

Articles

Exploring compositional meanings in the picturebook with a two-father family *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017)

Explorando significados de composição em um livro ilustrado com uma família com dois pais Me, Daddy & Dad (2017)

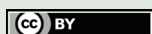
María Martínez Lirola^{1,2}

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a multimodal analysis of the main characteristics of the compositional metafunction in the picturebook with a two-father family Me, Daddy & Dad (2017). The purpose of the analysis is to observe how textual meanings are created. The main tools of the grammar of visual design applied to picturebooks will be used for the analysis, following the model proposed by Painter et al. (2013). The main ideas of the said grammar will be illustrated with a description of images from the picturebook to deconstruct the relationship between the written text and the visual, the types of written and visual themes, the layout, the framing, and the focus. The analysis shows that both fathers take care of the child and do things at home, such as cooking. Consequently, two-father families are promoted and presented in an egalitarian way. However, the analysis shows that

1. University of Alicante. Alicante – Spain. <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6427-425X>.
E-mail: maria.lirola@ua.es.

2. University of South Africa (UNISA). Pretoria–South – Africa.



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there are not open expressions of affection between the characters because, although the two fathers, Daddy and Dad, appear sometimes together, there is hardly any contact between them or between them and the child.

Keywords: *children's picturebooks; multimodality; visual/verbal modes; critical discourse analysis.*

RESUMO

Este artigo oferecerá uma análise multimodal das principais características da metafunção composicional no livro ilustrado, Me, Daddy & Dad (2017), sobre uma família de dois pais. O objetivo da análise é observar como os significados textuais são criados. As principais ferramentas da gramática do design visual aplicadas aos livros ilustrados serão utilizadas para a análise, seguindo o modelo proposto por Painter et al. (2013). As principais ideias da referida gramática serão exemplificadas com uma descrição das ilustrações do livro Me, Daddy & Dad, a fim de desconstruir a relação entre o texto escrito e o visual, os tipos de temas escritos e visuais, o layout, o enquadramento e o foco. A análise mostra que ambos os pais cuidam da criança e fazem coisas em casa, como cozinhar. Consequentemente, as famílias com dois pais são promovidas e apresentadas de maneira igualitária. No entanto, a análise mostra que não há expressões abertas de afeto entre os personagens, porque, embora os dois pais, papai e papai, apareçam às vezes juntos, quase não há contato entre eles ou entre eles e a criança.

Palavras-chave: *livros ilustrados para crianças; multimodalidade; modos visual/verbal; análise crítica do discurso.*

1. Introduction

Children's picturebooks are important in the development of literacy, and their linguistic and visual content contribute to the socialization of children and to the acquisition of cultural norms that will help children establish relationships inside and outside the classroom (Arizpe, Farrell & McAdam, 2013; Evans, 2015). In this sense, children will develop their ideology and internalise social patterns at the same time as they become interested in literature (Painter, 2018).

The fact that picturebooks are multimodal contributes to children's development of multiliteracies at the same time as they can deepen in the interaction between language and image to narrate the story (Unsworth, 2006). Thus, picturebooks should be used as an instrument to highlight children's reading and writing competences (Soto Reatiga, 2017), following Salisbury & Styles (2012, p.75): "[...] picturebooks are simultaneously art objects and the primary literature of early childhood, offering compelling drama for readers through the interaction of the visual and the verbal narratives". In addition, this type of book is also useful to help children establish connections between the world presented in the story and the real world.

This paper is a contribution to the relationship between the written text and the visual in a picturebook with a two-father family, *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017), written by Gemma Denham and published by Elizabeth Publications. The aim is to explore the compositional metafunction to observe how textual meanings are created. In this sense, this study will deepen on meaning creation and on the understanding of picturebooks as "[...] a powerful ideological tool, one capable of making an unchallenged contribution to social and political discourse" (Baguley & Kerby, 2021, p.2). Thus, the analysis of the said metafunction will shed light on how picturebooks contribute to children's socialization and to their development of ideology. The analysis to be carried out is multimodal because the relationship between the visual and the written text will be explored. The story is simple: Emily, the protagonist of the story, describes the different activities that she does with her two fathers. In fact, observing how the picturebook under analysis creates compositional meanings will contribute to deconstructing non-traditional family models.

