

Multimodal Translation and Ideological Representation in Picture Books: A Case Study of *King and King*

Roberto Martínez Mateo, Universidad de Castilla La Mancha

Abstract

This paper presents a multimodal contrastive analysis of the picture book King and King (De Haan & Nijland 2000) and its Spanish translation. By integrating Halliday's (2004) functional systemic linguistics, Kress & van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics, and Nikolajeva & Scott's (2001) taxonomy of text–image relationships—expanded by Martínez (2022)—the study explores how linguistic and visual choices interact to construct and translate representations of non-traditional princesses and homosexual couples. The analysis reveals that translation decisions are influenced by the visual narrative, resulting in linguistic modulations that challenge traditional gender stereotypes. Findings show that complementary, expanding, and counterpoint relations between text and image play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive meanings and redefining the portrayal of gender and sexuality in the target text. The study concludes that picture book translation is an ideologically charged, multimodal process through which translators act as mediators of cultural and ethical values.

Keywords: *gender stereotypes, multimodality, picture book translation, text–image interaction, inclusivity*

1. Introduction

Picture books (PBs) have long proven to be an invaluable resource for addressing complex and sensitive topics within the educational and cultural spheres (Evans 2015). Built upon narrative and visual interaction, PBs provide an engaging medium through which issues like identity, equality, and diversity can be explored in accessible yet profound ways (Colomer 2018). As Fernández (1996) notes, one of the challenges in studying children's literature is the fluidity of its definition, which encompasses a wide range of multimodal texts—from illustrated albums to digital adaptations—making it both heterogeneous and theoretically rich (O'Sullivan 2013).

Another issue confronted by PBs is that the critical perception of the public was that, as it falls within the scope of children's literature, they did not deserve to be called “literature”, but something second-rate, with a few notable and time-honored exceptions (Lathey 2016: 17). Added to this, the didactic purpose of PBs has justified the great abuses they have undergone (Alderete & Owen 2019), arguing that they were done for the benefit of infancy, PBs' theoretical main audience. It is precisely this formative-didactic value what has led to turn the PB into a dangerous genre for those who made a biased use of PBs (Fernández 2000: 232). Historically, PBs were often dismissed as inferior or didactic tools (Lathey 2016), yet recent scholarship has demonstrated their complexity as multimodal cultural artefacts capable of shaping ideological values. Through their visual and verbal narratives, PBs act as semiotic systems that transmit collective memories, beliefs, and social models (Svensson 2020). This influence renders them powerful vehicles for ideological negotiation, especially in translation, where linguistic and cultural transfers intersect.

In the last two decades, translation studies has increasingly addressed the role of PBs as sites of ideological and multimodal negotiation (Oittinen 2000; Kümmerling-Meibauer 2015). Authors such as Shavit (1986), O’Sullivan (2013), and Lathey (2016) have examined how translation mediates between cultures, particularly in relation to adaptation, censorship, and visual-verbal interaction. Leonardi (2020) expands this discussion by framing translation as a dynamic process of ideological propagation, where cultural values and ethical principles are not merely transferred but reshaped. Consequently, the translation of children’s literature becomes a powerful agent in the construction and perpetuation—or transformation—of ideological systems.

PBs are a multimodal ensemble where, as Lathey puts (2016: 55), there happens a sophisticated orchestration of text and image that demands a deep knowledge of multimodality and semiotics. It is precisely this text-image interaction which calls for a multidisciplinary approach from multimodal and critical discourse analysis. Hence, research in multimodal works has gained momentum and has already become a trendy research avenue in children’s books translation (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2015; Oittinen et al. 2018).

Amongst other scholars, Colomer (2010) and Pascua Febles (2016) highlight the fact that children’s literature has become more prone to cover topics previously regarded as inappropriate for children, namely gender stereotypes and homosexuality, to cite but a few. Despite this step forward, it has been checked that those PBs where these delicate issues are not central to the development of the story are more easily accepted (Febles 2016: 118).

PBs are part of the larger textual genre of children’s literature; yet they hold their particularities. The distinguishing feature of a PB is its graphic preponderance in quantitative terms. Here, illustrations cannot just be a mere accompaniment to the textual mode, but an active agent in meaning construction. Thus, a PB “is the result of a relationship between text and images such that neither would make sense in isolation” (Lathey 2016: 58). This intersemiotic connection established between the visual and the textual narrative generates a brand-new meaning construction that always leaves room for a personal interpretation by the reader, whomever it may be, to fill in the unavoidable interpretative gaps (Sipe 1998) on the side of the reader. In addition, translators of PBs are one kind of these possible readers that face the meaning construction of these cultural and social products and are agents who can intervene in the meaning transfer. But with the translator being the first reader, his task to convey meaning from one language/culture into another may result in the transference of unconscious nuances in the target text (TT) that may be imbued by different motives.

As García de Toro (2014) puts it, children’s literature is poliedric and biased as it has traditionally been considered a minor genre. Subsequently, this undervaluation on the hands of the diverse stakeholders has materialised in the cuts, adaptations, omissions, adjustments, and other offensive acts done to children’s literature over the years, as previous studies have extensively proved (Alvstad 2010; Martínez-Mateo 2015; Alderete & Owen 2019). It comes then as no surprise that controlling lobbies in the publishing industry have exerted their various types of influence over the final output of these so-called minor works, with a view to shaping belief systems at their discretion (Shavit 1986). This ideological manipulation in the translation of children’s literature has been made overt over the years on account of ethical and moral issues such as censorship and taboos of sensitive topics (Leonardi 2020). The PB under the magnifying glass here delves into gender studies and, more specifically, gender stereotypes, a question with a long tradition, as prove the numerous works by Sunderland (2012), Janet Evans (2015) and Moya-Guijarro & Cañamares-Torrijos (2020), for example. In particular, the work by Sunderland (2012) delves deep into how gender features are construed through language

and how characters are shaped through linguistic resources to create predetermined gender stereotypes.

