A Multimodal Visual Grammar Analysis of Gender Representation in *Egalitarian Tales – Cinderella's Riddle*

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how gender roles are visually reconstructed in the rewritten *Cinderella* story published in the *Egalitarian Tales* series. This study offers a multimodal visual grammar analysis of the rewritten Cinderella story in the *Egalitarian Tales* series. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework (representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions) and integrating socio-cultural semiotics and translation-as-rewriting perspectives, the paper examines how visual strategies reconstruct gender roles. Using three purposively sampled illustrations, coded via MAXQDA, the analysis demonstrates that images operate as ideological agents that can challenge traditional gender binaries and promote egalitarian social models. The findings suggest pedagogical implications for fostering critical multimodal literacy in early readers and highlight the significance of visual translation as a transformative tool in children's literature, particularly in contexts seeking to promote gender equity and inclusive narrative representation.

Keywords: visual grammar, multimodal discourse analysis, gender representation, children's literature, socio-semiotic rewriting

1. Introduction

Children's literature is a crucial site for cultural transmission, as its narratives and images shape early understandings of social roles, including gender (Nikolajeva, 2010). Fairy tales have historically functioned as cultural texts that transmit gender norms, values, and expectations across generations (Zipes, 2012, p. 34). Historically, canonical fairy tales such as Cinderella have reproduced patriarchal tropes: passive heroines, active heroes, and heteronormative endings (Bacchilega, 1997; Zipes, 2012). *The Egalitarian Tales – Cinderella's Riddle* (2020) project responds to this tradition by intentionally rewriting canonical tales to model gender-equitable relations. While textual rewritings are important,

the visual dimension is arguably even more influential in picture books: images often mediate values and identity scripts for early readers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Serafini, 2014).

This paper examines the rewritten Cinderella in the *Egalitarian Tales-Cinderella's Riddle* (2020) series, focusing on visual strategies that construct or deconstruct gender. The central aim is to examine how visual semiotic resources in retellings represent gender roles, power relations, and cultural values. The analysis proceeds through Kress and van Leeuwen's three metafunctions—representational, interactive, and compositional—to systematically decode how illustrations contribute to ideological meaning-making. Additionally, this study situates these visual processes within the frameworks of multimodality, sociocultural semiotics, and translation as rewriting (Lefevere, 1992; Toury, 1995).

The study investigates how the visual strategies in the rewritten *Cinderella* story construct or challenge traditional gender roles. It examines how Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar metafunctions—representational, interactive, and compositional—indicate shifts in the socio-cultural semiotics of gender within the *Egalitarian Tales* project. In addition, the visuals are interpreted through the lens of translation as rewriting, with attention to intra- and intercultural adaptation. By analysing these changes, the study aims to reveal how the multimodal reconfiguration of *Cinderella* may influence children's cultural and gender socialisation in contemporary Turkey.

By addressing these, this study aims to contribute to three domains: (a) visual discourse analysis of children's literature, (b) socio-cultural approaches to gender representation, and (c) the intersection of translation, rewriting, and multimodality. The theoretical foundation of this research lies in multimodal discourse analysis and visual social semiotics. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing images through representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions. Building upon Halliday's (1978) systemic functional linguistics, Visual Grammar Theory suggests that images, like language, are socially shaped and serve communicative purposes. Scholars such as Machin (2013) and Jewitt (2009) have further expanded on this framework, emphasising the importance of multimodal analysis in understanding how texts integrate various semiotic modes to produce meaning.

Children's literature has long been recognised as a key space where cultural ideologies, social norms, and gender expectations are reproduced and circulated (Nodelman, 1988; Stephens, 1992). Visual and verbal elements in picturebooks function not merely as storytelling tools but as symbolic resources through which meaning is constructed and negotiated. Previous studies (Machin, 2013, p. 92; Unsworth, 2008, p. 47) demonstrate how children's literature functions as a site where cultural ideologies are encoded visually and

verbally. Rewritten fairy tales are not only textual but also multimodal acts of translation and rewriting (Lefevere, 1992, p. 8; Toury, 2012, p. 67), transforming the semiotic resources of the source text into new cultural contexts. As multimodal texts, picturebooks combine image, layout, and written language, shaping children's perception of social roles through representational cues (Serafini, 2014). Visual portrayals of gender have historically reinforced binary hierarchies by placing female characters in passive, domestic, or beauty-oriented roles (Zipes, 2006; Bacchilega, 1997). These critiques have led scholars and educators to promote egalitarian retellings to challenge canonical narratives. Recent studies explore intersemiotic translation in picturebooks, emphasising how visual adaptation modifies character identity, relationships, and emotional tone (O'Sullivan, 2005; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). However, research on how visual grammar contributes to this shift remains scarce.

From the perspective of intercultural communication, fairy tales travel across temporal and cultural borders. While canonical versions of Cinderella emphasised passivity, domesticity, and heteronormative gender structures (Rowe, 1979, p. 237), contemporary retellings like *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) attempt to dismantle these hierarchies. Scholars highlight how multimodality enables the reconstruction of identity through the interplay of words and images (Bezemer & Kress, 2015, p. 57). Thus, the visual analysis of this project becomes essential to understand how cultural meanings are negotiated and reinterpreted through images.