Having a two-father family contributes to develop gender schemas, i.e., children reading this book will be open to different gender portrayals and family models, as the one presented in the story (Campagnaro, 2015; Coats, 2018; Soler Quiles, 2015). In addition, these books can contribute to sex-role socialization, as the following study made by Weitzman et al. (1972, p.1126) makes clear:

Picture books play an important role in early sex-role socialization because they are a vehicle for the presentation of societal values to the young child. Through books, children learn about the world outside of their immediate

environment: they learn about what other boys and girls do, say, and feel; they learn what is right and wrong; and they learn what is expected of children their age. In addition, books provide children role models-images of what they can and should be like when they grow up.

The comparison of the verbal and the visual within the compositional metafunction shows that both modes contribute to the construction of meaning, although the illustrations are essential in the narration of the stories. In this sense, children need to be taught to read not only the written text but also the visuals. Following Unsworth & Ortigas (2008, p.5):

If children are to be taught to actively engage with the interpretive possibilities of images, they need to develop their understanding of the meaning-making systems deployed in images. This entails a shared metalanguage – a language for describing visual meaning-making resources somewhat analogous to a grammatical description of the meaning-making systems available in verbal texts.

Learning to read the visual is essential to deconstruct meaning in picturebooks, because the visual occupies the main part of the page. The visuals help children understand the verbal meaning by extending the meanings expressed by the written text. Both modes help children understand the story and develop their literacy.

This picturebook has been chosen for two reasons: 1) it has a simple plot because it narrates the different things that a child called Emily does with her two fathers — in this sense, the actions narrated in the book are not specific to gay families — 2) the book shows a symmetrical representation of the fathers, which suggests that both have equal importance. The child refers to the actions that she does with each father in the book.

2. Theoretical background

Following Halliday (1978, p.27), language is understood as ‘meaning potential’ due to the fact that the communicative situation will determine speakers’ choices. Consequently, text and context are

interrelated and language is seen as social semiotics (Halliday, 1978). Thus, semiotic resources are “system (s) of meanings” that constitute “the ‘reality’ of a culture” (Halliday, 1978, p.123).

There are different modes used in multimodal texts, such as the picturebook under analysis in this article. Each mode does something different because each one consists of sets of semiotic resources. There are different studies that have developed the definition of mode, such as those of Elleström (2010) and Bateman (2011). Generally, mode is understood as a “socially shaped and culturally given resource for meaning making” (Kress, 2010, p. 54). This involves context and culture determining the different modes used in a communicative situation.

The multimodal text selected communicates through the way the writer and the illustrator select the visual forms and combine them with the written text. This combination creates a multimodal text according to the cultural conventions that surround the text, since every text is inside a context of culture that determines the principles for a text being created in that way, i.e., multimodal texts in Western cultures are different from those texts in Eastern cultures. In this sense, when dealing with a multimodal text, it does not make sense to analyse each resource (music, image, language, etc.) independently, since all these elements create a whole. Consequently, we talk about the use of different semiotic channels that create meaning through texts in a determined context, following Gatti (2013, p.17):

The multimodal page is actually more than a text. Meanings are built and spread across different resource systems, each acting through specific organizational, orientational and presentational modes (Lemke, 2002). The way these various modes are mapped onto the page is not additional, rather interactional.

Picturebooks are a clear example of multimodal texts that combine written texts and visuals to create meaning. Different authors have studied the combination of different semiotic modes to express meanings in multimodal discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Molina & Alonso, 2016; O’Halloran 2004, 2008; Unsworth, 2006, 2014; Painter et al., 2013, among others).

Different scholars have concentrated on how the different modes create meanings in children's picturebooks (Baguley & Kerby, 2021; Martínez Lirola, 2020; Moya Guijarro, 2014, 2016, 2019; Moya Guijarro & Pinar, 2009; Moya Guijarro & Ruiz, 2020; Moya Guijarro & Ventola, 2021; Painter, 2007; Salisbury & Styles, 2012). These studies concentrate on how these modes do something different for the construction of meaning and how the visual can complement or develop the meaning expressed by the written text. Sometimes the visuals predominate over the written text, whereas in other cases there is a balance between both modes, in Kümmerling-Meibauer's words (2018, p. 3):

As the term implies, the most significant characteristics are the medium (a book) and the content (pictures). The term does not imply that a picturebook also includes a text, although there is a common agreement that picturebooks have both pictures and text. [...] In actual academic discourse, the former being a book in which the text is more dominant than the illustrations, while the latter usually displays a balance between text and visuals.

