

**The Word-Picture Interaction in Children Picture Books:
Complementary or Contradictory?**



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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to investigate the relationship between words and pictures in children picture books, that is to say, whether pictures add details to the text and complete it or they just contradict with it based on the theory of Nikolajeva and Scott (2000). This study is going to take into account the book 'It's One Flower' (2004) by Hoda Al-Shaer. After analysis, the findings indicate that in the beginning of the story, the words and pictures worked in conformity to make a meaning wherein the pictures surpassed the text by providing some scenes that were not mentioned in the text without disturbing the harmony of the book. Whereas, in the next pages, the pictures seemed to contradict completely with the words as the text says something that is wholly different from what the image shows and this leads to confusion. Consequently, the role of a children picture book illustrator is pivotal and must be seriously taken into consideration.

Keywords: Children Picture Books; Words; Images; Complementary; Contradictory

1. INTRODUCTION

Pictures represent a direct means of communication through which children can tell a given story in their own words and, hence; this will enable them to develop their realm of imagination (Segun, 1988, p. 01). In addition to that, reading pictures is a skill that children acquire before learning to read words (Whalley, 2004, p. 322). For this reason, writers thought about producing works to the young audience which stir up their imagination and suit their age, therefore; children picture books

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represent a relevant illustrative example.

Browsing through the colourful pages in a picture book often results in a wonder about the superiority of an aspect over the other, that is to say, whether the text is more important than the image and vice versa. Another inquiry may arise on whether the image merely represents an ornament that beautifies the text and does not really back it up, for the pictorial and written parts of a book are seen crucial elements for its success when completing each other. Children can neither understand the text independently nor decipher the picture without the contribution of the words. In view of that, this paper aims to figure out the balanced and unbalanced relationship between the verbal and visual elements that constitute children picture books, that is to say, whether pictures add details to the text and consequently complete it or they just leave gaps and contradict with it.

2. Children Picture Books

As its name implies, a children picture book refers to the type of book that is written by adults and is addressed to the young audience. In this type of books, pictures are given the same importance if not more than that of words (Kennedy, 2019).

Children picture books are very important for children as they serve different purposes; they can be entertaining; supporting amusement and joy to the child reader, they can also be didactic; to entrench moral values and lessons about life, moreover, they can enhance visual literacy; as children who are exposed to reading books at an early age are supposed to develop the literacy skill by learning how to read pictures and grow like responsible future readers as compared to those who do not read books at a young age (Kennedy, 2019).

2.1 Definition

Finding an exact definition to the term picture book is quite difficult as there are exuberant definitions that have been given by theorists.

Shulevitz (1989) asserted that “picture books [...] are publications in which the picture stands alone, the pictures dominate the text, or the words and illustrations are equally important” (as cited in Jalongo, 2004, p. 11)

The aforementioned statement though seems to provide a general and imprecise definition to the concept of picture books for it refers to all the books of illustrations which rely on pictures and texts, therefore, the definition is still incomplete. This point has been reinforced by Norton (1999) who went on limiting the scope of this type of books as she states that: “most children’s books are illustrated, but not all illustrated children’s books are picture books” (as cited in Jalongo, 2004, p. 11). That means that, just because books are illustrated with

pictures does not make them all categorised as picture books for instance textbooks or schoolbooks are not considered as picture books.

According to Norton (1999), there should be a balance in what concerns the verbal and visual parts of a picture book and that these two parts cannot stand on their own; they work effectively only when they are together (cited in Jalongo, 2004, p. 11). There should be a sort of unison and equilibrium between images and words. Shulevitz supported this view as he added: "in a picture book, the pictures extend, clarify, complement, or take the place of words. Both the words and the pictures are 'read'" (1985, p. 15).

So the working process of a picture book is similar to that of translation, it is like a picture translates the text in a way of clarification and not contradicting with it and saying what is not said by the text.

2.2. Characteristics and Structure

The majority of authors agreed on certain features which characterize children picture books. Sutherland (1997) emphasized that they are brief and straightforward, they should be short in size with a simple style of writing. They are limited in terms of concepts and the concepts must be put easily for children to comprehend and the illustrations should be complementary. (Jalongo, 2004, p.11)

Nodelman and Reimer (1992) agreed that picture books stand upon three elements "The one told lay the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the other two" (as cited in Mourão, 2012, p. 41). This reveals that, there are three stories in a picture book, a story that is explicitly told in the text which is direct and a story that is hidden in the illustrations which is given indirectly and is left to the reader to decipher and the last one is the story which is gained from the collaboration of previous two: the text and the image.