1.1. From Verbal to Non-Verbal: Multimodality in Children's Literature

The shift from text-dominated storytelling to multimodal forms has significantly altered the ways in which meaning is produced and consumed in children's literature. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue that images are not supplementary to text but constitute a grammar of their own, with distinct semiotic resources that can be analysed systematically (p. 18). Similarly, Jewitt (2009) emphasises that multimodal analysis must account for the interplay of multiple semiotic systems—verbal, visual, spatial, and auditory—each of which contributes to the construction of meaning (p. 14).

In children's picture books, this shift is especially evident. Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2013) observe that images often carry equal or greater ideological weight than the accompanying words, especially when addressing issues of identity and social roles (p. 27). Thus, analysing the rewritten Cinderella through its visuals is not only methodologically justified but also essential for understanding how egalitarian discourses are made accessible to young readers.

1.2. Visual Grammar and Multimodality

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory provides a systematic vocabulary for reading images: the representational metafunction concerns 'what' is depicted, the interactive metafunction addresses interpersonal relations between image and viewer, and the compositional metafunction focuses on organisation and information value (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 36). This approach builds on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics and extends metafunctional analysis to the visual mode (Halliday, 1978).

Multimodality emphasises that meaning is produced through the orchestration of multiple semiotic modes (Jewitt, 2009). In children's picture books, images and text form interdependent intermodal ensembles (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2013). As a result, visual analysis must account for both intramodal (image-to-image) and intermodal (image-to-text) relations.

The concept of multimodality, as outlined by Kress (2010), refers to the use of multiple semiotic resources—such as text, image, colour, and spatial design—to create meaning. Within this framework, multimodal social semiotics views each mode as socially and culturally situated, capable of expressing ideologies and shaping discourse. This theoretical lens is particularly useful for analysing visual narratives in children's literature, where illustrations often carry ideological weight beyond the written word (Serafini, 2014).

1.3. Socio-Cultural Semiotics and Gender

Socio-cultural semiotics foregrounds how signs operate within power-laden cultural contexts (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). Gender studies, most notably Butler's (1990) concept of performativity, show how gender is constituted through repeated acts, including visual representation. Feminist literary scholars have traced how fairy tales reproduce gender scripts (Bacchilega, 1997; Tatar, 2004). Zipes (1995) and Tatar (2004) have documented the evolution of fairy tales and their socio-political functions, highlighting how rewritings can serve as counter-narratives. Contemporary rewritten tales often seek to destabilise these scripts by altering both narrative and visual codes (Sunderland, 2011). Scholars like Sunderland (2011) and Davies (2003b) have investigated how traditional fairy tales perpetuate binary and stereotypical gender roles, often portraying female characters as passive and nurturing, while male characters are active and dominant.

1.4. Translation as Rewriting and Intercultural Adaptation

Translation studies reconceptualise translation as culturally and ideologically mediated rewriting (Lefevere, 1992). Toury (1995) argues that translational norms and cultural expectations shape how narratives are adapted. When canonical tales move across cultures, visual elements are frequently reconfigured to align with local pedagogical aims (Toury,

1995). Toury's (1995) cultural translation framework further adds an intercultural dimension to the analysis, suggesting that translated or adapted narratives often undergo cultural negotiation. In the case of the *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) project, the visual rewriting of canonical European tales for a Turkish audience provides fertile ground for examining both gender and cultural representation.

1.5. Multimodality as a Pedagogical and Ideological Tool

Multimodal literacy is increasingly recognised as an essential skill in contemporary education. Serafini (2014) argues that young readers must be taught not only to decode written text but also to critically interpret visual and multimodal resources (p. 11). Bezemer and Kress (2008) similarly stress that multimodal resources play a central role in how children learn cultural values and social norms (p. 171).

Within this framework, Equal Tales operates both pedagogically and ideologically. By combining rewritten narratives with reimagined illustrations, it equips children with alternative frameworks for understanding gender equality. As Davies (2003a) notes, disrupting "scripts of gender" through storytelling is one of the most effective ways to challenge systemic inequalities from early childhood (pp. 22–24).

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative visual analysis based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Theory, focusing on representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions. MAXQDA software was used for qualitative coding of visual elements in selected pages from the illustrated children's book *Cinderella's Riddle* in the *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) series. MAXQDA is a professional qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis software developed by VERBI Software GmbH in Berlin, designed for systematic coding, visualization, and interpretation of multimodal datasets including text, images, audio, video, and PDF documents. In this study, MAXQDA 2024 version was used due to its extended functions for visual material processing and its suitability for sociocultural semiotic research. Visuals were imported into MAXQDA, and coding categories were developed based on the metafunctional framework. Each image was analysed for narrative and conceptual representation, gaze and viewer positioning, and compositional layout.