Visuals are important in this kind of texts due to the role they have in transmitting values, ideas and examples that can be significant in the process of narrating the story. Moreover, the visual has to be analysed with the written text in order to see how both modes of communication complement each other and how they interact to create meaning in the picturebook (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2014). Some scholars have paid attention to the way children develop multiliteracies from an early age (Lewis, 2001; New London Group, 2000; Moya Guijarro & Ruiz, 2016; Pinar & Moya Guijarro, 2016; Unsworth, 2014). In addition, there are studies that point out the importance of the visual to narrate the story and to observe the ideology transmitted (Hamer et al., 2017; Kümmerling-Meibauer et al., 2015).

Painter et al. (2013) propose a model to analyse multimodal meanings in picturebooks that concentrates on representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings; it is based on the model of visual grammar of Kress & van Leeuwen (2006). Representational meanings concentrate on the relations between participants, things, the actions they perform, and the settings or circumstances in which they occur. Interpersonal meanings pay attention to the social relations

between interactants by observing distance, gaze, and perspective. Finally, compositional meanings pay attention to the different relations between the elements in the discourse.

3. Methodology and categories for the analysis

The methodology of this article is mainly qualitative-descriptive because only one picturebook will be analysed in detail. Due to the space limitations of this paper, I will just concentrate on one of the metafunctions, i.e., the compositional, and the other two will be explored in future studies. The analysis will mainly concentrate on the textual metafunction (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014), which is referred to as compositional by Painter et al. (2013). The analysis will explore the relationships between the written text and the visual in the picturebook under analysis (see Section 4).

Regarding the categories for the analysis, Painter et al. (2013) refer to the layout, the framing, and the focus as elements to be explored to deepen in the compositional meaning of picturebooks. This model is based on Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), where the authors explore information value, salience and framing in order to deconstruct textual meanings. For this reason, the analysis will mainly concentrate on the said elements to shed some light on the narrative of both picturebooks.

4. Compositional analysis of *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017)

It is interesting that *Me, Daddy & Dad* starts with some pieces of paper and pencils on the floor in a foregrounded position, but none of the characters are represented. However, they are referred to in the written text and also in the pictures that appear in the background. The written text appears on the wall, with the exception of one line that appears on the carpet; it is highlighted because it appears right in the centre of the page. The next page shows all the characters: dad and daddy appear in the background and Emily, the protagonist of the book, appears on the left foreground partly covered by Max, their pup, sitting on a carpet that functions as a frame. The three characters are

wearing casual clothes: jeans, t-shirts, and shirts. Dad has dark hair, and Daddy is blonde, like Emily.

Emily is observed with Daddy and Dad drawing and painting on the next page. It is Dad who appears on the right, the place of the most important part of the information, drawing next to Emily. Daddy appears on the left, standing and just observing them painting and drawing. Then, the next written text appears on the next page where we also find Papa's elbow on the left and two cups of tea and a kettle on the right. This page makes reference to the different activities that Emily does with her family. "Craft with paint and string", which makes reference to the action represented visually on the previous page, is only mentioned almost at the end of the written text. Again, the written text appears on the wall in a centred position.

Sometimes the written text appears before the action described in the visual text is presented, as on page 10, where it is printed on the left, but in the foreground and written on the pavement, which is white, so that the text can be clearly distinguished: "I like to help to wash the car, so that it sparkles like a star. I squeeze the sponge to make some bubbles, And splash around in all the puddles. And if I'm feeling really cheeky, Super quiet and extra sneaky...I spray my Daddy with the hose, until it runs between his toes". This message is an introduction to the visual action presented on page 11. Again, the other pattern is found on the next pages: first we find the visual action of Emily cooking with her dad, page 12 – she appears on the right this time – and the written text explaining the action of cooking appears foregrounded at the bottom of the page in the kitchen. Then, on the next pages, the written text comes first, again, and the action of the three characters drinking tea appears visually on the next page. It is noteworthy that there is an explicit reference to Emily's tea set colour, pink (a colour traditionally associated with girls), as we can see in the visual: "We sit around and sip our drink, from my tea set which is pink", page 15. Following van Leeuwen (2011), colour is a textual strategy used to give cohesion to the story or to point out aspects of the characters represented. In this case, the use of pink can be considered stereotypical because it is well known that pink is a colour associated with women and femininity; traditionally girls are socialised in pink.

