

# *Meaning without words: analyzing the picture book Bárbaro through a social semiotic perspective*

Significados sem palavras: uma análise do livro infantil Bárbaro sob a  
perspectiva sociosemiótica

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**Abstract:** Investigating multimodal meaning-making resources in children's literature may contribute to develop readers' critical interpretative possibilities. In the present study, we provide an analysis of the award-winning Brazilian wordless picture book *Bárbaro* (MORICONI, 2013) under a social semiotic perspective. Initially, based on Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), we present the three metafunctions that are co-present in any text, specifically related to the Grammar of Visual Design (KRESS; van LEEUWEN, 2006) and to visual narratives (PAINTER; MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013). Subsequently, we analyze these metafunctions (representational, interactive and compositional meanings) in *Bárbaro*. Results suggest that the analysis undertaken allows for the description of detailed information about the unfolding narrative, the sequence of events, characters' actions, attributes and emotions, as well as distribution of visual elements, among other features. We hope our study may contribute to the development of critical multimodal literacies.

**Keywords:** Multimodality. Children's literature. Visual narratives.

**Resumo:** A investigação de recursos multimodais na literatura infantil pode contribuir para o desenvolvimento de possibilidades interpretativas críticas. Propomos, no presente estudo, uma análise do premiado livro brasileiro *Bárbaro* (MORICONI, 2013) sob a perspectiva da semiótica social<sup>1</sup>. Inicialmente com base em Halliday e Matthiessen (2004), apresentamos as três metafunções presentes em qualquer texto, relacionando-as especificamente à Gramática do Design Visual (KRESS; van LEEUWEN, 2006) e a narrativas visuais (PAINTER; MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013). A seguir, efetuamos uma análise dessas metafunções (dos significados representacionais, interacionais e composicionais) no livro. Resultados sugerem que a análise empreendida permite a descrição

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the grammar of visual design in Portuguese, please see Nascimento, Bezerra and Heberle (2011). Likewise, see Cabral and Barbara (2015) as well as Fuzer and Cabral (2014) for recent studies in systemic functional linguistics in Portuguese.

detalhada sobre o desenrolar da narrativa, a sequência dos eventos, os personagens, suas ações, atributos e emoções, bem como a distribuição de elementos visuais, entre outras características. Esperamos que o estudo possa contribuir para o desenvolvimento de multiletramentos.

**Palavras-chave:** Multimodalidade. Literatura infantil. Narrativas visuais.

## Introduction

Viviane M.  
Heberle

Verônica  
Constanty

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90

Technological, social and economic changes in contemporary societies have led to greater complexity regarding literacy practices. According to the New London Group (1996), multiple discourses, the context in which they occur as well as cultural and linguistic diversity found in societies nowadays need to be considered in a pedagogy of multiliteracies. Unsworth (2001; 2008) and Kress (2003; 2010), among other scholars, have also emphasized a necessary change in the educational setting, from the teaching of verbal language alone as the only means of representation to a wider view in which other modes of communication, such as images, gestures, and music, for example, integrate the meaning-making process.

Several scholars working with multiliteracies have based their studies on Halliday's view of language as social semiotic, known as systemic functional linguistics (SFL). As proposed by Halliday (1978), language is seen as "one of the semiotic systems that constitute a culture" (p.2), that is, a complex semiotic meaning-making potential, inextricably linked to social processes. Systemic functional theory allows us to study language "focusing attention on the actual and the potential, both discourse and the linguistic system that lies behind it in terms of the infinitely complex network of meaning potential that is what we call the culture" (HALLIDAY, 1978, p. 4-5). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006)'s Grammar of Visual Design (GVD), as well as Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013)'s study on visual narratives draw on SFL in their theoretical and methodological insights, including the metafunctional framework which is discussed in the present article.

Thus, taking into account these theoretical perspectives, and considering the relevance of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, our main purpose in this paper is to present a visual analysis of the award-winning wordless picture book *Bárbaro*. To do so, we first briefly discuss the three meaning-making metafunctions within GVD, proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) as well the study of visual narratives (PAINTER; MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013). Then, we provide the analysis of image resources in the selected book and, by doing so, we hope to highlight the relevance of such type of analysis for multimodal literacies.

