Child Reader's Process of Selecting Picture Books based on Gender

: Focused on 2nd Grade Elementary Student

Yu, Seongryeong   Eunjung Elementary School (1st Author)

Cheon, Haeju   Korea University (Corresponding Author)

I. Introduction

Personal identity is deeply involved in the meaning-making process that occurs while reading(Noh, 2008). A person views the world with background knowledge and a perspective that reflects his or her existing identity while reading. Readers also modify their existing identities through the accumulation of new reading experiences. In other words, reading is a highly cognitive and social activity that involves a complex combination of individual schema and identity(McCarthey, 2002; Lee, S., 2017).

Since high reading motivation is closely related to reading achievement(Schwabe et al., 2015), the process of selecting a book that reflects readers' interests is important for readers. Furthermore, at the time when child readers begin to utilize both 'learning-to-read' and 'reading-to-learn' methods themselves, they attempt to expand their own world by applying their diverse identities while reading(Martinez et al., 2000).

Picture books consist of 'pictures' and 'text', which facilitate the meaning-making process through synthesis. In particular, the covers of picture books serve as a deliberate element that reveal the characteristics of a book, and they have a significant influence on the book

selection process for children through their holistic images(Lee, J. Y., 2011; Lee, H. J., 2015). Readers can infer and imagine the meanings of picture books through its cover as representation of contents(Song & Choi, 2013). Through this process, readers can choose books by inferred meaning of book, their own interests, emotions, and perspectives based on identities.

Based on theories assuming that child readers' actions in selecting books reflect their identities, the ultimate goal of this study was to explore the factors that influence children's book choices. To achieve this aim, this study was guided by two main research questions: (a) What is the difference between gender group in book selection? and (b) How does a child reader's identity work in the book selection?

II. Theoretical frames

This study is designed to research on factors that affect child readers' process of selecting a picture book. For discussion about collected research data, general factors of book selection and identity model were used as theoretical frames of study.

1. Child reader's book selection factors

Personal interest about book can be stimulated by two main axles including book's own formational characteristics and reader's internal characteristics. This study especially focused on elements of picture book's cover and reader factors to analyze book selection factors of child reader.

1) Picture book and components of its cover

Picture books display their characteristics on the book covers' external components, including headings, author information, body, and addendum to the book. These components have a significant in-

fluence on book selection and reading. The major characteristic of the components are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of External Components in a Storybook (Roberts, 1986: 156)

Component	Characteristics
Front	Book title, author name, illustrator name, cover picture, and publisher name
Spine	The visible outer part of the book when it is displayed on the shelf, book title, author and illustrator name, and publisher display

In selecting a book, the cover is the main representation of the book as a whole that young readers recognize first, and the cover induces interest in other characteristics, such as the title, author, and cover picture(Lee, J. Y., 2011). This study concentrated particularly on the cover element of external components. When child readers select a book, they can infer certain plot from the title of the book's cover, the size and shape of the book or overall color.

The book cover is important as a cultural artifact that distinguishes it from the stories to represents(Drew & Sternberg, 2005; Mackey, 2014) and induces rapid judgement through visual language. Cover art is the first step of communicating the contents of the book; thus, the front face of the components that comprise the cover should be sufficient to appeal to young readers.

2) Reader factor and reading preference

'Reader factor' is deeply involved in all the processes and experiences of reading, such as the process of selecting texts, proceeding with reading, the results of reading, the difficulty of texts, and the emotional responses to reading(Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Given Lee. S.(2006), self-efficacy, expectations and curiosity about reading, values assigned to reading, concentration on reading, purpose and attitude of reading, and the identity of the reader are considered reader factors. Indeed, readers' identities also effect to reader factors, which

are changeable by external or internal factors around readers.

Especially, Munson-Warnken(2017) have explored quasi-factors when the reader chooses a book, which can suppress the potential for gender bias in the text. According to the results, girls enjoyed novels more than boys. Also, boys tend to read a book based on the back jacket rather than book cover as compared with girls(Munson-Warnken, 2017).

2. Personal identity and reading

This study focused on identity intervention during child reader's book selection, especially operation of personal identity through peer groups divided by gender. Understanding a process how personal identity works as standards of behavior helps to find out one's book selection reasons.

1) Identity model and preference

Burke & Stets(2009:62) explained how personal identity works as a standard to judge unfamiliar situation and regulate own behavior through 'Identity model' shown in Figure 1. In the identity model, there are four main components: an *input*, an *identity standard*, a *comparator*, and an *output*. These components are deeply connected each other to determine how to behave in a certain situation as an output of process.