2.3. The Role of Pictures in Children Picture Books

It is agreed that human beings tend to store more pictures than words in their long-term memories, let alone children who are fascinated by them. Thus, it is noteworthy to mention the usefulness of images associated to texts in children picture books. The utility of pictures is numerous as they may add a rather different point of view, consistency, supporting the text, to name but few.

2.3.1. Coherence

Illustrations are important in terms of contributing to textual coherence. When they are well-integrated in the text or when they provide referential signs

to the text, pictures help or develop the text consistency. Thus, illustrations should be given a dominating cover of the text.

2.3.2. Different Standpoint

Sometimes the picture does not relate what the text is saying yet it goes on opposition and hence it becomes contradictory. This can be done either intentionally or unintentionally by the writer as it has been stated by Fang Z (1996): "Whether intended or not, illustrations sometimes tell a slightly different or even contradictory story than the text." (p. 134)

2.3.3. Strengthening the Text

The pictorial parts in children picture books may have an important function like reinforcing the written text. Rather than extending or amplifying the text, illustrations in children picture books do reinforce it (Fang Z, 1996, p. 136).

This function can be revealed in different aspects; for instance, pictures reinforce the text when they depict the background of the narrative; its setting, the characters, actions, etc. This helps the reader to better understand the environment where the story is taking place and which culture is presented in the story.

3. The Text-Image Interaction

Words and pictures are the piles upon which a children picture book is built; therefore, it is important to clarify the relationship between them. While some scholars may consider pictures as mere supplements to the text; that is to say, they just repeat the same story provided in the text, some others view them as being a prerequisite element for the success of the book; without the collaboration of both parts, the book may be a failure.

This study is going to give an account to the counterpoint theory of Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) who classified the text-image relationship in children picture books into four categories that are: symmetrical, enhancing, counterpointing and contradictory. These four categories are going to be explained separately and in details in the upcoming sections.

3.1 Symmetrical

The first category about the text-image interaction in children picture books that Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) provided is known as the symmetrical relation. When the pictorial part and the verbal part provide the same and equal narrative, the interaction is known as being symmetrical; in this vein they argued: "words and pictures tell the same story, essentially repeating information in different forms of communication." (p. 225)

That means, the text of book's story and the images associated to it give the same account by repeating the narrated information yet through different styles; visually and verbally.

3.2 Enhancing

According to Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) a successful communication between texts and images in children picture books is the one which extends to expansion so that the different information provided by the two styles is generated in a more complex and effective way. In this regard, they went on saying: "pictures amplify more fully the meaning of the words, or the words expand the picture so that different information in the two modes of communication produces a more complex dynamic." (p. 225)

When the text-image interaction is significantly enhancing this helps to build a complementary relationship between the two modes of communication (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, p. 225-226). That is to say, when the interaction between the text and the image is enhancing, this may result in unison among the visual and verbal parts of the book.

3.3 Counterpointing

Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) pointed to another text-image interaction which may develop depending on the amount of the different information that results from the previously mentioned verbal and visual aspects of a children picture book. They described it as being counterpointing. Accordingly, they state: "Dependent on the degree of different information presented, a counterpointing dynamic may develop where words and images collaborate to communicate meanings beyond the scope of either one alone." (p. 226)

So this category results from the collaboration of the two different modes of communication; textual and pictorial which complement each other yet differently.

3.4 Contradictory

When the counterpointing interaction is extremely significant, this may result in a contradictory relationship between the text and image in children picture books. This point has been reinforced by Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) as it is considered the last classification of the categorization that they have formed, hence they suggest:

An extreme form of counterpointing is contradictory interaction, where words and pictures seem to be in opposition to one another. This ambiguity

challenges the reader to mediate between the words and pictures to establish a true understanding of what is being depicted. (p. 226)

When the text is not in accordance to tell what the picture reveals or when the image does not depict exactly what the words narrate, this leads to a sort of dissonance between the two modes of communication and thus causes the reader to find a difficulty in truly understanding what is being exposed to him.

4. A Glance on the Author-Illustrator Relationship

A picture book involves two artists who despite the difference of their styles complement each other's works. The process of writing a children picture book requires a responsibility that is shared between the writer and the illustrator. There are in fact some authors who are gifted both talents; they put words on paper and at the same time they enliven those words into images and give them vitality but others are not. So finding the righteous illustrator is the daunting dream of any picture book writer and a good collaboration between writer and illustrator leads to the production of an excellent and perfect children picture book.

