



ANALYSING PICTURE BOOKS THAT CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES MULTIMODALLY

JESÚS MOYA-GUIJARRO¹ & EIJA VENTOLA²

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1 University of Castilla-La Mancha, Department of Modern Language, Cuenca, Spain

2 Aalto University, School of Business, Aalto, Finland

KOESPONDENČNI AVTOR/CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

arsenio.mguijarro@uclm.es

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Abstract/Izveček This paper identifies the transitivity strategies used in six picture books that aim to challenge gender stereotypes. They were selected because of the large number of commonalities they share; they are all authentic texts, written in English and were not created for experimental purposes. In addition, the selected stories are intended for children (four to nine years old). The theoretical frameworks adopted are SFL (Halliday 2004) and Visual Social Semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, Painter et al. 2013). The findings show that the meaning load carried by embedded images (action plus reaction), together with verbal and mental processes of perception, provides essential cues for fostering progressive gender discourses. The analysis also demonstrates that metonymies are essentially used to highlight important aspects of the plot that challenge gender stereotypes.

Analiza slikanic, ki razkrivajo spolne stereotipe večkodno

Članek odkriva strategije prehodnosti, uporabljene v šestih slikanicah, ki razkrivajo spolne stereotipe. Izbrane so bili zaradi mnogih skupnih značilnosti; vsa besedila so verodostojna, napisana v angleščini in niso bila ustvarjena v eksperimentalne namene, izbrane zgodbe so namenjene otrokom (od štirih do devetih let). Uporabljena teoretična okvira sta SFJ (Halliday 2004) in vizualna socialna semiotika (Kress in van Leeuwen 2006, Painter et al. 2013). Ugotovitve kažejo, da pomenska teža vključenih podob (akcija in reakcija) skupaj z verbalnimi in miselnimi procesi zaznavanja zagotavlja bistvene namige za spodbujanje naprednih diskurzov o spolih. Analiza tudi dokazuje, da se metonimije v bistvu uporabljajo za poudarjanje pomembnih vidikov zgodbe, ki razkriva spolne stereotipe.

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Introduction

Picture books are used for reading at early stages of literacy both at home and school. The story unfolds through text and images along with interaction with caregivers. Text and images socialise the child into meaning-making and social roles in society. But what if we consider it necessary to help children to understand different realities and how to live in them, e.g., children who feel that they do not quite fit the stereotypical role of a girl or a boy?

Previous research on picture books has centred, for example, on matters of gender, questions of content, on the number of male and female characters in the stories or the frequency in which they play a leading or secondary role depending on their sex (see McCabe et al. 2011; Sunderland and McGlashan 2012; Evans 2015). These foci are relevant, demonstrating, for example, that male characters outnumber females in children's narratives, both in the linguistic mode and in the illustrations. This aspect has implications for the gender image that is constructed for the child in the picture books.

Research has also focused on the relationship between text and image in visual narratives. However, not enough attention has been paid to the meanings that come from the *interplay of images and words* in visual narratives. Indeed, researchers have called for the study of multiple integration of semiotic resources in all communicative events (Nikolajeva and Scott 2001; Sunderland and McGlashan 2011; others). This call for enhanced research integrating different semiotic resources has been widely addressed by the multimodal theories developed within the *Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL)* and *Visual Social Semiotics (VSS)* (for discussion, see Moya and Ventola 2022). Particularly, Unsworth (2006), Painter et al (2013), and Moya (2014), to mention but a few, have analysed children's picture books from a linguistic and multimodal perspective.

Aims

Complementing these previous studies, this paper analyses six picture books. It aims:

- (i) to determine whether the characters are depicted either in *full* or *metonymically*, once they have previously been represented by complete depictions (Painter et al. 2013),
- (ii) to capture the verbal and visual *representational options* that are actualised in the sample texts (essentially participants and processes),

(iii) to determine whether the semantic load that each mode contributes to the construction of gender is *similar (convergent)* or *different (divergent)*.

These aims become more transparent as we proceed with the theoretical background, methodology and the analyses.

Theory

As implied, the multimodal analysis of the six picture books that challenge male gender stereotypes relies theoretically on *SFL* (Halliday 2004) and *VSS*, (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Painter, et al. 2013). Halliday's *SFL* explores the representation of reality (*ideational* function; subdivided to *experiential* and *logical*), the interactions established between represented participants (*interpersonal* function) and the cohesive devices available to the language user to make coherent wholes of communication (*textual* function).

