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Reading aloud as performance and its representation on television programmes for children

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ABSTRACT
The social practice of reading aloud picture books to children, or shared reading, has been represented on many televisions programmes broadcast across English-speaking countries. This article views shared reading as a performance, and explores its transformation on two television shows for children and the potential of such shows to promote reading engagement and literacy development. Taking a critical multimodal perspective, we analyse shared reading in real life and on television as a social practice, focusing on the ways the participants talk about the picture book, relate it to exterior texts or activities, and legitimise shared reading through the employment of multimodal and interactive strategies. The analysis reveals significant differences between actual adult–child shared reading and its representation on television. The comparison illustrates the potential benefits and limitations of television shows in which picture books are read to the viewer, in terms of promoting shared reading among families and supporting young children's emergent literacy development.

KEYWORDS
Shared reading; social practice; television programmes for children; performance studies; multimodality; critical multimodal discourse analysis

1. Introduction

In Western cultures, the practice of reading aloud to and with young children, also known as joint or shared reading, has been playing a significant role in acculturating children into key social values, promoting language and literacy development, and fostering positive relations between children and their parents or caregivers for centuries (Bus 2002). This practice plays an essential role in key aspects of early child language and literacy development, such as children's ability to recognise alphabet letters or other written symbols, their vocabulary growth, developing knowledge of the conventions and functions of print, and learning about the world by linking the book with other texts or personal experience (Beck and McKeown 2001; Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini 1995; Lennox 2013; Torr 2004, 2007). Designed to promote reading to children in the digital age, television programmes in which picture books are read to the audience are produced and broadcast globally. Yet, little is known about the ways television discourse represents and thereby transforms the social practice of shared reading, and about the implications of such transformations for children's engagement with books, their language and literacy development, and families' shared reading practices.

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Two factors key to the analysis of shared reading and its representation on TV are (1) the quality of the picture book, including its structure, text–image integration, and the print conventions it embodies, and (2) the dialogic interaction between the adult and child readers during the reading. An engaging story and book design can attract and hold children's attention, and influence their attitudes and expectations (Nodelman 1988). Patterns in text–image relationships have also been shown to vary depending on the age range picture books are designed to target (Wignell 2011).

Dialogic interaction, to which all the participants in a shared reading experience contribute, arguably plays an even larger role in promoting effective language and literacy development (Mol, Bus, and de Jong 2009; Mol et al. 2008) while at the same time providing entertainment and encouraging regular engagement in reading (Baker et al. 2001; Torr 2007). It is widely recognised that dialogic interaction during shared reading depends considerably on the adult-readers' styles of reading, interaction styles, and attitudes towards books and reading (Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini 1995; Lennox 2013; Snow 1993).

A new approach to examining the social practice of shared reading and its representation on television is to view it as a performance. Drawing on van Leeuwen's (2008) social semiotic framework for the critical analysis of social practice, we explore the performance of reading aloud to and with children in real life and the representation of reading aloud on two television programmes for children, *Bookaboo* and *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*. We analyse one episode from each programme which presents the same award-winning narrative picture book – *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown* (Cowell and Layton 2006) – and we compare its reading on the screen with the way it is read by two mother–child dyads in real life.

The present study aims to enrich performance studies and early literacy studies alike by being the first to examine shared reading as a performance and analyse it as social practice, comparing the elements that constitute this social practice in two naturalistic examples and on two TV shows with different formats. This comparative analysis sheds light on the advantages and disadvantages of the televisual performances in promoting particular norms about what constitutes effective, dialogic shared reading. The analysis focuses on the role of specific multimodal resources (e.g. speech, image, body movement) in constructing and promoting selected aspects of shared reading on the television screen. This article draws upon and integrates insights from the merger of multimodal with critical discourse analysis proposed in Djonov and Zhao (2014) and van Leeuwen (2013). In conclusion, we discuss the implications of the analysis for using television to promote adults' and children's attitudes to and practices surrounding shared reading.

