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Engaging readers through language and pictures. A case study

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the interpersonal choices afforded to the writer/illustrator in creating engagement between the reader/viewer and the represented participants (RPs) of the picture book *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne. The analytical tools applied in this study are Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics.

The results, obtained from a comparison between the verbal and non-verbal semiotic modes, show that images seem to contribute more than words to the identification of the viewer with the main characters in the story. Some of the visual techniques chosen by Browne (frontal and medium angles, demand images, close-ups and focalizations) are evidence of the engagement that is created between the RPs themselves and between the RPs and the child-reader in this picture book. In addition, the analysis reveals that verbal and visual modalities inter-relate in this tale to emphasize the two different realities in which the main character, Hannah, is involved: Hannah and her father's

isolation and loneliness contrast with Hannah and the gorilla's successful interaction and focus on companionship. A multimodal analysis in which both images and words are considered as interdependent components turns out to be necessary to delve into the potential of combining words and images in picture books.

Highlights

I analyse the interpersonal meanings conveyed by words and images in *Gorilla*. The analytical tools applied in this study are SFL and Visual Social Semiotics. Verbal and visual modalities inter-relate to emphasize the two different realities in which the main character is involved. Images contribute more than words to the creation of engagement between the RPs and the viewer.



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Keywords

SFL; Social semiotics; Interpersonal metafunction; Verbal/visual modalities; Intersemiosis; Picture books

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Arsenio Jesús Moya Guijarro is a professor of language and linguistics at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. He does research in discourse and text analysis and has published several articles on thematicity, topicality and multimodality in international journals such as *Word, Text, Functions of Language, Journal of Pragmatics* and *Text and Talk*. Among other books, he is co-editor of *The World Told and The World Shown: Multisemiotic Issues* (2009, Palgrave Macmillan). His research interests are also in children's literature and applied linguistics. Within this framework he has edited *The Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages within the European Framework* (2006, University of Castilla-La Mancha).

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