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## HOPE AFTER DEATH? A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF *GRANPA*

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze how the concept of death is represented both verbally and visually in the picture book *Granpa* by John Burningham. The analytical tools employed in this study are essentially Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics. The results, obtained from the comparison between the verbal and non-verbal semiotic modes, shed light on the complementary relationships that are established between words and images to present a delicate topic such as the death of a grandfather. The results also show that the illustrations seem to represent aspects related to death and hope more effectively than words.

**KEYWORDS:** Multimodality, SFG, Visual Semiotics, Death, Hope.

### RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo el concepto de *muerte* es presentado en los modos semióticos verbales y visuales del libro álbum, *Granpa*, escrito e ilustrado por John Burningham. Los enfoques teóricos utilizados para el análisis son la Gramática Sistémica Funcional de Halliday y la Semiótica Social de Kress y van Leeuwen. Los resultados del

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análisis llevado a cabo demuestran que palabras e imágenes se complementan para presentar un tópico tan complejo como la muerte de un abuelo al joven lector. El análisis también revela que las ilustraciones parecen representar aspectos relacionados con la muerte de una forma más efectiva que el modo verbal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Multimodalidad, GSF, Semiótica Visual, Muerte, Esperanza.

## 1. SCOPE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

Before the latter years of the nineteenth century death was a very common topic in children's literature, addressed to in the myths, legends and also fairy tales created for young readers. As Avery (2000: 87) points out, «death dominated all seventeenth-century works for the young» in both England and America. Plotz (1995: 7) also demonstrated that death was present and became a crucial topic between the 1860s and 1880s when children's literature emerged as an established genre. However, from the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century writers tended to avoid dealing with death in children's literature, perhaps in an attempt to protect them from suffering, fear and anxiety. Indeed, with some notable exceptions, as Clement (2016: 11-12) affirms, death «disappeared from western children's literature after World War I until the 1970's with the arrival of New Realism».

This tendency became challenged during the late 1970s and early 1980s and now, in the twenty-first century, not only may animals die in award winning books that come highly recommended by booksellers and psychologists, but people as well, mostly grandparents. Contemporary picture books show children who experience death through the loss of a grandparent or other older relatives (Cotton 2016: 162). One example of this is *Granpa* by John Burningham, a picture book that brings this topic to the fore and, at the same time, shows a specific way of approaching it when dealing with children.

The reason why I have chosen this picture book instead of others which also deal with the loss of an old person is that *Granpa* is a complex and ambiguous work in which the narrative is essentially constructed through the dialogues established between granddad and his granddaughter. Through their interactive turn-takings, indicated by two types of font, one normal and one cursive, reference is made to actions and doings, sometimes unrelated, which both characters share from the moment they meet until the grandfather disappears after his illness. In fact, the book's most interesting resource is the play on the dialogues between them where the grandfather and his granddaughter's actions and thoughts are manifested each in their own world while remaining intensely united. After spending time with the little girl - nursing her dolls, telling her the story of Noah's ark and going along with her plans to travel to Africa - the old man passes away.

In this paper I aim to determine whether the images used by the illustrator in *Granpa* can express aspects and feelings related to death more effectively than verbal language. As Cotton (2016: 161) suggests, illustrations emulate basic and silent emotions related to pain and suffering more effectively than words: «What visual language can achieve that verbal cannot is the representation of feelings, sorrow and pain as well as love and joy, which help to develop emphatic relationships between generations.» As *Granpa* is a picture book intended for six year-olds, images may play a key role in the representation of such an abstract topic as the loss of a loved one and, in turn, offer a message of hope.

An analysis of an illustrated story such as this should be approached from a multimodal perspective that lets us access both its verbal and visual components. Picture books are recognizable because the images occupy an important space on the surface of the page or double spreads, but this is not the only feature that identifies them. It is essential for there to be a dialogue between the texts and the illustrations and an interconnection of codes (Moebius 1986, Nodelman 1988, Nikolajeva and Scott (2000), Lewis 2006, Sunderland 2011, Painter et al. 2013, Moya 2014).