Additionally, the study incorporates a cultural semiotics perspective (Toury, 1995) to evaluate the intercultural implications of visual rewriting. Key analytical categories included gender role reversals, power dynamics, emotional expressivity, attire, and domestic vs. public space representations.

This qualitative, descriptive study employs multimodal discourse analysis combined with systematic coding via MAXQDA. Visual data were purposively sampled to include three pivotal illustrations from the *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) – *Cinderella's Riddle* book: (1) a preparatory domestic scene with her stepfamily, (2) the young Prince and Princess as rulers of the country, the country's leaders and society scene, and (3) the resolution and ending scene. These images were chosen because they visually foreground different aspects of gender and power dynamics. Additionally, these 3 pages are important for analysis because they contained the most coding scenes and were selected as examples because the goal is to ensure data saturation.

The analysis uses Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) meta-functional framework. For each image, the following dimensions were examined: (a) Representational meaning (participants, processes, settings, symbols); (b) Interactive meaning (gaze patterns, social distance, angle, modality); and (c) Compositional meaning (information value, salience, framing, rhythmic sequencing).

Images were imported into MAXQDA and segmented into analytical units (panels, character close-ups, and background motifs). A codebook was developed iteratively, with codes derived deductively from visual grammar concepts and inductively from the data. Key codes included Agency, Role Reversal, Domestic/Public Space, Scientific/Creative Tools, Neutralised Gaze, Direct Gaze, Central Framing, Shared Salience, and Intercultural Motifs. Each coded segment included memos that captured interpretative observations. The codebook was built iteratively, following a grounded-visual approach:

1. Initial descriptive labels created during open coding (low inference).
2. Codes refined using Kress & van Leeuwen metafunction categories forming three code families: Representational codes, Interactive codes, Compositional codes
3. Code definitions were operationalised with examples to ensure consistency.
4. Axial grouping organized codes into semantic clusters.
5. Final themes emerged by cross-checking code frequency, segment overlap, and memo trails.

This systematic progression ensured transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor, fulfilling qualitative reliability criteria. Additionally, the study incorporates a cultural semiotics perspective (Toury, 1995) to evaluate the intercultural implications of visual rewriting. Codes were clustered around themes of gender representation, power dynamics, and socio-cultural symbolism.

The analysis followed these steps:

1. Importing visual data into MAXQDA.

2. Coding of representational elements (actors, actions, symbols).

3. Coding of interactive elements (gaze, distance, angle).

4. Coding of compositional structures (salience, framing, information value).

5. Interpretation of findings in relation to research questions and socio-cultural context.

Table 1. Sample MAXQDA Coding of Visual Elements

Visual	Representational Metafunction	Interactive Metafunction	Compositional Metafunction
Cinderella with Stepfamily	Cinderella is shown performing domestic labour, symbolic of the gendered division of roles.	Gaze avoidance: Cinderella is positioned at a lower angle, reinforcing subordination.	Stepfamily centred, Cinderella at the margin, showing unequal salience.

The primary data comprises three pages (uploaded as images) from the *Cinderella's Riddle* storybook published within the *Egalitarian Tales (2020)* project. These visuals were selected for their diverse portrayals of gender representation, power dynamics, and socio-cultural symbolism.

Table 2. Analytical Procedure

Stage	Procedure
1. Visual Unit Selection	Key frames from each page were segmented based on narrative shifts and character interactions.

2.Visual Grammar Coding	The images were examined using the three metafunctions: - *Representational*: participants, settings, actions - *Interactive*: gaze, size of frame, angle - *Compositional*: composition, salience, framing
3.MAXQDA Integration	Codes such as "Empowered Female", "Reversed Authority", "Non-traditional Attire", "Neutralised Gaze", "Symbolic Action", etc., were applied.
4.Thematic Clustering	Recurring patterns were grouped under higher-order themes like "Egalitarian Decision-Making", "Critique of Aristocracy", and "Visual Empowerment of Marginalised Characters".

Table 3. Sample Code Structure in MAXQDA

Meta function	Code Name	Description
Representational	Gender Role Shift	Depiction of females in intellectual or authoritative roles
Interactive	Neutral Gaze	Absence of objectifying visual contact
Compositional	Central Framing of Female Characters	Emphasizing female agency visually

This analysis examines three illustrations from a Turkish Cinderella storybook through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Theory, incorporating Toury's Cultural Semiotics framework. The images represent different narrative moments within the fairy tale, each employing distinct visual strategies to construct meaning through representational, interactive, and compositional elements.

Image 1. Selected Illustration from *Cindrella's Riddle*

Mis kokulu ormanlar, mavi dereler, pırıltılı göllerle kaplı bir masal ülkesinde Sindirella adlı bir kız yaşarmış. Çok akıllı ve bir o kadar da meraklı olan Sindirella ablasının ve abisinin onunla uğraşmalarına aldırmaz, tavan arasında kuşlarıyla, fareleriyle arkadaşlık eder, genç yaşta ölmüş olan annesinin kitaplarını okurmuş.