Over the past few years, there is a wealth of PBs devoted to gender representations of various types, though they basically study the main characters (Evans & Davies 2000), amongst which some have focused on the many representations of parenting (Sunderland & McGlashan 2010; Moya-Guijarro & Ventola 2022). However, little attention has been paid to analysing the gender-stereotyping of women in secondary characters who also play their part in configuring the reader's cultural conceptions and stereotypes.

A theoretical framework for gender stereotyping moves beyond a simple traditional vs. non-traditional binary. It can be understood as a system of widely shared, oversimplified, and essentialist beliefs about the attributes, behaviours, and social roles deemed appropriate for men and women. These stereotypes are not merely descriptive but are prescriptive and normative, reinforcing a heteropatriarchal ideology that privileges male dominance and heterosexuality. This system often operates through a series of foundational binaries: active/passive, public/private, rational/emotional, and powerful/submissive. In this framework, masculinity is stereotypically associated with the first term of each binary (active, public, rational, powerful), while femininity is confined to the second (passive, private, emotional, submissive). These constructs are not natural but are dynamically produced and reproduced through discourse, including the multimodal discourse of children's literature (Sunderland 2012). Precisely, this preliminary study seeks to be part of an increasingly booming body of research on children's literature and the representations of non-traditional princesses and homosexual couples. Authors interested in these issues, such as Lester (2014) and Soler-Quílez (2016), contend that introducing in PBs characters whose sexual orientation does not fit into heteronormativity could pave the way for shifting the present situation of disregard of non-hegemonic discourses. In the same vein, empirical studies such as Sunderland & McGlashan's (2010) uses a selected corpus to review how visible homoparental families are. While studies increasingly address challenging topics like gender and homosexuality (Colomer 2010; Pascua Febles 2016), little attention has been paid to how translation, as a multimodal process, shapes the portrayal of secondary female characters. This paper fills this gap by investigating the translator's verbal choices in relation to the visual narrative. Despite the emerging trend of publications in this field having already tackled several topics, there are still many which have been understudied, as for example the representation of non-traditional princesses who are not the main characters of their PBs. This study situates itself within this growing field by focusing on *King and King*, a groundbreaking picture book that reimagines the fairy-tale paradigm through the inclusion of a homosexual couple and a diverse array of princesses. The analysis builds on the assumption that gender and sexuality representations are not static entities, but multimodal constructs articulated through text-image interaction and translation. Drawing on Halliday's (2004) ideational metafunction and Ketola's (2017) taxonomy of equivalence, this paper examines how linguistic and visual narratives converge or diverge to construct alternative models of identity.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are threefold: (a) to analyse the representational metafunction in the source text (ST); (b) to contrast linguistic and visual equivalences between source and target versions; and (c) to determine how text-image relationships, following Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) and Martínez (2022), influence the translator's choices and the construction of gender stereotypes. By combining linguistic, visual, and ideological perspectives, this research seeks to contribute to the expanding body of scholarship on multimodal translation and on the role of translated PBs as instruments of social change.

The sections of this paper are organized as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical framework and state of the art, outlining the linguistic, multimodal, translational, and ideological foundations that underpin this study and culminating in the integration of these perspectives into a unified analytical model. Section 3 describes the methodology adopted, detailing the procedures for the multimodal and contrastive analysis of *King and King*. Section 4 presents the results derived from the linguistic and visual analyses, highlighting how translation decisions are shaped by the visual narrative. Section 5 summarizes the results and, finally, Section 6 discusses the findings and draws the main conclusions, emphasizing the translator's role as a semiotic and ideological mediator in the construction of inclusive meanings in picture book translation.

2. State of the art

In the last few decades, multimodal studies have flourished in various fields, translation studies included. Amongst the most renowned, we cannot but mention Oittinen (2000) and Lewis (2001) regarding PB translation. The multimodal burden embedded in PBs turns them into a highly sophisticated element where text and illustration intermingle to create new aesthetic wholes that forge new interpretative possibilities (Sipe 2012: 4). As a sign of the complexity of such relation, see the studies by Nodelman (1988), Sipe (1998) and Nikolajeva & Scott (2001). All of them share the common ground that the full understanding of a PB is born from the verbal–textual interrelation. Hence, bearing in mind the dynamic character of the verbal–visual relationship, the meaning of the message would not be complete if only one of these items in this two-legged creature would be considered. That's why it is unavoidable to deal with word–image interplay when trying to untangle the full understanding of a PB. And this task inevitably involves two complementary approaches. One is linguistic, comprising two steps: first, an analysis of the source text and, second, the translational job (target text). The other approach is the one dealing with the multimodal relationship that stirs between words and images whose mutual impact enriches them both to generate new meanings.

2.1. Linguistic foundations

From a linguistic perspective, and given the multimodal nature of PBs, this study uses Halliday's (2004) functional systemic approach to linguistically analyse one of the three metafunctions, the ideational, and to specifically determine the actor, the process, the participants, their attributes, and the circumstances of the narrative. However, as PBs are multimodal products, it is also necessary to consider the communicative task that the visual narrative plays in the transmission of the message in the PB. In this study, we focus on the ideational metafunction which is encoded through the grammatical system of transitivity, and which consists in the linguistic expression of human experience through the processes, participants and associated circumstances that are present in the clause structure.

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004: 172), there are various processes that are central (i.e. material, mental and relational), and intermediate ones, such as behavioural (between material and mental), verbal (between mental and relational) and existential (between relational and material). Normally, each process has a type of role associated with it. Thus, in material processes there is an *Actor*, who performs the action, that affects a *Participant* (*Goal/Object*). Mental processes are carried out by a *Sensor/Processor* and affect what is

processed (*Phenomenon*). Relational processes refer to abstract relationships between two or more objects. These relations can be attributive (x belongs to class y) or identifying (x equals y). Moreover, relational processes construct three types of relations depending on the process: intensive (x is y); possessive (x has y) and circumstantial (x is / is in y). In behavioural processes, the actor is called the *Conductor*, and the phenomenon is known as the *Subject*. In verbal processes, the initiator of the linguistic exchange is the *Speaker* who addresses a *Receiver* by means of the *Said/Report*. Existential processes merely indicate that something exists or happens. Finally, there are the circumstantial elements, which are common to all processes and actors and their meaning does not vary to express spatial–temporal location, manner, or cause.

