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MULTIMODAL IMAGERY IN PICTURE BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract

This research focuses on revealing visual means of creating imagery in picture books, addressed to a child-reader. The theory of J. Appleyard has been acknowledged. It is believed that in early and later childhood children realize themselves as players, heroes, and heroines of the stories. Given that, visual imagery contributes to their reading experience and creates special world, which attracts child-readers. The theory suggested by G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, supplemented by C. Painter, J. Martin, and L. Unsworth has been developed and amplified. Social distance, proximity, attitude, and contact in picture books for children are created by means of visual devices, i.e. color and saturation, page layout, close up and long-shot depiction. It is assumed that the most prominent means of creating meanings in picture books for children becomes the focaliser's viewpoint, as in most narratives for children a child or an anthropomorphic character of a child's age is a focaliser of the events. It is claimed that close-up depiction of images creates a special eye contact with the reader, as well as color decisions become visual means of creating the point of view of the focaliser. Furthermore, full-length pictures become a visual tool of implementation ironic senses. In ironic narrative for children, the incongruity is shaped via visual depiction of the characters, which builds the contrast between conventional understanding of issues and their representation in narratives for children. Proximity and distance of the images implements social and psychological connection, status or misunderstanding between the characters. Special angle of viewing the images serves as a device of revealing the type of the narrator of the story, as oblique and high angle become a tool of narrating a story by an adult narrator.

Keywords: picture books for children, visual imagery, child-reader, focaliser, point of view.

1. Introduction

Narratives, written for children, possess specificity on the level of their storytelling and story creating. Dynamic plots, child-characters, special setting, and composition structure, as well as adult-narrator and child-focaliser—comprise unique poetics of the texts, addressed for children (Tsapiv, 2020).

Children face different obstacles when they make their first steps to literacy and life experience. Books with beautiful illustrations and dynamic plots became special guides that teach and give children that important knowledge they need to be aware of things and objects that surround them every day (Nodelman, 2005). Visual narratives make such apprenticeship both simple and complicated. Narratives, addressed to young child-readers are constructed in a special way—verbal

and visual story produce a multimodal narrative, in which a special synergy of words and illustrations is created (Arizpe & Styles, 2016).

Literary texts for children have been beneath the notice for a long time, thus appeared in focus of linguistic research since the 19th century. In that period, the whole world society agreed that children need something different from what is addressed to adult readers (Hunt, 2005).

One of the main tasks of the linguist who researches narratives, addressed to a child-reader, is to interpret *what* and to understand *how* the story is implemented in the book, addressed to a child-reader. What tools are used for actual verbiage and visualization of the narrative that makes it so attractive, so clear for children.

2. Theoretical background and method

This research is based on the methodology of multimodal stylistic analysis developed by Norgaard (2010; 2018), the concept of reader–character relationship suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and extended by Painter, Martin & Unsworth (2012). The theory of types of readers, developed by philologist Appleyard, has been elaborated. Given that a child-reader in their early childhood realizes themselves as a player, while in later childhood, this role is believed to be a hero or heroine of the story (Appleyard, 1991). Such theory enables to highlight the special demands of children to the narratives they read.

In this research, the methodology of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) of revealing visual meaning systems, which enables to create the tie and empathy between a child-reader and a character of the narrative, is implemented. We find it absolutely relevant to concentrate on four main systems: *social distance, attitude, contact, and modality*.

Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2012) add one more criterion—*proximity*, which shows the relationship between characters—the closer to each other they are depicted, the closer interconnection they possess. Such visual proximity influences the realization of a child-reader’s family ties and friends’ bonds, which exist between characters of the narrative. For example, a well-known Bond’s fiction narrative “Paddington” is a story about a small bear, who was found by Mr. and Mrs. Brown on a railway platform. Very soon, that bear from Peru became a real member of their family. A narrative about transformation and a great change from lonely little bear, who was absolutely alien and unaware about the world around him, to a friendly member of the Brown family is presented both verbally and visually.