Onlar pahalı giysilere, süslenmeye ve gösterişe önem verirken Sindirella, kitaplarda okuduklarının hayallerini kurar, dünyanın ne kadar güzel ve büyük bir yer olduğunu düşünürmüş.

(English Translation of the text: In a fairytale land of fragrant forests, blue streams, and sparkling lakes, lived a girl named Cinderella. Cinderella, who was very smart and curious, did not mind her older sister and brother's messing with her, made friends with her birds and mice in the attic, and read the books of her mother, who died at a young age. While they valued expensive clothes, adornment and ostentation, Cinderella dreamed of what she read in books and thought about how beautiful and big the world was.)

The first image is a domestic scene. In Image 1, the representation of Cinderella seated and caring for her intellectual inner self thoughts while her stepfamily is more concerned with the outer world and showing off is a classic Narrative Action Process, where her passivity visually communicates her marginalisation. The interactive meta-function is activated through her indirect gaze and medium distance, which renders the viewer empathetic but emotionally distant. Compositional elements frame Cinderella on the left side (new), symbolising alternative values of intellect and introspection as opposed to the right-side characters' obsession with glamour (given).

Representational Analysis (Image 1):

This image presents narrative and conceptual processes that foreground non-traditional gender roles. Characters are depicted engaging in actions that connote agency and competence. Symbolic artefacts, such as clothing and books, are used to reinterpret once-domestic items as tools for public participation and creativity. While Cinderella's (left) kneeling suggests ongoing domestic labour, her stepsister and stepbrother (right) engage in leisurely activities and conversation. The image establishes classificational relationships

between characters through visual hierarchies. Cinderella's positioning low (kneeling) is associated with labour tools, while her stepsister's and stepbrother's positioning higher is associated with leisure objects.

Interactive Analysis (Image 1):

Interactive relations are negotiated through gaze and social distance. Where canonical tales rely on objectifying gazes that render female characters passive, these illustrations frequently employ direct or neutralised gazes that invite alignment with the protagonist as a thinking subject. Social distance is manipulated through framing: medium-close shots promote empathetic engagement, whereas long shots allow the viewer to observe communal dynamics. Cinderella looks downward, indicating an averted gaze, creating emotional distance and reflection. Her gaze is directed downward toward her work, avoiding eye contact with the viewer – creating indirect address. Viewer distance is medium, reflecting personal involvement. Stepsisters' and stepbrothers' gazes are also indirect, focused on their activities rather than acknowledging the viewer. The viewer is positioned as an observer rather than a participant, maintaining social distance and allowing viewers to observe the scene without intimate involvement. The horizontal angle creates a sense of equality with the viewer, while the slightly elevated perspective suggests mild superiority over the domestic scene.

High modality achieved through detailed architectural elements (window frames, floor patterns), realistic colour palette with naturalistic lighting, consistent perspective and proportional relationships, contextual details (scattered objects, furniture)

Compositional Analysis (Image 1):

Compositional choices—such as central framing, colour salience, and symmetrical layouts—work together to distribute importance across characters. Instead of a single focalised heroic figure, salience is balanced, visually enacting egalitarian relations. Cinderella is placed on the left (new/given opposition), while her stepsister and brother on the right dominate the theme of superficiality. High contrast in colours emphasises Cinderella's marginality.

As compositional elements, Cinderella's positioning to the left (given) and her labour represent the established, familiar narrative element, while her stepsister's and brother's positioning on the right (new) and their leisure activities represent the contrasting social information. The large window in the centre serves as an ideal space, suggesting possibility and escape. The floor level with cleaning implements represents the grounded reality. Salience and visual prominence are established through colour contrast, such as Cinderella's blue dress against warm interior tones; size relationships, with the large window dominating

the upper portion of the image; and positioning the window in the central placement creates focal hierarchy. Spatial separation between left and right areas, different activity zones (work vs. leisure), and architectural elements (window frame) creating internal boundaries constitute strong framing between social groups.

Image 2. Selected Illustration from *Cinderella's Riddle*

Yaşadıkları ülkenin başında ise bir prenses ve prens varmış. Anne ve babaları genç yaşta öldüğü için ülkeyi yönetmek onların görevi olmuş. Ancak ikisi de keçi gibi inatçı olduklarından hep kendi dedikleri olsun istiyor; bu yüzden de bir türlü sorunları çözemiyorlarmış.

Sonunda ülkenin ileri gelenlerinin canına tak etmiş, bu artık böyle gitmez demişler.

Böylece prenses ve prens ülkenin işlerini yönetmekte onlara yol gösterecek akıllı bir vezir bulmaya karar vermişler. Ülkenin dört bir yanına haberciler salmışlar, aklına güvenen tüm genç kadınları ve erkekleri, yarışıp hünerlerini gösterecekleri bir baloya davet etmişler.