2. Reading aloud as performance in real life and on television

Defining shared reading as a performance enables a closer analysis of the various semiotic modes involved in this practice. This approach also allows us to examine critically the nature of adult–child interactions which take place in the home or on the television screen, in order to shed light on the ways in which they reflect and reinforce or break away from norms about shared reading (as elaborated in Section 3).

Drawing on Bauman (1989) and Carlson (2004), a performance can be defined as a situated activity conducted by participant(s) conscious of it having a certain audience. This definition reflects Bauman's (1989) understanding of performance as "reflexive" and Carlson's

(2004) notion of performance as involving "a consciousness of doubleness", where performers are viewed as conscious of their own role as well as that of their target audience.

In shared reading, the adult-readers are conscious of performing a specific activity aimed at simultaneously educating and entertaining children. They are usually sensitive to children's current state of knowledge, and use shared reading as an opportunity to talk to, question and engage children, and challenge their thinking and imagination. Just as a performance "involves self-conscious manipulation of the formal features of the communicative system (physical movement in dance, language and tone in song, and so on), making one at least conscious of its device" (Bauman 1989, 266), so too the adult-readers also manipulate features such as their voice quality and gestures, often with the purpose of stimulating children's curiosity and enhancing their comprehension.

There are many television programmes in which picture books are read for children, and these are broadcast by different global companies, in different countries and languages. Some examples include *Bookaboo* (Britain's Happy Films and Canada's Cité Amérique), *CBeebies Bedtime Stories* (British Broadcasting Corporation), *Driver Dan's Story Train* (Twofour54 and 3linemedia), and *Play School* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). Many of these programmes depict a picture book as it is being read to the viewing audience. *Bookaboo*, on the other hand, includes both a picture-book reading, and the interaction surrounding that reading. In each episode of *Bookaboo*, a celebrity presenter reads a picture book with Bookaboo, an animated puppy character, to help him overcome his stage fright prior to his performance as a drummer in a rock band. (Hereinafter, *Bookaboo* in italics refers to the TV programme and in plain font to the puppy character.) In contrast, on *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*, the presenters read and partially retell the picture-book stories directly to the television audience.

In this article, we analyse one episode from *Bookaboo* and one from *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*, each of which features a reading of the same picture book, Cowell and Layton's (2006) award-winning *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*. The *Bookaboo* episode features British actress Amanda Holden, while the *CBeebies Bedtime Stories* episode features British actress Freema Agyeman.

Specifically, we compare the readings depicted on these two television programmes, with the interactions of two mothers and their 4-year old children reading the same picture book in real life. These mother–child interactions constitute the point of entry for our comparative analysis of reading aloud as a performance in real life and on television. They provide a snapshot of parent–child shared reading practice, and illustrate the key elements (e.g. performer and script) and characteristics (e.g. performativity) of that practice. As a methodology, in-depth case studies of individual performances have been effective in revealing the dynamic relationship between the authority of narrative texts and performers' creativity in (re)presenting such texts (Bauman 1986).

For both mother–child dyads, the interaction, which was video-recorded without the presence of a researcher in the room, was their first encounter with the picture book, that is, they had not read or seen it anywhere before. Both mothers were fluent English speakers with university education. Previous research suggests that maternal education is related to the nature of the adult–child interactions that occur during shared reading (Heath 1983; Neuman 1996; Torr 2004). The children, a boy and a girl, are in the year prior to school, both aged 4 years and 3 months at the time of the shared reading. We refer to the two dyads as Mother A and Child A, and Mother B and Child B.

3. Theoretical framework: critical multimodal analysis of social practices

A cogent basis for comparing shared reading performances in real life and on television is van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for the critical discourse analysis of social practice. In it, a social practice consists of different elements such as social actors, social actions, time, space, and resources (tools and materials). When a social practice is represented in discourse, these elements undergo different types of transformations including additions, deletions, rearrangements, and substitutions. A discourse, van Leeuwen (2008) argues, not only transforms these elements, but can also add purposes, legitimations and evaluations to the construction of a social practice.