Our investigation also takes into account reflections offered by studies based on GVD concerning multimodal meanings specifically in picture books for children, such as those by Lewis (2001), Unsworth (2013), Unsworth and Thomas (2014) and Guijaro (2104). Lewis (2001), for example, explores the first studies of children's picture books as well as the relation between image and words, and introduces the notion of 'interanimation', used later by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013), in their discussion of 'intermodality'. Unsworth (2013, p. 15) compares two segments of *The Lost Thing* in the book and the movie versions, and he explains that his analysis "is intended to indicate the accessibility of a metalanguage of multimodality derived from systemic functional semiotics as a pedagogic tool for multimodal literacy pedagogy". Also drawing on social semiotic descriptions of the form images construct meaning, Unsworth and Thomas (2014) demonstrate how the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings are constructed in picture books and digital fictions. Guijaro (2014, p. 2), however, based on Piaget, focuses on the three metafunctions in both "verbal and non-verbal components of nine picture books designed for children of three different stages of cognitive development".

Specifically regarding the role of narratives for children, Toolan (1988, p. 215) says that "behind their seemingly simplicity and playfulness, stories for and by children are, on a closer consideration, remarkably complex, and an aid to and index of the interactional and cognitive development of the child". Nodelman (1988, p. 43) also states that many children "can learn to develop a rich and subtle consciousness of the special characteristics of picture-book narrative -and can immensely enjoy doing so". Nodelman adds that "such a knowledge cannot be learned if it is not taught." (p. 43).

Similarly, Salisbury and Styles (2012) emphasize the complexity of picture books for children, and explain that:

Academic theorists analyze aspects of picturebooks and visual literacy from a range of perspectives. Their studies over the last 30 years have looked at and recognized not only the dynamic relationship between word and image in children's picturebooks, but also the importance of visual design and the multiplicity of meanings offered by the genre (p.90).

Salisbury and Styles (2012) go on to say that “wordless picture books [such as the one we analyze in this paper], are emerging as an increasingly common form of visual literature and, of course, have the benefit of being universally readable” (p. 98).

## **1. The Grammar of Visual Design and Visual Narratives in picture books**

Viviane M.

Heberle

Verônica

Constanty

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92

The Grammar of Visual Design (GVD) draws on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as theoretical and methodological background for the study of language resources, directly related to the communicative function of language and to the context of communication in which meaning-making processes are constructed. Three metafunctions are present in any instance of communication: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Specifically in GVD, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) call these metafunctions representational, interactive and compositional, whereas Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) keep the same terminology used in Systemic Functional Grammar. In general lines, Unsworth (2001, p. 72-73) explains that representational/ideational structures refer to the “nature of events, the objects and participants involved, and the circumstances in which they occur”. Interactive/interpersonal meanings include the verbal and visual resources which depict “the relationship between the viewer and the represented participants”. Compositional meanings, in turn, “are concerned with the distribution of the information value or relative emphasis among elements of the image”.

### **1.1 Representational/Ideational meanings**

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006), representational meanings categorize images in either narrative or conceptual. Whereas narrative structures present “unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements”, conceptual patterns represent “participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006, p. 79). As the images in *Bárbaro* are predominantly narrative, we concentrate on providing information only on this type of representational/ideational meanings.

Participants in narrative images have their functional role and processes of action signaled by vectors, which indicate the Actor of the action and the Goal. Specifically in picture books, Painter, Martin and

Unsworth (2013) explain that participants may be interpreted in a visual story as performing an action whether or not there are prominent vectors. These authors propose the terms ‘character manifestation’ and ‘appearance/reappearance’ options to identify the depiction of a character along a narrative. As we will see in our analysis of *Bárbaro*, tracking the characters’ appearances and reappearances is relevant to identify the participants and, consequently, to better understand the unfolding events of the narrative.

Regarding the connection between actions in picture books, it is important to explore the notion of inter-event relations, proposed by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) to help understand not only the actions depicted in an image but how one event relates to another in the unfolding images. Following these authors, one of the most common choices to link actions within a story is the unfolding option that in turn can indicate temporal [succession] as one of its possibilities. The option [unfolding:succession] occurs

when the same character or characters, appear in successive images, either within a single page, across a double-page spread or a page turn, in return, the reader is to infer a temporal relation of succession between the actions depicted (PAINTER; MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013, p. 71).

Thus, some narratives can repeat the option [maintain pace], or otherwise [shift] pace within a series of actions. Besides, whereas the succession within a sequence involves the pace option, succession between sequences concerns the counter-expectation aspect of the narrative. Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) also explain: “That is, we have expectancy about the next action to come in a sequence, and thus there is always the risk of that expectancy not being fulfilled” (PAINTER, MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013, p. 73). These authors add that “counter-expectation is crucial in the creation of a narrative problematic.” (p. 73).