2.2. Multimodal foundations

The pioneering work of Nodelman (1988) and Sipe (1998, 2012) framed PBs as dialogic spaces where words and images interact to construct layered meanings. Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) later formalised this interdependence through their typology of text–image relationships—symmetrical, complementary, expanding, counterpoint, and contradictory—which remains one of the most comprehensive models for understanding visual–verbal intersemiosis. Their work underscores that text and image seldom tell the same story; instead, meaning arises in the interpretive tension between the two modes.

The translation of PBs is a process where the rich multimodal load of the ST must necessarily be kept in mind, which entails not only translating the verbal narrative in isolation, but it must also be considered in its intimate interrelation with the visual narrative, which can condition somehow the way in which the reader (and the translator, who would be its first reader), interprets the words (Nodelman 1988). However, the starting point of any classification of the semiosis generated between text and image, and that of Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) is no exception, is that these two narrative modes never tell the same story. It is precisely this discordance in the content of the message carried by each narrative mode that forces the reader (in this case, the translator) to embark on the task of filling the interpretative gap emerging between what he reads and what he sees. The imaginary space hidden in the interplay between words and images is the central notion of PBs (Styles & Watson 1996). Or in the words of Nodelman (1998: 200), in PBs, the whole is much more than the sum of its parts (in reference to text and image). For this reason, we resort to Nikolajeva & Scott's (2001) classification of word–image relationship, one of the most complete ones. They set five categories to designate text–image interaction in PBs. *Symmetrical* (SYM), when both modes tell the same story; *Complementary* (COM), when both modes complement each other; *Expanding* (EXP), where the images amplify the meaning of the text or vice versa; *Counterpoint* (COU), when the modes collaborate to offer a message that goes beyond their individual scope; *Contradictory* (CON), when they offer contradictory information. Yet, and in view of the examples analysed in this PB, we have found cases where there is a lack of relationship between text and image since one of the modes is not present. Consequently, another category has been added to Nikolajeva & Scott's (2001) classification to reflect this absence of a multimodal (text–image) relationship. This category has been named *Incomplete* (INC) (Martínez 2022) since the message is encoded in only one of the available modes.

Subsequent studies have expanded this typology to accommodate the complexity of contemporary PBs. Martínez (2022) proposed the INC category to describe cases where one mode (visual or verbal) is partially or entirely absent, an addition especially relevant to translation studies. This refinement acknowledges that translators often face situations where verbal transfer cannot fully replicate the multimodal density of the source text, requiring adaptive strategies to maintain coherence and meaning. The inclusion of the INC type thus allows for a more nuanced understanding of multimodal relationships in translation.

2.3. Translation studies and ideological mediation

As for translation and translation studies, it is a relatively new discipline, as Munday (2016) argues, since its founding manifesto (“The name and nature of translation studies”) was presented at the 3rd International Congress of Applied Linguistics held in Copenhagen in 1972. This caters to the fact that in its origins, translation studies has been nourished by other sibling areas of knowledge such as linguistics to outline its first theories. This heritage gave rise to the first postulates that posed the dichotomy between literal translation and free translation. Once these obsolete concepts and practices were overcome, in the 1980s, a paradigm shift in translation studies took place. The main proponent of this change was German functionalism led by Nord (1997), among other authors. Until 1980, the dominant models of translation assessment, as exemplified by Catford, Nida, and Newmark, were fundamentally based on a comparative analysis between the TT and the ST. The ST was the ultimate yardstick for measuring faithfulness, accuracy, and success. The subsequent revolution in translation studies, led by Toury and others, explicitly rejected this product-focused, ST-centric view, shifting attention to the function and reception of the translation within the target culture. This shift is what marks the transition from a primarily linguistic to a cultural and sociological discipline.

The functionalist paradigm in translation shifts the focus from the ST to the contextual and situational conditions of the TT. Instead of evaluating translations as correct or incorrect, functionalism judges them by their adequacy or appropriateness within their communicative context. This approach replaces the traditional notions of formal and dynamic equivalence with functional equivalence, emphasizing the translator’s role in achieving meaning adequacy that is both contextualized—relevant to a specific communicative act—and dynamic—sensitive to the evolving nature of cultures and meanings. Following Jakobson’s (2000) assertion that absolute equivalence is impossible, the translator’s goal becomes achieving functional adequacy by ensuring that the TT produces a suitable response in its audience while remaining faithful to the ST’s intended meaning.

For the study’s analytical purposes, the term *elements* refers to the translation units between which equivalences are drawn. Since scholars disagree on what constitutes a translation unit—ranging from morphemes and words to entire texts—the study adopts Nord’s (1988) practical definition. According to Nord, a translation unit is any segment of the source language or text that the translator treats as a unit during the translation process. This definition allows for flexibility in analysis without engaging in debates over the precise scope or hierarchy of translation units.

In translation studies, the shift from product-oriented to process-oriented approaches (Toury 1995; Nord 1997; Munday 2016) redefined translation as a socio-cultural and functional act rather than a mechanical linguistic operation. Functionalist frameworks such as Nord’s (1988, 2009) and Ketola’s (2017) models foreground adequacy and contextualisation, emphasising that translation must be assessed according to its communicative purpose within

the target culture. In the context of PBs, this perspective is essential, as the translator's role extends beyond linguistic equivalence to include semiotic interpretation and cultural negotiation.

Leonardi (2020) further articulates this view by describing translation as an ideological act that shapes and disseminates cultural values. Within children's literature, this process carries particular ethical weight because young audiences are especially susceptible to the ideological underpinnings of narratives. Consequently, translators act not only as mediators between languages but also as agents who influence the representation of gender, family, and identity.