This model also explains individual's preference efficiently. Based on the identity model by Burke & Stets(2009), certain behavior that person decided to do so is likely shown when '*the meanings of situation*' and '*the meanings of their identities*' matches well. It means personal preference works as representation of one's identity through definite materials. Also, Burke & Stets(2009) explained that mismatching between situation and identity standards may helps to verify and regulate one's identity. If it is not working well, the person could become distressed at the unfamiliar situation.
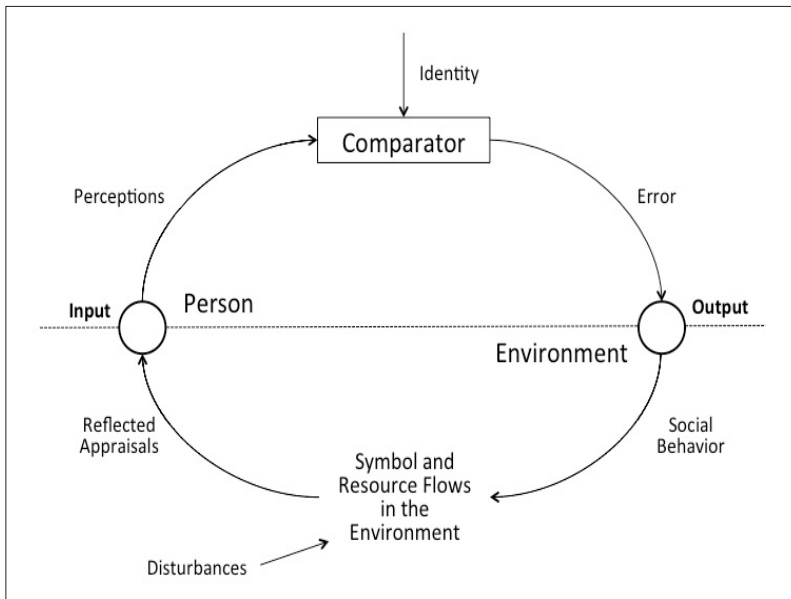
Figure 1. Identity Model(Burke & Stets, 2009:62)

The identity model helps to understand children's reading choices as well. In many practical researches, clear differences about reading preference in certain genre or subject matters were revealed between boys and girls(Christine & Martin, 1999; Yoon & Lee, 2007; Chung & Seo, 2012). However, these text preference were usually measured based on participants' various experiences and perceptions about typical genres or contents. Readers' immediate and actual responses on sample books were limited in relevant researches. For this reason, the cover of picture book is still efficient materials to check readers' preference which lead to book selection.

2) Gender identity operation in reading

Furthermore, gender identity, which is part of one's identity, is closely related in self-perception as a reader. Child readers' difference among reading attitude between gender group often reported in many researches(Christine & Martin, 1999; Yoon & Lee, 2007; Chung

& Seo, 2011).

Christine & Martin(1999) pointed out that child readers usually recognized reading habits belongs to only for girls. Boys in peer group rarely recognized themselves as a reader. Girls also recognized boys as '*who like to play football than read* '. Christine & Martin(1999) warned that this stance may effect boys to strengthen 'non-reader' identity. Thus perception as a reader is related to reading process in general, including personal reading preference, this difference between children's peer groups divided by gender should be more highlighted.

Based on importance of personal identity operation in reader's book selection, this study explored how child reader select a book and show responses about components of book cover.

III. Methods

This section discusses book materials and test methods used in data collection. In addition, this section describes the three methods used for data analysis: (a) frequency analysis, (b) qualitative coding, and (c) subsequent interviews.

1. Selection of book cover

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that influence children's book choices based on the elements of the picture books' covers and an intervention of identity. In this study, a total of eight picture books were selected considering diversity in content, format, and published year. Table 2 and Table 3 provide the basic information of the book covers selected for this study.

To stimulate the various elements used in the students' cognitive processes, the covers of the books were chosen from a variety of topics(see Table 3). Labels that include a variety of colors, characters

and environmental photos were also considered. The titles, were set in varied categories such as color, size and arrangement.

Table 2. Selected eight book covers

①	②	③	④
⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧

Regarding to the importance of the book cover, this study excluded text extraction(line, bookcase, etc.) and limited materials to the front cover(book summary, recommended text, etc.).[1] Each cover page is reproduced in full color with the title and author name. The various attributes of the book were also considered, including the font size(big books, handbooks, etc.), the shape of the book(home shapes, car shapes, etc.) and overall cover color(pink, blue, white, etc.). The books were limited to the books which usually used by lower-grade students and were selected to include various genres, such as history, art, and science, as the attributes of the books' titles that can accurately reflected.