Representational/ideational meanings can also be observed by the way circumstances are represented in picture books. In verbal language, circumstances construct notions of location, cause, condition, manner, time, among others. Visually, the circumstances provide the background context for the depicted process through circumstances

of place and time. According to Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013, p. 78), “where the circumstantiation is absent, the focus is necessarily simply on the character and/or the process depicted”.

### 1.2 Interactive/Interpersonal Meanings

Interactive/interpersonal meanings in GVD refer to the relationships established between the represented participants in the image, that is, “the people, the places and things depicted in images” (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 1996, p. 119) and the viewer, which are analyzed by means of the systems of contact, social distance and attitude, as well as modality. These systems allow us to describe specific reader-character relationships, including types of angles and shots, perspective, and involvement with the reader, among others. In one of these systems, contact, there are two options: offer or demand. If the represented participant looks at the viewer, there is “engagement”, since a demand is placed on the participant. If, however, there is no gaze, which is the case in *Bárbaro*, as will be seen later, then the relation between the viewer and the represented participant (s) is that of an offer.

Specifically for picture books, focalization is one of the systems regarding interactive/interpersonal meanings, which allows us to identify the relation between readers and characters (PAINTER, MARTIN and UNSWORTH, 2013)<sup>2</sup>. This relation occurs by positioning viewers “to engage with the character via eye contact, or just to observe the depicted participant, the primary opposition within the system of focalization, between the two features [contact] and [observe]” (PAINTER; MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013, p. 19). Accordingly, readers can be positioned to observe the events when there is no eye contact with the characters (as is the case in *Bárbaro*), or to participate in the story world, as the character gazes at the readers by establishing contact.

Different aspects of interactive/interpersonal meanings in the picture book add to the construction of readers’ engagement with it, such as the use of color. Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) consider ‘color’ as part of the system of ambience that creates an emotional effect on the viewer. However, the authors also argue that color may be a resource used in all three metafunctions and that ambience and the creation of

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94

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<sup>2</sup> According to Toolan (1988, p. 68), focalization is a term coined by Genette and it refers to “a viewpoint from which things are seen, felt, understood, assessed” in narrative.

mood may occur “by the splash of color created by a character or object depicted without any setting.” (PAINTER; MARTIN; UNSWORTH, 2013, p. 40). These aspects will also be identified in our analysis of *Bárbaro*.

### 1.3 Compositional/textual Meanings

The Compositional/textual metafunction is analyzed taking into account information value, framing and salience. Information value is related to the layout of texts on a page, in general lines. Usually, what is placed on the left side is likely to be more familiar to the reader, while “new information” is placed on the right side. Concerning information placed on the top and the bottom, Kress, and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that the information placed on top of the image indicates the “ideal.” For example: in advertisements, the top part often presents the “promise of the product” (imagined or ideal effects), while the bottom part of the layout is related to more concrete information, referring more specifically to the product advertised. For the analysis of picture books, however, Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) propose a discussion of focus groups, that is a network which allows us to visualize the distribution of visual elements within the page to call viewers’ attention.

Framing is related to the way the elements of a picture are connected or disconnected. As Unsworth observes (2001, p. 109): “the more framed an element is, the more it is emphasized as a separate piece of information”. In picture books, it is possible to observe whether the images are connected or not in terms of the frames used, that is, whether there are lines or margins separating the visual objects. This way, images with margins are classified as [bound], and images without margins are termed [unbound]. As pointed out by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013, p. 105) “[b]ound 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’ bound images or confine the character”.

The third kind of compositional meaning, salience, can, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006):

create a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others. The Given may be more salient than the New, for instance, or the New more salient than the Given, or both may be equally salient.

In this section on the review of literature, in order to contextualize our study, we have briefly outlined relevant aspects of representational/ideational, interactive/interpersonal and compositional/textual meanings as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) as well as by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013). We will now proceed with our analysis of *Bárbaro*.

Viviane M.

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Verônica

Constanty

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96

## **2. Interpreting *Bárbaro* through visual meaning-making affordances**

In order to explore the nature of the meanings conveyed by the visual choices realized in *Bárbaro*, in our study<sup>3</sup> we analyze the representational/ideational, interactive/interpersonal and compositional/textual meanings, based on the social semiotic perspectives briefly mentioned above. Even though each metafunction was analyzed separately for the purposes of the study, we emphasize that meanings are construed simultaneously and interdependently in complementary realizations. The description of these meanings, thus, is provided with the purpose of developing a closer look at visual narratives and, hopefully, enlightening the development of multimodal literacies.