The analytical approaches employed in this study are Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (2004) (henceforth SFG) and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics (1996, 2006) as they complement each other and are powerful models for the study of multimodal texts. Halliday (1978, 2004) assumes that language expresses three types of meanings: representing our experience of the world inside and around us (ideational), enacting social relationships (interpersonal), and finally, creating coherent wholes of communication (textual). The reality of the world, however, is not only conceptualized through language. Aware of this fact, Kress and van Leeuwen (1966, 2006) and Kress (2010) expand on the SFG model to account for types of semiotic meanings other than those encoded by language and create a descriptive framework of multimodality to assign representational, interactive and compositional meanings to images.

This paper is divided into the following sections: after the introduction, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (2004), and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics (1996, 2006) are briefly described in Section 2. In Section 3, the focus is on aspects of the tale's ideational meanings, that is, the types of processes and participants used by the writer to represent reality. Within the framework of Visual Social Semiotics, the attention turns to the study of images in Section 4: what they do to represent the characters and the processes in which they are involved. Finally, the results, obtained from the comparison between the verbal and non-verbal semiotic modes and their relationship to each other (sections 5 and 6), shed light both on the way verbal and visual modes are combined in *Granpa* and the manner in which they contribute to show a young child the death of a loved one.

The edition used in this study is the version of *Granpa* published by Red Fox in Walker Books in 2003. The story is composed of two single wordless images, which mark the beginning and the end of the tale, and fourteen double spreads. From the first to the last, the same pattern of structure and design is employed since in all of them the text is intertwined in the illustrations in the verso, while the recto, all in color, offers solely visual information. In an attempt to exemplify the type of analysis that will be undertaken, I will comment on the most representative scenes of the story both from a verbal and a visual perspective.

## 2. SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR AND VISUAL SOCIAL SEMIOTICS

In this section I will briefly outline those aspects of Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday 2004) and Visual Social Semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 2006) that serve to represent our experience of the world. Within the SFG framework, language is assumed to fulfill three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Of these three, the one that is concerned with the ability of language to convey certain information about reality at the lexico-grammatical level is the ideational. The conceptualization of patterns of experience is represented in language by choices in the system of transitivity. These involve primarily the type of process selected (realized by a verb), as well as the number and type of the participants involved in it (typically people, things, or abstract entities), the attributes or qualities ascribed to them (which typically characterize, identify, or locate them) and, finally, the circumstances of place, time and manner regarding the process itself.

Language enables us to conceptualize and describe patterns of experience, encoded in the clause as representation. According to Halliday (1994: 106), «our most powerful impression of experience is that it consists of ‘goings-on’ – happening, doing, sensing, meaning, and being and becoming.» This leads us to a first and basic distinction between outer and inner aspects of our experience. The former reflect the processes of the external world, that is, material processes, while the latter refer to the processes of consciousness, known as mental processes. While material processes are typically processes of doing, happening, causing and transferring, mental processes are processes of perception (seeing, hearing), of cognition (knowing, believing) and desideration (liking, fearing). Added to these are those of classifying and identifying, known as relational processes, which are processes of being or becoming in which a participant is identified or situated circumstantially (Halliday, 2004). Finally, although not clearly set apart, further categories located at the three boundaries can be distinguished: behavioral, verbal and existential processes (Halliday, 1994, 2004). Behavioral processes include volitional processes (watching, listening), bodily happenings (laughing) and psychological states

(sleeping). Verbal processes are processes of saying and communicating in which one participant is the «sayer», typically human, and what is communicated is the «verbiage». Finally, by means of existential processes, phenomena of all kinds are recognized to exist, or to happen.

Like linguistic structures, visual structures are also assigned visual processes. Within the visual system of transitivity, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) distinguish between narrative and conceptual images. The former are associated with both (i) action processes, which are similar, although by no means identical, to material and behavioral processes in language, and (ii) reaction processes, equivalent, to a certain extent, to mental processes of perception. Although not necessarily identical in function, conceptual images are related to relational and existential processes in language and their associated participants. While narrative processes are characterized by vectors of motion (action) or eye-lines (reaction), which allow viewers to create a story about the represented participants (henceforth RPs), conceptual images do not include vectors; rather, they represent participants in their more generalized and timeless essence (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 79). Conceptual images define a participant as a member of a class explaining how it is. Thus, they are entity-oriented, as they are seen as carriers that possess attributes. In turn, narrative processes show unfolding actions and events carried out at a particular moment in time and surrounded by a specific setting, which is typically absent in conceptual images. Unlike conceptual processes, narrative images are process-oriented, as they are similar to clauses containing material, mental, and behavioral processes and their related participants and circumstances.

