericization and Specification of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

	Genericization	Spesification		
		Individualization	Collectivization	Aggregation
Male	74	640	66	52
	52.48%	62.50%	53.23%	61.90%
Female	67	384	58	32
	47.52%	37.50%	46.77%	38.10%
Total	141	1024	124	84

As can be seen in Table 9, the two social actors were most frequently represented through specification and mostly individualization (females 37.5% and males 62.5%). To see the significant difference between male and female social actors in terms of the number of genericization and specification, chi-square test was used. Tables 10 and 11 below illustrate the results of the chi-square tests.

**Table 10.** Chi-Square Results for Genericization of Male and Female Social Actors

Genericization	No.	$X^2$	$df$	Sig.
Male	74	0.348	1	0.556
Female	67			
Total	141			

The  $p$  value was 0.555247. The result was not significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 11.** Chi-Square Results for Specification of Male and Female Social Actors

Spesification	Individualization	Collectivization	Aggregation	$X^2$	$df$	Sig.
Male	640	66	52	0.024	2	0.013
Female	384	58	32			
Total	1024	124	84			

The chi-square statistic was 0.0244. The  $p$  value was 0.0133697. The result was not significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

As shown in Table 11, males were individualized more than females and this distinction was statistically significant ( $sig = 0.0244$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The difference between male and female social actors for genericization, as Table 11 shows, was not significant, however. In the textbooks under investigation, individuality of males had been emphasized and, therefore, males were described as more independent individuals than males.

Through the transitivity processes, the representation of social actors and the sort of activities they were involved in were identified. In line with the purpose of critical discourse analysis and also to identify the representation at work, the current study was concerned with the language used in the texts. Table 12 presents the frequencies of representation of male and female social actors, concerning transitivity and the kind of activity in which they were involved.

**Table 12.** Transitivity of Male and Female Social Actors in Top Notch Series

Transitivity	Material Process	Mental Process	verbal Process	Relational Process	Behavioral Process
Male	441 56.98%	275 67.24%	97 51.60%	136 53.54%	99 61.11%
Female	333 43.02%	134 32.76%	91 48.40%	118 46.46%	63 38.89%

Total	774	409	188	254	162
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As can be seen in Table 12, female social actors participated in material process 333 times, while male social actors represented in 441 cases. Concerning mental processes, male social actors were represented in 275 cases, but female social actors participated in 134 cases. In general, the two social actors were most frequently represented through material, mental, and relational process. Table 12 indicates that males were mostly activated in relation to material processes, mental processes, and relational processes more significantly than females.

To see if the difference between representation of males and females was significant, the total number of transitivity was compared through chi-square. Table 13 below illustrates the results of the chi-square test.

**Table 13.** Chi-Square Results for Transitivity Processes for Male and Female Social Actors

Transitivity	Male	Female	X <sup>2</sup>	df	Sig
Material Process	441	33	15.07	1	0.0001
Mental Process	275	134	48.6	1	0.0001
verbal Process	97	91	0.1915	1	0.661
Relational Process	136	118	1.276	1	0.258
Behavioral Process	99	63	8	1	0.0047
Total			X <sup>2</sup> = 20.32	df = 4	Sig. = 0.00043

As the findings demonstrate, there was a different representation of male and female social actors in *Top Notch* textbooks. The linguistic features that were used mostly in order to make this different representation included inclusion, activation, participation, possessivation, functionalization, classification, relational identification, formalization, and individualization. As the results revealed, although the texts in *Top Notch* series tended to represent both actors equally to reflect a gender neutral bias, the qualitative analysis showed that it was not true. The text which introduced famous social actors included male actors in action verbs and excluded female actors from being involved in social actions. Stated in another way, the woman's life was described through passive agent deletion while the man himself was the doer of the action.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In all the textbooks under study, positive attitudes were reflected toward males and negative toward females. Male social actors were represented in action verbs and were the doer of the action and female social actors were introduced in the form of passive agent deletion. In terms of role allocation, it was obvious that in all 6 levels of *Top Notch* series, males were represented as dynamic and active actors in their social contexts. In terms of substitutions, as Van Leeuwen considers (2008), individualization is primary significance in CDA and textbooks under investigation tended to represent male social actors as more self-reliant persons and specific and identifiable individuals in comparison with female actors. Differences between representation of male and female social actors in terms of functionalization showed that males were represented as those having high status activities. The hidden ideology of these differences in terms of nomination, individualization, and assimilation showed that the emphasis was on male actors and this ideology that they were represented as more independent individuals compared to female