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1   Factors in book selection include not only text factor such as cover pages, pages and font sizes, but also environmental factor, including reader factor(Lee, J. Y., 2011). However, this study focused on factors that students most considered.

Table 3. Selected eight book covers' basic information

No.	Book title	Title format		Color	Picture	Content
		Style, color, arrangement	Size			
①	《A Friend》 (2018)	Decorated, blue, tilted	Big	Blue	A girl who wears a dress and dances with a squirrel	Friendship, conflict
②	《My Favorite Sea-Creatures》 (2008)	Angular, aligned, colorful	Very big	White	Sea creatures	Encyclopedia /science
③	《My Brother is Bow-wow!》 (2017)	Decorated, crooked, brown	Big	Brown	A girl with an opened-mouth	Love, conflict
④	《Why Should I Bow (Sabae) for the Same Age?》 (2012)	Decorated, free layout, black and red	Medium	Red	Bowing scene with Korean clothes	Society/ history
⑤	《Fabre and Great Insect Friends》 (2014)	Decorated, black	Very small	Blue, green	Fabre character and insect picture	Science/ history
⑥	《A Working Car》 (2018)	Dense, uncluttered, hard, aligned, black	Big	Yellow	Heavy equipment	Encyclopedia /machine
⑦	《Research on My Whimsical Hair》 (2012)	Decorated, black	Big	White	A big head	Encyclopedia
⑧	《The Strongest Slap-Match(Ttakji) King》 (2018)	Round, yellow	Small	Pink	A boy playing slap-match	Entertainment

2. Data collection

To determine which factors influence the selection of books, 44 second-grade students' (26 boys and 18 girls) responses were analyzed. Furthermore, the following methods were conducted: (a) sign response gathering test (4 questions), (b) reading attitude test (5 questions), and (c) focused student interviews.

The research participants were asked to view the covers of only eight picture books and scale their preference in a 4-point-scale by three situations(see Figure 2). They were also asked to freely describe the reasons behind their choices.

Figure 2. Example of sign response gathering test

In this study, reading attitude tests were conducted to investigate surface reader factors that affect the reaction to the book covers.[2] Each question was asked to include the frequency of reading, the attitude of reading and independency on book selection in usual. Table 4 shows all the items used in the study.

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2   Attitude test result is excluded from this study due to its difficulty to analyze them significantly. However, some of results are included in Table 8 to provide students' information who participated in focused interview.

Table 4. Summarization of items in used

Category	Item	Response
Book Selection Factors	The book which wants to read <u>MOST</u> and reason why	Opened
	Expectation response of reading 'the book wants to read <u>MOST</u>' - Self expectation - Parents' expectation - Friends' expectation	Sign responding/ Opened
	The book which wants to read <u>LEAST</u> and why the reason	Opened
	Expectation response of reading 'the book wants to read <u>LEAST</u>' - Self expectation - Parents' expectation - Friends' expectation	Sign responding/ Opened
Reading Attitude	Reading frequencies in usual days	Multiple
	Usual feeling when I read a book	Sign responding
	How do I choose my book in usual	Multiple
	Most favorite book that I'd read	Opened
	Reasons for choosing a book that I answered above	Opened

To minimize peer effects, participants responded to the question-naires in their independent spaces, and autonomy in their response was secured since time constraints were not imposed to them.

3. Data analysis

The main results were obtained using triangular verification through frequency analysis, qualitative coding, and subsequent interviews, which are explained in the succeeding section. First, the frequency analysis was conducted on the results of an attitude test, as well as based on the book selected by the child reader. The qualitative coding was handled by the students' gender. In particular, there were significant references to conflicting key-words such as related to 'girls', 'female student' answered by boys, and key-words 'boys' and 'male student' answered by girls. Finally, four boys and two girls who responded based on gender biased responses in the survey chosen for focused students for interview. With the assistance of the teacher,

the interview method was applied with additional questions and answers regarding the reasons students responded when watching the picture book covers.

IV. Findings

Data which collected by three ways were analyzed by both quantitative method including frequency analysis and qualitative methods which coded participants' response including their interview results. This multi-faced analysis helped to find several main findings as below.