Next, on page 16, Emily appears in the park, and it is Dad who pushes her on the swings – she is foregrounded and appears on the right. The next page refers to this action, where apart from the written text on the right centred position, written on the grass, we find Daddy and Max just observing the action of Dad, and Emily on the swing. This is a very clear example of Dad being active while Daddy just observes the action of the other father.

On page 18, in the middle of the book, a similar pattern to the one on page 6 is observed, i.e., there are some objects foregrounded in the floor, in this case it is a pair of glasses, a crown, and a dress-up box. The same pictures and a bookshelf appear in the left background. Similarly, the written text is right in the centre of the page on the wall, except for the last two lines that are on the carpet. On the next page, the three characters are on the carpet. In this case, Daddy is right in the centre of the carpet wearing a small pink dress that gives him importance because he is wearing girls' clothes, highlighting the fact that he is the centre of attention.

Up to this point, page 20 is the only case of Daddy represented in the visual doing an action with Emily: he is in the background fishing with Emily. Then, on the next page, it is Dad who is sitting on a bench with Max observing how they fish. The written text is at the bottom of the page, in the foreground, right after the stream that is also on the previous page.

Then, on page 22, the written text is again right in the centre left of the page on the grass. After that Emily, Max, and the two fathers are running in the countryside. Emily is foregrounded and appears on the right of the page. Max is in the mid-ground and the two fathers are in the background. The action is described verbally in this way:

“A game at which I’m really ace,
Is when we are all playing chase.
I’m really good at running see,
So Dad and Daddy can’t catch me.
I run through spaces way down low, where both my Daddies cannot go.
And then I’ve gone and won the race, and that’s why I like playing chase.”

In the next visual, page 24, it is Max who is shown in the foreground, followed by Emily in the mid-ground, and the two fathers in the background. In this case, it is Dad who is portrayed on the right with a clear vector between his right hand and Emily, as he is trying to catch her. His dynamism contrasts with the static position of Daddy, whose hands are in his pockets, just observing. This visual corresponds to the written text that appears on the next page where the first topical theme is Max:

“Max’s favourite thing to do,
(apart from chewing Daddy’s shoe!)
Is when we say “it’s Walkie time!”
We take him out come rain or shine.
I think if Max had his own way,
He’d run and run, and run all day!
And playing fetch, he loves that too,
They’re Max’s favourite things to do.”

After a few pages where the action takes place outside home, on page 26, the action is again situated at home. There is no doubt that it is Emily’s bedroom because there is a clear reference to this in the written text (“I lay by books upon my bed”), which is on the left of the page in a centred position, written on the wall. It is clear that this action takes place in Emily’s room because a small part of the bed can be seen as well as a part of Dad’s legs. Then, on the next page, Emily appears surrounded by her two fathers in bed. In this case, it is Daddy who is located on the right, the place of prominent position. This has to be connected with the written text, which makes it clear that it is he who reads: “My Daddy reads in silly voices, and then I laugh with all my might, until it’s time to say ‘goodnight.’” The three characters are looking at the book, which is held by Emily and by Dad.

The next visual also takes place in Emily’s room. In this case, she is lying in bed sleeping, and the two fathers are in the background of the room, clearly framed by the door, observing how she sleeps. It is Daddy who is on the right, his arms crossed, the same posture he has on page 17.

This book finishes in the same way it started: there is only text right in the centre of the page written on the wall. The picture shows

Emily's room with her pens and pencils on the floor, just as on page 26. Similar to what happens on the first page of the book, there is a clear reference to Dad, Daddy, and Max in the same order:

"I love my Dad and my Daddy.
I love them, and they love me.
And Max of course, let's not forget,
About our very lovely pet.
So that's all there is to be said,
For now it's time to go to bed.
So snuggle down, and say "Goodnight",
I'll see you soon my friend, sleep tight."

