

A textual analysis of a sample of picturebooks with two-father families: a multimodal discourse study¹

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Abstract

This study attempts to carry out an analysis of the textual metafunction of three picturebooks where the family model represented consists of two fathers and illustrate the three textual strategies that Sunderland and Mclashan (2012) propose to portray gay families: *Daddy's Roommate* (1989), *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (2009) and *Stella Brings the Family* (2015). The article aims to be meaningful in understanding the construction of the non-traditional family discourse in children's picturebooks by deconstructing textual meanings. The analytical tools employed in this study are Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics (2021) and Painter and others's (2013) approach to picturebooks. The results show that the three books deal differently with regard to the discourse of gay relationships, which can contribute to socialise children by offering different explicit/implicit strategies to understand non-traditional family models.

Keywords: multimodality; picturebooks; textual metafunction; visual/verbal modes; two-father families.

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1. Introduction

Children's literature has an effect on children's ideology and on the development of cultural norms and values associated with different frames of reference, including gender (Arizpe and others, 2013; Soler Quiles, 2015). In fact, picturebooks contribute to children's socialization, following Painter (2018: 420): "Printed picturebooks stories have always been a significant resource both for the socialization of young children and for introducing them to the principles and pleasures of literacy and literature".

These books have a central role in school curricula, which justifies the importance of analysing them. The deconstruction of the different linguistic and visual choices in children's picturebooks contributes to deepening the understanding of what and how children learn while they read (Hamer and others, 2017; Kümmerling- Meibauer and others, 2015).

This article will contribute to the study of the relationships between images and words in the genre of picturebooks. In particular, I aim to explore the textual meanings in the sample selected, using the model for reading visual narratives proposed by Painter and others (2013) and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual social semiotics (2021). The exploration of the said meanings will shed light on the role of visuals in the way children understand the stories being narrated and in the social knowledge that they acquire in the reading process. In order to deconstruct the gender ideology in the said genre (Coats, 2018; Sunderland, 2012), I am especially interested in picturebooks in which the family pattern consists of two fathers. In fact, the books selected can be considered challenging because they do not represent the classic family (Evans, 2015).

Exploring the relationship between the written text and the image will throw light on the non-traditional family portrayal and on the socialization of children into understanding the non-traditional family model through the use of particular semiotics resources. The main objectives of this article are: 1) to deconstruct the textual metafunction of the said picturebooks in order to systematize the different layouts, frames and focus patterns used by the writers and illustrators for the construction of meaning in picturebooks framed by different textual strategies; 2) to observe similarities and differences in the composition of the sample of picturebooks analysed, and 3) to approach how children's picturebooks are employed to construct the non-traditional family discourse. In this sense, the article intends to be meaningful in understanding the construction of the non-traditional family discourse in children's picturebooks.

This paper is structured in the following way. After the introduction, the theoretical background is presented. Next, the data and the methodology are included. Then, I explore the textual meanings in the three picturebooks selected for analysis. Finally, the article finishes with the discussion and some conclusions based on the study.

2. Theoretical background

Multimodality has been given attention in the past two decades in order to deconstruct the meaning of textbooks, comics, advertisements, scientific texts and picturebooks (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2021; Moya Guijarro, 2019; O'Halloran, 2008; Painter and others, 2013; Unsworth and Ortigas, 2008). Nevertheless, it is still necessary to clarify the way images and words combine in order to express meanings. The role of the visual is essential to deconstruct the values and ideas transmitted (Hamer and others, 2017; Kümmerring-Meibauer and others, 2015).

Different authors have analysed the way in which the image and the written text create meanings in children's picturebooks due to their multimodal nature, where the image is crucial in the process of meaning creation (Baguley and Kerby, 2021; Elorza, 2024; Lewis, 2001; Moya Guijarro, 2014; Moya Guijarro and Ruiz, 2020; Painter, 2007, 2008; Serafini, 2010; Unsworth and Ortigas, 2008). Consequently, the multimodal nature of these texts needs a visual grammar that describes how the different elements combine in order to express meaning. In this sense, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014) has been influential in the model of visual grammar proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2021), because they apply the model of the three metafunctions proposed by SFG to the analysis of multimodal texts.