We have selected this particular book, *Bárbaro* (which was written and illustrated by Renato Moriconi), because it was awarded the best wordless picture book in 2014 by the Brazilian Foundation of Books for Children (Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil Juvenil, FNLIJ). It also received a special prize (Troféu Monteiro Lobato de Literatura Infantil) from the magazine *Revista Crescer* as well as the Jabuti Prize for best illustrated children's book.

*Bárbaro* tells the story of a young Viking barbarian, signaled by his clothes and artifacts, such as a traditional Viking helmet, his sandals with straps as well as his sword and shield. The story, characterized as a narrative representation according to GVD, is centered on the actions of this barbarian, the main character, who mounts up a black horse on the first pages of the book, and faces many challenges during a fantastic dangerous journey that unfolds along the pages. The

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3 The present study is part of a broader project which investigates contemporary social practices, CNPq Project entitled: Social practices in contemporary society: multiliteracies, identities and multimodal Práticas sociais na contemporaneidade: multiletramentos, identidades e gêneros multimodais, with a research grant to the second author.



author/illustrator's skillful use of representational/ideational, interactive/interpersonal and compositional/textual meanings holds the reader's expectation and interaction via these three metafunctions, as pointed out in the analysis that follows.

### 2.1 Representational/ ideational meanings in *Bárbaro*

Regarding processes, participants, and circumstances, related to the representational/ ideational metafunction, we can say that in *Bárbaro*:

- a) the processes/actions are sharply and sequentially paced to construct the unfolding events of the narrative;
- b) about participants, characters' appearance and reappearances play an important role in the construction of context, since they contribute to create an initial setting and the subsequent events of the narrative;
- c) circumstances are also enacted by means of characters' actions and attributes.

Representational/ideational meanings in images are, as previously presented, signaled by vectors that indicate the Actor and the Goal of the action. In Moriconi's book, the main participant, *Bárbaro*, along with his horse form the primary vector, but secondary vectors also emanate from other participants along the story. Thus, *Bárbaro* and his horse perform two types of action: they are Actors and Goals in different situations: *Bárbaro* is the Actor when he rides his horse towards the subsequent page, but he also becomes the Goal in relation to beasts that attempt to attack him, as we hope to show in our analysis.



Figure 1

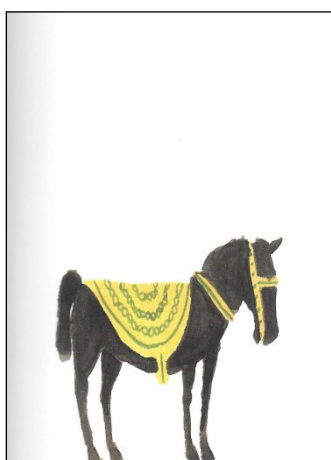


Figure 2

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Verônica  
Constanty

98

In Figures 1 and 2, which correspond to the first double-page spread, it is possible to see the main character running and his sword pointing diagonally to the top of the page<sup>4</sup>, forming vectors. The action is conveyed by the option known as [unfolding:succession] by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013), as previously explained, with our hero appearing on the left page of a double-page spread. By the sequence of these two pictures, from the page on the left to the one on the right, we visualize the barbarian on his way to mount his horse (the Goal) in order to start his journey to overcome the obstacles that will appear throughout the story.

Regarding the narrative actions performed by the main character, as the story progresses, *Bárbaro* has to face several dangerous beasts, and he reappears in successive images across the pages, facing his enemies, such as hazards and perils that surround him. To illustrate, he has to face blue angry birds (see Figure 3 below), scaring snakes (Figure 4) and a red dragon with its full open mouth and its tongue moving towards *Bárbaro* (Figures 5 and 6).