In this article, we analyse the performance of reading aloud, in real life or on television, as a social practice. This social practice includes the following key elements: the *social actors* of reader and listener/s, the *actions* of reading and talking about the book or related experiences, and the *place and time* of these actions (e.g. at home, in the classroom). The picture book is a defining resource, which may be accompanied by other resources (e.g. various semiotic modes and in some cases also artefacts such as puppets or musical instruments). The picture book also provides a script for the performance of shared reading. The major elements of the practice of shared reading are listed in Table 1. During the performance, the readers and listeners also evaluate the elements of the activity, constructing legitimations for the social practice of reading aloud with children. van Leeuwen (2008) explores various types of legitimation sources, for example, authority, tradition, customs, moral values, goals, and mythopoesis, or the use of a story where good is rewarded and evil punished.

For van Leeuwen (2008), some social practice elements (e.g. actors, locations and resources) are subject to eligibility conditions, that is, they must have certain qualities to qualify as the actors, locations or resources for a social practice. For example, a parent must be literate and aware of the child's need to become a proficient reader. A picture book must also have certain qualities to enable it to be chosen as shared reading material.

In analysing social actions, van Leeuwen (2008) underlines the "performance modes", or the manners in which an action is performed, including the semiotic resources that are involved. van Leeuwen's framework supports us in taking a critical multimodal approach to analyse the performance of reading the picture book *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown* by two mother–child dyads and on the television programmes *Bookaboo* and *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*.

Table 1. Elements in the social practice of shared reading.

	Settings		
Elements	Real-life reading	*Bookaboo*	*Cbeebies Bedtime Stories*
Actor: Reader	Mother	Presenter	Presenter
Actor: Listener	Child	Bookaboo, an animated puppy; TV audience	Not presented, with the TV audience directly addressed
Action	Reading, talking	Reading, talking	Telling, talking to the TV audience
Resources: picture book	As both a physical object and a text of written language and images	As both a physical object and a text of written language and images	As a sequence of illustrations
Resources: semiotic modes	Speech, gesture, posture, gaze	Speech, gesture, posture, gaze, animation, sound, music, camera movement	Speech, gesture, posture, gaze, sound, music, camera movement

Specifically, a critical multimodal approach involves the analysis of multiple semiotic resources to reveal the hidden values, power relations, and ideologies in social practices (Djonov and Zhao 2014; Machin 2013; van Leeuwen 2008). In accordance with this approach, we examine how the social actors in real life and on television use different resources to perform the social practice of shared reading.

Books are the defining resource for the practice of shared reading, and if shared reading is viewed as a type of performance, then the book involved in it can be viewed as a script. In a real-life shared reading interaction, the picture book provides content to be read and discussed and can guide the manner in which this is done. Unlike TV, theatre and play scripts, however, the picture book does not offer explicit directions for performers to follow, so that its use as a script is negotiated by the participants in the shared reading experience. In the television programmes, by contrast, the picture book is supplemented with a script that tells presenters how to perform the reading based on decisions made by each show's producer, director, presenter, and possibly others involved in its making, such as animation and sound designers. In using the script of the picture book, power relations between different social actors are displayed. In real-life shared reading, the adult readers dominate in the sense that they determine what counts as legitimate knowledge, as can be seen when they evaluate the correctness of the child's responses to questions about the meanings in the text. Yet the child reader still has the opportunity to ask questions relevant to their own lives, to make requests and express her or his opinions. On the other hand, decisions about which aspects of the picture book script to highlight in the television programme are made by the various performers and producers, rather than by television viewers.

The analysis presented in the next section explores the differences in the ways the picture book *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown* is used by performers in real-life and televisual shared reading, and the implications of these differences for promoting early literacy and engagement with books and reading.

Prior to conducting the analysis, we transcribed the recorded videos of mother–child reading and the episodes of the two television shows that represent *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*. Semiotic resources and strategies were taken into account in the transcription of both kinds of data but in different ways. The mothers' and children's gestures and voice quality were noted in parentheses, like stage directions in a drama text. The mother–child reading was transcribed in this way to capture the natural turn-taking in their conversations. On the other hand, the TV episodes were transcribed in the form of tables based on shots (see Baldry and Thibault 2006; O'Halloran 2004), with visual stills, camera angles and movement, descriptions of the events, sounds and music set out in different columns. This transcription allowed us to systematically observe the interaction between various semiotic resources and compare the relationship between semiotic resources used in the picture book (print conventions, pictures, words, narrative stages and events) and the surrounding shared reading interaction on television and in real life.

