

Chapter 7

Adaptations of Print Narratives Into Literary Apps: Reading the App *The Big Word Factory* in Literacy Practice on Primary–School Level

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ABSTRACT

Adaptations of children's books into literary apps provide a twofold approach for literacy practise at primary school. This chapter deals with the app The Big Word Factory (2013), which is based upon the picture book of the same title, written by Agnès de Lestrade and illustrated by Valeria Docampo. An analysis of the narrative framework of literary apps is meant to show that nonlinear storytelling, a key component of numerous print works of children's literature, but also of digital narratives, may help untrained young readers develop reading motivation while print and digital readings are practised as complementary activities.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling in children's literature almost naturally makes use of idiosyncratic and multimodal structures of text and images that play with, add to, or work against each other to convey a certain didactic or entertaining effect. These structures, or elements, can be, among others, picturesque texts, illustrations and cartoons, included or separate content such as audiobooks or digital extras, and, especially in the preschool section, flaps, sound buttons, or pop-up elements. Regarding content, many texts in children's fiction are very imaginative and highly nonsensical. Nonsense verse certainly has a rich literary tradition in children's literature since at least Edward Lear's prose and poetry and Lewis Carroll's works such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Julie Cross (2011) hints at a trend that has developed at the turn of the millennium: (adult) readers revisit nonsense texts, such as Victorian nonsensical children's literature. When the child was glorified in terms of the Romantic dream child (see McGillis, 2012) in

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Victorian middle-class England during the 19th century and a market for children's literature began to prosper, adults also formed a regular readership of children's literature, with its combination of two semiotic modes, one represented by text/words, the other by images/pictures. At the turn of the millennium, adult readers again share so-called crossover fiction with what is declared the primary target group, that is children (Falconer, 2009). This marks a curious return to Victorian reading habits and, in part, conceptions of childhood. Helene Høyrup (2017) concludes: "To see and address this conflation between ages and modes as an emblem of print culture is part of the new media encounter, which is a more hybrid intergenerational experience than that promoted by print culture" (p. 82).

In *Alice*, the play with language and a fantastic world concept challenging thematic coherence correlates with peculiar text structures, resulting for example in a calligramme like the poem that tells a mouse's tale and, in a playful homophonic correspondence, displays the form of a mouse's tail (Carroll, 1865/1993, p. 36). Some of these narrative elements parallel the developmental stages of the child (for a corresponding analysis with reference to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series see Meißner, 2001), more precisely child realism, the child's imitation of the external world without acknowledging the difference between "internal and external, and the psychical and the physical" (Piaget, 1929/1997, p. 124). Animism is part of this conception of realism, according to Piaget the tendency to believe inanimate objects, mainly those partaking in movement, to be enlivened by locating thinking (internal) in the external world (1929/1997, ch. VII). Animism especially occurs in forms of personification in children's fantasy stories, and can even expand into the realm of nonfiction when children's nonfictional texts contain narrative elements.

All these formal and content-related narrative elements constitute a break with conventional adult storytelling and may be subsumed under the notion of nonlinearity. By this, a very broad notion of nonlinearity or – considering multimodality – of multilinearity is applied in this chapter, which will be specified in the following subchapter.

Many studies have shown that nonlinear or multilinearity properties as presented by and through multimodality trigger children's reading interests (Barzillai et al., 2018; Manresa & Real, 2015; Ciampa, 2012; Unsworth 2006) while the benefits and disadvantages of screen versus print reading have been controversially discussed (Delgado et al., 2018; Clinton, 2019; Mangen et al., 2013; Wolf, 2018). This chapter presents different nonlinear elements in print and digital children's fiction to show how or to what extent combined print and digital reading may successfully contribute to literacy learning on primary-school level; usually after second year, a disruption in children's reading habits occurs if practising reading skills is not accompanied by fostering reading motivation (Mahling, 2016, p. 4). As adaptations from print books into digital/electronic literature link both media in terms of content, readings of both print and digital texts can be closely connected in literacy practise and motivate children to read since these adaptations combine text reading with appealing digital features. In what follows, this will be demonstrated using the example of the picture book *The Big Word Factory* and its adaptation into a literary app.

NONLINEARITY AND DIGITAL LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

Science writer John Briggs gives a basic definition of nonlinearity as a natural state:

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