



Parents Representation in Children’s Book: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis Framework

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how parents are represented in their children books using the multimodal discourse analysis framework. It seeks to answer the following questions: what are the multimodal resources been drawn on in presenting the role of parents in the children’s books? what does the multimodal resources revealed about the role of parents in the children’s book? Do the multimodal resources align with the Hausa culture? It is a qualitative research and the data were purposely selected from an information book titled Modern Social Studies for Nigerian Primary Schools (books 1 & 3). An ethnographic content analysis technique was adopted. The result shows that colour, images, and language are the multimodal resources that displayed the role of parents in the book we selected. It also shows that nurturing is the overall role of parents conveyed by the multimodal resources. Moreover, it also shows that the language used aligned with the Hausa norms and values, while some images aligned and others did not.

Keywords: Hausa, multimodal resources

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The question of how to parent “the right way” is one of the simplest but vague questions asked by new and old parents in search of what they are and aren’t responsible for. Providing children with food, shelter, clothing, health, and safety is one of their basic responsibilities. In addition, providing school materials, time, and a conducive atmosphere for school work at home is also needed once the children begin to attend school. It is noted that parents are no longer serving as onlookers in their children’s education as they actively participate in many ways. Some of these ways include but are not limited to spending time with them, keeping in touch with their teachers, gingering them, listening to their problems, developing their study habits, and so on. Nonetheless, although not all children who are in touch with books know how to read and write, however, the events, diagrams, and images presented in those books play an important role in their lives. The books were usually aimed at entertaining or preparing them for life within and outside their immediate environment. Real-life events that include both positive and negative know-how are expected in such books as they influence the children in the following years. In Western cultures, research shows that both preschool teachers and parents prefer storybooks rather than information books for their children (Saracho&Spodok, 2010). However, despite the central role of parents in selecting or rejecting books for their children, few studies were conducted on the way(s) parents are presented in their children’s books particularly using a multimodal discourse analysis framework. To address this, the study will answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the multimodal resources been drawn on in presenting the role of parents in the children’s books?
- (2) What does the multimodal resources revealed about the role of parents in the children’s book?
- (3) Do the multimodal resources align with the Hausa culture?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

According to Kerlinger (1986), a research design is an effective strategy that guides getting the desired outcomes of a given study. Depending on a research objective, Creswell (2012) recommends that one can approach research either qualitatively, quantitatively, or in mixed mode. A researcher is doing quantitative research if he wants to quantify things by asking questions such as how many? a researcher is doing qualitative research if he wants to interpret, describe, explain, or explore a particular phenomenon for better understanding. Mixed-mode research design is the combination of both (Cohent, 2007; Creswell, 2012). To examine the way(s) parents are presented in their children’s books, a qualitative research design is adopted in this paper. The qualitative research design is adopted because it will enable the researchers to have an in-depth interpretation and explanation of the collected data.

2.2 Book Selection Procedure

In this study, one children's reference book prepared for primary school students (Primary 1 and 4) is conveniently selected. A reference book is a book that provides information rather than just telling a story. The study chooses a reference book because the information presented is mostly real-life activities and experiences that are aimed at preparing children for a better life. Storybooks that some studies examined might have a little impact as the children grew and realize that the events presented in the books were fictional. One book is enough because of the research design. Creswell (2012) recommends that the number of data in qualitative research range from 1 or 2 to 30 or 40. He made this recommendation based on the fact that the higher the number of data in qualitative research, the shallower the analysis/result. The book selected is "Modern Social Studies for Nigerian Primary Schools (Books 1 and 4). The rationale for selecting this book is that it has a chapter specifically designed as "Role of Members of the Family". Table one (1) contains detailed information about the book.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

In this study, a multimodal discourse analysis framework is adopted. It originates from the works of Halliday's (1978, 1989a) Social Semiotic Approach to language; an approach that counts language as one of the semiotic components that people use in meaning construction (Paltridge, 2012). The multimodal discourse analysis "considers how multimodal texts are designed and how semiotic tools such as colour, framing, focus and positioning of elements contribute to the making of meaning in these texts" (Paltridge, 2012:170). It involves examining how modes like images, videos, sounds, and pictures combined with words to construct meaning (Paltridge, 2012). The multimodal discourse analysis has four basic assumptions, namely: images and other semiotic resources do not support meaning, rather, they contribute to it, language alone presents a partial view of what is been expressed, various forms of modalities were selected by people while constructing meaning, and meaning creating by modalities are social (Jawett, 2009). In a nutshell, Multimodal Discourse Analysis seeks to examine how various kinds of modalities interlink to create a unified text.