4. A comparative analysis of real-life vs. televisual performances of reading aloud

In this section, we first focus on the ways in which the social actors in real life and on television "perform" and engage with the picture book text, including their focus on its print

conventions, pictures and words, narrative events and structure of the story. We then explore how the social actors move beyond the picture book text, relating it to life experiences and other texts, and integrating it into other social activities.

4.1. Performing the text

4.1.1. Performing print conventions

Picture books are "semiotic artefacts" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001), physical objects whose construction follows various print media conventions. Knowledge about print conventions (e.g. distinguishing between the front and back cover, book handling skills, the ability to locate the name of a book's "author" or "illustrator") is important for early literacy development, enabling children to engage with the printed book, which has been shaping cultures and social values across the world for centuries.

In real-life shared reading interactions, children can engage with the picture book as a physical object, opening and closing it, pointing to its pages and turning them. For instance, in the shared reading episodes in our data, Child A and Child B actively turned or tried to turn pages, to discover what happens next in the narrative. Mother A guided her child to survey the book cover, title, back cover, and copyright page before beginning to read the main text. In this way, she was familiarising her child with some of the characteristics of the book as a physical and semiotic artefact.

In the *Bookaboo* episode, similarly, the presenter first introduces the author and illustrator of *That Rabbit Belong to Emily Brown*. The episode also shows the opening and closing of the book, and a shot of the presenter turning a page in the middle of the reading. Specific reference to these features and conventions is absent on *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*. The book is not shown, its author and illustrator are not introduced. Nor is the audience told that the storytelling is in fact based on a picture book. This contrast is consistent with the two shows' different formats. *Bookaboo* represents the experience of shared reading, and includes a reader (the presenter) as well as a listener (Bookaboo the puppy), while *CBeebies Bedtime Stories* adopts the mode of storytelling, constructing and directly addressing the child television audience as the listener. *Bookaboo* thus foregrounds the fact that a picture book is being read, thus having greater potential not only to engage children with the story, but also to present a model of effective shared reading to their families and caregivers.

4.1.2. Talking about semiotic resources

The real-life interactions and the shared reading on television also differ according to whether the reader and listener discuss the semiotic resources in the book. The interaction on *Bookaboo* concentrates specifically on the unfolding story, whereas the mothers and children in our project discussed the story content as well as the specific features of the book itself. Consider two examples of Child B's interpretation of the images in the picture book and the representation of these images on *Bookaboo*.

On one page of *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown* (as shown in Figure 1), a static image of Emily holding the door knob constructs Emily's action of shutting the door. Before her mother had read this page, Child B said, "Mummy, Look! Look they open the door." Considering the image in isolation, Child B misinterpreted the image as representing the opening rather than the shutting of the door. In addition to the child's inability to read

the written text, she also had not noticed the foot at the bottom of the door, which represents someone leaving the room, rather than entering it. This example then illustrates that "children must learn to 'read' pictures", and are not born with this ability (Torr 2008, 47).

In the *Bookaboo* episode, the action of shutting the door is accompanied by animation and the sound effect of a door shutting. In audiovisual media, semiotic resources such as sound and movement can function as cues for inference and interpretation (Bateman and Schmidt 2012; Wildfeuer 2014). The added resources here direct the viewer to a more plausible interpretation of the image as representing shutting rather than opening the door. This transformation of the text is an interpretation of the picture book as a script, which supports children's comprehension of the depicted actions, while at the same time reducing their need, and denying them the opportunity, to discuss pictorial print conventions with the adult-reader (Zhang, Djonov, and Torr 2016).