Paying attention to the theme-rheme structure, the analysis shows that the themes are unmarked in most cases (75%), because they are the subject in declarative clauses: 'my name', the demonstrative 'this', 'I', 'we', 'they', etc., and the predicator or let + subject in the four imperative clauses ('be careful', 'come', 'find out', 'let's not forget'). Simple themes predominate on multiple themes as Table 1 shows:

Table 1 – Types of themes

| Themes | Absolute values | Values in percentages |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Simple theme | 48 | 75% |
| Multiple theme | 16 | 25% |
| Total number | 64 | 100 |

Out of the 64 sentences, 'I' referring to Emily is the theme in 23, i.e., in 35,93% of the examples. The written theme 'I' coincides with Emily being the visual theme in most of the pages, because the whole picturebook is about the things she does with her fathers. There are other 7 themes (10,93%) that refer to the characters as 'Me and Dad', 'Dad and Daddy' (three times), 'they', 'my dad' and 'my daddy'. Whenever these themes are used, the characters are represented in lines, so again the visual theme coincides with the written one. 'We' referring to Emily, Daddy and Dad is the theme also in five cases (7, 81%).

Finally, the dog, Max, is the written theme in the three cases (4,68%) that refer to him as 'Max' and 'he' (twice). This coincides with his visual representation as theme, because he is foregrounded on the

right-hand corner of page 24. The thematization of the dog is a way of giving him importance. He is also foregrounded by being represented in front of Emily the first time that all the characters are together.

The rest of the themes are ‘our adventures’, ‘the kitchen’, ‘the park’ or ‘a game’, i.e., they refer to the things Emily does or to the places where actions take place. However, there are some examples of marked themes (25%), whenever there is a textual theme before the topical one before the conjunctions ‘and/but’, the adverbial ‘sometimes’, the prepositional phrase ‘On a damp and rainy day’, page 14, ‘there’, ‘then’, and ‘so’.

The visual representation of the two fathers suggests that they have different personalities and different roles when taking care of the child: Daddy is represented smiling, whereas Dad appears more serious. Moreover, the fact that Dad wears a blue shirt suggests that he has a masculine role. This blue shirt clearly foregrounds masculinity on page 19, when Dad is in a pirate costume, which contrasts with the pink costume worn by Daddy, clearly giving him a more feminine role. As already mentioned, colour is a textual strategy that contributes to the creation of meaning, following Painter et al. (2013, p.35), “[...] a colour may be used cohesively as a kind of visual rhyme to link different parts of a narrative”.

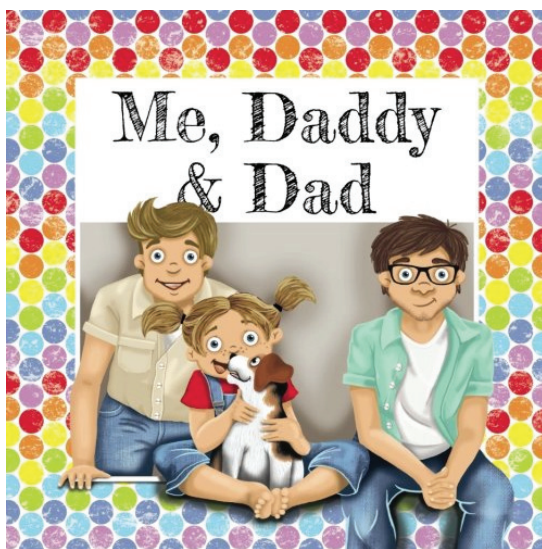
The pages where Emily appears with her two fathers show that Daddy and Dad are situated in different positions: on the right, page 7, surrounding her, pages 8, 14, and 27, in the centre and on the left, page 19, and in the background with Daddy on the right joined with vectors to Emily, page 23 and 28. When she is represented with Daddy, Emily is on the right on page 11 and on the left on page 20. Dad is the first one mentioned on page 6, the first page there is written text: “This is my Dad, and my Daddy”, and he appears in the prominent position (on the right, i.e., the place of new information) the first time he is in the visual, page 7. He is also doing the action of drawing, page 8, and cooking, page 12, i.e., he is more active than Daddy.