Within the *ideational* metafunction, Halliday (2004) distinguishes between different types of processes, typically realised by a verb, and the number and type of participants involved in them (actors, goals, sensors, etc., realised by nominal groups), the attributes ascribed to them (adjectives) and, lastly, the circumstances of place, time, and manner, etc. (adverbs etc.), related to the processes themselves. As shown in Fig. 1, Halliday's (2004: 251) six types of processes are: material, mental and relational, behavioural, verbal, and existential (see language examples).

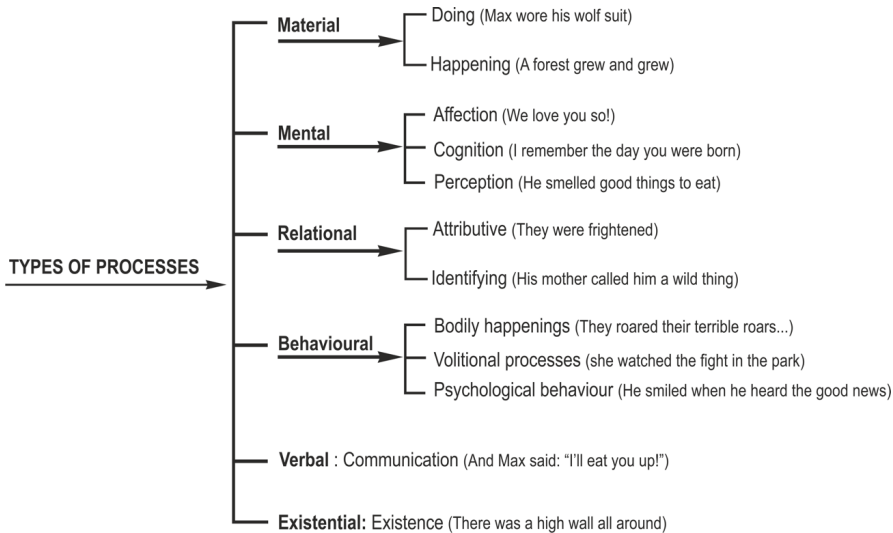


Figure 1: Types of processes (Halliday (2004: 107-149)) with examples.

Halliday's views on multifunctionality of grammatical structures led Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to develop a grammar of visual design. Both SFL and VSS see language and visuals as social semiotic systems. Multimodal texts are conceptualized as choices of semiotic systems which are beyond language itself. Like verbal language, images are capable of simultaneously realizing three types of meaning: *representational*, *interactive* and *compositional* meaning (cf. Halliday's ideational, interpersonal textual metafunctions).

Painter et al. (2013: 3) considered Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar to be insufficiently developed to analyse certain aspects of picture books, e.g. participant representation, inter-events relations in successive and simultaneous illustrations, focalisation, circumstantiation and appraisal. Thus, they added further systems of delicacy to the visual grammar to deal with image realisations in picture books (see also Moya-Guijarro (2014), Moya-Guijarro (2021) and authors in Moya-Guijarro and Ventola (2022)). Based on these studies, we shall briefly explain the main features of the *representational* metafunction, our interest in this paper.

Visual structures in images are also assigned visual processes, which in turn are divided into four main categories: narrative, conceptual, mental, and verbal (the first two with further options, which will be described in detail later; see Fig. 2. Mental processes are essentially processes of cognition, perception, and affection, whereas verbal processes imply communication and interaction.

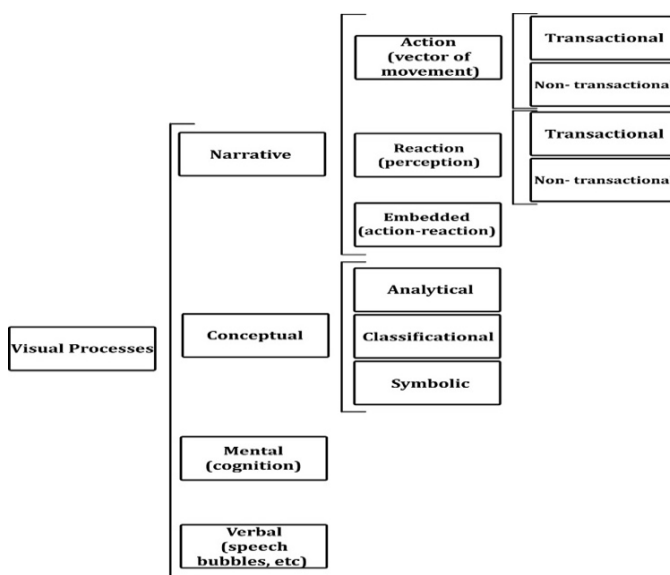


Figure 2: Visual processes of representation (adapted from Painter et al. (2013: 69)).