3. Results and discussion

In first narrative episodes, Paddington is lonely and scared. In text illustrations, he is represented alone or with Mr. and Mrs. Brown who keep a little distance from him and have no tactile contact, his gestures demonstrate embarrassment and fear (see fig. 1). However, the closer relationship he has with the family, the stronger ties they gain, the more they learn about Paddington – the closer the bear and the members of the family are represented in the illustrations (see fig. 2).



Fig. 1. *Paddington on the railway platform* (from “Paddington” by M. Bond)



Fig. 2. *Paddington drinks tea with the Browns* (from “Paddington” by M. Bond)

Visual proximity of the characters can also talk about their relationship with other characters. In the adventures of Paddington at the Carnival, Mr. Gruber is a friend and a guide for the bear, who explains to him unknown things and introduces people and traditions of the carnival—bubbles, boats, barbecue, bands, and banjo. Almost on each illustration, Paddington is presented with Mr. Gruber, who helps, explains, or just watches the little bear (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. *Paddington at the Carnival* (“Paddington at the Carnival” by M. Bond)

At the same time, *full-length* (long shot) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124) depiction creates a constant social distance between the child-reader and the character of the narrative, who becomes rather an observer than a participant of the story. Picture books about Paddington also imply social hierarchy (Nodelman, 2005) adult::child. The reader can observe in the pictures that Mr. Gruber is an adult, who has better life experience and chooses where to go and what to do, as if in real life, when children go for a walk with parents, who are elder, experienced, and wiser and who decide in which direction to go.

It is assumed that *close up* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124) presentation of the characters makes special closeness between a child-reader and a character and at the same time, such close shot becomes a method of visual representation of the point of view of the focaliser.

Narrative theory provides basic notions, which are necessary for the narrative analysis of the text – they are narrator and focaliser. It is assumed that narrator functions as a mediator in the verbal and/or visual medium of the representation, he tells what the focaliser sees (Fludernik, 2002, p. 6), he presents the events from the point of view of the focaliser. One of the most vivid visual devices of creating the point of view of the focaliser is a visual eye contact of the character and the reader (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, p. 19; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Very often close-up depiction makes possible such eye contact in case when the character is represented in front position. It shortens or even dissolves the social distance and creates certain intimacy between the child-reader and the character (see fig. 4)

Verbal-visual narrative “Russel the Sheep” is a story about the sheep Russel, who was trying to fall asleep at the end of a long busy day. No matter how hard Russel tried, what life hacks and tricks he implemented, he could not cope with the task and achieve the desired effect. Close up presentation of the main character, dark blue and white colors of the illustrations, special typeface with ‘jumping’ letters of different size and shape create an atmosphere of the night and sleepy Russel, who is doing his best to fall asleep (see fig. 4).

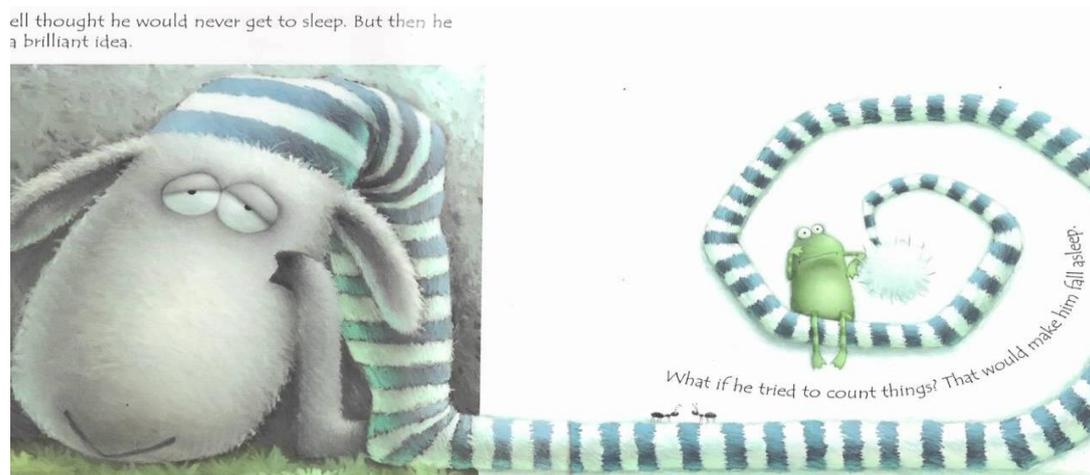


Fig. 4. *Russel the sheep is trying to fall asleep* (“Russel the Sheep” by R. Scotton)