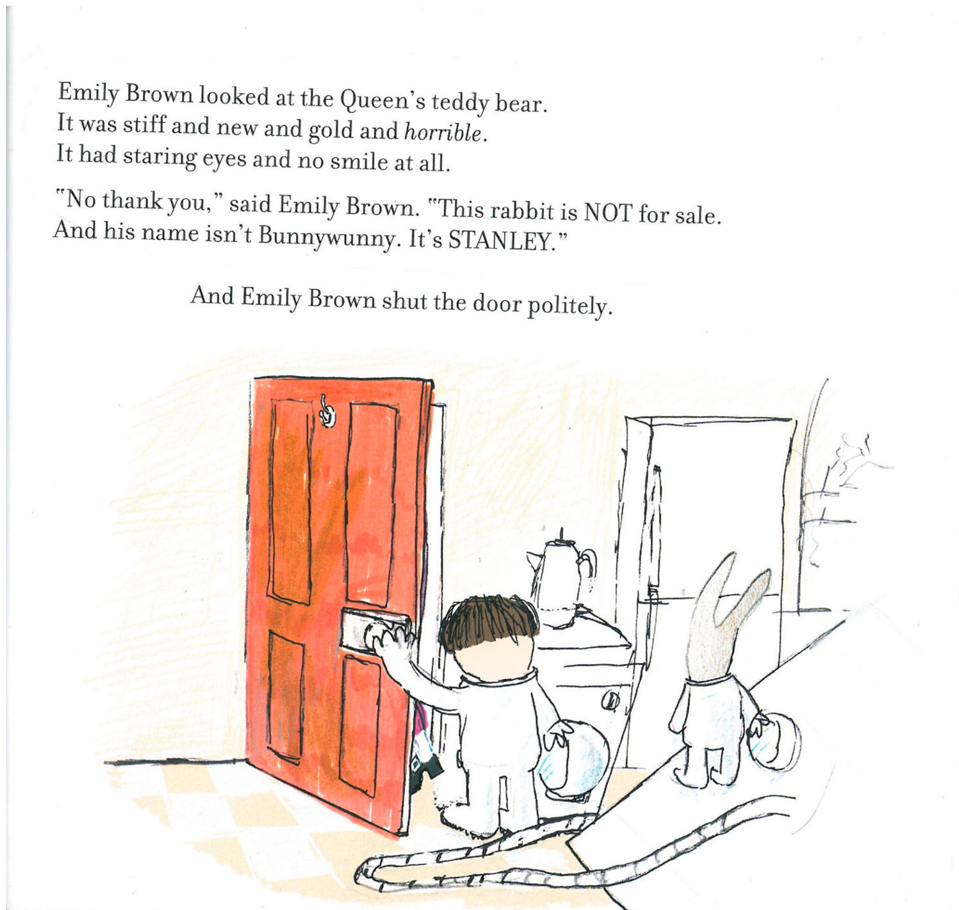

Figure 1. A static image representing an action. Reprinted from *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, © Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton.

In the second example, Child B interprets an image correctly and creatively. When reading the image in Figure 2, which shows Emily Brown and her rabbit walking home, the child excitedly initiated a conversation with her mother.

> Child B: Mummy, look, they coming, coming, coming, coming, coming, coming, coming, coming, coming (making a line stepwise with her index finger along the pathway on the page and extending it onto the desk).
>
> Mother B: Yeah so, Emily Brown, go back home (showing the pathway with her finger). Say bye-bye.
>
> (Mother B tries to turn the page, but the child stops her.)
>
> Child B: Mummy, mummy. They coming, coming, coming, coming, coming (repeating the same gesture).

The child's words and gestures suggest she correctly interpreted the static image as representing an action in progress, while taking intense delight in interpreting the image, as evident in the child preventing her mother from turning the page and repeating her interpretation once more.

Figure 2. A static image representing an action. Reprinted from *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, © Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton.

On *Bookaboo*, this action is recontextualised and explicitly realised through an animation of the character jumping forwards. This exemplifies the distinctive conventions of meaning-making in print vs. dynamic audiovisual media such as television, which deploy the "temporal dynamics of visual semiosis" (O'Halloran 2004, 109).