In representation, our interest here, visual narratives lack the linguistic identification and referential resources (cf. Halliday 2004) which enable writers to activate and, subsequently reintroduce characters in discourse (Painter et al. 2013: 64). Visual narratives are provided with other resources to track participants after their first visual activation. Sometimes a depicted participant may be reintroduced in subsequent images through explicit visual repetition, sometimes participants must be identified through implicit *metonymic* depictions of their salient features, i.e., referring to the character’s clothes, body part, shadows, etc. Aware of this fact, Painter et al. (2013: 60-66) propose a system of character manifestation for visual narratives, the main options of which, *complete and metonymic depictions*, are shown in Fig. 3 and are also important for our analyses of the picture books (see the analysis section).

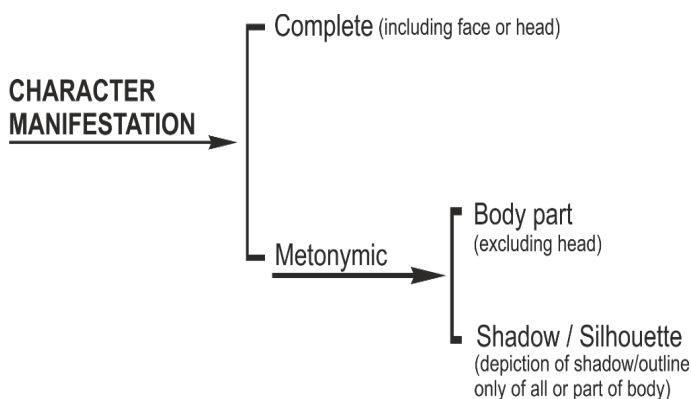


Figure 3: System of character manifestation (Painter et al 2013: 61).

We agree with Painter et al.’s view (2013) that if characters are represented metonymically through a body-part character relation, a shadow or a silhouette of the character, the inferences viewers must make to identify them are more complex, as their basic features (face and hair), which aid recognition, may be absent. Thus, for young readers, metonymies are likely to require more inferences than complete manifestations when they track participants in a story. Also, when analysing metonymy in multimodal discourses, we have to consider if using metonymic depiction implies a change in salience and perspective. Through the choice of a metonymic representation, one or more aspects of the represented participant are made more salient or, at least, more accessible to the viewer (Forceville 2009, 2020).

When considering the intersemiotic model for the verbal and visual modes put forward by Painter et al (2013), our analysis further concentrates on the complementary interplay, i.e., *synergy*, that is established between text and image in the sample texts.

Table 1 shows how material and behavioural processes in the verbal mode may be symmetrically reflected in the visual mode through action narrative images with vectors. Mental perception processes may be reflected in the visual mode through narrative reaction images with gaze vectors. In addition, mental and verbal processes in the verbal mode may be reflected in the visual mode through thought and speech bubbles. Finally, relational and existential processes in the verbiage may be symmetrically realised by conceptual images.

Table 1: Verbal and Visual Interplay at Representational Level (adapted from Painter et al. (2013)).

Representational metafunction		
Potencial meaning	Visual realization	Verbal realization
Action (material and behavioural processes)	Action narrative images with vectors	Material and behavioural processes, transitive/intransitive structures
Mental: perception and affection	Narrative images of reaction with gaze vectors	Mental perception processes
Mental: cognition	Thought bubbles, facial expression, hand gestures, etc.	Mental cognition processes
Verbal: communication	Speech bubbles, facial expression, etc.	Verbal and behavioural processes
Relational: being and having	Conceptual images with carries and attribute	Processes of having, being or becoming
Existencial	Conceptual images (existing)	Processes of existing

Analysis of the sample texts

This section introduces the methodology adopted in our analysis and explains the plots of the six visual narratives. We then explore the metonymic character depictions and identify both the verbal and visual representational choices available to writers and illustrators. We also show how the choices challenge gender stereotypes in the sample texts and what kind of synergies are established between verbal and visual language to generate gender progressive discourses.