(English Translation of the text: At the head of the country lived a princess and a prince. Since their parents had died at a young age, it became their duty to rule the land. However, both were as stubborn as goats and always wanted things to go their own way; therefore, they could never resolve problems properly. Eventually, the leading figures of the country had enough and said, "This cannot go on like this any longer." Thus, the princess and the prince decided to find a wise vizier who would guide them in governing the affairs of the kingdom. They sent messengers to every corner of the land, inviting all young women and men who trusted in their own wisdom to a ball where they would compete and demonstrate their talents.)

The second image is a royal announcement and meeting. In Image 2 the prince and princess are depicted at equal heights, suggesting shared responsibility. The silhouetted adults/people in the panel below represent societal pressure and outdated governance styles. The ideational focus here is a rejection of hierarchical patriarchy in favour of youth-led decision-making.

Table 4. Sample MAXQDA (see visual above):

Visual Element	Code	Interpretation
Princess pointing to Prince	Gender Role Shift	Indicates leadership competence
Adults in silhouette	Outdated Authority	Visual metaphor for obsolete tradition

Representational Analysis (Image 2):

The image presents multiple simultaneous actions. In the upper left, the prince and princess are quarrelling (action vectors from their gestures and mimics); in the upper right, there is a court scene with characters in discussion (conversational vectors), and royal heralds make proclamations. In the lower section, silhouetted figures represent the common people (reactive vectors). Primary actors such as royal heralds, court figures, and common people constitute the image. Positioning the royal court (upper) and common people (lower) as a setting and symbolic elements such as curtains, formal dress and architectural elements suggests hierarchy.

Non-traditional gender roles are highlighted by the narrative and conceptual processes this image presents. Characters are portrayed acting in ways that suggest competence and agency. Princess' pointing to Prince represents non-traditional power relations and indicates leadership competence. Adults in silhouette in the below panel of the image represent a visual metaphor for obsolete tradition.

Interactive Analysis (Image 2):

In the visual analysis of the contact patterns, the royal figures are portrayed as engaged in indirect forms of address, emphasising their responsibilities and social roles rather than establishing a direct connection with the viewer. In contrast, the silhouetted figures function as an anonymous collective, representing the broader population without drawing attention to individual identities. The viewer's position is constructed from an elevated perspective, allowing the audience to observe the unfolding scene from above and thus reinforcing a sense of overview and detachment from the depicted social dynamics.

In terms of social distance and perspective, the use of long-shot framing establishes a sense of public distance, positioning the scene as one that belongs to the collective social sphere rather than intimate interaction. The high-angle depiction of the lower figures reinforces existing hierarchies by visually situating them in a subordinate position, while the eye-level orientation with the royal court creates an impression of equal status between the viewer and the authority figures, thereby legitimising their elevated role.

The modality variations across different sections of the image further reinforce these dynamics. Court scenes are rendered with high modality using full colour, sharp detail, and elaborate textures, which lend them a sense of realism and authority. In contrast, the silhouetted figures are depicted with low modality, minimising their individual identities and instead representing the populace as a collective mass. A third layer, symbolic modality, emerges through architectural structures and costume details, which function less as literal depictions and more as markers of social status and hierarchy.

Compositional Analysis (Image 2):

From a compositional perspective, information value is distributed strategically. The top of the image conveys the "ideal", represented by royal authority and the proclamation of possibilities, while the bottom embodies the "real", reflecting the grounded experiences and responses of the common people. The left-to-right arrangement establishes a temporal flow, guiding the viewer's eye from the moment of announcement to its reception by the masses. The salience hierarchy also directs attention within the scene. The royal heralds, emphasised through their large scale, vibrant colour, and central positioning, occupy the primary level of salience. Secondary attention falls on the detailed rendering of the court scene, which reinforces its significance within the narrative. Tertiary salience is assigned to the silhouetted masses, whose visual presence is collective rather than individual, underscoring their subordinate role.

Finally, the framing strategies demonstrate multiple layers of separation and differentiation. Architectural features act as physical and symbolic boundaries between distinct social spaces, while differences in colour saturation and rendering style further distinguish class positions. A clear horizontal division separates the royal sphere, aligned with the ideal, from the common sphere, associated with the real, thereby reinforcing both the spatial and ideological distance between these groups.

Image 3 Selected Illustration from *Cinderella's Riddle*
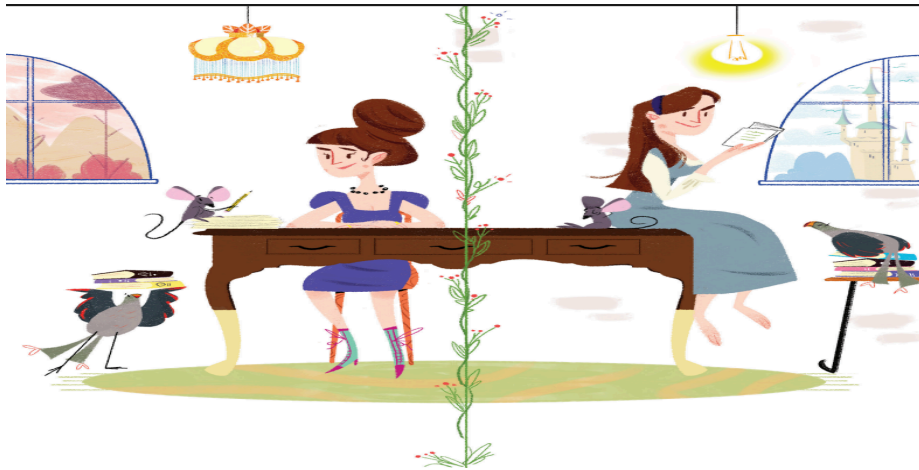
The third image is the transformation scene. This scene at the end of the story constitutes the resolution scene. In the final scene, Cinderella demonstrates her intelligence by correctly answering the riddle that no one else could solve, after which she is offered the position of vizier. Whether she accepts this offer is deliberately left unresolved, allowing the conclusion of the story to remain open to the reader's interpretation.