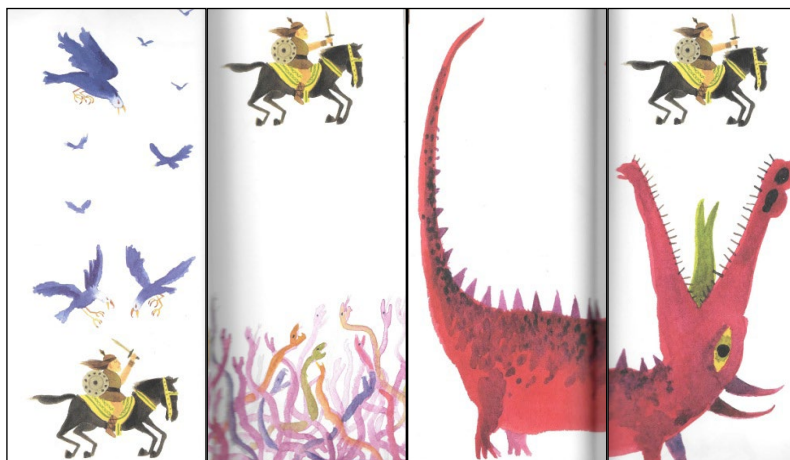


Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

This way, the actions performed by *Bárbaro* and his ‘enemies’ are depicted through the succession of events within a sequence of “attacks”. Such succession helps to maintain the pace of the narrative. However, when the enemies stop attacking, there is

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the story, the barbarian uses his sword diagonally pointing to the top.

a shift in the pace, which signals the problem of the story. As pointed out by Toolan (1988), a narrative is understood minimally as “a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events” (p. 7), and an event can be seen as a fundamental aspect of narratives, since it brings “a change of state” (p.90), or “a disruption of the usual sequence of events” (EGGINS, 2004, p. 71).

This change of state or complication may occur by two different ways: the relation between actions and the depiction of ‘unfulfilled’ sequences. Such options are explored in *Bárbaro* with the idea of movement versus inertia/stillness. The main character usually moves from the lower part of the page, on the left, to the upper side of the page on the right. During this trajectory, the barbarian needs to overcome dangerous situations with beasts, plants and birds who try to attack him (again see Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6). Suddenly, unpredictably, one blank page on the right appears, suggesting that there is a shift in the narrative.

This shift in the narrative can also be visually depicted through different features. *Bárbaro* now looks ahead, his eyes are now open, and there are vectors formed by his eyes and sword which point to the next, blank page (see Figure 7 below)<sup>5</sup>; Besides, the legs of his horse are in the same position as on the first pages: they are stretched and still, indicating the absence of movement. The ‘surprise’ element is ideationally constructed here also by a change in terms of the type of actions performed by the main character as well as the absence of actions with *Bárbaro*’s antagonists – which appeared previously with every turn of the page. Because of that, our little hero, depicted on the left page (see Figure 7), starts to gaze up to something/someone that might be on the pages that follow, as his eyes and his sword make an invisible vector which points to the page on the right.

Turning the subsequent pages, readers see that Figures 7, 8 and 9 contribute to show that *Bárbaro*’s adventure is now over, once the pages on the right side are still blank, and the legs of his horse are still stretched, not moving as they were during the previous adventures. This sequence can be visualized in the figures below:

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5 Figure 7 is followed by a blank page, and so are Figures 8 and 9.

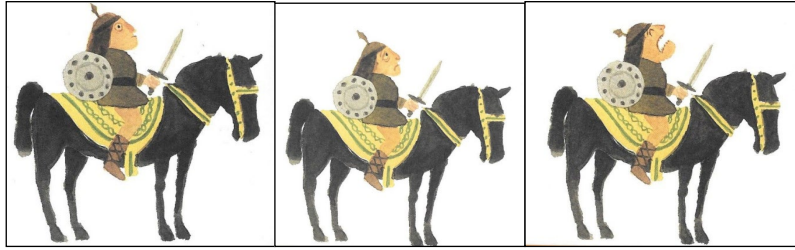


Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

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Verônica  
Constanty

100

Afterwards, as can be seen in Figure 10, big hands and face appear on the page on the right and bow in Bárbaro's direction. The big figure resembles a giant –given the big proportions, accentuated by the fact that the reader can only see the, apparently, giant's face, arms and hands, suggesting that the rest of his body is so big that it could not be drawn on the book. A man with curly brown hair and brown beard is the only creature who seems to be able to beat the little barbarian hero, but how? Who is this mysterious giant?