4.1.3. Playing a role that plays a role: performing characters in the book

The performance of the speech and actions of characters is a significant part of reading a book to children because character speech and actions are essential elements of narrative picture books and because performing them reveals the adult-readers' skills and relationships with the audience. Eco (1977) refers to the actor's performance of characters' speech as "saying performatively", where the actor plays a double role: the role of the performer and the role of the character. For example, a presenter's performance of a character's action simultaneously shows her/his skills in acting and construes what happens in the story.

The readers in our data, both real-life and on television, employ the same performance modes to represent the characters' actions and speech. For example, both Mother A and the presenter in the *Bookaboo* episode employed a special voice quality for the Queen's direct speech. This distinguishes the character's from the narrator's voice, as readers tend not to alter their voice for the latter. The different voices may attract children's attention and increase their engagement with the story, while also foregrounding the fact that different perspectives on a particular situation or state of affairs are possible.

Both the presenters on the TV shows and the mothers in our study used interactive gestures to represent some actions from the story. Consider their performance of the following advice that Emily Brown gives to the Queen in the story:

> Emily Brown whispered so that nobody else could hear, "*You take that horrid brand-new teddy bear and you* **play with him all day. Sleep with it at night. Hold him very tight and be sure to have lots of adventures.** *And then maybe one day you will wake up with a toy of your OWN*." (Cowell and Layton 2006, n.p.; original emphasis in bold and italic types)

The presenter on *Bookaboo*, for example, moves closer to Bookaboo, holds his ear and whispers Emily's words in it. Later, when she reads "Hold him very tight", she clenches her fist. Mother A also varied her voice albeit not as obviously as the presenter, and when reading "Hold him very tight", she held her child very tight, enacting the meaning of these words. Similarly, after reading these words, Mother B made gestures of sleeping with and holding her child while paraphrasing Emily's speech. What is performed provides the child with a vivid impression of the character's speech, while the activity of performing per se also reinforces the intimacy between the parent and child. This intimacy, as Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995) argue, plays an important role in promoting children's engagement with reading.

The performers in real life and on television construct for their audience two layers of meaning: denotative and connotative, to use Barthes' (1973, 1977) distinction. As van Leeuwen (2004, 94) explains,

> The first layer is the layer of *denotation*, of "what, or who, is being depicted here?". The second layer is the layer of *connotation*, of "what ideas and values are expressed through what is represented, and through the way in which it is represented?"

The adult readers deliver the denotative meaning by performing, for instance, the actions of sleeping with the toy and holding it tight. They meanwhile convey the connotation of these actions, that is, intimacy, a valued quality for a human being to become the friend with a toy or other human. By communicating the connotative meaning, the performers socialise the child listeners into the social values carried by the picture-book text.

Whereas the mothers use the interactive performance to enhance their children's experience of listening to the story, the performance of the presenter on television serves the purpose of modelling such engagement between the presenter and Bookaboo, while also engaging the television audience. In this sense, Bookaboo plays two roles: of the audience in the shared reading interaction performed on the show and of a performer who alongside the presenter addresses the television audience, thus exemplifying Carlson's (2004) notion of performance as involving "a consciousness of doubleness".

4.1.4. Making use of generic structure

That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown tells a narrative story. In systemic-functional genre theory, narratives are defined through their social goal of presenting an engaging story and the compulsory generic stages of Orientation (introducing settings and characters), followed by Complication (where an unexpected event causes a problem) and then Resolution (in which the problem is solved) (Hasan 1996; Martin and Rose 2008). In this story, the main protagonist is Emily Brown, who likes going on imaginary adventures with her toy rabbit Stanley. Interrupting these adventures, the Queen sends, one after the other, her Footman, Army, Navy, and Air Force to bribe Emily into exchanging Stanley for other toys (a teddy bear, 10 talking dolls, 50 rocking horses, and all of these plus all the toys in the world that Emily could ever desire). Each time, the Queen's underlings knock at the door and offer something in exchange for Stanley, and Emily refuses the bribe. One night the Queen has the rabbit stolen. Emily then goes to the Palace, takes Stanley back, and gives the Queen advice on how to have a toy of her own.