Representational Analysis (Image 3):

The representational elements of the scene emphasise a magical transformation through distinct narrative processes. The central action vector is embodied by a vertical plant stem that rises through the middle of the composition, symbolising growth and transformation. Bilateral symmetry is achieved by placing two female figures on either side of this vector, suggesting a before-and-after sequence or parallel states of development. This dynamic is further reinforced by circular staging, where a round carpet frames the action and creates a contained space for the unfolding transformation.

The participants and symbolic elements within the scene support this visual narrative. On the right, Cinderella is shown in her working attire, wearing a simple blue dress while seated at a desk, embodying her current reality. On the left, she appears in an elegant dress, representing her transformed state. Magical elements, such as the growing plant, an ornate chandelier, and symbolic birds, reinforce the fantastical dimension of the event. Transformation markers—including the change in clothing, posture, and surrounding objects—underscore the shift between the two states of being.

The composition also conveys conceptual relations through an analytical structure. Individual components, such as costume, posture, and symbolic objects, operate as parts of a greater whole that together communicate the theme of transformation. Temporal progression is implied through the juxtaposition of the two figures, visually narrating change over time.

At the same time, symbolic classification emerges through the inclusion of magical elements—such as birds and decorative motifs—that signify supernatural intervention.

Interactive Analysis (Image 3):

From an interactive perspective, gaze and contact remain indirect. Both figures are absorbed in their respective activities and do not engage the viewer, reinforcing the sense that the audience occupies the position of an observer rather than an active participant. The internal focus of the characters enhances the perception of a private, unfolding event. Perspective and distance are established through a medium-long shot, which creates social distance yet maintains accessibility. An eye-level angle positions the viewer as equal to the transformation process, while a frontal perspective enables direct observation of the magical occurrence.

The modality construction combines realism and symbolism to reinforce meaning. Fantastical features, such as the magical plant, birds, and ornate decorative elements, provide high symbolic modality, while the architectural and furniture details ground the image in realism. The use of warm colour tones suggests positivity and highlights the beneficial nature of the transformation.

Compositional Analysis (Image 3):

Finally, the compositional architecture structures meaning through information value mapping, salience distribution, and framing mechanisms. The right side of the image presents the "Given"—Cinderella's established reality—while the left side introduces the "New", her transformed state and the possibilities it symbolises. The central plant functions as a mediator between these states, embodying the transformative process itself. The chandelier and lighting at the top represent the "Ideal", associated with aspiration and elevation, whereas the carpet at the bottom signifies the "Real", containing and grounding the event. Salience is organised hierarchically: the central plant dominates through verticality and symbolic weight, followed by the two female figures whose positioning underscores their importance, and finally, the environmental elements that complete the setting. Framing mechanisms subtly reinforce this structure, with the circular carpet delineating the transformation space, the vertical plant dividing left from right, and horizontal layers separating the grounded elements from those associated with aspiration.

The translation and cultural adaptation of the Cinderella's Riddle images in the *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) series can be effectively examined through Toury's framework of cultural semiotics. The Turkish text accompanying the visuals demonstrates a process of cultural translation in which linguistic norms maintain the overarching narrative structure

while simultaneously adapting cultural references to resonate with Turkish readers. Visual norms, in turn, are aligned with contemporary Turkish children's book conventions, emphasising vivid illustration styles that are accessible and engaging. At the cultural level, character representations combine universal fairy-tale motifs with culturally specific visual codes, producing a hybrid narrative that is both familiar and locally grounded.

The cultural positioning of the text and visuals reflects a clear ideological orientation. Class consciousness is made visible through structured visual hierarchies that reinforce social stratification, while gender roles are articulated through depictions of domestic labour and transformative moments of empowerment. These images simultaneously convey broader cultural values, such as the celebration of patience, virtue, and the promise of eventual reward. In this sense, the images serve not only as narrative elements but also as semiotic carriers of ideological meaning.

The semiotic code systems embedded in the visuals illustrate how meaning is constructed through multiple layers. Costume codes signify social status and stages of character development, while colour codes add symbolic nuance: blue is associated with virtue and humility, whereas warm tones are linked to comfort and transformation. Spatial codes establish relationships of power and temporality through vertical and horizontal arrangements, and architectural codes further demarcate interior and exterior spaces, symbolising social boundaries. Together, these codes create a culturally embedded semiotic network.