Kress and van Leeuwen's model of visual grammar (2021) proposes three metafunctions in the grammar of visual design: the representational, the interpersonal and the textual. These metafunctions are based on the three functions proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014): the ideational metafunction concentrates on how the world around and inside us is represented by observing the nature of events, the objects and participants involved, and the circumstances in which they occur; the interpersonal metafunction focuses on how social interactions and social relationships are established; and the textual metafunction concentrates on how the elements of the text express meaning in a coherent way.

Due to space limitations, I will concentrate on the textual metafunction. Textual meanings concentrate on information value, salience and framing (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2021). Information value allows a deepening of the location and the relationship between elements: placing elements on the right (new information) and on the left (given information) contributes to giving more importance to certain elements. In addition, the elements in the upper part of the layout function as 'ideal', whereas those in the lower position function as 'real'. Regarding salience, attention is paid to the elements that are highlighted by their size, colour, focus, etc. Salience contributes to giving importance to certain units of information, called 'focus group' in visual texts (Painter and others, 2013: 91).

A focus group can be placed around the centre in various ways (centrifocal) or can be repeated in a series across the image, normally in regular lines (iterating, aligned); the type

iterating; scattered is not very common. Centrifocal focus groups can be a) centrifocal: centred when the centre of the space is filled or b) centrifocal: polarised when different elements are opposed on a diagonal, vertical or horizontal axis.

Finally, frames contribute to creating a sense of detachment between the picture and the reader, whereas the absence of frames integrates the reader in the visual (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001). Painter and others (2013: 103-109) explain that when the only boundary is the page edge, images are 'unbound'. However, when images are set within a page margin that contributes to separate readers from the story, they are 'bound'.

There are two main types of layout: a) integrated, where image and written text come together, and b) complementary, when the written text and the visuals appear in their own space, indicating that they have a different role in the meaning construction (Painter and others, 2013).

Sunderland and Mclashan (2012: 162-170) propose three textual categories to promote, accept or understand families with same-sex parents: the 'gay strategy', where "[...] gay sexuality is discussed explicitly, in part through the device of explaining the word to the child in the story" (Sunderland and Mclashan, 2012: 163); the 'different' strategy ("where having two Mums or Dads is conceptually recognized as different by the child" (Sunderland and Mclashan, 2012: 165) and the 'backgrounding' strategy: "These books do not address the issue of gay sexuality directly or even indirectly, but rather issues surrounding the family or personal life, which are not specific to gay families" (Sunderland and Mclashan, 2012: 168). Each picturebook selected belongs to a different textual category.

3. Data and methodology

The books chosen for analysis are *Daddy's Roommate* (1989), written by Michael Willhoite; *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (2009), written by Lesléa Newman with illustrations of Carol Thompson, and *Stella Brings the Family* (2015), written by Miriam Schiffer, with illustrations by Holly Clifton. They have been selected in order to illustrate the three textual strategies that Sunderland and Mclashan (2012) propose to portray gay families. The selection of the picturebooks is also justified because they will contribute to the development of children's gender schemas by portraying a family with two fathers (Campagnaro, 2015; Coats, 2018).

After selecting the books, I decided to use the following analytical tools: Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual social semiotics (2021) and the specific model that Painter and others (2013) propose for the analysis of picturebooks as multimodal texts. The descriptive framework of these models assigns representational, interactive and textual meanings to image. The textual metafunction has been chosen due to its importance in observing how meanings are packaged into units of information on the page and on the relative emphasis

among elements of the text and the image. Firstly, I will identify the main layout, frames and focus patterns used by the illustrators in the picturebooks. Then, I will analyse the way they contribute to the creation of meaning in the multimodal page and to the way children deconstruct meanings.