### 3. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FICTIONAL WORLD IN THE VERBIAGE

Once the theoretical framework has been described in Section 2, I will then proceed to count the verbal processes of the tale that serve the author, who also doubles as illustrator, to convey the representation of the narrated world. Later, and according to the theoretical models established in section 2, the correlation between textual and visual components will be studied by comparing the participant-process configuration of the verbal component with the corresponding RPs and visual processes shown in the pictures. This comparison will serve to determine the types of interaction that all the visual and verbal elements exhibit individually in each double spread.

As shown in Table 1, the analysis of transitivity in *Granpa* reveals that in the verbal component most of the processes identified are material (57% of the tokens identified). After these, relational and mental processes are the most frequent and reach 25% and 12.5%, respectively, of the cases counted. The remainder of the processes, verbal and

existential, only reaches 5% of the cases analyzed. There are no behavioral processes in the tale. Let's focus on the most predominant processes: material, mental and relational, and analyze how they contribute to show the life and death of a grandfather to six year-old children.

**Table 1. Types of Textual Processes**

	Absolute Values	Values in Percentages
Material	23	57.5
Relational	10	25
Mental	5	12.5
Verbal	1	2.5
Behavioural	0	0
Existential	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Material processes contribute to the development of the plot by telling the child about the actions carried out by the main characters while they are together in different situations of their daily lives. Sometimes they are planting seeds in the greenhouse of their house: *Do worms go to Heaven?*<sup>2</sup> or singing a song: *One man went to mow, went to mow a meadow...* Other times, the main characters go to the beach: *When we go to the beach, can we stay there for ever? [...]* and the little girl plays in the sand while Granpa sunbathes: [...] *I need the sticks to make things*. In addition, Granpa also rolled wooden hoops and skipped down hills with his friends, Harry and Florence, when he was a child: *Harry, Florence and I used to come down that hill like little arrows [...]*, and he also fishes with his granddaughter in a lake: *If I catch a fish, we can cook it for supper*. These material processes either refer to moments shared in the present or actions that invoke the grandfather's past life.

From this point on, also through two material processes (*come out and play*), the narrator of the story intervenes to announce the present illness of the old man without any explicit mention of the sickness itself: *Granpa can't come out to play today* (double spread 12). This moment does not seem to be taken to heart by the little girl, who continues to make plans for the future, again through use of the material process *go*: *Tomorrow shall we go to Africa, and you can be the captain?* Two new double spreads,

<sup>2</sup> Page numbers for the examples quoted cannot be provided, since picture books intended for young children, as is the case of *Granpa*, are not usually paginated.

without text, mark the final point in the story: Granpa's death (double spread 14 and the last single image). I will refer back to these later. As shown in the examples given, material processes are typically associated with animate agents, doers of verbal actions, essentially Granpa and his granddaughter, and do not reflect aspects related to death in an explicit way. They just indicate that the old man cannot come out to play. The visual reader wouldn't have given this fact, verbally expressed, any importance if it had not been for Granpa's pale complexion and medicines shown in the twelfth illustration. The medicine on top of the table found to the left of the little girl clearly manifests the precarious health of the grandfather.

Regarding relational processes, they reach 25% of the tokens identified and are principally utilized by the author to express Granpa and his granddaughter's opinions about some of the objects mentioned in the story: *That was not a nice thing to say to Granpa*, showing the anger that is created between both protagonists after sharing the story of Noah's Ark, or some of their discussions: *This is a lovely chocolate ice cream; It's not chocolate, it's strawberry*. This sixth, colorful, double spread shows that granpa does not remain stuck on the real aspects all the time, but joins the imaginary world of the little girl: they are pretending that they are eating real ice-creams. The relational process identified is *be*, and it usually has a descriptive function (Halliday, 2004), as the examples included in excerpts 1 and 2 show:

- (1) I didn't know Teddy was another little girl [...]
- (2) When I was a boy we used to roll our wooden hoops down the street [...]  
*Were you once a baby as well, Granpa?*

Due to their descriptive nature, a higher presence of these might have led to detailed descriptions and digressions that could have interfered with the narrative tension. In one occasion, *be* fulfills an identifying function: *Tomorrow shall we go to Africa, and you can be the captain?* The first clause in the story also contains a relational process, *And how's my little girl?*, and introduces the main character into the narrative discourse, realizing functions usually associated with existential processes.