3.0 Data Analysis Technique

In this study, a content analysis technique is adopted. It is a technique that encompasses the collection and explanation of data from a written or spoken discourse including books, newspapers, novels and so on (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Content analysis can either be enumerative or ethnographic (Liamputtong, 2013). The ethnographic that is adopted here concerns with text analysis for significance and meaning, whereas, the enumerative involves the calculation of a frequency.

4. 1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having introduced the methodology in the previous section, we will now move to the analysis. Based on the overall assumption of the Multimodal Discourse Analysis Framework, the study will answer the questions one after the other:

(1) What are the multimodal resources been drawn on in presenting the role of parents in the children's books?

In multimodal discourse analysis, there are a lot of items that are counted as multimodal resources (also known as semiotic resources) that contribute to meaning construction. They include but not limited to the following: videos, images, colour, frame, position, size, font, words, light, film, posture and so on (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006;Paltridge, 2012). In the books we selected, three multimodal resources are found to be used in constructing the role of parents in children's books:

- (1) Colour
- (2) Images
- (3) words

Concerning colour as a multimodal resource, a novice in the field of multimodal discourse might ask what communicative functions colours serve, however Kress, & van Leeuwen, (2006) claim that colour is a modality on its own. It, first of all, serves an ideational function. This means it represents people, ideas, roles, places, and so on. For example, the colours of flags represent countries (Green White Green represent Nigeria), colours on uniform might represent a position (for example, nurses wear light blue scrubs, surgeons wear green or teal scrubs, doctors wear blue scrubs, and so on), colours on maps can serve as an identity of rivers, mountains, water and so on. Colours also communicate interpersonal meanings. For example, in the Colour Healing written by Verner-Bonds (n/d), he believes that green is a colour of disharmony, bright reds are energizing colours, orange is a colour of gentle, and so on. The interpersonal function of colour also reveals that putting colour on a document can adjust the target audience's attention span by more than 80% and that colour invoices are 30% more likely to be paid than mono-colour invoice (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006). Colours can also be used in textbooks to create topical unity; a case where topics have distinct colours from other parts of the text. The above discussions show that colours indeed have a communicative function.

We will identify some of the colours used by the publishers of the present book. The colours include but not limited to yellow, green, blue, silver, grey, black, and so on. Some of the colours used in this book correspond to the psychology of colour we discussed earlier. For example, blue colours which in the psychology of colour represent calm and pleasure (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006) were used as a background for a picture in which MalamaHadiza is distributing food for her children (see the appendix). The yellow colour which represents charm is used as a background for the image of Jummai carrying her baby on her back (see the appendix). On the contrary, a green colour which is a colour of disharmony was used as a background for the image of MalamaHadiza breastfeeding her baby (see the appendix). To sum it off, Kress, & van Leeuwen, (2006) claim that colours are signifiers that sometimes are selected by implicit or explicit rules, while in other situations are relatively free from such rules.

The present study observes that the book writers mainly used colours for interpersonal reasons, i.e., to attract the attention of the children and help them have a vivid and clear image of the events and messages of the book. The colour indeed has a communicative function of attracting the attention of the children. Without the colours, it will be difficult for the children to grasp the exact role of their parents presented.

Moreover, images in multimodal discourse analysis received special attention and they include photographs, cartoons, maps, and so on (Paltridge, 2012). Images have “grammar” on their own. By having its grammar, it means that the relationship between an image and its viewer is influenced by certain aspects. For example, the perspective of the image determines some sort of social relationship. If the image is horizontally displayed, it suggests involvement as the viewer is in the same class as the subject of the image. Eye contact might suggest a demand, while no eye contact might suggest an offer (Paltridge, 2012).

In multimodal discourse analysis, an image can either be conceptual or narrative. The narrative images are those images in which the participant are been connected by a vector; something is happening between them. While conceptual images are those that represent the participant in terms of less-stable and timeless essence (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006). The term participants refer to the object and elements in a given picture. Within the multimodal perspective, various methods can be adopted while analyzing an image. In this paper, we will use Functional Semiotic Theory which uses concepts like actor, goal, and recipient in the analysis.