The analysis of the main principles of composition and the distribution of the information value will allow the deconstruction of the relationships between the different elements in the visual. Once the textual analysis is made, I will observe if the picturebooks analysed promote the equal role of both fathers. In fact, the analytical framework will be used as a means to understanding how children's picturebooks are employed to construct the non-traditional family discourse.

4. Analysis

Each of the following subsections analyses the textual meanings of a picturebook that illustrates one of the three textual patterns mentioned. The analysis will be useful to understand how children's picturebooks are employed to construct the non-traditional family discourse from three different angles.

4.1. Textual meanings in *Daddy's Roommate* (1989)

Daddy's Roommate (1989) is framed in 'the gay strategy' because the concept of being gay is clearly explained to the child in the story. The picturebook narrates the different activities that the child does with his father and with Frank, his new roommate, and the different actions that both men do while living together.

The child is foregrounded in the first illustration of the story. The written text next to him on his left is very significant because it makes clear that his father was heterosexual: "My Mommy and Daddy got a divorce last year" (double page 1). In the background, included in a bubble, just behind the child, clearly indicating that this is something that happened in the past, the father appears leaving home, putting his suitcases in the car and the child and the mother seeing him go.

The image in the bubble is clearly divided in two parts: the mother and the child are framed by the window and the curtains on the right background of the page layout; the father is looking at them saying good-bye. The mother and the child appear on the right, i.e., the most important part of the information. Nevertheless, their bodies are cut by the window frame and their size is small, which does not contribute to foreground them. By contrast, although the father appears on the left, the place of known information, the fact that he is represented bigger than the mother and the child and that his whole body appears in the visual, foregrounds him and makes clear that the story that follows is about him.

After that, in illustration 2, the written text situates us in the present with the marked textual theme “now”: “Now there’s somebody new at Daddy’s house” (double page 2). The person that is referred to as new in the written discourse also appears foregrounded in the visual framed by the sofa, whereas the child appears in the midground framed by the carpet and the father is situated in the background, framed by the door. Then, in illustration 3, it is the father who appears foregrounded because there is a new person in his house is already known. Frank, the father’s roommate, appears in the midground, and it is the child who appears in the background, joined by vectors to his father and to Frank. He is represented lying on the carpet, reading, in the same posture as his father. After these introductory pages, the two men are presented doing different things together: working, eating, sleeping, shaving and sometimes even arguing.

Considering visual themes, i.e., the most relevant element in a visual, Daddy is foregrounded in some illustrations: 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, and 22. However, it is Frank who appears on the right, the place of new information, in illustration 8, when the two men appear arguing (Frank is angry, standing up showing Daddy a shirt with a burn mark from the iron). But then, in illustration 9, it is also Frank who appears on the right when they are making up after the argument. It seems that it is Frank who started the argument and it is he who seems to start the process of making up, because he is holding Daddy’s shoulder.

After this, we find different illustrations outside the home, where Frank is also given importance in the child’s life. Both appear together without Daddy in different visuals: they appear playing together (illustration 10), Frank tells him jokes and riddles (illustration 11) and he helps him catch bugs for show-and-tell (illustration 12). Then, the action takes place at home again, and Frank appears sitting in an armchair next to the child, reading to him (illustration 13). They also appear together to point out that Frank makes great peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches (illustration 14). In illustration 15 Daddy, the child and Frank appear together after the child has had a nightmare; Daddy is hugging the child, and Frank is talking and chasing the nightmare away. In fact, there is a general tendency to Frank being on the right, which contributes to foregrounding him not only in Daddy’s life but also in the story.

The book ends with the two men sitting on the sofa watching TV and eating popcorn while Frank has his arm round Daddy (figure 1). The very last page represents the two men with the child in the middle queuing outside the cinema. The child is holding Frank’s arm and Daddy has his arms around the child’s shoulders. Again, the fact that Frank is on the right suggests that he is the one who has more importance. The three characters are followed by a heterosexual couple in the cinema queue; the woman appears first, followed by a man who is touching her shoulders. Consequently, on this page we can observe one of the new family models represented by Daddy, the child and Frank, and a traditional couple.