Methodology

Relating to our first aim, we use the system of character manifestation (Painter et al. 2013) to identify the representational choices available to the illustrator to represent characters in the picture books chosen. Two basic and simultaneous options are initially distinguished: *complete* and *metonymic* depictions (see Fig. 3). The latter, in turn, opens the choice of *body-part* (excluding head) or *shadow / silhouette* (Painter et al. 2013: 61). A *complete depiction* involves the representation of a character including face or head, which helps recognition. A *metonymic representation*, in contrast, implies a visual depiction of a character realised by a body-part, a shadow and a silhouette. The *body-part* relation is utilised when a part of the body (excluding the head) is depicted. The *shadow* and *silhouette* alternatives come into play only if a shadow or a silhouette of the character is shown. Once the visual metonymies have been identified, we explore the motivations that may have led the illustrators to use these particular ones in our sample texts.

For our second aim, implementing the systems of *verbal* and *visual transitivity/transactional* choices (Halliday 2004; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Painter et al. 2013), we determine the strategies used by writers and illustrators to convey *representational meaning* in the six picture books that challenge gender stereotypes. This involves (a) identifying and counting the types of processes the male characters are involved in in the *verbal mode*. Material processes are typically processes of doing, happening, causing, and transferring that reflect external aspects of our reality. Mental processes are internal processes of consciousness and express perception, cognition, desideration, emotion, and affection. Relational processes involve classifying and identifying, those of having, being or becoming, where a participant is identified or situated circumstantially (Halliday 2004: 351). Halliday also distinguishes between behavioural, verbal, and existential processes. Behavioural processes, typically human, are processes such as crying, snoring or smiling, etc, which reflect external manifestations of inner aspects of our experience. Verbal processes are processes of saying and communicating. Existential processes are those of existence and introduce a represented participant into the discourse (see Fig. 1).

For our second aim, we also need to consider (b) the representational meaning in *visual mode*. The visual processes depicted in the illustrations are analysed taking into consideration their communicative functions. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish between narrative and conceptual processes.

Narrative processes contain vectors of motion that allow viewers to create a story about the Represented Participants (RPs). There are two types of narrative images: *action* and *reaction* (see Fig. 2). While the former depicts actions and shows an actor doing something in a transactional or non-transactional situation, the latter builds the narrative through eye-lines that act as vectors between the RPs. Action and reaction processes can also be combined and thus give rise to the category of embedded processes. Finally, narrative processes may also have a transactional or a non-transactional character, like the transitive and intransitive features of processes in language. In transactional processes there is a goal or phenomenon represented at the end of the vector that shows directionality from an actor to a goal (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Moya-Guijarro 2014; Moya-Guijarro and Cañamares 2020). Unlike narrative images, conceptual images do not include vectors, but rather represent participants in their more generalised and timeless essence (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 79). Conceptual images are entity-oriented; participants are seen as carriers that possess certain attributes. Added to these conceptual images are mental processes of cognition, typically realised by vectors leading to thought bubbles, and verbal processes, realised by vectors leading to speech bubbles.

Our third and final aim is to verify whether the *semantic load* that each mode contributes to the construction of the stories is *convergent* or *divergent* (similar vs different). For this purpose, we align the meaning potential of verbal systems with the meanings of the visual systems at the representational level, especially in those areas where correspondences can be established (Painter et al. 2013). Consequently, comparisons are made between the semantic load provided by each semiotic mode and the way in which words and images converge or diverge to represent reality (see Table 1).

Sample texts

Our six sample picture books are: *Willy the Champ*, *Ballerino Nate*, *Prince Cinders*, *Tough Boris*, *10,000 Dresses* and *The Purim Superhero*, all acclaimed by critics (see, McCabe et al. 2011, Sunderland and McGlashan 2012, among others) and they all aim to challenge male gender stereotypes. These six picture books were selected because of the large number of commonalities they share; they are all authentic texts, written in English and they were not created for experimental purposes. In addition, the selected stories are intended for children aged approximately from four to nine years old.

