BOOK REVIEW

A Multimodal Analysis of Picture Books for Children: A Systemic Functional Approach
Arsenio Jesús Moya Guijarro
Equinox Publishing Ltd: Sheffield, UK and Bristol, CT, USA, 2014. 301 pages.
ISBN: 978 1 908049 77 3 and 978 1 908049 78 0

Reviewed by **Mary Frances Litzler**
mf.litz@uah.es
Universidad de Alcalá, Spain

This book is a study of nine picture books for children ranging in age from 0 to 9 years old. The conceptual framework follows Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (2004) (henceforth, SFG) and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics (2006) (henceforth, VSS). The main objective is to "identify the verbal and visual strategies used by writers and illustrators… to convey a representation of reality, to create interaction with child-readers and to form coherent wholes of communication" (257). The author is also interested in determining the correlation between the target age of the children and the choices made by the writers/illustrators as evidenced by the sample of books. It is hoped that the results of this study can lead to expanded information on the covers to children's books and on "web pages, public brochures or literary reviews that state the age range for which a specific tale has been written" (4). At the same time, the study is intended to serve as a framework for assisting teachers and other professionals involved in selecting books that are "appropriate for their young readers" (259).

According to the author, this study differs from previous research in that it considers the connection between the linguistic and the visual aspects of the picture books, while other writers either ignore the combination of the two or focus their work from a literary or cognitive perspective. This is the case, for example, of Feaver (1977) or Moebius (1986) (1). In addition, authors who have examined children's picture books from a multimodal standpoint, such as Lewis (2006), Martin (2008) or Painter et al. (2013), have not considered the age of the target readers (1-2).

Three books for each of Piaget's (1981, 1984) three cognitive developmental stages (0-2, 3-6 and 7-9 years old) are examined. The nine of them are all originals, as opposed to adaptations, and they have won literary awards for their quality. In addition, they have "defied time" and, in this sense, are classics that have been popular for at least one generation after the author (13). Examples are *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. A thorough introduction to the study is presented in Chapter 1. It includes a clear reasoning for the present study, the selection of books and the sample size. Chapter 2 introduces Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and Visual Social Semiotics as the framework for this research along with the author's rationale for using them as opposed to other models. The chapter takes the non-specialist's hand to lead him or her step-by-step through an overview of the concept of *text*, the differences between formal and functional grammar, and the different types of functional grammar. At this point, the characteristics of SFG that make it appropriate as the theoretical framework for the study are explained. Specifically, the author indicates that SFG considers language beyond the sentence level in its context (28); it views language as a sociocultural phenomenon (29); it describes the three metafunctions for which language is used: ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning (32-3); and it operates as a set of systems (36). The three types of meaning, along with their parallels in VSS, form the basis for the study presented in this book. In a similar fashion to the introduction to SFG, the author provides an overview to Visual Social Semiotics by comparing it to other types of multimodal analysis before stating his reasons for opting for VSS, which echo the reasons for using SFG. In particular, the representational, interactive and compositional metafunctions of VSS correspond to the three metafunctions in SFG (47), the VSS model considers texts in their social context (48) and it is made up of a number systems (48). Finally, a discussion of the concept of *mode* is provided.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide details on the representational, interpersonal/interactive and textual/compositional metafunctions respectively. The applicable theoretical notions from SFG and VSS are explained for each of them along with a discussion of the difficulties in applying the models to the books examined here. Examples of these problematic areas include the assignment of specific verbs to different categories (75-77), or the handling of ellipsis of subjects or finite verbs when determining mood structure (98-99) according to SFG. In terms of VSS, difficulties can involve the need