FIGURE 1

Last illustrations in *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite (1989). © Alyson Wonderland



This picturebook follows “the more frequent choice for a complementary vertical layout in a picturebook is for the verbiage to come below the picture [...]” (Painter and others, 2013: 96). This is the pattern found in all illustrations. The visual is clearly framed in all cases and the written text appears after it, occupying just one line; the visual is the ideal and the page is the real. Consequently, this layout highlights that the image is given importance. This frame is only modified on the very first page, where the boy telling the story appears foregrounded and the image of his father leaving home after the divorce from his mother appears in a bubble. This suggests that the boy is situating the reader to what happened in the past before narrating what is happening now.

Regarding framing, all the visuals are bound because they are “[...] set within a page margin or border, demarcate the story world as more distinctly separated from the reader’s world than unbound ones and may also serve to ‘contain’ or confine the character” (Painter and others, 2013: 105). In this way, there is a clear division between the world presented in the picturebook and the readers' world.

Considering focus, the fact that the image occupies the majority of the page means that it is the most important element to catch the readers' attention. The main focus pattern found in this book is centrifocal: centred. However, in some cases there are examples of centrifocal: polarised, where characters are placed in polarised positions joined by different vectors (illustrations 1, 2 and 16).

Colours are significant in expressing textual meanings. It is noteworthy that the child is wearing blue in the first three visuals, a colour traditionally associated with men. The fact that his father is also wearing something blue (trousers and pyjamas) contributes to establishing a connection between both characters. In contrast, Frank is represented wearing other colours (yellow, red), which highlights that he is new in the story.

It is only later, when Frank appears alone with the child (illustrations 10-14), that Frank is also represented wearing blue clothes, as a way to show that he is building a relationship with the child, and therefore they are connected. Later on, when the child, Frank and his father appear doing things together at the end of the story, the three characters are wearing blue trousers (illustrations 23 and 29). Consequently, the three characters are connected and the blue colour contributes to establishing a relationship between them; the blue colour is a textual strategy used to give cohesion to the story. In this sense, we coincide with Painter and others (2013: 35) in that “[...] repetition of a colour may be used cohesively as a kind of visual rhyme to link different parts of a narrative”.

4.2. Textual meanings in *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009)

Daddy, Papa, and Me (2009) narrates a simple story: the book starts with the child asking the fathers who wants to play with him. After a positive answer from both fathers, the book describes the different activities they do together. Consequently, this is a clear example of a book that belongs to the ‘backgrounding’ strategy because the activities described in the story are not specific to gay families.

The book comprises 18 illustrations where the image and the verbal text share the white space; the written text contributes to the harmonious organization of the layout with this pattern: integrated: expanded: instated: co-located (Painter and others, 2013: 100). This kind of layout helps the audience read the words and the pictures as a unit.

Apart from the visual, each page contains a short sentence that describes the action being depicted by the image. The written text is always on a white background of the page with the exception of illustrations 15 and 16, where it appears on the green grass represented in the visual. The written text appears at the top of the page on almost all pages; illustrations 14 and 16 are exceptions because the written text comes below it, centred. The written words are easily seen.

Sometimes, the written text appears at the top centre of the page (illustrations 1, 5, 14, 16); other times, horizontally on the left (illustrations 2, 10, 12, 17), or horizontally on the right (illustrations 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13). The fact that it appears on the right, the place of new and more important information, shows that it is presented as an important part of the message. In some cases, the verbal faces the visual horizontally, but normally it appears vertically on top of it (illustrations 1, 3, 4, 5). This confirms that, generally, the lower position of the page corresponds to the real (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2021), opposed to the upper

position, which is the ideal, represented by the written text in most cases. It is only in illustration 16 that the written text appears at the bottom of the page, clearly illustrating the visual of the two fathers having a rest at the top of the page.