Within the cultural meaning systems, the Turkish cultural context shapes the organisation of domestic space, reflecting traditional household structures familiar to the audience. Visualisations of social hierarchy resonate with Turkish understandings of class dynamics, while the representation of magical transformation incorporates motifs that align with cultural belief systems surrounding destiny, morality, and reward.

An ideological analysis reveals that power relations are central to the imagery. Vertical hierarchies visually encode social stratification, while labour divisions distinguish those engaged in domestic work from those inhabiting leisurely or authoritative positions. Access to resources is depicted unequally, with the distribution of material culture reinforcing class divisions. These patterns support the naturalisation of social order within the visual narrative.

The images also function as tools for cultural values transmission, carrying a pedagogical dimension. Through their visual structure, they reinforce moral lessons about the virtues of patience and resilience, normalise hierarchical social relationships, and sustain

the notion of transformation as a reward for moral character. In this way, the images position young readers to internalise both ethical and social norms.

An integrated discussion of visual grammar and cultural semiotics demonstrates how the representational, interactive, and compositional features of the images operate within broader cultural systems. Representationally, the visuals construct a multimodal narrative that serves simultaneously as a universal fairy tale, a cultural artefact reflecting Turkish norms, and a pedagogical tool for transmitting values. Interactively, the viewer is positioned as an observer and moral witness, tasked with evaluating character behaviours while engaging with familiar cultural codes. Compositionally, the sequence of images follows a clear narrative arc: the establishment of social relationships and domestic reality, the complication introduced by external intervention and public announcement, and the resolution achieved through personal transformation.

Through this process, Toury's framework reveals the cultural semiotic integration at work. The Cinderella visuals adapt universal narrative patterns to the Turkish cultural context, preserving core moral lessons while embedding them within locally meaningful visual codes. This duality enables the text to maintain its universal fairy-tale appeal while operating as a culturally specific artefact.

Finally, the theoretical implications underscore the complementary contributions of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Toury's cultural semiotics. Visual grammar illuminates how meaning is systematically constructed through representational, interactive, and compositional domains, highlighting multimodal integration and the social positioning of viewers. Cultural semiotics, on the other hand, reveals how ostensibly universal narratives are recontextualised through cultural translation, adapting to local values and serving ideological functions in cultural transmission. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive account of how images function as both aesthetic texts and cultural instruments.

Considering the focal points in the study, it can be said that visual strategies challenge traditional roles by portraying female characters in agentive positions, deploying artifacts that connote intellectual labour, and arranging compositions that distribute salience equally among genders; representational changes (new action types), interactive changes (gaze patterns), and compositional changes (shared salience) collectively indicate a semiotic shift from gendered scripts to egalitarian modelling, and the visuals perform a cultural negotiation: they retain narrative recognizability while adapting character roles and social relations to reflect local pedagogical aims and global egalitarian discourses (Toury, 1995; Lefevere, 1992) and multimodal picture books like *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) provide

educators with material to teach critical visual literacy and to introduce counter-stereotypical role models in early education.

3. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Theory, enhanced by Toury's Cultural Semiotics framework, provides comprehensive tools for understanding multimodal cultural texts. By analysing representational, interactive, and compositional metafunctions, the research shows how images can be purposefully designed to foster egalitarian identities and demonstrates that the rewritten *Cinderella's Riddle* in *Egalitarian Tales* (2020) uses multimodal visual grammar strategically to reframe gender relations. These findings underscore the importance of integrating visual literacy into curricula and of recognising translation-as-rewriting as a multimodal practice.

The study shows that the Cinderella images operate as complex semiotic systems that simultaneously:

1. Construct narrative meaning through systematic visual grammar
2. Position readers within specific cultural and ideological frameworks
3. Transmit cultural values through recognizable visual and textual codes
4. Adapt universal stories to cultural contexts

The integration of these theoretical approaches reveals the sophisticated ways visual texts function as both aesthetic objects and cultural instruments, mediating between universal human narratives and specific cultural meaning systems. The Turkish Cinderella illustrations exemplify how children's literature serves not merely as entertainment but as powerful vehicles for cultural transmission and social value construction.
Through systematic application of visual grammar analysis and cultural semiotic interpretation, we can understand how images work not just as illustrations but as complex meaning-making systems that shape cultural understanding and social positioning within specific communities.

The study is limited by its small purposive sample (three illustrations) from the *Cinderella's Riddle* storybook published within the *Egalitarian Tales (2020)* project. Future research could expand the corpus to include the entire series and employ reader-response methods with children to assess interpretive outcomes.