Moreover, the question of gender identities is challenged in various ways, as will be shown later. In *10,000 Dresses* we witness how Bailey, who feels like a girl, finds his mother, father and brother very unsupportive in dealing with his inner wish to wear a dress. Finally, Bailey meets Laurel, an older girl, and the two of them make dresses together. Similarly, in *Ballerino Nate*, a young male protagonist loves ballet and, despite his brother's reluctance, is determined to become a 'ballerino'. In the Jewish-themed, *The Purim Superhero*, another Nate, wants to dress up as an alien for Purim, the Jewish holiday that celebrates the deliverance of the Jewish people by Queen Esther, while all his classmates are dressing up as superheroes. His supportive dads (not treated as an issue in itself), help him to get an unusual outfit and his friends ultimately approve of his uniqueness. In *Willy the Champ*, a small, sensitive chimpanzee likes reading, listening to music, and going to the cinema with his friend Millie. He is not good at sports or swimming and is thus vulnerable in terms of peer acceptance. One day he is threatened by another gorilla, an obnoxious, powerful bully called Buster Nose, whom, quite by chance, Willy manages to beat. Willy is cheered and acclaimed as the Champ. *Tough Boris* deconstructs the preconceived idea that pirates (and by extension boys) cannot be tender. Boris and his pirate peers look scary, but at the end of the picture book they are also shown to be sensitive. *Prince Cinders* is a retelling of the classic fairy tale, *Cinderella*, and portrays a boy, Prince Cinders, who is constantly teased by his three brothers, who go the Palace Disco with their princess girlfriends. Meanwhile Prince Cinders is left behind to clean up the mess they have left behind, but at the end Prince Cinders is the one who gets Princess Lovelpenny.

Aim (i): Metonymies in picture books portraying boys

The characters in *The Purim Superhero* and *Ballerino Nate* are represented in full. In *Prince Cinders*, *10,000 Dresses*, *Tough Boris* and *Willy the Champ*, several characters are depicted metonymically, i.e., one of their parts is used to stand for their whole. Table 2 shows the 16 metonymies that have been counted in the data. For reasons of space, we shall only discuss the most striking metonymic representations.

Table 2: Analysis of Metonymies in the sample texts.

Character representations	Number of images. Absolute and relative values
Metonymic after previous complete depictions	4 (25%)
Metonymic without previous complete depictions	12 (75%)
Total	16 (100%)

In *Prince Cinders*, a metonymic representation is used during the night Prince Cinders' fairy godmother falls down the chimney and announces to him that all his wishes will be granted. However, unlike in the traditional story of Cinderella, the godmother in Prince Cinders' picture book fails many times. For example, when she tries to turn an empty can of beer into a big car to take Prince Cinders to the Palace Disco, she only manages to create a tiny toy car. At this point the illustrator uses a metonymic depiction to ridicule Prince Cinders' fairy godmother (see also Moya 2020 and Moya-Guijarro and Martínez 2022). On the right-hand side of the fourth double spread, Prince Cinders and his fairy godmother become so large that only part of their legs and feet can be seen. This part/whole representation contributes to making fun of traditional stories.

10,000 Dresses has six metonymies (four of them activated without a previous full depiction). The first metonymic depiction is in the first illustrations: the mother, facing Bailey, her son, is represented by part of the head, back and part of legs of a woman in a blue skirt (Moya-Guijarro 2021). Her head and legs surpass the frames of the illustrations, whereas Bailey is shown as a small character. Bailey, unsuccessfully, tries to attract his unsupportive mother's attention, wishing her to share his true desire to wear beautiful dresses but when Bailey tells his mother that he dreams about dresses, she says: "*Bailey, what are you talking about? You are a boy. Boys don't wear dresses!*" (*10,000 Dresses*, double spread 5). Bailey's father and brother share this unsupportive attitude towards the transgender boy and are also introduced metonymically without being previously depicted in full. When Bailey wants to tell his brother that he has dreams about dresses, his brother ignores him, being involved as he is, in his own activity with his friends (the brother and the two friends are represented by three pairs of legs and shorts with a footfall on the ground). Finally, Bailey leaves home to find support elsewhere. The text refers to Bailey as a girl: "*Bailey ran and ran. She ran all the way to the end of the block, until she came to a house with a big blue porch*" (double spread 11).

A different metonymy, hands holding a needle, introduces a new character into the story - Lauren, a girl that shares Bailey’s interest in making and wearing dresses. For the first time, a character other than Bailey, is shown in full, having first been introduced metonymically. This establishes a contrast: the members of Bailey’s family, always engrossed in their own activities, are never shown in full, vs. Lauren, who is highly supportive of Bailey. The use of *complete* vs *metonymic* representations establishes engagement (complete depictions) vs. distance (part-whole depictions). Lauren is the only character who loves Bailey for who he is, and she is represented as a full figure in the last illustration, holding hands with Bailey, who is now treated as a girl, and making eye contact with the viewer.