5. Methodology

This study relies on an Arabic children book written by a Jordanian writer Hoda Al-Shaer entitled 'It's One Flower' (2004) in order to examine the relationship between the text and image in children picture books. In addition to that, it seeks to find out whether there is interplay between the words and pictures in terms of meaning and if the verbal and visual texts are just contradictory and open to alternative interpretations that the child reader has to make. The analysis is going to consider both the text and the image associated to it to find the type of their interaction taking into account the theory of Nikolajeva and Scott (2000).

5.1 'It's One Flower' (2004) by Hoda Al-Shaer

'It's One Flower' (2004) is a children picture book written by the Jordanian author and illustrator Hoda Al-Shaer who wrote several educational and didactic books for children. The book is illustrated by Emad Younes.

The story talks about the importance of flowers in making scrumptious honey and their importance in beautifying forests and gardens as well. It points also to a bad habit which is flower pick and how this small act can lead to the disappearance of many flowers; not only flowers' life end but also honey's death. Moreover, it refers to the cooperation of the animals and their success to protect the flowers; the source of their delicious honey.

5.2 Text-Image Analysis of 'It's One Flower' (2004)

The story opens with a set of scenes in which both the verbal and the pictorial descriptions collaborate to work together to establish the meaning. The text and image are put on the same page but the visual text is much bigger than the verbal in terms of its space allocation on the page. Both the narrative and the visual tell the reader about the spring season, birds singing, beautiful flowers and butterflies of different colours are well-illustrated. The pictorial details have in fact a good correspondence with the verbal text, that is to say, the picture complies with the text but it seems that the image is not only much bigger in space but also in terms of meaning committed. This can apply to the additional figure that has been added by the illustrator which is the rabbit. Although in the text nothing is mentioned about the animals, the illustrator included a rabbit which though does not disturb the beauty of the book, shows that the picture is richer than the text. **Fig.1** represents the illustrative example.

Fig.1. The pictorial description of the rabbit does not conform to the text.



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

Another disparity that the reader can detect in the next page is when the text is saying that 'all' the animals woke up after a long sleep while the image does only show few of them; two beards and two rabbits. In the book pages to come, the reader is going to be exposed to other animals that are not shown in the third page. The following illustration explains what is being noticed.

Fig.2. The verbal text is richer than the pictorial text.



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

Another state in case in page 03 from the book when the text is describing the flowers of different colours through emphasizing the red and white colour though the picture reveals other colours in addition to the red colour that have not been mentioned by the text while the white flower is not illustrated and this opposes the harmony that should be found between text and image.

Fig.3. The picture deceives the text by omitting some elements.



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

In page 04 of the book, the reader can also notice a sort of inconsistency when the text narrates that all the animals are lining up to get the bees' honey from the beehive yet again not all the animals are shown in the picture associated to the text only two bears, a rabbit and a squirrel.

Fig.4. Inconsistency between text and image



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

The reader can also spot a dissonance between the verbal text and the visual text in page 06 of the book where the text is telling something that is entirely different from what the illustrations reveal. While the text is talking about the arrival of animals to get the honey as usual, they get surprised that no honey is found. And to the reader's surprise, instead of finding animals on the picture describing this scene, only astonished flying bees are noticed. This example represents a clear pictorial divergence from the text.

Fig.5. Pictorial divergence from the text



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

The picture in page 07 is completely contradicting with what is being said in the text. The verbal text tells about a bee who is telling the animals about the reason behind the disappearance of honey which is the shortage of flowers but the visual text shows surprised animals that are gathered around the beehive. This picture however should be better placed in page 08 for illustrating its text.

Fig.6. Picture contradicts with the text

(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

The illustration that is associated to the text in page 09 does not accurately reflect what is written as it shows a bear and a squirrel that are listening attentively to a flying bee which means that the bee is informing them that the reason behind the honey's disappearance is that flowers are no longer in the forest mainly that flowers are essential for bees to make honey. This picture should be placed however in page 08 as it better describes its text. Again the illustration deceives the text by reflecting something that the text does not say.

Fig.7. Picture refers to something different from the text.

(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

Again page 10 gives an account about the paradoxical disparity between text and image in the children picture book 'It's One Flower' (2004). While the narrative relates a scene where the dog spotted a rabbit picking a flower and the dog is asking him about his act and the rabbit answers him that it is but one flower and it does not cause any harm because the forest is full of flowers, the picture though illustrates something entirely different which has been already mentioned in the text on page 09 when the animals agreed that the dog will watch out the flowers to know who is the animal that is responsible for their appearance from the forest. This makes the child reader in confusion between the verbal and the visual descriptions.