Regarding framing, the visuals in this book are unbound because the image extends on the page without any specific margin. This gives a sense of freedom and space to the characters and to the readers to participate in the world depicted. In fact, the dominance of unbound images draws our attention to the playful and dynamic behaviours of the characters. The only boundary is the page edge, which contributes to establishing no demarcation between readers and the semiotic world of the story. In this way, attention is given to each of the specific moments represented between the child and the fathers. There are some simple frames created by furniture, such as a piece of furniture in illustrations 2 and 13, a table in illustrations 8, 11 and 14, trees and the grass in illustrations 15 and 16, and the sofa in illustrations 17 and 18.

Considering focus, the fact that the image occupies the majority of the page means that it is the most important element to catch readers' attention. The main focus pattern found in this book is centrifocal: centred. However, in some cases there are examples of centrifocal: polarised where the child and one of the fathers is represented on two sides of the illustration joined by different vectors (illustrations 7, 10, 12).

Regarding visual themes, it is Papa who appears on the right the first time both fathers appear together (illustration 2), although Daddy is the first one referred to linguistically (figure 2). After this, we find different pages where the child appears doing things with his fathers. Daddy is again the first one that appears with the child alone (illustration 3).

FIGURE 2

First illustrations in *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009) by Léslea Newman © Tricycle Press



There are five times where Daddy and Papa appear together in the visuals; it is always Papa who appears on the right (illustrations 2, 5, 14, 16, 18), which gives him importance on the

page. However, in illustration 5, the written text refers to Daddy's action: "Daddy's plane goes zoom, zoom, zoom!" (double page 3). This contrasts with illustration 14, where Daddy appears on the left of the page drinking tea next to the child, but it is again Papa who appears on the right, pouring tea. This coincides with the written theme, which is also Papa: "Papa pours for Bear and me" (double page 7). There is a change in the layout of the story in illustrations 15 and 16, where the child appears on the right of the page joined by vectors to his fathers, first to Papa and then to Daddy.

Colours are significant in this picturebook, because they contribute to establishing a clear connection between the different characters: the child and the two fathers. One of the fathers is wearing blue, the other garnet, and the child is wearing both colours. Representing the child wearing a red t-shirt contributes to making him a salient element in the story, following Painter and others (2013: 35): "In its textual role, colour may be used contrastively to highlight or foreground some element within a composition to make it especially salient to the viewer, [...]".

The bright colours of the characters' clothes contrast with the white background that reinforces the characters. Red, blue, yellow and green are intense colours that highlight certain characteristics of the people represented (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2002: 347; Van Leeuwen, 2011: 16). The fact that the background is white contributes to making clear that the visual units or focus groups consist of a single focus of attention: the place where the characters appear. This contrasts with illustrations 15 and 16 where placing the action in the countryside means the background is blue and green. In these visuals there are trees, grass, leaves and a bird. Consequently, there is more than one focus of attention, although the main purpose of these elements is to foreground the characters. Green being a colour of growth and fertility and of serenity (Nodelman, 1988) points out that both fathers need a rest and need to be calm after playing with the child.

4.3. Textual meanings in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015)

Stella Brings the Family (2015) is framed in a 'different strategy': the picturebook narrates Stella's concern about not having a mother to take to school to celebrate Mother's Day because her family consists of two fathers. Consequently, Stella feels different from her classmates because her family is different from the classical one, which makes her worry.

This picturebook starts with an image of Elmwood Elementary School, where the teacher is waiting outside, welcoming the children. Right after that we find Daddy and Papa holding Stella in their arms just before she comes to school. One of the fathers has dark hair (referred to as Papa in illustration 24) and the other is blonde (Daddy) (figure 3). There are only four illustrations where Stella appears alone with her two fathers, and in three cases she appears right in the middle (illustrations 6, 28, and 30).