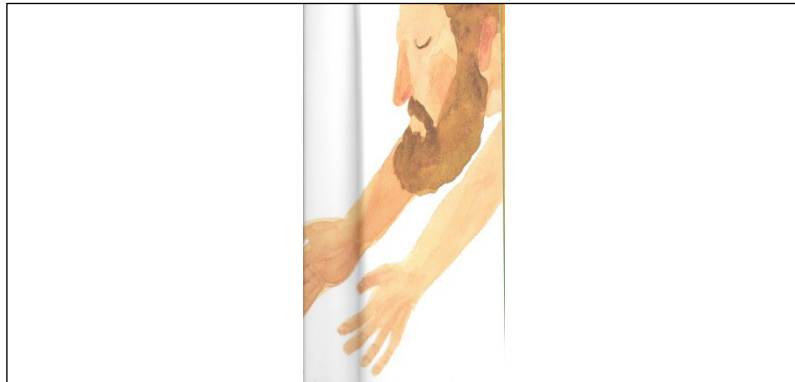


Figure 10

The answer will only appear on the final two pages where it is possible to see, on the left page, a carousel with its horses (see Figure 11 below), and, among them, Bárbaro's black horse, who was an active participant together with Bárbaro on the preceding adventures. On the right page (Figure 12), a man can be seen walking ahead with a boy and holding hands with him. In terms of representational/ideational content and the relations between characters, proposed by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013), it is possible to infer that the adult is the boy's father, by configurational comparison of physical attributes, since the man and the child have the same hair color and facial resemblance.

Concerning the visual construction of participants, still a characteristic of representational/ideational meanings, the man has the same physical characteristics of the previous “giant”, but now he appears as a person. The boy is not a barbarian anymore: he does not portray a helmet and warrior’s attributes (sword and shield): he is wearing Bermuda shorts, a t-shirt and tennis shoes (see Figure 12). This way, the protagonist reappears without any variation on status and appearance throughout the story until the complicating action occurs, signaled by a change in the main character’s attribution, with Bárbaro’s appearance as a boy (Fig. 12).

Accordingly, a key feature of the text to provide the context of the story is instantiated by the reappearance of the character, with a difference in attribution. At this moment of the narrative, it can be observed that all along Bárbaro was a child and had been creating a representation of ancient times, where he imagined himself as a brave and unbeatable warrior. Thus, the variation in participant status aligned with a change in circumstances serves to suggest the imaginative child’s world. Such variation in participant status helps to construe the imaginative life of the child, as it can represent two aspects of the narrative: “a character’s changing status as a protagonist, and the depicted character’s creative imagination” (PAINTER, MARTIN, UNSWORTH, 2013, p. 63).

Still ideationally, the vectors operate an important piece of information here (see Figure 12): the adult’s face and hand, as well as his feet, form a vector into the right side of the page indicating movement. In other words: the former “barbarian”, now a boy, and his father –the previous giant –are walking away. The boy’s body still forms a vector, but now his left hand forms the same angle as when he was holding the sword, and his head is in the same position as it was when he first realizes the carousel ride has finished, as it is possible to see in Figures 11 and 12.

The construction of the brave warrior, his actions and ‘setting’ (or almost lack of it) occurs with representational/ ideational meanings, whereas the relation between readers and characters is constructed through interactive/interpersonal meanings, which we refer to now.