2.4. Gender, diversity, and representation in picture books

Research in children's literature has increasingly turned toward the study of gender, sexuality, and inclusivity. Authors such as Evans (2015), Sunderland (2012), and Moya-Guijarro & Ventola (2022) have examined how PBs construct or challenge traditional gender roles through both linguistic and visual strategies. These studies underscore the didactic and ideological power of PBs in shaping young readers' perceptions of social norms. Within this broader context, the representation of non-traditional princesses and same-sex couples has emerged as a significant field of inquiry. Scholars such as Lester (2014) and Soler-Quílez (2016) highlight the transformative potential of such portrayals to disrupt heteronormative narratives and broaden the spectrum of acceptable identities in children's literature. Works like *King and King* exemplify this trend, positioning PBs as tools for promoting empathy, diversity, and critical literacy.

2.5. Multimodality and translation of ideologically sensitive content

The translation of ideologically charged PBs—those that address gender diversity, homosexuality, or non-traditional family models—demands heightened multimodal awareness. As Oittinen et al. (2018) argue, translating PBs requires attending to how visual and verbal modes mutually influence meaning. The translator's engagement with visual cues, compositional elements, and emotional tone ensures that the ideological intent of the original is not diluted or distorted in the target version.

Studies such as Moya-Guijarro & Martínez-Mateo (2022) show that translation decisions frequently correlate with visual prompts, particularly in the depiction of gendered actions and emotions. When dealing with unconventional characters—such as active princesses or same-sex partners—translators may employ linguistic strategies that align with or counterbalance the visual narrative. This responsiveness to visual input underscores translation as a multimodal and interpretive act rather than a one-dimensional transfer.

2.6. Theoretical integration

The present study builds on this interdisciplinary foundation, merging linguistic, translational, and multimodal perspectives to analyse *King and King* as a paradigmatic example of inclusive children's literature. It combines Halliday's (2004) model of transitivity for linguistic representation, Ketola's (2017) taxonomy of translation equivalence, and Nikolajeva & Scott's (2001) multimodal classification, expanded by Martínez (2022). By integrating these frameworks, the study seeks to trace how text–image relationships mediate

ideological meaning and how translation choices reshape the representation of gender and sexuality.

In sum, current scholarship supports the view that PB translation is an inherently multimodal and ideological process. Translators operate within overlapping systems of visual interpretation and cultural adaptation, and their decisions significantly affect how readers perceive non-traditional gender identities and same-sex relationships. This study contributes to this growing body of research by providing an empirically grounded, multimodal examination of how such representations are negotiated through the intersemiosis of text and image in *King and King*.

3. Methodology

The method employed in this study is a multimodal content analysis. According to Serafini & Reid (2019: 3), this is a modified version of qualitative content analysis. It is based on various interpretive research designs, also on deductive and inductive argumentation, and theories of multimodality used to study and analyse a given corpus of multimodal occurrences. However, assuming a contrastive multimodal analysis of content demands paying heed to the potentialities and limitations of the verbal and the visual mode of communication. As a result, we will carry out a qualitative contrastive multimodal analysis that constitutes a flexible method to cater for the different aspects of the linguistic and visual content and their relationship. The methodological design is grounded in the assumption that translation in multimodal texts must be interpreted as an intersemiotic and ideological act (Ketola 2017; Oittinen & Ketola 2014; Martínez 2022). Therefore, the analysis seeks not only equivalence at the linguistic level but also functional and ideological adequacy in relation to the visual narrative.

Given its exploratory nature and limited scope, this work constitutes a pilot study focused on the analysis of an illustrated album. The methodologies employed in this study are various, depending on the specific analysis of each section. In the following two sections (4.1 and 4.2), a descriptive-quantitative analysis is carried out; in 4.1, to describe how experience is epitomized through the representational metafunction in the ST and, jointly, to contrastively analyse the linguistic pairs between ST and TT and establish the equivalences between their elements according to the classification proposed by Ketola (2017); in 4.2, to describe the text-image relations according to a taxonomy based on the model of Nikolajeva & Scott (2001). Section 5 presents the outcomes of the analysis, and Section 6 draw up the findings of the paper.

The picture book *King and King*, written by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland and translated into Spanish by Ediciones Serres (2004), challenges traditional gender stereotypes through the story of a prince urged by his mother to marry a princess and take over the throne. After meeting several princesses from different countries, none appeal to him until he meets Princess Magdalena's brother, Prince Charming, with whom he instantly falls in love and eventually marries. The book addresses themes of diversity, equality, and nontraditional relationships, offering a progressive view of love and gender roles that contrasts with the conventional portrayal of men as active and dominant and women as domestic and passive.

4. Analysis

The analytical process unfolds in the following steps:

1. Selection of representative instances from *King and King* that exemplify gender-related content and translation shifts.
2. Identification of transitivity structures in the ST and TT to determine participant roles and processes.
3. Categorisation of translation equivalences according to Ketola's (2017) model.
4. Cross-referencing with visual data to identify the type of text–image relationship following Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) and Martínez (2022).
5. Interpretive synthesis, where linguistic, visual, and ideological findings are integrated to explain how translation mediates multimodal meaning and ideological stance.

The foregoing sequence provides the methodological architecture for the paper. The analysis proceeds by applying the first four steps to each cluster of representative examples. Therefore, the subsequent sections (4.1 and 4.2) are structured not as separate applications of each step, but as integrated analyses where transitivity and equivalence (Section 4.1) and multimodal intersemiosis (Section 4.2) are examined in relation to the chosen instances. The final interpretive synthesis, detailed in Sections 5 and 6, emerges from these findings, offering a holistic explanation of the translation's ideological mediation.

4.1. Linguistic analysis

According to Halliday (2004), the ideational metafunction makes it possible to express on the linguistic level the Actors (person or thing), the actions performed (Processes), which attribute qualities (Attributes) and are framed in a context. For this purpose, a table has been drawn up in which the most salient instances of ST are listed (see Table 1). As for their translation, the fidelity and degree of linguistic equivalence of the analysed units is reviewed by means of a comparison between ST and TT, bearing in mind the context in which they appear. Thus, the contrastive linguistic study has used the categorisation of equivalent elements proposed by Ketola (2017: 52). This classification establishes six possible categories that correspond to the same number of equivalences to describe the relationship maintained between the linguistic components of ST and TT, i.e., their equivalences in a cross-linguistic translation. Each category has an alphabetical code to facilitate its identification.