The Complication stage, where the Queen's desire for Stanley disrupts Emily and Stanley's normality, includes four Scenes, each with three sub-stages of Orientation (Emily and Stanley are engaging in imaginary play in some part of her house), Complication (the Queen sends her underlings to request Stanley) and Temporary Resolution (Emily rejects the request) as represented in Figure 3. In this section, we compare the ways parents and television performers use the story's structure,[1] and discuss the potential effects of this on children's comprehension.

Performers in real life and on television both seize key moments in narrative progression to help children understand the story, anticipate what will happen next, and engage with the plot. This is most notably the case with Complication stages, due to the role this stage serves in signalling a turn in the narrative and helping it achieve its overall purpose. Each Complication in the story's structure is introduced by the event of someone knocking at Emily's door. After reading "There was a Rat-a-tat-tat! at the [kitchen/garden] door" in Complication 1 and 4, Mother A asked, "What do you think that is?" and "Look at that, [child's name]. What do you think this time?" In three out of the four scenes, moreover, she performed this event by knocking on the book. Alongside the questions she asked at these turning points, this knocking gesture has the potential to capture the child's attention, arouse curiosity about the story, and stimulate anticipation. Both mothers also used the end of the complication in a scene, the moment after reading

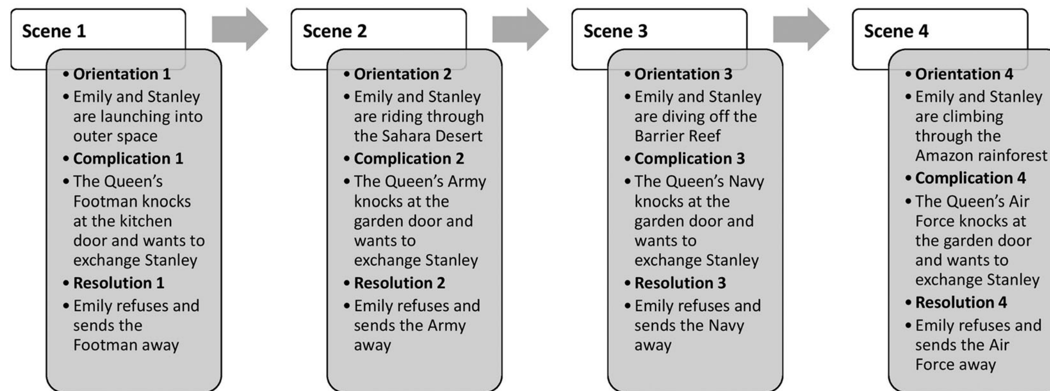

Figure 3. The repetitive structure in *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*.

that the Queen would like Emily Brown to exchange her rabbit for one bribe or another, to ask questions such as "Do you think she will swap?" (Mother A) and "Oh, they give them a lot of toys to exchange the bunny. Do you think is she going to change her bunny?" (Mother B). Such questions urge children to consider possible subsequent events, drawing upon their existing experiences in life and story reading as well as reasoning skills.

The two television shows also capitalise on the Complication stages in Scenes 1–4. In the *Bookaboo* episode, the knocking at the door is accompanied by a congruent sound effect. This is followed by the puppy Bookaboo asking questions such as "Who's at the [kitchen/garden] door?". These convey Bookaboo's sense of curiosity and expectation as a listener, while aiming to involve the TV audience. Bookaboo also asks questions or exclaims, addressing the presenter or the characters, at the end of each Complication. Examples include: "Was she going to do that, was she, Amanda?", "Don't do it, Emily. Don't give Stanley away!", and "She's not going to give it, isn't she?". These questions and exclamations have the potential to increase the audience's engagement with the story and in this way to legitimise the practice of shared reading as an engaging experience and the TV show's purpose of promoting it. Unlike the mothers' questions, however, the Bookaboo character's questions and interjections provide an explicit "correct" reading; that it would be wrong for Emily to exchange her rabbit for "better" toys.

Resolution stages too are utilised by the adult-readers, mainly to enhance children's understanding of the story. For example, Mother B talked to her child after reading of Resolution 1, "And she, while the Queen wants to exchange it, she doesn't want to, because she loves her rabbit, doesn't she?" This question tests the child's ability to follow the events and characters' motives in the story.