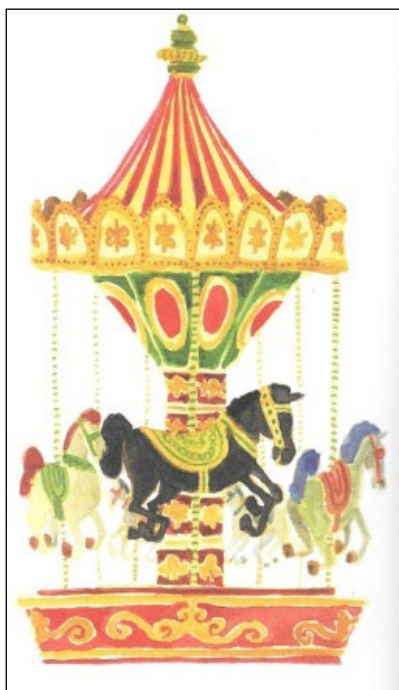


Figure 11

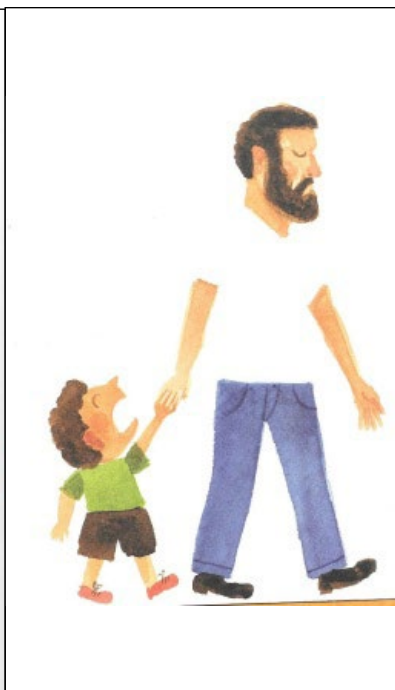


Figure. 12

## 2.2 Interactive/ interpersonal meanings in *Bárbaro*

When analyzing the interactive/interpersonal aspects of the images, specifically the relation between the main character/participant and the viewer, constructed through the system of focalisation, it is possible to observe that in *Bárbaro* there is no eye contact between the reader and the participants. Readers just contemplate the scenes, created through an “offer” to follow the adventures together with *Bárbaro*. This way, the author gives the reader a ticket to observe *Bárbaro*’s ride in the carousel. Aligned with the minimalist depiction style, which, according to Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013), evokes emotional distance between characters and the reader, readers are invited to appreciate and observe the scenes. Furthermore, the characters are depicted in a horizontal, oblique angle detaching readers from the main character, who is also depicted in long shots. In other words, all his body appears in the images, which helps to maintain social distance between readers and *Bárbaro*.

The complicating action is built up interpersonally through the system of feeling. Such system encompasses the complementary meaning of visual affect –realized by the depiction of emotion in facial features or bodily stance. Thus, visual affect is depicted in a crescendo of *Bárbaro*’s

emotion, which is provided by the little barbarian's facial expressions: firstly he looks sad and disappointed with the corners of his mouth down (Figure 8), until he ends up by bursting out in tears (Figures 9 and 12), when he finally notices that the adventure has reached its end.

Regarding color choices and the way they create an emotional effect on the viewer through the system of ambience, in the selected book, we can observe a balance between warm and cool colors, as the warmer colors, such as yellow hues and red, juxtapose with cooler greens and blues. Thus, the mixture of water colors, even when depicting monsters, construct a light atmosphere throughout the story.

Another aspect regarding interpersonal meaning used in *Bárbaro* is the graduation system which is complemented by the compositional meaning system of salience to construe *Bárbaro*'s enemies as a 'big challenge', extolling the character's virtues. Such 'big challenge' notion is built by the realization of number quantification, with a high number of eagles (Figure 3) and snakes (Figure 4), for example, and extent quantification, where monsters take up a considerable amount of available space (Figures 5 and 6). Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013, p. 45) explain that "[q]uantification choices can play an important role in ensuring an attitudinal response in the reader, often working together with other interpersonal choices".

To conclude the analysis of the three metafunctions in the selected book, we refer now to the three types of compositional meanings: information value, framing, and salience. Also some attention will be given to color choices and its relation with framing.

### **2.3 Compositional/ textual meanings in *Bárbaro***

Concerning the three main types of compositional meanings, it can be observed that in *Bárbaro* images are [unbound], that is they are not enclosed by margins –other than the page edge, and they allow readers to be "invited into the story world", as suggested by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013, p. 104). This way, the choices of unbound images which are, at the same time, decontextualized, as there is no explicit setting in the story, help to focus attention on *Bárbaro*'s actions and attributes, as well as on his enemies.

Regarding information value and the orientation of the images on the page layout, it is possible to see the main character moving from left and right, as well as up and down, as he moves from the bottom part of the

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Verônica  
Constanty

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104

page on the left-hand side to the top part of the page on the right-hand side. The construal of Bárbaro's up-and-down movement, can be seen, for instance, in Figure 3, where he is depicted on the bottom of the left page, and in Figure 4, where he is on the top of the right-hand side page. Such up and down movement, however, does not seem to represent the "ideal" on the top page and the "real" information on the bottom page, as suggested by Kress and van Leuween (2006). In fact, it is connected to the story to suggest the movement of the carousel, even though this movement can only be more clearly identified when the real carousel appears.

Information value helps to construct Bárbaro's expectations, as well as his counter expectation. Towards the final pages of the book, we see an 'unfulfilled' sequence, with the main character on the page on the left, where the Given information is usually displayed –according Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)–, in opposition to a blank page, where the New actions should be exhibited. Thus, when realizing that there were no more of the monsters' actions/ attacks, Bárbaro is 'taken by surprise'.