Analysing the visual representation of Dad and Daddy as visual themes shows that the written theme ‘This is my Dad, and my Daddy’ corresponds with representing Dad on the right of the page. Out of the eight times that both fathers are with Emily at the same time, the

number of times that Dad and Daddy are the visual theme is equal, that is, Dad and Daddy are featured as a visual theme, on the right, four times each. As previously mentioned, whenever Dad and Daddy are the written theme, Dad is always mentioned first.

Although there is a clear reference to Dad in the first place, there is no reference to him being the biological father. The fact that Daddy's hair is similar to Emily's associates him with the biological father. In addition, he is normally closer to Emily and has a protecting role, as observed from the cover of the picturebook (see Figure 1):

Figure 1 – Cover of *Me, Daddy and Dad* by Gemma Denham (2017). © Elizabeth Publications



Daddy's close relationship with Emily can be observed in the following cases: Daddy is behind Emily on page 8, observing what Emily is drawing and protecting her, while Dad appears next to her drawing like Emily. On page 11, it is Daddy who plays with Emily ("I spray my Daddy with the hose, until it runs between his toes"). Moreover, apart from observing Emily while she is painting, he looks at her while she is serving tea, page 15, and while Emily is on the swing, page 17. Daddy is also located behind Emily, protecting her, while they

are in the stream, on page 20. He is also the one behind Emily when both fathers are represented running with Emily on page 23, whereas Dad is represented running right after Max, the dog. However, on page 24 there is a change in the picturebook, because it is Dad who appears on the right, trying to catch Emily while Daddy observes. In this picture, it is the dog that is foregrounded.

Dad is highlighted in different ways: he is on the right, on pages 7, 8, and 15, and he is the one who is doing actions with Emily in most cases (drawing, page 8; cooking page 12, pushing Emily on the swing, page 16). In contrast, Daddy is mainly on the left, on pages 7, 8, and 15, and he is represented observing the actions that Emily and Dad are doing on pages 17 and 24. The only exceptions to such characterizations are on page 19, where he is located in a centred position, on page 20 where he is fishing with Emily, and on pages 23, 27, and 28, where he is on the right next to Dad. This means that it is Dad who has a more active role in Emily's life and in the family. It is significant that it is Daddy who is placed in the centre of the page wearing a pink dress, on page 19, as such depiction connects him with some feminine characteristics. The fact that Emily's tea set is pink and the net and bucket that she uses to fish are pink clearly reinforce that she is a girl, pink being the colour traditionally linked to femininity. However, the lamp, the bed cover in Emily's room, and her pyjamas are purple, which is the colour traditionally associated with feminism.

All the actions in the story take place inside, pages 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, and 26 to 29, and outside the house (right outside the house, pages 10 and 11; in the park, pages 16 and 17; in the stream, pages 20 and 21; in the countryside, pages 22 to 25). It is interesting that the kettle appears on more than one page, pages 9 and 12, as a way to show that the action takes place at home, and the place of the house where most of the actions take place is the sitting room, pages 6, 7, 14, 15, 18, and 19.

There are two general patterns in the relationship between the written text and the visual: sometimes the written text introduces the characters or actions represented on the next page, for example, on pages 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, and 26. However, there are cases where the visual action is offered first and then the written text is found after,

explaining the action already offered visually. There are examples of such pattern on pages 9, 13, 17, 21, 25, and 29.

Normally, characters are not depicted on pages that have written text, with the exception of page 17, where we find Daddy on the left of the written text and, therefore, the written text is given more importance, and page 21, where Dad and Max are on top of the written text and, thus, the visual is given more importance, because it is at the top position and has a function of ideal, following Kress & van Leeuwen (2006, p.187):

If the upper part of a page is occupied by the text and the lower part by one or more pictures [...] the text plays, ideologically, the lead role, and the pictures a subservient role (which, however, is important in its own way, as specification, evidence, practical consequence, and so on.). If the roles are reversed, so that one or more pictures occupy the top section, then the Ideal, the ideologically foregrounded part of the message, is communicated visually, and the text serves to elaborate it.