Such visual devices create close interconnection between a child-reader and a character of the narrative. The double-page spread of the Russel’s image demonstrates the given priority to the visualization of the story. Light dizziness of the main character Russel is represented with the help of visual representation of his half-closed eyes, a nightcap with a long-pointed top and the text, which graphically imitates the loop of the long curly nightcap’s top (*What if he tried to count thing? That would make him fall asleep*). While looking at the image of Russel and reading the text a child-reader turns his head what strengthens the atmosphere of sleepiness and dizziness of Russel, as well as creates the interconnection between the feelings of the main character and a child-reader.

3.1. Multimodal creation of the point of view. Character's introduction

In visual narratives for children, multimodal meaning-making is created by means of interaction and integration of verbal and visual modes (Norgaard, 2010, p. 42), it creates a multimodal semiosis. If the linguist manages to decode it, he captures the sense, construed by these modes. Characters of the narratives for children who become focalisers of the narrated events, as a rule are of child age (Tsapiv, 2020). The point of view of the focaliser is often created both verbally and visually, though in picture books visual means are dominant.

For example, in the fairy narrative “Once Upon a Wish”, a little magician, a wishgiver boy, lives inside an old oak tree and makes special potions and lotions to make children’s wishes come true. The atmosphere of magic is created with the color choices—violet, blue, pink. The child-reader maintains an observer of the events, but he can understand the position of the main character with the help of the color saturation, as it symbolizes children’s dreams and hopes. Verbal text is integrated into the visual pictures, as it repeats the contours of the steam that comes from the copper, in which magic potions are boiling (*A marvellous, magical wishgiver boy, who works to grant wishes and bring others joy*). The text integrates and repeats the movements of the air stream, which floats in the breeze (*At nightfall a new wish floats in on the breeze*) (see fig. 5).

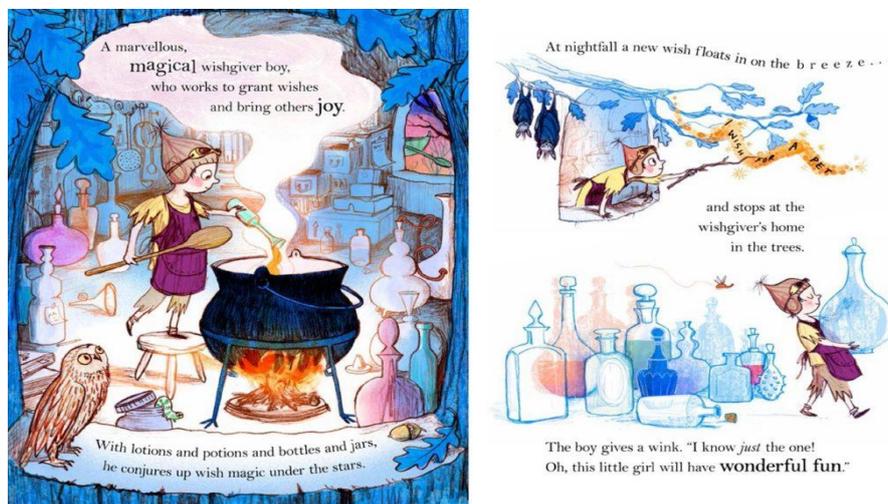


Fig. 5. *Color realization of the point of view of the focaliser* (“Once upon a wish” by A. Sparkes & S. Ogilvie)

3.2. Visual figuration. Irony

Ironic visual narratives always have long shot size of frame (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124), as they intentionally make a social distance between a child-reader and a character, suggesting a reader to observe, rather than participate in the story. A verbal-visual narrative “Olivia” is a story about a little piglet Olivia who behaves like a common child—she plays, goes for a walk, draws, and dreams. The story is presented both verbally and visually with the symmetrical (words and pictures tell the same story) and complementary (pictures significantly amplify the words) interaction (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, p. 225) between the text and pictures. Visual storytelling becomes a tool to implement the narrator and the focaliser of the story. Most pictures in the narrative have a special angle of viewing—Olivia is viewed from above, using an oblique angle. Such depiction imitates an adult narrator, who looks from above (comparing his height to a child’s one) at Olivia and tells about her. However, the choice of grey and red colors, becomes a device to create a character’s point of view. The things that matter for Olivia are in red color, as well as everything that is unimportant – in grey pallet (see fig. 6).