All the images from the book we selected are narrative. They are narrative because they are personal, dynamic, and dramatic due to the availability of transactional schemas. The transactional schemas which determine the “ones who do the deed” and the “ones who the deed is done” are always realized by a vector. A vector can be an oblique line, colour, gradient focus, and so on (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006). The modalities in all the images contribute to the sense-making of the activities going on. Most of the things that are realized by words can also be realized by visual modes. For this analysis, we will analyze the following image.



Figure 1

The transactional relationship between the participants of the above image is realized by the vector that links them, namely, initially the degree of the saturated yellow colour that forms the background which indicates a meaningful whole. Two individuals, namely, a mother and a daughter participated in this image. The two parties are realized as distinct entities salient to a different degrees of size, shape, and colour. The mother stands out as a distinct entity because of her shape realized by the pink colour shirt she is wearing. The daughter stands out as a distinct entity because of her size, position, and colour which reveals her head and hand-tied with the mother's body using a veil. The mother from Functional Semiotic Theory is the “actor” which acts as carrying, while the daughter is the “goal” which receives the action of carrying. The transactional schema enables us to make sense of the image. It is important to note that in any narrative image, it is problematic to identify all the participants

because some images are worth a thousand words (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006). The idea here is to determine the semantic dimensions of some of the participants.

Finally, one of the basic assumptions of multimodal discourse analysis is that “writing is a form of visual communication” (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006:17). The words written under each image are supportive of the multimodal resources in making sense of it. For example, under the above image, I analyzed, “Jummai carrying Fati on her back” is written. This writing makes it clear as to what is happening between the participants. It is not Fati that is carrying Jummai, rather, it is the other way around.

Question two

What does the multimodal resources revealed about the role of the parents in the children’s book?

The overall role of the parents revealed by the multimodal discourse resources in the books is that of “nurturing”. In a little book published by WHO and other NGOs (2018), nurturing is defined as “a set of conditions that provide for children’s health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning. Nurturing children means keeping them safe, healthy and well-nourished, paying attention and responding to their needs and interests, encouraging them to explore their environment and interact with caregivers and others”.

It further stresses that for children to reach their capacities, they need the five components of nurturing care, namely, good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, secure and safety, opportunities for early learning. Some of the multimodal resources convey an image of a mother breastfeeding a baby, dressing up, cooking and distributing food. It also shows a father supervising his children’s homework, leading them for prayer, flogging a land for farming, flogging a child for misbehaving, advising a child on how to become a good citizen and on (refer to the appendixes).

Question three

Do the multimodal resources align with the Hausa culture?

In the well-known definition of culture given by Goodenough (1957:167) “a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe to operate in a manner acceptable to its members and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone of themselves”. Wardhaugh (2006) claims that the knowledge of culture is socially acquired rather than genetically endowment. The language used in the book we selected is normal and aligned with the Hausa norms. Consider the language used to describe the image we analyzed above “Jummai carrying Fati on her back” or the language used to describe a mother feeding her children “MalamaHadiza sharing food among her children” (see appendix). On the contrary, some of the images aligned with the Hausa culture while others did not. For example, the image that displays Malam Ahmad playing with his child aligned with the Hausa mode of dressing. Malam Ahmad is wearing Babbar Riga and a cap (see appendix). However, the image that displays Lola who fails to heed her parents’ advice is contrary to the culture of Hausa society (see appendix). It shows that Lola is wearing a pant, brassier, smoking and holding a bottle of a wine in her front. The meaning of the modalities that aligned with the culture of Hausa will easily be digested by the children. An image that shows a father flogging his child will easily be understood by the students rather than the one which shows a woman in somehow necked form.

4.2 CONCLUSION

Inspired by the Multimodal Discourse Analysis perspective, this research examines the role of parents in their children’s book. It shows that colour, images, and language are the multimodal resources that displayed the role of parents in the book we selected. It also shows that nurturing is the overall role of parents conveyed by the multimodal resources. Moreover, it also shows that the language used aligned with the Hausa norms and values, while some images aligned and others did not. This analysis implies that children’s book publishers should be very careful while selecting multimodal resources to convey certain message in their books. Multimodal resources that are known to the children will help them in understanding and easily grasping the intended information. It also recommends that children’s books publishers should read or know about the psychology of colour while designing images in their books. Also, book publishers should be careful while presenting images as sometimes they violate the culture and the religion of the target audience.

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