for additional categories for labelling images in order to enable more precision in the descriptions (78-79), or in the determination of the degree of modality for the illustrations in the picture books (99-101). Of particular interest in each chapter is a section on the combination of the two models together to obtain a more complete analysis of texts. Chapter 3 goes into more detail in this respect and reviews work carried out in this area to date along with describing different possible degrees of agreement between verbal and visual elements at the representational level in a text, based on such authors as Barthes (1977), Nikolajeva and Scott (2000), and Unsworth (2006). One contribution of this study is the author's decision to include circumstantial elements when comparing the combined effect of the verbal and visual aspects of the books because a provisional examination of the books for the different ages revealed some differences in this respect (70). Each chapter then provides an analysis of one of the books as an illustration of the concepts discussed up to that point.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 each discuss the findings of the corpus of 9 books as a whole in terms of each of the three metafunctions described in the previous chapters. As in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the verbal aspects of the stories are discussed first, followed by their visual aspects, and then both are considered together. The main question addressed in the third of these sections is whether the visual information is merely a reflection of the verbal information or if it is a necessary part in communication of the plot (143). A fourth and final section in each chapter examines the relationship between the target age of the children for which the books were written and the verbal and visual choices made by the authors and illustrators. While the third section of the chapters comments to some extent on age while discussing the connection between verbal and visual information, the fourth section goes into a more detailed analysis that includes statistical measures for each of the different aspects of the metafunction in question. Readers with little or no background in statistics will have no difficulty following the discussion, as the explanations are clear. While these three chapters are, in fact, more technical in nature, the author's highly readable presentation of the results will enable non-specialist readers to benefit from the descriptions.

The ninth chapter serves as a conclusion to the entire study. It provides a summary of the verbal and visual features used to represent the three metafunctions, as observed in the sample of books and according to each of the three age ranges. The discussion

provides a valuable contribution to the study of picture books for children thanks to its new findings. While some of the results vary depending on the target age, other results were found to be common to all three age groups, suggesting that they are characteristics of the genre of picture books. One of these is the relationship of complementarity between the verbal and visual modes of communication, particularly in terms of the representational metafunction of language (278). In other words, the images provided in the books provide essential information for the storylines instead of paralleling the plot, even in the case of the books for the youngest age group, contrary to the author's expectations (169). The final pages of this chapter include some suggestions for writers and illustrators to assist them in making picture books more attractive to their young readers by taking advantage of the potential that exists in combining the verbal and visual modes in their work effectively. While the study is not aimed at them, researchers and educators who incorporate this study into their plan for evaluating books can convey these ideas indirectly to creators of future books.

A strength of this book is its thorough yet clear reasoning and explanations. The reader of the study is guided from start to finish so that both the theoretical framework and the actual technical analysis itself can be comprehensible to those involved in the field of education as opposed to linguistics or communications. This, together with the practical objectives and new findings of the study, mean that Moya Guijarro's book is fundamental reading for those involved in the selection of picture books for children.

REFERENCES

Barthes, R. 1977. *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives: Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana.

Feaver, W. 1977. *When We Were Young: Two Centuries of Children's Book Illustrations*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Halliday, M.A.K. 2004. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (3rd edition). Revised by Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen. London: Edward Arnold.

Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. 2006, 1996. *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.

Lewis, D. 2006, 2001. *Reading Contemporary Picture Books. Picturing Text*. London: Routledge.

Martin, J. 2008. "Intermodal reconciliation: Men in Arms". In Unsworth, L. (ed.) *New Literacies and the English Curriculum: Multimodal Perspectives*. London: Continuum, 112-148.

Moebius, W. 1986. "Introduction to picture books codes". *Word and Image*, 2 (2), 141-158.

Nikolajeva, M. and Scott, **C**. 2000. "The Dynamics of Picture Books Communication". *Children's Literature in Education*, 31 (4), 225-239.

Painter, **C, Martin, J. and Unsworth, L**. 2013. *Reading Visual Narratives. Image Analysis of Children's Picture Books*. Sheffield and Briston, CT: Equinox.

Piaget, J. 1981. *Psicología y pedagogía [Psychology and Pedagogy]* (8th edition). Barcelona: Ariel.

Piaget, J. 1984. *La Representación del Mundo del Niño [The Child's Conception of the World]*. (6th edition). Madrid: Morata.

Unsworth, L. 2006. "Towards a metalanguage for multiliteracies education: Describing the meaning-making resources of language-image interaction". *English Teaching, Practice and Critique*, 5 (1), 55-76.