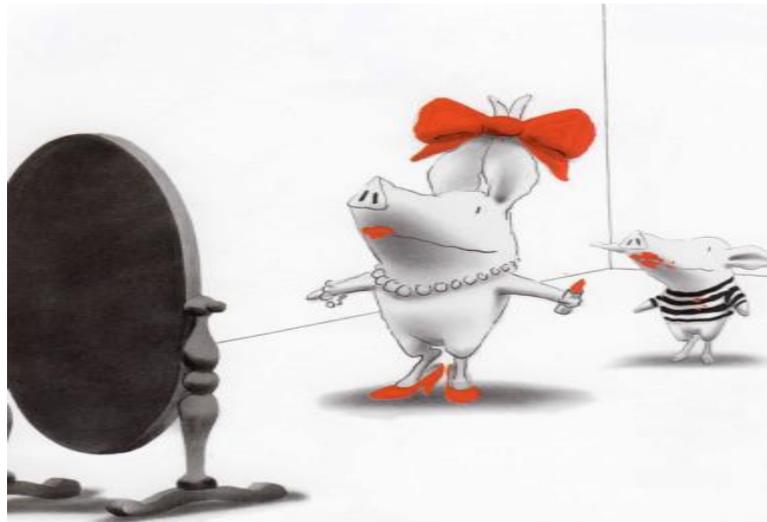


Fig. 6. *Olivia is looking in the mirror* (“Olivia” by I. Falconer)

In Figure 6, little piglet Olivia is wearing a red bow, red high heeled shoes and uses red lipstick for the make-up. Olivia feels absolutely beautiful, as she is looking at her reflection in the mirror with pleasure. The incongruity between the typical appearance of a pig and her image of a fashion-conscious child creates a visual irony. A more vivid ironical effect is created by the image of Olivia’s little brother, who has copied the behavior of his sister and colored his lips with the red lipstick, to be alike Olivia. The prominence of red color also symbolizes unity and proximity between Olivia and her younger brother, who is looking into the mirror with the same admiration as his sister.

Verbal-visual narrative about princess Smartypants is a humorous narrative about an unusual princess. Visual images possess visual incongruity i.e. unusual or different from what is common or generally acceptable by the society. The incongruity here is between a typical image of a princess, who is beautifully dressed and has good manners – and an unusual princess Smartypants, who wears jeans, t-shirts, doesn’t attend balls, but rather is having fun with her friends by watching TV and doing nothing (see fig. 7).



Fig. 7. *Princess Smartypants with her friends* (“Princess Smartypants” by B. Cole)

3.3. Visual hyperbole and distance in picture books

Visual means as well as images layout make senses of proximity or distance of the characters of the narratives. Convergence of meanings, created by images and their special layout implements focaliser’s point of view. In the given example (see fig. 8), Olivia is playing and building a sandcastle on the beach. Her mother is busy with reading a newspaper; she is sitting in a chaise longue, paying

no attention to her daughter. The size of the castle, built by Olivia, is exaggerated, as it symbolizes the distance and misunderstanding between Olivia and her mother. From Olivia's point of view, there is a huge gap between them and visual hyperbole (a huge castle, which looks more like a skyscraper) becomes a means of creating focaliser's viewpoint. The distance between the characters, created with the help of the layout, strengthens Olivia's position.