Table 1: Textual relations of equivalence between ST and TT items

Code	Description
A	Item of the TT corresponds to its literal verbal equivalent of the ST
B	Item of the TT is more precise than its literal verbal equivalent of the ST
C	Item of the TT is more general than its literal verbal equivalent of the ST
D	Item of the TT does not correspond to its literal verbal equivalent of the ST
E	Item of the TT has no verbal equivalent in the ST
F	Item of the ST has no verbal equivalent in the TT

Due to the length and scope of this paper, a selection of the most representative examples appearing in *King and King* has been extracted for analysis and commentary. The following tables (Tables 2–10) compile these clauses broken down according to their representational function analysis in the ST and paired with their equivalents in the TT grounded in Ketola's (2017) equivalence taxonomy.

Instance 1 (see Table 2), in which the ST is expressed by means of an existential process (*lived: vivían* 'who lived'), is transferred to the TT broadening its scope by including the prototypical formula of the story (*Érase una vez* 'Once upon a time') which, however, does not find its natural equivalent in the ST (*Once upon a time*). The actors in this existential process have been given descriptive nuances in the TT about their age (*anciana* 'elderly', *joven* 'young') that do not appear in the ST and that contribute to establish with greater accuracy the range of their ages by expanding their description (linguistic relation code B). Besides, the translation of the circumstantial is codified as C since it is more general in the TT than in the ST.

Table 2: Instance 1. Existential process

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	a queen, the young crown prince and the crown kitty	lived			On the tallest mountain above the town
TT	una anciana reina, un joven príncipe heredero y una gata con corona (‘an elderly queen, a young crown prince and a cat wearing a crown’)	Érase una vez (‘Once upon a time’) que vivían (‘who lived’)			en lo alto de una montaña (‘at the top of a mountain’)
Linguistic relation code	B	A			C

The queen is the actor of this material process (*had ruled: llevaba reinando* ‘had been ruling’, see Table 3). In its translation into the TT, the term undergoes a double modulation process. On the one hand, the translator has chosen the noun *dama* (‘lady’) which is a more general term (hence the linguistic code C) since it refers to a very broad collective, instead of choosing the ordinary equivalent which would have been *reina* (‘queen’), which would express in Spanish its more common meaning with greater neatness. On the other hand, the TT adds an age qualifier (*anciana* ‘elderly’) to this noun, which has no equivalent in the ST (linguistic code E). In the same way, the attribute of the relational process of the circumstantial character (*very tired*) incorporates the quality of *harta* (‘fed up’) which has no correspondence with any element of the ST (linguistic code E) and implies an extension of the information exclusively offered by the textual narrative about the mood of the old woman.

Table 3: Instance 2. Material process

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	The queen	had ruled			for many long years
TT	La anciana dama (‘The elderly queen’)	llevaba reinando (‘had been reigning’)			ya muchos años ... (‘for many (long) years’)
Linguistic relation code	C / E	A			A
ST	and she	was		tired	
TT	y (ella) (‘and she’)	estaba (‘was’)		harta y muy cansada (‘fed up and very tired’)	
Linguistic relation code	A	A		B / E	

While the ST material process is expressed with the verb *to make* (see Table 4), whose semantic scope is rather ample, when it is transferred to the TT, its meaning is rendered much more precisely with the verb *ceder* ('give in') (linguistic code B) which the translator chose instead of its more common English equivalent, in similar contexts, which would be the verb *hacer que* ('make'). The ST actor is not manifested and appears as implicit when referring to *all that talking*. However, when translated into Spanish, the actor is made explicit when referring to *la reina* ('the queen') (linguistic code B). On the other hand, the translation of the attribute *dizzy* into Spanish turns the word category into a different one when the adverb of manner *completamente* ('completely') is used, which modulates the degree of the quality (linguistic code B) but lacks an equivalent in the ST (linguistic code E).

Table 4: Instance 3. Material process 2

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	all that talking	had made	the Prince	dizzy	by the evening,
TT	La reina siguió hablando y hablando (‘The queen kept talking and talking’)	por fin, cedió (‘and she finally gave in’)	y el príncipe (‘and the prince’)	completamente mareado (‘completely dizzy’)	hasta la noche (‘until nightfall’)
Linguistic relation code	B	B	A	B / E	A

In Table 5, in the circumstantial, the adverbial phrase *No sooner* is used to indicate that one event happens immediately after another. It is frequently associated with a verb tense, the past perfect, and is followed by the preposition *than*. Therefore, since it is linked to the past perfect tense, the event to which it refers (event 1, *had finished*) occurred at an older time in the past in relation to the other event mentioned (event 2, *was shown*), which happens in a later past. In this case, event 1, *had finished*, should be prior to the 2nd event, *was shown (to the door)*. However, the translation of this temporal marker (*No sooner*) inverts the order of events in the TT and it is *Pero antes de que* ('But before it was finished') when *she had already been shown (to the door)*. This temporal inversion of events further emphasizes the fact that they did not even let her finish (linguistic code D) thus altering the given order of the ST.

Table 5: Instance 4. Circumstantial phrase

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	she	had finished	she was shown to the door		No sooner
TT	(ella)	acabara (‘finished’)	ya la habían echado (‘they had already sent her out of the room’)		Pero antes de que (‘But before it was finished’)
Linguistic relation code	A	A	B		D

When transferring this material process (see Table 6, *had flown*) to the TT (*llegó haciendo* ‘arrived performing’), its meaning in the original has been made less concrete (linguistic code C). On the other hand, the object of this process, *with her magic act*, has acquired a greater degree of specificity than its ST equivalent by adding *malabarismos* (‘juggling’) (code B), which is not necessarily an inherent part of a magic act.