To summarize, illustrators seem to use visual metonymies to promote social acceptance and gender equality in picture books portraying boys who do not **adopt** male stereotypes. These part-whole depictions tend to be activated before a full complete representation (see Table 2). Indeed, contrary to our expectations, 75% of the tokens identified follow this pattern.

Aim (ii): The representation of processes in the verbal and visual mode

With regard to our second goal, we analyse the processes associated with the male protagonists of the six visual narratives, first in the verbiage and then in the images.

(a) Verbal Mode:

As shown in Table 3, the representation of the narrated events in language is conveyed mainly through material and mental processes. In fact, 42% of the tokens identified in the sample texts are material and 27% are mental.

Table 3. Analysis of Verbal Transitivity in the Sample Texts.

Processes	Material	Mental	Verbal	Relational	Behavioural	Totals
Transitive	48	46	22	0	7	123 (49%)
Intransitive	57	22	2	43	4	128 (51%)
Totals	105 (42%)	68 (27%)	24 (10%)	43 (17%)	11 (4%)	251

The picture book *10,000 Dresses* exemplifies these findings. Through transitive mental processes Bailey’s feelings and true desires are made explicit:

“With all her heart, Bailey loved the dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows in the sun” (NB the pronoun *her* for Bailey; double spread 3). In addition, through material processes, used both transitively and intransitively, Bailey, who usually plays the role of actor, has his true desires realized and finally meets a female friend, Laurel, who accepts him as he is, a girl: *“Bailey ran and ran. She ran all the way to the end of the block, until she came to a house with a big blue porch [...]. Together the girls made two new dresses”* (double spreads 12-13). Material processes show that Bailey never relinquishes his passion for dresses.

Unlike in the other stories, in *Tough Boris*, there is a predominance of relational attributive clauses. This may be because this picture book essentially refers to the personal attributes of the pirate Boris (the carrier). Relational clauses capture the qualities that are traditionally associated with pirates: *“He was tough”*, *“He was massive”*, *“He was scruffy”*, *“He was greedy”*, *“He was fearless”* and *“He was scary”*. However, these characterisations of the fierceness of pirates through relational attributive clauses end when Boris’s parrot dies, and his heart is broken. The behavioural process, *cry*, reveals the tenderest feature of pirate Boris’s personality: *“But when his parrot died, then he cried and cried. All pirates cry”* (double spreads 14-18).

(b) Visual Mode:

As we can see in Table 4, there is a predominance of embedded images over the other types (63% of the tokens counted), as most of the illustrations combine both action and reaction processes. In turn, narrative transactional images (12% of the items identified) and verbal and mental processes, although smaller in number (7% and 6%, respectively), also play a role in the representation of the main characters in the sample texts. Finally, conceptual images account for only 4% of the tokens identified in the illustrations of the six picture books. We will come back to this aspect later.

We shall next consider examples of these choices in some of the picture books analysed in this paper. In the first, *10,000 Dresses*, there is a preponderance of embedded images involving action and reaction processes. But mental processes (the illustrator showing Bailey’s dreams projected in thought bubbles) also play a crucial role in the representation of the main character’s desire to wear dresses (double spreads 2, 3, 6 and 9). These pictures show several balloons, emerging from Bailey’s head to visually symbolise how this transgender boy expresses his true desires.

As can be seen in Fig. 4, Bailey’s dream is projected in a mental process of cognition by means of a dream bubble.

Table 4. Analysis of visual transactional patterns in the sample texts.

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONAL PATTERNS			Absolute Values	Relative Values	
VISUAL PROCESSES	Narrative	Action (Vectors of movement)	Transactional Non-Transactional	17 12%	
		Reaction (perception)	Transactional Non-Transactional	11 8%	
		Embedded (action + reaction) + mental process of cognition	Transactional	84	63%
			Non-Transactional		
	Mental (cognition)		8	6%	
	Verbal		9	7%	
	Conceptual		5	4%	
Total			134	100%	

Furthermore, the bubble is also an analytical image, as it shows Bailey’s happiness when he wears a colourful dress. In his dream, he stands, foregrounded, on top of the stairs, as if he were a supermodel about to start a catwalk – spotlights emitting bright beams in the background. These features (mental plus analytical) contribute to fulfilling the illustrator’s purpose of highlighting Bailey’s happiness and transgenderism.