Disclosures

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendices

Figure 1. Analysis

Representational Elements Comparison / Interactive Elements Comparison

Compositional Elements Radar Comparison

Visual Grammar Codes: Image 1 (Domestic Scene)

REPRESENTATIONAL	Code	Description
Narrative Process	ACT-DOM	Domestic action vectors
Participants	ACT-CIN	Cinderella as main actor
Participants	SEC-SIS	Stepsisters as secondary
Circumstances	LOC-INT	Interior domestic space
INTERACTIVE	Code	Description
Contact	IND-GAZ	Indirect gaze/address
Social Distance	MED-SHOT	Medium shot framing
Perspective	EYE-LEV	Eye-level angle
Modality	HIGH-MOD	High realistic modality
COMPOSITIONAL	Code	Description
Info Value	L-GIV-R-NEW	Left given, right new
Salience	COL-SAL	Color-based salience
Framing	STR-FRA	Strong spatial framing

Visual Grammar Codes: Image 2 (Royal Announcement)

REPRESENTATIONAL	Code	Description
Narrative Process	MULT-ACT	Multiple simultaneous actions
Participants	ROY-HER	Royal heralds as primary
Participants	COLL-PEO	Collective people silhouettes
Circumstances	HIER-SPA	Hierarchical spatial division
INTERACTIVE	Code	Description
Contact	ANON-COL	Anonymous collective gaze
Social Distance	LONG-SHOT	Long shot public distance
Perspective	HIGH-ANG	High angle on masses
Modality	DIFF-MOD	Differential modality levels
COMPOSITIONAL	Code	Description
Info Value	TOP-IDEAL	Top ideal, bottom real
Salience	SIZE-SAL	Size-based hierarchy
Framing	ARCH-FRA	Architectural framing

Visual Grammar Codes: Image 3 (Transformation Scene)

REPRESENTATIONAL	Code	Description
Narrative Process	TRANS-ACT	Transformation action
Participants	DUAL-CIN	Dual Cinderella states
Participants	MAG-ELE	Magical elements/helpers
Circumstances	CIRC-SPA	Circular contained space
INTERACTIVE	Code	Description
Contact	INT-FOC	Internal focus, indirect
Social Distance	MED-LONG	Medium-long shot
Perspective	FRONT-EYE	Frontal eye-level
Modality	SYM-HIGH	High symbolic modality
COMPOSITIONAL	Code	Description
Info Value	L-NOW-R-THEN	Left current, right transformed
Salience	CENT-SAL	Central vertical salience
Framing	CIRC-BOUND	Circular boundary framing

Visual Grammar Coding Intensity Heatmap

Analysis Summary
Representational Elements Comparison (Top Left)

- Image 2 (Royal Announcement) shows the highest complexity across all categories, particularly in narrative processes (5/5) and conceptual relations (4/5)
- Image 1 (Domestic Scene) demonstrates strong circumstantial detail (4/5) with moderate narrative complexity
- Image 3 (Transformation) excels in conceptual relations (5/5) but has simpler participant structures

Interactive Elements Comparison (Top Right)

- Image 3 (Transformation) achieves the highest modality score (5/5), indicating strong symbolic representation
- Image 2 uses anonymous collective gaze (1/5 contact) but employs long social distance (4/5) for authority
- Image 1 maintains medium engagement levels across all interactive categories

Compositional Elements Radar Chart (Centre)

- Image 1 shows strong left-right information value and robust framing
- Image 2 demonstrates clear top-bottom hierarchy with good size-based salience
- Image 3 exhibits the strongest left-right contrast (transformation narrative) but weaker framing

Visual Grammar Codes for Each Image
Image 1 (Domestic Scene) Codes:

- Representational: ACT-DOM (domestic action vectors), ACT-CIR (circumstantial actions)
- Interactive: IND-GAZ (indirect gaze/address), MED-SHOT (medium shot framing)
- Compositional: LEFT-GIVEN (left as given information), COL-SAL (color-based salience)

Image 2 (Royal Announcement) Codes:

- Representational: MULT-ACT (multiple simultaneous actions), ROY-HER (royal hierarchy)
- Interactive: ANON-COL (anonymous collective gaze), HIGH-ANG (high angle on masses)
- Compositional: TOP-IDEAL (top ideal, bottom real), SIZE-SAL (size-based hierarchy)

Image 3 (Transformation) Codes:

- Representational: TRANS-ACT (transformation action), DUAL-CIN (dual Cinderella states)
- Interactive: INT-FOC (internal focus), SYM-HIGH (high symbolic modality)
- Compositional: L-NOW-R-THEN (left current, right transformed), CIRC-BOUND (circular boundary)

Coding Intensity Heatmap (Bottom Right)

The heatmap reveals distinct patterns:

- Image 2 shows highest intensity in social distance and modality levels
- Image 3 excels in information value clarity and symbolic representation
- Image 1 maintains consistent moderate-to-high coding across most elements

Key Insights

1. Narrative Complexity: Image 2 demonstrates the most complex multi-layered storytelling
2. Symbolic Power: Image 3 achieves the highest symbolic modality through transformation imagery
3. Compositional Strategy: Each image employs distinct information value systems – given/new, ideal/real, and before/after
4. Interactive Positioning: The images create different viewer relationships – intimate domestic, authoritative public, and transformative magical

This analysis provides a systematic framework for understanding how visual elements work together to create meaning according to Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Theory.