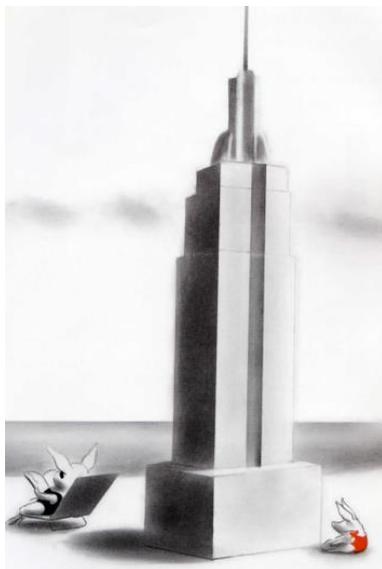


Fig. 8. *Olivia is building a sand castle* (“Olivia” by I. Falconer)

A wide range of visual means of creating imagery in picture narratives for children: color, page layout, proximity, and distance of characters, visual prominence, visual means of creating point of view of the focaliser construct special world for a child-reader in his/her reading experience as a player, hero, or heroine of the story.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I focused on the visual means of creating imagery in picture books for children. This research tends to acknowledge the theories on multimodal analysis of picture books, as well as suggests its own viewpoint on special poetics that picture books for children possess. In particular, the role of color and its saturation, page layout, color decisions, visual means of creating point of view of the focaliser have been foregrounded.

My research is based on the assumption that in early and later childhood, children realize themselves as players and heroes and heroines of the stories they read. Special narration of stories—adult narrator and child focaliser—comprise uniqueness of stories for children. Multimodal construing of picture books creates a special world for a child-reader with visual imagery and play of the colors.

Visual proximity demonstrates social and emotional contact of the characters, as well as their distance builds a gap between them. I claim that close-up depiction of the characters and their front position on pictures enables to create an eye-contact as well as arises empathy. The choice of a definite color, which becomes prominent among other shades, becomes a tool of creating the point of view of a child-focaliser. An oblique angle of depiction and above angle of viewing demonstrate the narrator's position, who tells about the characters as if an adult, watching from above.

Ironic narratives have a long-shot depiction and suggest a child-reader to become an observer, rather than a participant of the narrative. Visual irony is created by means of constructing visual incongruity in character's appearance.

Future studies on linguistic and cultural specificity of picture books for children are considered perspective and relevant.

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МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНА ОБРАЗНІСТЬ В ІЛЮСТРОВАНІХ ТЕКСТАХ ДЛЯ ДІТЕЙ

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Анотація

Наукову розвідку присвячено виявленню візуальних засобів створення образності в ілюстрованих текстах, присвячених дитячій читацькій аудиторії. У роботі підтверджується теорія, розроблена Дж. Апплеяром, щодо усвідомлення читачем себе у молодшому та старшому дитячому віці гравцем або героєм чи героїнею наративу під час його читання. У такий спосіб візуальна образність впливає на читацький досвід дитини та створює особливий світ для читача-дитини. У статті імплементовано та розширено положення, запропоновані Г. Крессом та Т. ван Льовеном, і доповнені авторами С. Пейнтером, Дж. Мартіном та Л. Унсвортом.

Соціальна дистанція, візуальне зближення, ставлення та створення читацького контакту в ілюстрованих текстах для дітей створюється завдяки візуальним засобам, зокрема кольору та його насиченості, розташуванню малюнків на просторі сторінки, крупного та дальнього плану зображення. У роботі стверджується, що одним з найважливіших способів створення смислів в ілюстрованих текстах для дітей є створення точки зору фокалізатора, оскільки у більшості наративів для дітей фокалізатором є саме дитини або антропоморфний персонаж дитячого віку.

У роботі доведено, що крупний план зображення персонажів створює зоровий контакт із читачем-дитиною, так само, як і кольорові рішення стають візуальним засобом творення точки зору фокалізатора. Дальній і повний план зображення постає візуальним засобом імплементации іронічних контекстів та смислів. В іронічних наративах для дітей інконгруентність конструюється завдяки візуальному зображенню персонажів і створенню візуального контрасту між узагальненим сприйняттям речей і їхнього бачення у наративах для дітей. Наближення персонажів на малюнках або їх дистанціювання втілює смисли щодо їхнього соціального або психологічного контакту або непорозуміння між ними. Спеціальний кут зображення персонажів слугує засобом визначення типу наратора історії, а саме непрямий косий кут із верхньої перспективи стає інструментом дорослого наратора у творенні історії.

Ключові слова: ілюстровані тексти для дітей, візуальна образність, читач-дитина, фокалізатор, точка зору.