The second example is found in *The Purim Superhero*, where most of the double spreads are also transactional embedded images, combined in this case with verbal or communication processes (participants depicted with their mouths open). This highlights the interaction that is established between Nate and his dads. In the double spread four, for example, we observe Nate having dinner and telling one of his dads his dilemma: whether to follow his preference and dress up as an alien or to fit in with the rest of the group and dress up as a superhero in the Purim festival.

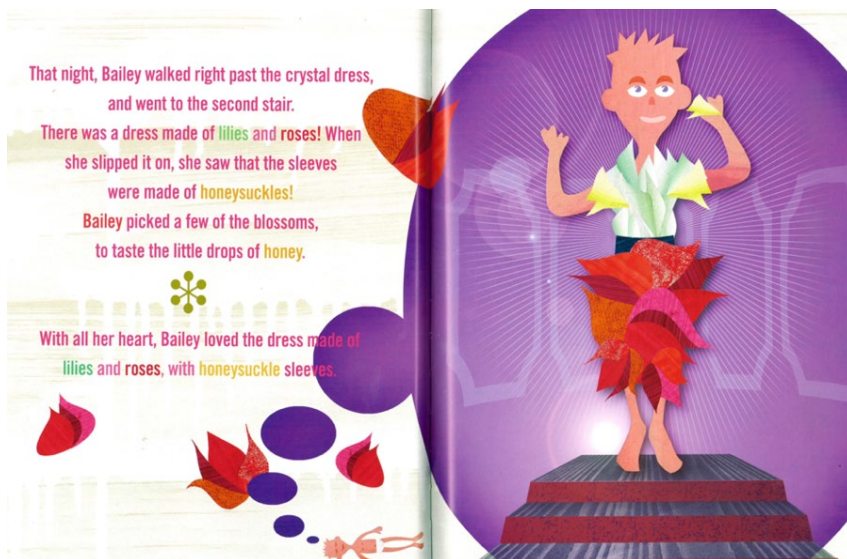


Figure 4: Bailey's dreams (*10,000 Dresses* by M. Ewert and R. Ray).

It is precisely when Nate interacts with his parents that his dad acts as a supportive father (shown by a transactional embedded narrative image), leaving the final decision up to Nate. That night, Nate goes to sleep still hesitating about his decision. In this scene, a visual mental process of cognition allows the reader to see the four-year-old boy dreaming about his dilemma, represented by two cloud-shaped balloons (coming) emerging from his head. One balloon depicts him dressed as a superhero, and the other dressed as a pirate.

To summarize, the analysis of the visual mode reveals that embedded images (action plus reaction), combined with mental and verbal processes play a key role in the representations of the characters' real desires and personalities. The illustrations contribute greatly to challenging male gender stereotypes in the six picture books analysed in this study.

Aim (iii): The semantic load – the interplay between images and words in the representation of the fictional world

Regarding our last goal, we shall explore the interplay between the visual and the verbal modes in meaning-creation in the sample texts.

By applying Painter et al.'s (2013), intersemiotic approach, we shall briefly investigate whether the semantic contribution of each mode is either *convergent* (similar) or *divergent* (different) in the *semantic load*. Based on Table 1 (see section on theory), we examine the commitment and couplings established between each mode to construe meaning.

The complementarity between words and images seems to be a recurrent pattern throughout the six picture books. Sometimes, images and words tend to create similar meanings (are *convergent*), as the meaning potential actualised by the verbal and visual systems of transitivity is similar across both semiotic modes. In *Prince Cinders*, for example, images and words convey similar meaning, as the material, mental and verbal processes identified in the verbal mode are directly reflected in the illustrations. In these, there is a predominance of embedded images that combine material, mental and verbal processes. An example is provided in double spread 12. The text announces: “Of course Prince Cinders’s brothers all fought to get into the trousers at once...”. Simultaneously, the young viewer can see how under Princess Lovelypenny’s close supervision (action + reaction) the brothers try to force themselves into the trousers that Cinders lost at the Palace Disco. Prince Cinders is the only prince who is able to slip into the trousers, and immediately the princess proposes to him: “...Princess Lovelypenny proposed immediately”. Her mouth is depicted open.