1. Clear preference in book selection

Analyzing participants' responses regarding book selections based on the request to list "the book they wanted to read MOST/LEAST" showed two important findings. Table 5 shows that boys and girls made totally different decision for the book which want to read or not.

Table 5. Ranking of picture book's cover

Book	①		②		③		④		⑤		⑥		⑦		⑧	
Group	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
MOST	5	3	2	5	6	2	3	3	6	6	6	6	4	1	1	4
LEAST	1	4	4	3	2	5	4	2	6	2	6	1	3	4	5	5

B = Boys; G = Girls

First, the preferred factors in picture books worked differently depending on the gender groups clearly. Table 6 shows that the most preferred book cover for boys was 《*The Strongest Slap-Match (Ttakji) King*》(*N*=11). It seems the personal preference for 'Slap-Match' which

shown in the title, and other factors, such as expectations and curiosity about book, were effective for boys.

Table 6. Want to read MOST result

n(%)

Group	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧
Boys(n=26)	2(7.7%)	6(23%)	0	4(15.4%)	0	0	3(11.5%)	11(42%)
Girls(n=18)	4(18%)	1(4.5%)	5(22.7%)	4(18.2%)	0	0	6(27.3%)	2(9.1%)

The favorite book covers for girls were distributed compared with that for boys, and reasons were also varied including the title, picture, and reader factor. No remarkable difference in the girls' preference was observed, in which 《*Research on My Whimsical Hair*》, 《*My Brother is Bow-wow!*》, 《*Why Should I Bow(Sabae) for the Same Age?*》, and 《*A Friend*》 were turned out to be the cover of the book they wanted to read in order.

Second, the most avoided book covers that were clearly identified by gender groups. It confirms that a person's diverse identities are involved in the selection criteria of children's books(see Table 7). Among the eight picture books, 《*A Friend*》 was chosen by boys(*N*=9) for book which want to read least. All nine boys said they did not like the book 《*A Friend*》, and provided the responses as "*I don't like the girl picture*", and "*I don't like the girl's reaction.*" For boys, 《*A Friend*》 turned out to be the least wanted book to read.

Table 7. Want to read LEAST result

n(%)

Group	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧
Boys(n=26)	9(34.6%)	3(11.5%)	6(23%)	3(11.5%)	0	0	4(15.3%)	1(3.8%)
Girls(n=18)	1(5.6%)	2(11.1%)	0	3(16.7%)	3(16.7%)	8(44.4%)	1(5.56%)	0

By contrast, girls chose 《*A Working Car*》 as the book that they least wanted to read(*N*=8), only two out of eight girls(25%) answered, "*I don't like a boy's book*", as to reason they did not prefer the picture

book 《*A Working Car*》. Female students often cited extrapolation or genre characteristics in paintings, such as "*I don't like cars*" and "*I don't like them*" rather than gender related responses.

2. Gender bias and child reader's book selection

The child readers selected book that wants to read the least and provided explanations for their choices. Given the result, four boys and two girls had answered with gender-biased responses and were chosen as focused participants for further interview. Table 8 summarizes focused students interview results. The frequency/attitude of their reading and the process of book selection in usual were varied according to individuals.

Table 8. Focused students interview result

Group	Student	Reason	Frequency	Reading attitude test score	Book selection in usual
Boys	B1	Looks like girls' book	One volume a day	4	Myself
	B2	I hate girls	Read only when I need to	1	Teacher's recommend
	B3	Looks like girls' book	One volume a day	3	Myself
	B4	Picture seems like girl's	More than three books a day	4	Myself
Girls	G1	Looks like boys' book	More than three books a day	4	Myself
	G2	Looks like boys'	More than three books a day	3	Myself

Few examples of focused students' responses depending on the book they selected and reasons are below(See Interview Excerpt 1, 2 and 3).

Interview Excerpt 1. Focused student interview: B1

T: You said the reason you do not want to read 《A Friend》 is the book "*looks like a girl's book*,"
   right?

B1: Yes.

T: Can you explain what a "*girl's book*" is?

B1: The girl is wearing a skirt. There are no animals like tigers. The color also looks like a
    woman.

T: But 《A Friend》's color is blue.

B1: It's not like blue. It's a girlish-blue color.

T: Well, what if there's a picture of this 《A Working Car》 in the blue book?

B1: It would be better if it were dark blue, but that picture is fine. It sounds good.

Interview Excerpt 2. Focused student interview: G1

T: What's a boyish book?