In this sense, there is no doubt from the beginning of the book that image and verbal language have a complementary layout (Painter et al., 2013, p. 93), and therefore each semiotic mode “has a distinct role to play in meaning making”. In this case, verbiage and image are on facing pages, which suggests that both modalities are given equal importance. The analysis shows that this book has a special distribution of the visual and the written text, since it is clearly observed that image and verbiage are separated. Also, the written text not only has its own space in the layout, but it also has its own page before or after the visual it is describing or referring to.

Regarding framing, the visuals in this book are bound because the image is enclosed by a margin or a space that separates readers from the world of the story. I agree with Painter et al. (2013, p. 105) in that, “Bound images, those 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”. The written text is always black, which contrasts with the light colour of the walls, pavement, or the green grass where it appears.

The margins afford ambiance, clearly situating the characters at home in a particular room or outside the home. In this sense, the

margins are bound: ambient margins. There are different cases where characters are framed by different elements in the house or from nature such as the following: the sofa, pages 7 and 19, the carpet, pages 7 and 19, the table, page 8, the house and the car, page 11, a window and two shelves, page 12, a table and piece of furniture, page 15, a fence, pages 16 and 17, the stream and trees, page 20, a bench and trees, page 21, a path and trees, page 23, a fence and trees, page 24, a bed, page 27, a door and a closet, page 28. The written text is also framed by different elements: the walk, pens, shelving, pictures and paper, page 6, the wall, page 9, the countryside and the house, page 10, pots and kitchen jars, page 13, a lamp and an armchair, page 14, a tree, a fence, Daddy and Max, page 17, a dress-up box, a pair of glasses and a wig, some pictures and a bookshelf, page 18, the grass, a bench and a stream, page 21, the countryside, page 22, a tree, the grass and a paper bin, page 25, a table, a lamp, some papers and pencils, page 26, a blackboard, a teddy bear, a doll and some papers and pencils, page 29. These frames “suggest boundaries separating or enclosing elements [...]” (Painter et al. 2013, p. 92).

The pages where there is written text are given attention. Regarding the visual, it is given importance by different patterns. In some cases, there are characters following a centrifocal-polarised pattern because they are in two different corners of the following pages: 7, 11, 16, 20, 23, 27, and 28. However, there are other cases where characters are represented in lines, following the iterating: aligned pattern, as in pages 8, 12, 15, 19, and 24. When characters are represented in lines, they consist of a single focus of attention. But when the pattern is centrifocal-polarised, there are different focuses of attention joined by vectors.

5. Discussion

This is a clear example of a picturebook in which the visual illustrates the message of the written text. In fact, the story could be clearly understood just by looking at the visuals because they show the main actions that the written text narrates. Consequently, children will not have difficulty understanding the story and observing how the visual and verbal modes combine to reinforce the main meanings that the actions by the characters communicate. The fact that there is no

fixed place for the written text (sometimes it appears before the visuals and in other cases it is after them) suggests that its place does not really affect the way in which children understand the plot of the picturebook.

The story is narrated from Emily's perspective: the pronoun 'I' referring to her is the most common type of theme. In addition, Emily is reinforced in the visual theme because she is represented foregrounded, at the right of the page or in central position. However, there is no simple visual where she is represented alone, which suggests that the purpose of the plot is to describe the different activities that she does with her fathers. The general tendency is to represent characters showing their whole bodies, i.e., they are full-length figures whose size is medium, and they are represented occupying a considerable part of the page.

The combination of visuals where the girl is represented with her two dads and those where she appears just doing an action with one dad suggest that both fathers could have a different role in the girl's life. Both fathers are given equal importance in the story and in the girl's life, as both fathers are represented the same number of times as the visual themes (see Section 3). However, it is noteworthy that Dad is the first one mentioned in the written text and he is the one that is located in the most prominent position of visuals the first time he appears. In fact, representing Dad doing more actions with Emily than with Daddy also reinforces his role.