Fig.8. paradoxical disparity between text and image



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

The illustration on page 11 however refers to the text on page 10. As the reader turns the page and reads the text which talks about a dialogue between the dog who saw a fox picking a flower and thinking that by doing so does not cause any harm to the flower, it is yet surprising to find an image that mirrors a rather different scene which is the one of a rabbit who is picking a flower which should be placed with the text on page 10.

Fig.9. The picture mirrors a different scene.



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

The verbal description on page 12 recounts a deer who is picking a flower and once asked by the dog he responded just like the rabbit and the fox that one flower does not cause any harm but what is shown on the picture provides a rather different story which must be associated to the text on page 11 because the picture instead of showing a deer, it reveals a fox holding a flower and talking to the dog. So, it can be concluded that the picture is not related to the text and it

does not match with it and does not represent exactly what is written. And most surprisingly, the illustrator did not provide any visual support which shows the scene of the dog and the deer.

Fig.10. the picture provides a rather different story



(Source: Reprinted from 'It's One Flower', 2004)

5.3 Data Discussion

After reading and analysing both the picture and the text relying on the theory of Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) in the children picture book 'It's One Flower' (2004) by the author Hoda Al-Shaer and illustrated by Emad Younes, it becomes clear that in the beginning of the book the interaction between words and picture was interplaying despite some additional details that the images sometimes provide but that did not disturb the harmony of the book. Soon afterward, the reader is exposed to information that contradicts between the text and the image which invites him to wonder about the verbal-visual accordance in the book and opt for various interpretations as Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) support: "As soon as words and images provide alternative information or contradict each other in some way, we have a variety of readings and interpretations" (p. 232)

This can either mislead the child reader and encourage his boredom towards the book or enable him to have an active role as there will be little left to his imagination but this is not the case with the book 'It's One Flower' as the text-image contradiction causes a sort of confusing as the disarrangement of the pictures is clear to the reader and no chance is left for the reader to fill the gaps of the narrative and this results from the author-illustrator relationship.

In the children picture book under scrutiny, it is clear that it is written by a writer who is not the illustrator. Even though Hoda Al-Shaer is an author and illustrator at the same time, her book 'It's One Flower' is illustrated by Emad Younes. Aygün and Abaci (2014) emphasised the author-illustrator collaboration that meets the measures of the child's age and development satisfaction:

It should be ensured that the author who writes the story and the illustrator who does the illustration work together in a coordinated way and the feelings and situations which are intended to be conveyed overlap in written and visually. Therefore publishers must bolster the illustration artists and the illustrations, without considering commercial concerns, must be used with appropriate colours and methods that cater to the children's age and development. (p. 99)

So, the collaboration between the writer of the book and the illustrator is of a paramount importance in children picture books. Additionally, the results show that the text-image juxtaposition in the book 'It's One Flower' (2004) written by Hoda Al-Shaer is both complementary and contradictory and this depends on the relationship between the writer and the illustrator. Moreover, there are several points that any children picture book illustrator should consider as it has been emphasised by Nasser AL-Hinaai (2021) "There are many other things that illustrators should be careful about when illustrating pictures, especially for children; which part of the story the picture should represent" (p. 104) and it can be clearly noticed that this part has been missed in the book 'It's One Flower' (2004). The latter has been also reinforced by Whalley (2004) who went on saying:

A good illustrated book is one where the accompanying pictures enhance or add depth to the text. A bad illustrated book is one where the pictures lack relevance to the text or are ill placed and poorly drawn or reproduced-these are books with pictures rather than illustrated books. (p. 318)

Indeed, image and text in children picture book should support each other instead of deceiving each other and the illustrator should pay attention to the artistic construction of the book and help in enlivening the child's imagination rather than dissuading him from reading it.

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the combination of image and text in children picture books leads to the creation of a relevant work for young readers. The words add details that the child can read and also the pictures provide illustrations that the text leaves, not as a gap but for the image to function as a complement aid and support. In the children picture book entitled 'It's One Flower' (2004) written by Hoda Al-Shaer which has been selected in this study, it is concluded that in the beginning of the story, the words and pictures collaborate to make a meaning with a remarkable exceeding on the part of the pictures which provide some scenes that the text did not mention yet this did not disturb the book's harmony. However, the reader noticed that in the next pages, the pictures seemed to contradict completely with the words as the text says something that is

wholly different from what the image shows and this can cause children's confusion.

To wrap it up, it can be concluded that writing for children requires a gigantic responsibility on the part of the author and the illustrator. Yet this latter's impact on children picture books is greater and his role must be seriously taken into consideration; mainly that the produced work is addressed to a young audience who should be encouraged to enter the amazing realm of reading and not being expelled from it.

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