FIGURE 3

First illustration where Stella is represented with her two fathers and first time where she is in the classroom with her classmates in *Stella brings the Family* (2015) by Miriam Schiffer © Chronicle Books



Considering visual themes, it is noteworthy that it is Stella in most of the visuals, i.e., in thirteen illustrations. Moreover, Stella is highlighted because we can see her whole body in all the visuals with the exception of three illustrations. Representing Stella on the right 43,75 % of the times she appears in the visuals makes clear that she is the centre of attention by appearing on the most important part of the page. The position and the proportion of the image that is occupied spatially by the depiction of Stella would be an indication of salience.

This picturebook alternates between placing the written text at the top and at the bottom of the visual. Although the written text is given more importance when placed at the top, the fact that it is written in small letters makes clear that the main emphasis is on the visual text throughout the picturebook. The written text is integrated with the visual. The pattern observed is integrated expanded: instated: co-located. Although we cannot see real bubbles, the written text appears symbolically in them, especially when it appears on top of or next to the characters that say the words.

Regarding framing, the visuals in this book are unbound because the image extends in the page without any specific margin; the only boundary is the page edge. We agree with Painter and others (2013: 105) in that, in this way, “the depicted characters are less constrained by their circumstances [...] and the story world is more opened up to the reader”. However, illustrations 22 and 23 show the invitations prepared by Stella and her classmates to invite their families to the Mother's Day party. In these we find the picture of each family clearly framed.

There are different focus patterns found in this book: in some cases, it is centrifocal, centred because on some pages the visual appears right in the centre of the space. This is very clear on the pages where Stella appears in the classroom sitting on a carpet with her classmates

and the teacher (illustrations 3 and 4), and when children are playing outside the school (illustration 10). This is also the pattern where Stella appears with her two fathers at the beginning and at the end of the story (illustrations 2 and 26), and when Stella's classmate Howie appears represented with his two mothers (illustration 25).

In other cases, the pattern is centrifocal: polarised because we observe the opposition of different depicted elements in the visual. For example, in illustration 5, Stella is represented in the right corner at the bottom of the page, and the two fathers appear washing and drying dishes in the left corner at the top of the page. The same pattern is observed in illustration 7, when Stella appears playing football with her classmate Leon (the black one): Stella is foregrounded in the right corner of the page, and Leon appears further up, towards the left corner at the top of the page.

However, the most common focus is itinerating aligned because “[...] the elements are nearly always organised in fairly regular ‘lines’” (Painter and others, 2013: 111). This pattern can be observed when Stella is working with her classmates in the classroom and they are all sitting in chairs (illustrations 6, 8, 9, and 14), or when she is riding a bike with a classmate (illustration 11), when she is with her fathers and with the whole family (illustrations 12 and 16), when the children appear with their families (illustrations 17, 20-21), and when Stella is talking to her teacher (illustration 23).

Colours have a role in the expression of textual meanings. Characters in this picturebook wear clothes of different colours, but red, yellow and blue are three colours present from the first visual to the last one, which contributes to add cohesion to the story. Papa wears a yellow pullover and blue jeans at the beginning of the book. Stella wears a red dress, and Daddy wears red trousers; the teacher also wears blue clothes.

These colours are also used in the clothes of Stella's classmates. There is a change in illustration 7 when Stella is playing football with Leon; they both appear wearing green t-shirts and red shorts, the uniform of the school team. After this event, Stella appears wearing a yellow dress. The classmates also wear different clothes but red, yellow and blue continue being the colours that predominate. In the next visual where Daddy and Papa are represented, their clothes are also different: Papa is wearing a yellow shirt and green trousers, while Daddy is wearing blue.