However, this repeated co-patterning of realizations from the verbal and visual systems of transitivity across images and words is sometimes *divergent*. *10,000 Dresses* sets a good example. This is mainly due to the added conceptual analytical nature of the illustrations which depict Bailey’s dreams projected in bubbles (double spreads 2, 3, 6 and 9). Another example of divergence is provided in double spread 17 of *Ballerino Nate*. The text announces that “on Monday they went to the ballet school”, but without specifying who went. It is necessary for the reader to look at the illustration in order to discover that Nate’s mum took him and his brother, Ben, to the ballet school, thus making the protagonist’s dream come true (eighteenth illustration).

In brief, these examples show that neither modality on its own is able to carry the complete representational meaning of the picture book. The implications of this will be discussed in the last section.

Conclusion and Discussion

To summarise, the transitivity analysis of the visual mode has shown that transactional embedded images involving *action* and *reaction* are the most common options in the books analysed. This aligns with the *material* and *mental* process types identified in the verbal mode. All in all, the meaning load of images encourages progressive gender discourses, fostering the reader/viewer to construct the personality and the desires of the male characters. The visual mode seems to carry more load than the verbal mode which may be due to the complexity of the visual processes. These involve both action (vectors of movement) and reaction processes (eye-contact vectors), combined with mental processes of cognition (dream and thought bubbles) and verbal processes (Moya-Guijarro and Martínez 2022).

In addition, as shown in the first part of the analysis, metonymies are typically realised by body parts, shadows and silhouettes in the sample texts. By means of metonymic representations, the illustrator highlights some relevant aspects of the characters, making them more noticeable to young readers (Moya 2021: 111). But contrary to expectations (Painter et al. 2013), the characters are sometimes activated through a part-whole metonymy before they are depicted in full. Multimodal analysis has revealed that in this data visual metonymies are used: to ascribe negative qualities or attitudes to chauvinistic characters (*10,000 Dresses*, *Tough Boris*, *Prince Cinders*), to foreshadow what is yet to come in the story (*Willy the Champ*), to imply the idea that not all boys necessarily adapt to male stereotypes, but all deserve to be loved and respected by their families and their peer group (*Willy the Champ*, *Prince Cinders*, *Ballerino Nate*), to create irony and make fun of traditional tales, while criticising macho stereotypes (*Prince Cinders*) and, finally, to introduce new characters in the story and create expectations (*Tough Boris*, *Willy the Champ*, *10,000 Dresses*).

By using multimodal analysis, we have tried to show how meanings are created verbally and visually to challenge gender stereotypes in children's picture books and how these picture books enhance acceptance and diversity in our social world. We now have to turn to writers, illustrators, parents and educators and ask how conscious they are of the meaning potential that emanates from the combination of images and words in picture books. To what extent are images used to challenge realities in early and advanced education? Are we stimulating and developing our children's critical minds sufficiently?

As shown, the visual code has immense communicative possibilities in picture books. Although children are able to interpret images long before learning to read the written code, this does not imply that learning the visual code comes easily. Young readers/viewers need to be taught from an early age, how images and words complement each other to create meaning in picture books. They need to learn to draw their own conclusions and make their own ethical judgements about what they are looking at and reading. Certainly, the inferences young readers must make to track participants depicted metonymically in visual narratives may help to develop their visual literacy. The more caretakers and early educators understand this process, the more they can help young children in their struggle for understanding our world through achieving excellent skills in literacy.

Due to limitations of data, we have simply wanted to show how the interaction between the verbal and the visual is functioning and how visual narratives may be used to socialise the young picture book readers in different realities. Studies like the one reported here will hopefully help to bridge the gap between early literacy of picture books and school literacy of various kinds. We would like to finish with Cerrillo's words (2014; our translation):

“Literature cannot change the world, but it can change people, and people, through their actions, can help to make a better, freer, and more caring world.”

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Authors:

Jesús Moya-Guijarro, PhD

Professor, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Department of Modern Languages, Avda de los Alfares 42, 16071 Cuenca, Spain, e-mail: arsenio.mguijarro@uclm.es

Profesor, Univerza Castilla-La Mancha, Oddelek za sodobne jezike, Avda de los Alfares 42 16071 Cuenca, Španija, e-pošta: arsenio.mguijarro@uclm.es

Eija Ventola, PhD

Emeritus Professor, Aalto University, School of Business, P.O. Box 11000 (Otakaari 1B) FI-00076 AALTO, Finland, e-mail: evhkifin@gmail.com

Zaslužna profesorica, Univerza Aalto, Poslovna šola, P.O. Box 11000 (Otakaari 1B) FI-00076, AALTO, Finska, e-pošta: evhkifin@gmail.com