Finally, five mental processes have been identified, and they represent the sources of cognition (*I didn't know Teddy was another little girl / Noah knew that the ark was not far from land [...] / I remember one Christmas [...]*), desire (*I need the sticks to make things*) and perception (*...when he saw the dove carrying the olive branch*) for the textual reality that is being described. They do not seem to be essential in the plot development of the narrative topic, basically constructed around Granpa's and his granddaughter's shared life experiences. Indeed, none of the mental and relational processes identified refer either implicitly or explicitly to the death of the protagonist.

#### 4. REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING IN IMAGES

In this section, the visual processes and the represented participants used by the illustrator to tell the story are analyzed in order to later determine the manner in which the verbal and visual modes transmit such a complex issue as the life and death of a loved one to a child.

In the visual component there is a predominance of embedded processes in which action and reaction images are combined in the same illustration. As shown in Table 3, they represent 70.4% of the cases counted. Evidence of an embedded image is the first single illustration, in which we can see how the little girl runs towards Grandpa with open arms, while the old man smiles at her and awaits her sitting in his armchair (action). Granpa and the little girl are the *actors*, and the actions of running and the opening of his arms are the action processes. As there are two participants involved in this illustration, the process is transactional (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). In this first illustration, the viewer also finds a reaction process, as both characters direct their gazes to one another, showing the contact and feelings of affection that predominate in their relationship.

**Table 3. Types of Visual Processes**

PROCESSES	Absolute Values	Values in Percentages
Action	3	11.1
Reaction	0	0
Embedded	19	70.4
Speech	0	0
Conceptual	5	18.5
Total	27	100

Three action images, which represent 11.1% of the tokens analyzed, have also been identified. As stated in Section 2, an action process is an image which involves a vector and shows something happening, an *actor* doing something. The right-hand side of the first double spread, for example, is evidence of an action image. Granpa and his granddaughter are planting seeds in the greenhouse. Although they are talking to each other about seeds and worms, there is no eye-contact between them. Their arms and hands are manipulating objects and form the vectors that create the action images of this illustration.

The narrative processes involving action and embedded images often have a clear correspondence to the typology of processes identified in the verbiage where, as

previously indicated, processes of doing and happening predominate. In the scene of the beach when the little girl is playing with the sand or when the protagonists are fishing at the lake the material processes and their main participants are reflected in both semiotic modes, reiterating, albeit only partly, the information that the writer and illustrator offer the reader of the story. However, not all the material processes with their participants are reproduced explicitly in the illustrations through action and embedded processes. In most cases throughout the tale, the processes and their corresponding participants in the verbal component do not have a direct correlation in the images. In the twelve double spread, for example, the verbiage announces that *Granpa can't come out to play today*. In turn, the illustration on the recto shows that Granpa is ill and sitting in his armchair, looking very pale.

The reaction processes identified within embedded images are basically constructed by the gazes exchanged between the characters Granpa and the little girl, and make their good relationship clear. These reaction processes are not usually echoed in the verbal mode either, but just shown in the pictures without being necessarily referred to in words. This lack of correspondence once again manifests the complementary relationship that exists between the text and the illustrations of this children's book. Examples like these show that the text and illustration are combined masterfully in order to offer complementary information. In this way, the viewer receives the information from two different perspectives: the visual, probably easier to comprehend for the child, and the verbal that, given the scarce reading competency of the young reader, may require the help of a mediator, possibly his or her parents, grandparents, or preschool or primary school teachers.

Five conceptual processes have been identified in *Granpa*, which represent 18.5% of the cases counted. Even though narrative images are most frequently used in children's books to give dynamism to the tales, in this story, discussing such an abstract topic such as death, the illustrator has made use of conceptual images as well. Some of them are classificational; others, however, are associated with symbolic values (symbolic images) or relate participants to each other in terms of part-whole relations (analytical images). Classificational images bring different RPs together showing that they have something in common as happens in the verso of the already cited first double spread where some garden tools are piled on top of a counter and arranged according to a clear compositional symmetry. Similarly, in the verso, left-hand side, of double spread 12, objects related to the grandfather's illness (hot water bottle, thermometer, medicines, etc.) are shown to the reader through a classificational image. Others are analytical in the sense that they show what participants or objects mentioned in the story are like, as happens in the recto of double spread twelve, where Granpa is depicted as ill, with a pale complexion.