Finally, when the party takes place, it is Papa who appears wearing blue trousers and a red pullover, whereas Daddy is wearing yellow trousers and a blue shirt. The fact that the colours of Daddy's clothes coincide with Stella's (she is wearing a pink dress and a blue jacket) helps to connect the two characters. Observing the clothes of the different people that go to the party, it is clear that red, yellow and blue are the three predominant colours. Colour is a social phenomenon and its use has a social effect in society (Van Leeuwen, 2011). Red is associated with passion and love, blue is associated with masculinity, and yellow, following

Nodelman (1988: 61), is considered “the conventional color of cheerfulness” and, therefore, its use contributes to associating cheerfulness with the Mother's Day party.

5. Discussion

Although there are two different layouts in the sample of picturebooks, the visual is always the most important element due to its size, the colours used and the small written text. The fact that *Daddy's Roommate* (1989) always places the written text at the bottom of the page highlights the visual and presents it separated from the short written text that just summarizes the content of the visual. In contrast, the general tendency in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015) is to place the written text at the top (in fifteen illustrations, in contrast with five illustrations where it appears at the bottom; there are also two illustrations where there is written text at the top and at the bottom of the illustration), which shows the short written text and introduction to the action that will be illustrated with the visual. The same pattern is found in *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (2009), where the written text appears at the bottom of the page only in two illustrations, which contrast with the thirteen examples where it appears at the top and the only one where it appears in the middle. This pattern contributes to reading the written text and the visual as a whole.

The bound frames in *Daddy's Roommate* (1989) contribute to establishing a division between the world narrated in the story and the readers' world. In fact, the different actions are presented to be observed by readers from a distance. This contrasts with the unbound frames in *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (2009) and in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015), where presenting the page edge as the only margin contributes to inviting readers to be part of the story. These types of frame also contribute to highlighting the action being described, because the background is generally the white page.

The fact that *Stella Brings the Family* (2015) uses different focus patterns contributes to observing characters from different perspectives. Using itinerating aligned as the most general pattern contributes to establishing a distance with the readers because characters are presented in lines in front of them. This focus pattern contrasts with the one used in *Daddy's Roommate* (1989) and in *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (2009). It is observed that these two picturebooks use the centrifocally centred focus pattern, which facilitates the way readers read the multimodal page by guiding them to concentrate on the action presented right in the centre of the page. When this pattern is used in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015) its purpose is to highlight Stella by presenting her right in the centre of the page. The two examples where the focus pattern is centrifocal polarised in this picturebook coincide with the moments when Stella shows her concern because she has no mother to take to the school party. Consequently, this pattern contributes to establishing a close connection with the readers so that they identify with Stella's problem. Table 1 offers a summary of the main textual elements in the three picturebooks.

TABLE 1

Textual elements in the picturebooks analysed

TEXTUAL METAFUNCTION	<i>Daddy's Roommate</i> (1989)	<i>Stella Brings the Family</i> (2015)	<i>Daddy, Papa, and Me</i> (2009)
LAYOUT	complementary vertical layout	integrated: expanded: instated: co-located	integrated: expanded: instated: co-located
FRAMES	Bound	unbound	unbound
FOCUS	centrifocal centred	centrifocal centred centrifocal polarised itinerating aligned	centrifocally centred

The analysis of visual themes contributes to observing the characters that are given importance in the stories. As table 2 makes clear, in the first picturebook, it is Frank who is highlighted, indicating that he is important in the child's life because he is his father's new partner. In the second case, the visual theme coincides with Stella, the protagonist of the story. Finally, in the third picturebook, the fact that one of the fathers is given more visual importance suggests that he has a closer relationship with the child.

TABLE 2

Visual themes in the picturebooks analysed

	<i>Daddy's Roommate</i> (1989)	<i>Stella Brings the Family</i> (2015)	<i>Daddy, Papa, and Me</i> (2009)
VISUAL THEMES	Child: 7 Dad: 7 Frank: 14 Mother: 1	Stella: 14 Other characters: 7	Papa: 8 Daddy: 2 Child: 7

As the non-traditional family model is not such a common theme in picturebooks, reading picturebooks like the ones analysed in this article will contribute to socialise children understanding non-traditional families where the gay relationship is presented using different explicit/implicit textual strategies (see sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). Thus, the non-traditional family discourse is constructed through the use of particular semiotics resources. The different explicit/implicit strategies used to portray two-father families will not only inform children about the existence of this kind of families, but also broaden their perspective so that they can be normalised.