social actors. The findings were in line with some similar previous studies such as Ehya Amalsaleh (2006), and Karimaghaei and Bagherzadeh Kasmai (2013). All the reported results similar to the findings of the present study emphasize a significant difference between the representation of male and female social actors in particular English textbooks. This study took a critical discourse approach to indicate how language as social practice was utilized in all EFL *Top Notch* series. Based on the analysis of the data presented above, there were statistically significant differences in representation of male and female social actors. This study showed that the curriculum developers or authors of these textbooks, consciously or unconsciously, had given a priority to a special gender in developing the content of the texts. In other words, it was evident from the results that male social actors as the dominant group was represented with superiority over others. The outcomes recommended that educational programs employ textbooks which can compensate for the shortcomings of ideology behind the male and female representation in the current ELT textbooks.

The findings of the current study are also helpful for textbook designers because textbooks as the most important tools of teaching and learning play a crucial role in social improvement of the society. So, they should consider gender representation for developing the textbooks based on the social matters. Students have perspectives toward the role of genders in society and textbooks can help them have a neutral attitude towards gender roles in society. Such data analysis helps learners recognize how to read and interpret critically, understand the underlying ideological structures of the texts, and comprehend them.

Finally, any research has its own sets of problems and limitations. In this research, the ideological assumption was not directly imposed by curriculum because at first sight hidden ideologies which underlie texts cannot be understood; so it was a difficult process for the researchers to analyze this kind of procedure. Similar surveys can be conducted in future research on the other ELT textbooks with the same or different domain like reading, exercises, or even on the paralinguistic factors like intonation, stress, and the like.

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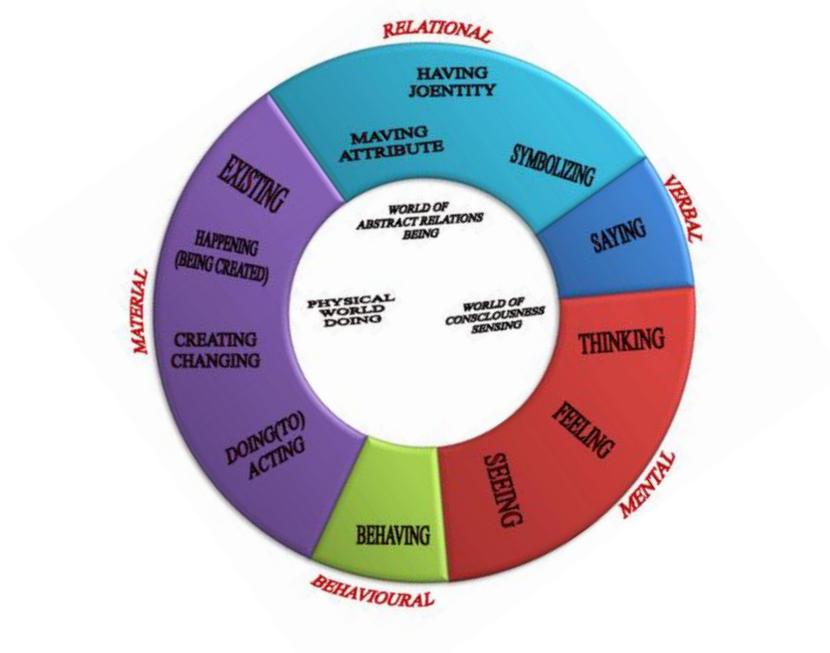
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## **Appendices**



**Figure 1:** Analytical Framework of the Study



**Figure 2:** Types of Processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)