Likewise, it is interesting to observe that the carousel is now on the page on the left, now a Given, as proposed by GVD, while Bárbaro, now a little crying boy, is holding hands with an adult who is walking to the right, almost reaching the end of the page. Such distribution of the images on the page seems to highlight the carousel as the context in which Bárbaro's adventures took place, and to suggest that Bárbaro is literally leaving the adventure behind, as he moves to right, where new events will probably occur.

Still regarding the compositional/ textual meanings, colors in the book are mostly water colors, and they clearly define background-foreground, that is, they contribute to distinguish the white page from the figure, helping readers to focus their attention on the main character's actions. Due to the use of water color as a light and fresh technique, we observe that it is difficult to firmly frame images, as they gradually fade away, such as the boy's daydreams, which seems to us appropriate for this specific story. The colors are not enclosed in a thick black line that might firmly define pictures; on the contrary, the colors move and spread with the amount of water used in the same way the story moves and spreads, and the narrative evolves. Water colors imply transparency like the boy's adventure.

With the analysis carried out in our study, we hope to have shown how meaning can be construed visually in a wordless picture book. In order to do so, we explored the representational/ideational, interac-



tive/interpersonal and compositional/textual meanings, from which we highlight the way these meanings complement each other, so as to foreground the main character's actions and shifts on the narrative. In this sense, the ideational content allows us to identify, through characters' depiction (of symbolic attributes and physical features) both the identification of the characters' actions and circumstances, as well as the relation between characters. The representational/ideational choices regarding the pace of events are also important to construct the shift on the narrative, which is reinforced by the compositional distribution of the characters on the page layout, highlighting Kress and van Leeuwen's notions (2006) of information value (given and new information). Interpersonally, readers are kept in an appreciative stance, as suggested by the drawing style, long shots and no eye contact with the characters. Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) suggest that such type of interpersonal choices help to construe a kind of social commentary, from which children are positioned to 'observe' and 'learn' through the story. Perhaps, this is where the irony of *Bárbaro* lies: besides all the imaginative world constructed by children -which allows boys and girls to become brave warriors and super heroes -parents have the (super) power to end up stories. We now turn to our final remarks related to multimodal analysis in general and to our study, specifically.

## **Conclusion**

For a multimodal analysis, and considering any text as a whole, the three metafunctions (representational/ideational, interactive/interpersonal and compositional/textual meanings) should be examined. A close look at the ideational meanings and the way the participants are depicted contributes to situate and contextualize the story: when and how they (re)appear, the types of actions that are performed by the characters and how they relate to each other, as well as the circumstances of time and place.

On interactive/interpersonal meanings, it is interesting to observe that readers' gaze may be aligned or not with the characters mainly by visual focalization. Besides, the drawing style, the shot size, and the angle are important interpersonal aspects in the construction of a relationship between readers and characters. Similarly, the matter of color choices and graduation, in terms of force, constitute important notions related to readers' feelings in response to the story.

Concerning compositional meanings, understanding how framing operates to foreground certain characters and/or depicted objects, in consonance with other textual components, such as color, and the distribution of information on the pages, for example, is also relevant when investigating and exploring visual narratives.

If, with Kress (1998, p. 21) we believe that “[a] text, any text, is a microcosm of the social world in which it is made”, analysis of an aesthetically valued text such as *Bárbaro* may contribute to the development of multimodal literacies. We emphasize the relevance of the Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), as well as Painter, Martin and Unsworth’s (2013) work on visual narratives for teachers to start working with a multimodal literacy perspective. The discussions, metalanguage and the examples offered in these sources and others mentioned in this article may hopefully contribute to readers’ interpretive and productive possibilities in terms of multimodal meaning-making processes.

Wordless picture books can constitute a valuable tool to introduce young readers to basic aspects that construct any narrative, such as: 1) the representation of participants and actions and their relevance to create the unfolding events; 2) the circumstances of place and time; 3) the processes/actions and the sequence of events which define the narrative phases; 4) the focus and the major information foregrounded in the compositional arrangement.

Furthermore, taking into account the alignment between reader and character, we also suggest the observation of different interactive/interpersonal dimensions of images used to engage readers/viewers persuasively, so they may feel aligned (or not!) with the stance communicated by the text/images. We particularly highlight the use of wordless picture books to gradually introduce the notion of intermodality among verbiage and image to be explored when readers start to read verbal texts.

Aligned with Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013, p. 156) we believe books for young readers “are not only enjoyable and engaging” ... “but offer a vital “training” to sensitize them in how to read narrative texts (including monomodal ones) in ways that are educationally valued”.

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Constanty

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106

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108

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*Meaning  
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109