G1: (Pointing to book covers) 《A Working Car》, 《The Strongest Slap-Match King》…

T: Why? Because of the painting?

G1: 《The Strongest Slap-Match King》's painting is fine. Just the "*slap-match*" game is for
    boys.

T: What about 《A Working Car》?

G1: That is a real boy's book.

T: Aren't you curious about cars?

G1: I don't like cars.

T: How about a slap-match?

G1: Better than a car. But it's for the boys.

Like the examples of interview above, boys and girls think some-what different in "*boy's book*" and "*girl's book*". Boys often showed gender-biased standards such as making decisions on cover design itself, in contrast to girls are depend on their own interests and background knowledge of their opposite gender.

Interview Excerpt 3. Focused student interview: B2

T: You didn't want to read 《*A Friend*》 because you didn't like girls?

B2: Girls beat me and run. I hate girls.

T: The girl on the cover of 《*A Friend*》 won't bother you.

B2: But it reminds me.

T: So, you don't want to keep reading books about girls?

B2: I can read it by force.

It is notable that B2 is linking the reader with external causes other than book factors. Similar to G1's response in terms of personal experience, but the fact G1's personal experience stems from the book cover's factor-title, but B2 is perceived cover book's girl painting as a "*female student*" entirely can be differentiate.

In total, the child reader was dependent on positive/negative perspectives and individual's preference for specific materials, as well as content reasoning through the synthesis of 'picture' and 'text' that constitutes the cover of picture books. This positive or negative view, in particular, was based on personal experience, and interest in the material. In the case of the child reader who participated in the study, the view was largely derived from their identity formed by gender-separated peer groups. It is worth noting that boys selected books on the basis of their gender-biased beliefs more compared with girls.

V. Conclusion

This study focused on factors related to pre-reading process, especially gender identity. Forty-four elementary school students were asked to select books that they wanted to read the most and the least. The results of this study reveal that there were various reasons for the girls' responses regarding the books they wanted to read the least. Female students chose cover designs considering a variety of reader

factors and the book covers' external components. In contrast, the boys' responses reflected gender identity bias more often.

However, there are limitations of this study. The result of study is hard to generalize because of the small sample size and validity of book comparing process by participants. Nevertheless, it was possible to observe and to analyze which of the various elements of the picture books' covers affected book selection among children as well as how the children's identities influenced their choices. Despite having eight-year-old child readers as participants, we were able to confirm that the gender identity of an individual based on peer group's sense of belonging significantly influences the selection of books. This feature is especially noticeable for boys. Further research is needed to determine whether the book selection process of children readers is significant depending on gender that encompasses not only the reader factor but also the text factor.

The present study is an extension of the previous study's findings that gender and social identities affect the teenagers' selection of books(Christine & Martin, 1999; Munson-Warnken, 2017), which shows students need steady instruction and observation for book selection, including the child readers. The importance of selecting books according to individual interests remains unchanged.

In addition, excessive self-centeredness of children may lead to misguided judgments regarding the contents of books due to their attitudes, and preventing them from avoiding certain books is essential. The results of this study show that the emphasis on reading attitudes is important for child readers without prejudice to books of various content and formalities. Creating a reading environment where child readers can learn to respect the diversity of book choices without classifying it as mainstream or non-mainstream is necessary. Moreover, reading teachers or parents can be able to check the readers' gender sensitivity by observing reading process such as book selection or response about book. If a child has a gender-biased thinking, instructor should talk about factor of that perspective through conver-

sation. Books, which includes various contents or formats, can be a mediation for discussion.

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ABSTRACT

Child Reader's Process of
Selecting Picture Books based on Gender
: Focused on 2nd Grade Elementary Student

Yu, Seongryeong · Cheon, Haeju

This study explores process of selecting picture books influenced by child reader's identity. 44 second-grade students' responses about picture book selection were collected by sign response gathering test and focused student interviews. The child readers showed diverse preferences on components of picture book's cover. The perspectives of participants were largely derived from their identity formed by gender-separated peer groups, especially for boys: the boys selected books on the basis of their gender-biased beliefs compared with girls. The excessive self-centeredness lead children to misguided judgments regarding the contents of books, and avoiding certain books. It shows even child readers are needed to learn admitting attitude about diversity shown in book selection. Reading teachers or parents are needed to check the child readers' gender sensitivity by observing reading process such as book selection or response about book.

KEYWORDS Child readers, Elementary students, Picture books, Identity, Peer groups, Gender, Reading education, Gender bias, Book preference, Pre-reading process, Book selection