Lastly, in double spread 14 (reproduced as Figure 1) I have also located a symbolic image, associated with Granpa's death. The armchair where the grandfather usually sat now appears with green and white lines, vacant, while the little girl stares at it from the verso of the double spread. The table next to the armchair is also empty, announcing that Granpa has passed away, although he may still be alive in the little girl's thoughts. Reaction and conceptual images are combined in the same illustration to represent Granpa's death. Therefore, we can say that the visual mode contributes more than words to representing these aspects related to the loss of a loved one.

**Figure 1. Granpa's Death<sup>3</sup>**



Imagen 1: Poster de la escena 3

Narrative images are associated with participants, usually agents and affected entities that have visual support, above all those that play a determining role in the development of the plot. There are only eight plates where either Granpa or the little girl are not depicted. They typically correspond to the conceptual images identified and to those referenced above. Although the protagonists are usually fully depicted in the illustrations,

<sup>3</sup> Text and illustration from GRANDPA by John Birmingham. Copyright © John Birmingham. 1984. Right hand side of double spread 14.

sometimes other characters are only represented in the illustrations through metonymy (Forceville 2009, Moya 2013, 2014). In the last illustration, for example, one can only make out the head of the baby that the little girl is pushing around in the baby carriage; therefore, one of its parts is being used by the illustrator to represent the whole. In spite of this, one can see how the baby is smiling: life continues after the death of a loved one.

## 5. THE SYNERGY BETWEEN VERBAL AND VISUAL ELEMENTS

At this point, I will analyze how words and images complement each other to create meaning in *Granpa* and thus determine the extent to which each mode contributes to the construction of the plot. Different models have been proposed to study how verbal and non-verbal modes complement each other in the genre of picture books. Among them, Barthes (1977) distinguishes two image-text relations: elaboration and relay. While in elaboration the textual component restates the meanings of the image or vice-versa so that the same meaning is expressed by both the verbal and the visual codes, in relay, one component expands on the meaning transmitted by the other. In relay each code adds new meanings to complete the message, going beyond the information transmitted in one of the two components. Since Barthes' attempt to define the interanimation between verbal and visual codes, other researchers in visual communication have proposed additional precise categories to describe how visual and verbal modes complement each other in the transmission of meaning and how this co-deployment is achieved. Agosto (1999) and Nikolajeva and Scott (2000, 2001), among others, have applied their theories to the genre of picture books. The most elaborated model is the one proposed by Nikolajeva and Scott (2000, 2001), who provide five categories to describe word and image interactions, ranging from symmetrical relationship at one extreme of the scale to contradictory interanimation at the other. Between these two poles they distinguish three other types of interaction: enhancement, complementary and counterpointing. However, these terms are not absolute and the boundaries drawn between them are not always clear, especially in the cases of enhancing and complementing, as the only feature used to distinguish them is the amount of information, minor (enhancing) versus significant (complementary), that one of the two modes provides. For this reason, Barthes's distinction between elaboration and relay will be followed here in an attempt to define the intersemiosis that is established between verbal and non-verbal modes in our illustrated story book.

Although this tale is intended for young children under six years of age, no cases of elaboration have been identified in *Granpa*, as the pictures do not simply convey what is mentioned in a prior written text. All the illustrations respond to interanimations of relay or complementarity as what is represented in images and what is represented in

language is different but complementary. As Painter et al. (2013: 76) point out when they refer to the synergy of images and words in *Granpa*: «the words give us fragments of the characters' speech, while the images show both their current actions and their thoughts.» Therefore, text and image are both essential to forge a true understanding of the content of the story.

In addition, the topic of death is not mentioned explicitly in the visual component. In double spread 14, the little girl is all alone, depicted in black and white. In this story death takes place after a shared lifetime, and, with the gradually announced events, one can anticipate the final outcome. Grandpa's absence is evident with his armchair left vacant on the recto of the penultimate illustration. The chair as a real object appears in color, but the table is missing all its former medicines.<sup>4</sup> It is never stated that the grandfather has died, but it is inferred by the images. This is evidence that, when faced with death, no words are necessary. In fact, the verbiage does not make any reference to Granpa's death or final outcome.