Table 6: Instance 5. Material process 3

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	Princess Dolly	had flown	with her magic act		all the way from Texas
TT	La princesa Dolly (‘Princess Dolly’)	llegó... (‘arrived’) haciendo... (‘performing’)	malabarismos y magia (‘magic and juggling’)		desde Texas (‘from Texas’)
Linguistic relation code	A	C	B		A

In Table 7, what in the ST is a material process (*to come*) has been transferred to TT as a relational process of circumstantial character (*La siguiente fue una sonriente princesa* ‘Next **was** a smiling princess’). Moreover, in this instance 6, it is worth noting the translation into Spanish of the adjective *funny* by an unusual *sonriente* (‘smiling’). According to the Cambridge English-Spanish online dictionary, its first two entries are: 1. Making you smile or laugh; 2. Strange or unusual and not what you expect. Considering only the linguistic level, the more likely translation proposals for this term would be *graciosa* (‘funny, amusing’) or *rara* (‘weird, odd’), instead of the equivalent proposed here, *sonriente* (‘smiling’) (linguistic code D). As a result, this choice adopted by the translator hints at the possibility that something else was taken into consideration in the meaning construction process.

Table 7: Instance 6. Material process 4

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	the funny princess	came		from Greenland	Next
TT	una sonriente princesa (‘a smiling princess’)	Fue (‘was’)		que llegó de Groenlandia (‘came from Greenland’)	La siguiente (‘Next’)
Linguistic relation code	D	A		A	A

The ST clause is expressed in an active voice sentence by means of a material process (*to hit it off*, see Table 8) which is usually associated with informal contexts and accompanied by the adverb *either* to deny something again after having done it previously. In this case, *either* refers to the fact that it did not impress the Prince. It is also noteworthy to remark that in Spanish, the original clause has been turned around to express it through an adversative subordinate clause, introduced by the conjunction *pero* (‘except’) (linguistic code D) where the material process *se enamoró perdidamente de ella* (‘fell madly in love with her’) (linguistic code B) is more precise than its ST equivalent. However, the object of that process which in the ST is limited to the two actors involved (the prince and the princess of Greenland), in the TT refers to a general, much broader addressee (namely by means of the indefinite pronoun *nadie* ‘nobody’).

On the other hand, the instance continues with a causal subordinate clause in the ST introduced by the conjunction *so* whose translation into Spanish does not correspond to the original (code D) since it is translated as *salvo* (‘except’), an adversative conjunction that in this context means *except* and which differs from the causal sense of the conjunction in the ST. Moreover, this phrase is expressed by means of a mental process (*enamorarse* ‘to fall in love’) whose scope and intensity (*perdidamente* ‘deeply/madly’) are expressed in its Spanish version,

although it lacks equivalent in the ST (code B). These instances point at the fact that other factors, information, must have been taken into account when translating the textual narrative.

Table 8: Instance 7. Material process 5

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	The Prince	didn't hit... off with	her either		
TT	the prince	no impresionó (‘did not impress’)	a nadie (‘anyone’)		Pero (‘But’)
Linguistic relation code	A	B	D		E
ST	he	really didn't mind	when his page promptly	fell in love with her	so
TT	que (‘that’)		el paje del príncipe (‘the prince's page’)	se enamoró perdidamente de ella (‘fell madly in love with her’)	Salvo (‘except’)
Linguistic relation code	A		C	B	D

In Table 9, the ST instance is embodied by a material process (*to shed*) accompanied by the object *a tear* whose equivalent in English would have been *derramó una lágrima* (‘shed a tear’) instead of the option chosen, *lloraba* (‘was crying’). However, the TT in Spanish dispenses with the object of the ST to incorporate a circumstantial complement in its place to indicate that this process was carried out without interruption (*sin parar* ‘incessantly’), which lacks an equivalent in the ST (code E).

Table 9: Instance 8. Material process 6

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	The queen	even shed	a tear		
TT	La reina (‘The queen’)	Lloraba (‘wept’)			sin parar (‘incessantly’)
Linguistic relation code	A	C	F		E

In Table 10, the first part of the ST instance takes the form of a mental verb (*to know*) in passive voice that is transferred to the TT with an existential verb (*vivir* ‘to live’) where the sensor (the two princesses) and the phenomenon (King and King) refer to the same people. In addition, the TT has a temporal circumstantial phrase (*Desde entonces* ‘Since then’, code E) that does not appear in the original. The second part of the instance presents a relational process with the verb *to have* that is translated into the TT by a material verb (*descansar* ‘to rest’) inserted in the verbal periphrasis *poder + infinitivo* (‘to be able to/can + infinitive’) to show the possibility of the semantics expressed by the infinitive, which does not coincide with the translation of the equivalent segment in the ST (code D). When comparing the ST and TT processes of this instance, we observe how their translation differs from some of the possible common equivalents expected for such segments. This lack of semantic agreement between syntactically equivalent elements leads us to think that there must be other reasons that motivate such choices and that we will delve into later.

Table 10: Instance 9. Existential process

	Representational metafunction				
	Actor	Process	Goal	Attribute	Circumstantial
ST	The two princes	are known as	King and King		
TT	los principes (‘the princes’)	viven juntos (‘had lived together’)	como Rey y Rey (‘as King and King’)		Desde entonces (‘Since then’)

Linguistic relation code	A	D	A		E
ST	the queen	has some time	for herself		finally
TT	y la reina (‘and the queen’)	puede descansar (‘could rest’)			por fin (‘finally’)
Linguistic relation code	A	D	B		A

In this section, we have analysed the representational metafunction in a selection of instances on the linguistic level where semantic discordances between comparable elements can be observed. These occurrences spark the curiosity to seek a plausible explanation that could be borne in the intersemiosis generated between the verbal and the visual narratives which is studied in the next section.

4.2. Text-image intersemiosis

After the linguistic analysis, the pairs of equivalences explored in the previous section are compared with the visual information of the ST. Now, following Nikolajeva & Scott’s (2001) typology of PB relationships between text and image expanded by Martínez’s (2022), this section deepens the multimodal analysis of *King and King* by focusing on how the interaction between verbal and visual narratives contributes to constructing non-traditional gender identities and same-sex relationships. These relationships are not merely aesthetic configurations; they function ideologically as semiotic mechanisms through which the translator mediates between the visual input and the target-culture expectations.

Symmetrical (SYM) relations—where both modes communicate essentially the same information—are rare in *King and King*, precisely because the album’s subversive ideology relies on multimodal tension rather than redundancy. Still, certain introductory scenes, such as the presentation of the royal family (“a queen, the young crown prince and the crown kitty”, De Haan & Nijland 2000: n.p.), display a near-symmetrical correspondence between text and image, providing narrative stability before the ideological disruption that follows.