Me, Daddy & Dad (2017) presents the characters doing the following actions: painting, washing the car and playing with the hose, cooking, playing 'Time for tea', visiting the local swings, playing dress up, fishing, playing chase, and reading. It is observed that all the verbs are material processes and refer to actions. The different actions narrated visually and in the written text suggest that Emily and her two fathers are an active family. Thus, drinking with the girl, playing and running with her, and reading to her in bed reinforce that they are a family and that they do the type of things that any heterosexual family could do. In this sense, this picturebook is a good example of what Sunderland and McIlashan (2012, p. 168) call the "backgrounding strategy" to refer to gay families because "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".

The actions selected suggest that Emily has a balanced life: she does things with both fathers, some of the actions are joyful, such as playing inside and outside the house. There are some actions that are clearly connected with doing things at home, such as cooking or sewing. It is noteworthy that Emily is not represented studying or doing homework. The closest activity to doing homework Emily does is painting or reading with her two fathers in bed, at the end of the story.

After the presentation of the family done by Emily, at the beginning of the book, the story shows the different actions that the girl does with each of her fathers. There are a few examples of her appearing with both fathers at the same time in the picturebook, but they are less than one third of the pages (7 out of the 24 pages, i.e., 29,16%).

There are actions done inside and outside the house, which means that there are two settings: home and the countryside. This gives a balance to the story and points out that the socialization of children takes place both inside and outside the house. Consequently, cultural patterns and social norms are shared with children in both settings. Table 2 illustrates some aspects related to the visual representation of both fathers and the number of times there is physical contact between them. As the table shows, around one third of the times that both fathers are together, there is physical contact between them in *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017), i.e., the signs of affection between both fathers are few and not very explicit. When Emily is with her fathers, there are also very few cases where there is physical contact between her and the fathers (see Table 2).

Table 2 — Visual representation and physical contact in *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017)

| Title | N. of frames | Times dads pictured together | With contact | Times both dads pictured in family setting | Father mentioned first | Times there is physical contact between the child and both fathers at the same time | Times there is physical contact between the child and one of the fathers |
|----------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------|--|---|---|--|
| <i>Me, Daddy & Dad</i> | 24 | 8 (33,33%) | 3 (37,5%) | 2 (25%) | Dad the first one mentioned in discourse and he appears on the right. | 1 (12,5%) | Daddy: 2 (25%) Dad: 1 (12,5%) |

As Table 2 shows, there are hardly any examples of affection between the fathers in *Me, Daddy & Dad* (2017). Table 2 illustrates that there are more examples of physical contact between Daddy and the child in the book. In fact, this implies that one of the fathers shows more affection than does the other. The analysis shows that there are not many examples where there is contact between the fathers, which is associated with the few cases that they appear together in the visuals.

Showing contact or expressing affection is associated with new forms of masculinities. The reinforcement of an egalitarian masculinity is essential to create new family models that are far from the classical model of hegemonic masculinity, which has been present quite often in classical heterosexual families. In fact, the construal and representation of new masculinities, both in heterosexual and in homosexual couples, constitutes a challenge for the patriarchal system, which is mainly based on a social structure that gives more power and privileges to men and an ideology that justifies the said social structure.

6. Conclusion

When children read picturebooks like the one analysed in this article, they are exposed to new family models in their socialization process. Representing the girl, who is the protagonist of the story, doing actions with her two fathers that any other child could do with a heterosexual couple, such as cooking, playing, and running, contributes to the normalization of this type of family. This reinforces an alternative gender ideology where different types of families are normalised. The balance between the actions that take place inside and outside home also contribute to normalize the life of the family represented in the picturebook.

The pedagogical application of using this picturebook with children is clear: this picturebook contributes to teaching that both men share the responsibility of taking care of the child and they both do things with the child inside and outside home. Therefore, this picturebook foregrounds the actions narrated because the two fathers are represented doing things with Emily.

The picturebook analysed contributes to promoting two-father families. In this sense, it helps empower students with this family pattern. In addition, the content of this book invites students, who belong to traditional families, to respect and be open to different types of families, so that a cultural and social change can take place. In fact, traditional family models are challenged and new ways of structuring a family become more common. The children who read this book will have opportunities to acquire values related to equality and promotion of rights for people, no matter what sexual orientation they have. Consequently, this picturebook makes the curriculum inclusive for all children, especially those that fear that people will not understand their types of family.

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Conflict of interests

The corresponding author has no conflict of interest to declare and bears full responsibility for the submission.

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