The absence of Granpa is also made up for in the last illustration, also without words, in which someone, probably the little girl, is pushing a baby carriage with a dog following along behind. The sun is shining and the countryside is green, the color that symbolizes hope and life. And so, life goes on. This is precisely the final message Burningham tries to transmit throughout this story. The last two illustrations once again show the complementary relations that exist between text and image in this picture book. As Gill (2009) points out, relationships of a complementary nature also occur when significant segments of the narrative, as the ones just commented upon, are shown in pages consisting of image or text alone.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The study of the intersemiosis of verbal and visual elements in *Granpa* shows that both modes complement each other and specialize in conveying particular meanings. The author / illustrator shows leisurely moments shared between the grandfather and his granddaughter, mainly through both material processes and embedded images. In fact, there is a predominance of narrative patterns, mainly action images as the narrative is basically created by vectors of motion, combined with reaction processes. These visual narrative patterns, which serve to present actions carried out by Granpa and the little

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the table appears for the first time in the first illustration. On it, there is a pipe, an ashtray, and a box of matches, objects that will eventually be replaced by medicines as the grandfather's illness advances. In its last appearance, the table appears empty, next to the grandfather's armchair.

girl, have a clear correspondence in the ideational component of the language as there is also a predominance of material processes over the other types. However, this does not imply that the material processes and the participants used in the verbiage are always represented in the visual mode. At times, as has been stated in the previous analysis, there are material and relational processes that appear in only one of the semiotic modes; other times, the message can only be deduced from the combined reading of both semiotic modes.

We are before a tale in which the actions that are being carried out by the protagonists are not the fundamental part of the storyline. The story addresses the topic of death, an abstract subject that is not easy to combine with the infant world. In order to do this, the author also makes use of conceptual images that are related to objects belonging to the grandfather or regarding his illness. These conceptual images do not usually have a complete correspondence in the verbiage, since occasionally there is no explicit mention in the verbal part to the elements that they contain (garden tools, medicines, etc.).

The use of complementary interanimations seems to be a useful technique here to create a tale that is both interesting enough to hold the young child's attention and, in turn, appropriate to present the topic of death with a message of hope. As Soriano (1995: 521) points out, beyond the makings of philosophy and religion, it is also useful to explain to children that if an individual disappears, the human species still continues. Unlike illustrated books, where the illustrations simply support the text, quality picture books such as *Granpa* go beyond this. Neither words nor illustrations are subordinate to each other. Both semiotic modes complement each other to reflect the moments shared by Granpa and his granddaughter until he finally passes away.

That being said, after comparing the information given by the verbal mode concerning Granpa's death with the information transmitted in the illustrations, the analysis also reveals that those aspects related to the protagonist's death and which anticipate the final outcome of the story are essentially shown through visual material. Words seem to play a less important role in representing this complex topic. The plate where Granpa is missing and the armchair where he used to sit appears vacant (double spread 14), or the last illustration, where a little girl is pushing a baby carriage in a green countryside, are evidence of this fact. In addition, there are also other illustrations which advance the final outcome of the story by introducing aspects related to Granpa's illness. In double spread 2, for example, the little girl is dressed up as a nurse, which is also an indication of the progressive illness. In the next two pages, we begin to notice that the elements connected to grandfather's illness increase: the toys themselves become sick, being shown as covered with little, white sheets.

The analysis carried out here is but a small contribution to what still remains as an underexplored topic within picture books on controversial topics. A sample of picture books dealing with death and other controversial topics (Evans 2015) needs to be analyzed multimodally to determine whether the visual mode reflects aspects and feelings related to the loss of a loved one more effectively than the verbal mode. The analysis of other picture books such as *Duck, death and the tulip* by Erlbruch (2008), Michel Rosen's *Sad Book* by Rosen and Blake (2004), *When your Grandparent dies* by Ryan and Alley (2002) or *Can you whistle, Johanna?* by Stark and Höglund (2005), to name a few, will definitely help to reach definite conclusions in this respect.

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