More frequent are complementary (COM) relationships, in which each mode supplies information that completes the other, resulting in cohesive meaning. For instance, the depiction of *Princess Dolly* (see Image 1) performing a *magic act* in the ST, rendered as *malabarismos y magia* (‘juggling and magic’) in the TT, illustrates a case of complementary expansion. The translator’s lexical specification responds to the visual depiction of the princess juggling, aligning the textual element with the visual narrative. This synergy not only refines the depiction but also challenges the traditional passivity of princesses: Dolly’s self-presentation as an active performer signals agency, mobility, and occupational identity. The verbal precision in Spanish, motivated by the image, thus reinforces the ideological stance of the book towards empowered femininity.

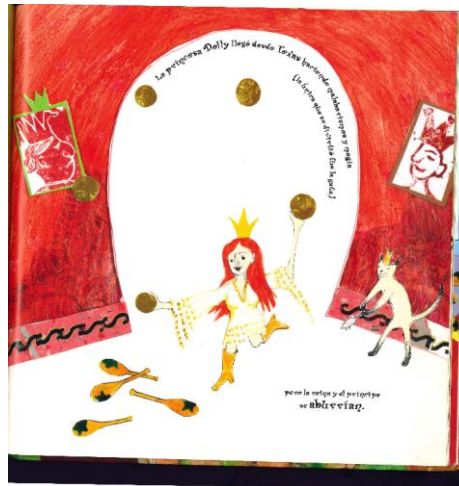


Figure 1: Princess Dolly

Thus, the visual narrative presents us with an atypical princess whose visual representation is closer to that of a circus performer than that of a member of royalty. The following image (Figure 2) shows us again another princess who departs from the traditional canons usually associated to the members of the royal houses.

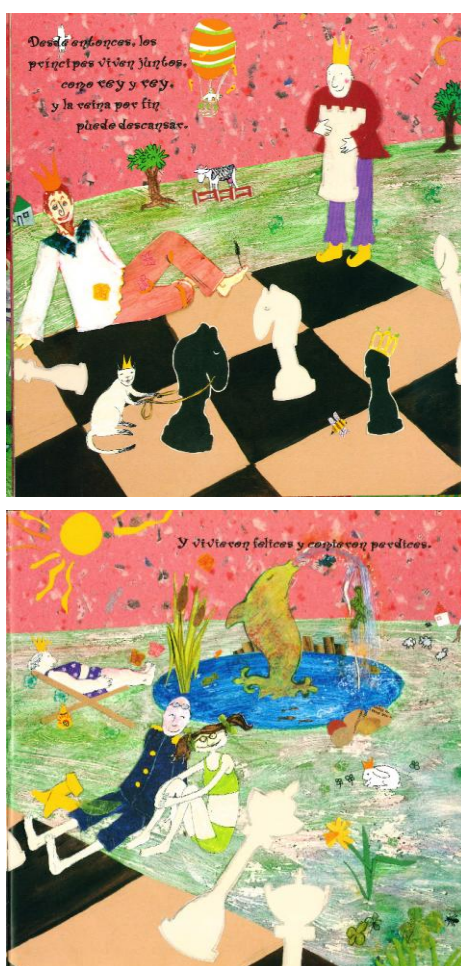


Figure 2: The Princess of Greenland

The most ideologically productive interactions are those of counterpoint (COU) and contradictory (CON) types, where verbal and visual cues diverge or collide to invite critical interpretation. A notable case is the portrayal of the Princess of Greenland. The analysis focuses on a segment classified as type D, which represents the actor in a material process and plays a key semantic role in the image's verbal conceptualization. The phrase *the funny princess* was translated as *princesa sonriente* ('a smiling princess'), a choice that diverges from expected equivalents given the visual context. The princess, depicted with childish attire, pigtails, large glasses, and imperfect teeth, conveys an image closer to *strange* or *peculiar* than simply *smiling*. By highlighting only her smile, the translator overlooks the overall visual cues and foregrounds a positive affect while toning down the visual strangeness, creating a COU relationship between the verbal and visual narratives. The dissonance between textual mildness

and visual peculiarity generates irony and stimulates interpretive agency, encouraging readers to reconsider what counts as beauty by presenting conflicting character portrayals.

A similar counterpoint arises in the closing scene doublespread (Figures 3 and 4) when the text and image jointly redefine masculinity through domestic tranquillity. The two princes' serene posture and gentle engagement in a leisure activity (EXP) visually undermine the hyperactive, heroic masculinity typical of fairy-tale princes. The ST's mental process *are known as King and King* is rendered as the existential *viven juntos como Rey y Rey* ('lived together as King and King'). This translation, prompted by the everyday scene depicted, shifts the focus from external recognition (social naming) to internal experience (shared life), thereby humanizing the homosexual couple and aligning with contemporary discourses of normalisation and inclusivity.



Figures 3 and 4: Playing chess

Along the same lines, the other ST process, a relational process (*to have*), is transferred to the TT as a material process in the form of a verbal periphrasis (*poder + descansar* 'to be able + rest'). Once again, we witness how it is plausible to consider the possibility that the image showing how the queen appears placidly lying in a hammock sunbathing would have led the translator to opt for the periphrasis *can rest* instead of what would be a translation equivalent more in line with the TO, such as *have time for her* (Table 10).

Martínez's (2022) addition of the INC category proves valuable in accounting for moments when one semiotic mode is absent or underrepresented. In *King and King*, these occur when the TT omits verbal reference to a visual cue, such as gestures or background elements. For example, the mountain landscape in the opening spread—visually emphasizing three hills of almost equal height—is simplified in the TT (*en lo alto de una montaña* 'on top of a mountain'), eliminating the superlative of the ST (*on the tallest mountain*). The translator's decision can be interpreted as visually motivated moderation: since the illustration minimizes height difference, the linguistic attenuation achieves coherence at the expense of verbal emphasis. Such incomplete correlations highlight the translator's interpretive agency and demonstrate how omissions can serve coherence rather than loss.