Egalitarian relationships are promoted in the three picturebooks because both fathers are represented taking care of the child and doing things with him/her. For example, in *Daddy's Roommate* (1989), Daddy and Frank appear doing housework together in illustration 4

or going to the supermarket with the child in illustration 22. Similarly, in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015), the fact that both fathers take Stella to school (illustration 2) or that they both wash dishes (illustration 5) points out that both fathers are involved in the education of the child and in housework.

This is also very clear in *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (2009) from the beginning of the story when both men answer the child's question positively: "Who wants to play with me today?" Both men appear active doing housework when they answer "I do! Daddy and Papa say" in illustration 2. Activities connected traditionally with women such as cooking or sewing are shared by the two men; for example, "Papa helps me bake a pie" (illustration 8) and "Daddy shows me how to sew" (illustration 11). The division of tasks is also clear in this example: "Daddy brews a pot of tea" (illustration 13) and "Papa pours for Bear and me" (illustration 14).

In fact, the linguistic and visual content chosen by the authors and illustrators of children's picturebooks, whose work has traditionally reflected a society's values, morals and pre-occupations, contributes to children's socialization and also to the development of children's ideology and contemporary attitudes. This will have an effect on the way children understand the world because they "[...] are a powerful ideological tool, one capable of making an unchallenged contribution to social and political discourse" (Baguley and Kerby, 2021: 2). Consequently, the analysis of picturebooks with two-men families will contribute to broaden gender schemas in children and to be open to non-traditional family models.

6. Conclusions

In this study, I have analysed the main textual characteristics in order to observe how the different layout, frames and focus patterns in the sample of picturebooks contribute to the way the multimodal meaning is conveyed. The results of the analysis show that there are similarities and differences in the way the visual meaning is created in the three stories. The main principles of composition and the distribution of the information value have allowed the deconstruction of the relationships between the written text and the visual by observing the page layout, the frames and the focus patterns.

The analysis of the page layout has shown how the written language and the visual cohere to express meanings although the visual mode seems to contribute in large part to the creation of meaning. In fact, although two layout patterns have been observed, there is no doubt that illustrators made the visual the most salient element on all the pages. Its size compared to that of the written text makes clear that it is noteworthy. Generally, the images enhance or extend the meaning of the words.

From a textual perspective, situating the visual and the written text on the white page in *Daddy, Papa and Me* (2009) and in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015) makes clear that there is

an integrated layout on all pages. The unbound frames used in these picturebooks shorten the distance between the audience and the characters, because there is no specific margin on the pages apart from the page edge. This contrasts with *Daddy's Roommate* (1989), where the bound frames establish a distance between the actions narrated in the story and the readers' world.

The different textual elements in the picturebooks influence the way young readers decode the meanings expressed. The general tendency observed in the analysis is to create a simple relationship between the written text and the visual and to use the same pattern in the layout, frames and focus. Using only one type of focus pattern contributes to simplifying children's reading process. The use of centrifocal: centred focus is one of the tools used by writers and illustrators to tell the story in a simple way, with the aim of making the plot accessible to children and inviting them to identify with the actions being narrated. However, the fact that there are different focus patterns in *Stella Brings the Family* (2015) makes children use different strategies to read the visuals in order to decode the different meanings being expressed in the story.

The textual analysis has been useful in observing the position of characters in the story. Moreover, the different explicit/implicit strategies used to portray two-father families will not only inform children about the existence of this kind of families, but also broaden their perspective so that they can be normalised. Consequently, same-sex egalitarian relationships are presented as new family models that will have an effect on children's socialization.

7. References

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