5. Results

This article examines how the interaction between visual and textual narratives in a PB influences the translator's treatment of gender stereotypes. An analysis of 39 translation instances revealed that while nearly half (19) used literal equivalents (code A), the rest showed varying degrees of modification: 9 made meanings more precise (code B), 5 generalised them (code C), and another 5 diverged completely from the source (code D). A few rare cases fell under codes E and F. Similar trends appeared in object and attribute translations, where literal equivalents were often replaced by generalized or imprecise alternatives. The study also highlights how images shaped translation choices—for example, translating *magic act* as *juggling* due to its visual depiction, and replacing *are known as* with *live together* to better reflect the visual portrayal of two kings enjoying a shared activity. Overall, the findings show that visual context significantly guided translation decisions, leading to shifts in meaning and characterization.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This study has examined how the verbal and visual narratives of *King and King* (De Haan & Nijland 2000) interact in translation to construct inclusive representations of gender and sexuality. Drawing upon Halliday's (2004) representational metafunction, Ketola's (2017) taxonomy of translation equivalence, and the multimodal typology of Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) extended by Martínez (2022), the research demonstrates that PB translation is a multimodal and ideological act. The translator emerges not merely as a linguistic intermediary but as a semiotic interpreter who negotiates between the source text's visual cues and the target culture's ideological expectations.

Across these relationship types, the translator emerges as a mediator between the semiotic resources of the PB and the ideological norms of the target culture. Complementary (COM) and expanding (EXP) relations tend to normalize inclusivity by aligning the verbal and visual modes towards coherence and empathy. Counterpoint (COU) and contradictory (CON) relations, by contrast, destabilize heteropatriarchal norms, compelling readers to negotiate meaning and recognize difference. Incomplete (INC) relations, finally, expose the translational negotiation itself—moments in which cultural adaptation or visual fidelity guide verbal attenuation.

The findings reveal that translation choices in *King and King* are significantly influenced by the visual narrative, which often guides linguistic modulation and re-interpretation. COM and EXP text–image relationships foster coherence between verbal and visual elements, promoting inclusivity through depictions of active female characters and normalised portrayals of same-sex love. Conversely, COU and CON relationships generate interpretive tension, inviting critical reflection on conventional notions of gender and beauty. INC relationships, in which one mode is absent or reduced, highlight the translator’s role in maintaining coherence and meaning when textual and visual information diverge.

Through these varied semiotic relations, the translator’s interventions subtly reshape the ideological fabric of the narrative. For instance, the amplification of the queen’s emotional state in the Spanish translation (*harta y muy cansada* ‘fed up and very tired’) aligns with visual cues to enrich character depth, while the shift from *are known as* to *viven juntos* (‘lived together’) transforms external social recognition into a portrayal of domestic intimacy. These examples illustrate how translation mediates not only language but also the ethical and cultural meanings embedded in multimodal storytelling.

From an ideological standpoint, the study underscores that translated PBs operate as dynamic spaces of negotiation where cultural, ethical, and aesthetic values intersect. Translators, as the first readers and mediators, engage in acts of ideological positioning through their interpretive responses to visual and verbal stimuli. In *King and King*, these responses contribute to the deconstruction of heteronormative and patriarchal narratives, encouraging empathy and inclusivity. The translation thus functions as a site of resistance, re-articulating familiar fairy-tale conventions to promote diversity and acceptance.

Pedagogically, these findings reinforce the potential of PBs as tools for fostering critical literacy and social awareness. By exposing young readers to alternative models of love, identity, and gender expression, PBs like *King and King* contribute to developing open-minded and ethically reflective audiences. As Cerrillo (2016) argues, children’s literature plays a foundational role in shaping the social imaginary, and when translated across cultures, it carries the additional responsibility of bridging ideological and linguistic boundaries.

The results of this study highlight the translator’s dual agency as both a linguistic artisan and a multimodal reader. Translation in PBs involves decoding visual messages, interpreting emotional tone, and reconstructing ideological nuances through language. This process often entails balancing faithfulness to the source with sensitivity to the target culture’s sociocultural context. The translator’s interpretive agency becomes especially visible in moments of multimodal dissonance—when text and image diverge—and in the deliberate modulations that enhance coherence or mitigate potential cultural friction.

In sum, this study provides a holistic understanding of *King and King* as a multimodal construct. It recognises the translator’s dual role as linguistic mediator and semiotic interpreter, highlighting how visual cues guide verbal decisions that ultimately shape the ideological and aesthetic identity of the translated PB.

As a pilot study, this research focuses on a single PB and therefore does not aim for statistical generalization. Its strength lies in its qualitative depth, offering detailed insights into multimodal translation processes. Future studies could expand the corpus to include multiple PBs addressing gender and sexuality across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Comparative analyses could further elucidate how translators from diverse backgrounds negotiate similar ideological tensions or employ distinct multimodal strategies.

Additionally, future research might explore reception-oriented perspectives, examining how young readers in different cultures interpret multimodal cues in translated PBs. Such studies would deepen our understanding of how translation mediates ideological meanings not only at the textual level but also at the level of reader response and cultural pedagogy.

Ultimately, this research confirms that the translation of PBs like *King and King* transcends the boundaries of linguistic transfer. It is a multimodal, interpretive, and ethical endeavour where text–image intersemiosis shapes new forms of cultural understanding. Through the interplay of COM, counterpoint, and EXP relationships, translators contribute to redefining gender roles, family models, and affective diversity in children’s literature.

The translated PB thus emerges as a transformative artefact—a space where the convergence of linguistic creativity, visual literacy, and ideological reflection opens pathways toward more inclusive representations. By bridging textual and cultural worlds, the translator affirms the ethical potential of translation as an act of social and artistic mediation, one that empowers readers to imagine and embrace plural and equitable forms of humanity.

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Roberto Martínez-Mateo
Universidad de Castilla La Mancha
Facultad de Educación. Campus de Cuenca
Avenida de los Alfares s/n. 16071
Cuenca, Spain
Email: roberto.martinez@uclm.es