On *Bookaboo*, the puppy Bookaboo comments each time Emily rejects one of the bribes – "Good!", "Hop it, Army!", "Go away, Navy, on your boat.", or "That should do it.". These comments mark the end of each scene and tell the audience that new events are about to unfold.

Since the listener is not represented in the *CBeebies* episode as a social actor, interactive questions are impossible, and different strategies such as gestures are employed to reconstruct generic staging and engage the audience. For example, the presenter uses her hand to perform the act of knocking at the door at the start of Complication 1. Similarly, she makes a gesture of shutting a door when reading "And Emily Brown shut the door politely" at the end of Scene 1.

The adult-readers in both the real-life and televisual performances also exploit the pattern of repetition created by the four scenes represented in Figure 3, each of which concludes with Emily Brown correcting the Queen's people that her rabbit's name is not "Bunnywunny", as they all call him, but Stanley. This pattern enables the child to anticipate both the language that will be used and the upcoming events in the story. In the real-life interactions, at the end of Scene 2, Mother A asked the child what the rabbit was called, and after the child replied "I don't know", the mother told him it was Stanley. After that when reading Emily's words "And his name isn't Bunnywunny. It's –", the mother lengthened the reading of "it's" and then paused in order to encourage her child to complete Emily's words by adding "Stanley". Each time, the child complied:

Mother A (reads): And his name isn't Bunnywunny. It's –

Child A: Stanley!

Replies like this one can be viewed as signalling children's engagement and comprehension strategies during dialogic shared reading. They also enable the child to participate directly in the reading, becoming both the "teller" and the "told".

The puppy Bookaboo's performance is similar to Child A's: at the end of Scenes 2, 3, and 4, Bookaboo reads "It's Stanley" together with the presenter. Yet, he does this without being prompted by the presenter. This constructs anticipation and prediction as successful comprehension strategies that children are expected to perform during shared reading, but risks downplaying the role of adult-readers in encouraging children to use these strategies.

4.2. Beyond the text

The interactive exchanges between readers and listeners go beyond the limit of the storyworld. During shared reading, parents and children are known to relate the story content to their life experiences and other texts. Torr (2007) uses the term intertextuality to cover these two kinds of connections, to "autobiographical intertexts" and to "semiotic intertexts". The former refers to "children's personal lived experiences" and the latter means "other semiotic texts such as picture books, television programmes and computer games" (Torr 2007, 81–82).

4.2.1. Autobiographic intertextuality

The following conversation between Mother B and her child provides an example of autobiographic intertextuality.

Mother B: (explaining what has just been read) Oh, they give them a lot of toys to exchange the bunny. Do you think is she going to change her bunny?

(They look at each other.)

Child B: No.

Mother B: Why?

Child B: Because her loves her – because her want her want to leave the bunny in the bed.

Mother B: In the bed. She wants to sleep with the bunny?

Child B: Yeah.

Mother B: Just like you, like you sleep with your Mikey Mouse, Hello Kitty, and Thomas, and Peppa, and George, yeah?

Child B: Lots of things.

Connecting with autobiographical intertexts supports children as they attempt to interpret and make sense of their own life experiences by referring to meanings expressed in picture books (Bruner 1986). At the same time, children develop reading comprehension and narrative literacy skills by relying on their own experiences in order to understand those represented in stories (Cochran-Smith 1984; Sipe 2000; Torr 2007). In the above example, Child B uses her life experience with toys to comprehend the

reason why Emily Brown does not want to relinquish her beloved rabbit Stanley in the story.

4.2.2. Semiotic intertextuality

The interaction between Mother A and Child A offers an example of a semiotic intertextuality. It occurred after the mother had read the page shown in Figure 4.

> Mother A: (pointing to the image of the rabbit in the poster) That's the sign that we saw. Where did we see that sign?
>
> (Child A turns the pages back, and with the help of his mother, finds the copyright page, which shows the same poster.)
>
> Mother A: Where was it?
>
> (Child A points to the image of the poster on the copyright page.)
>
> Mother A: There!

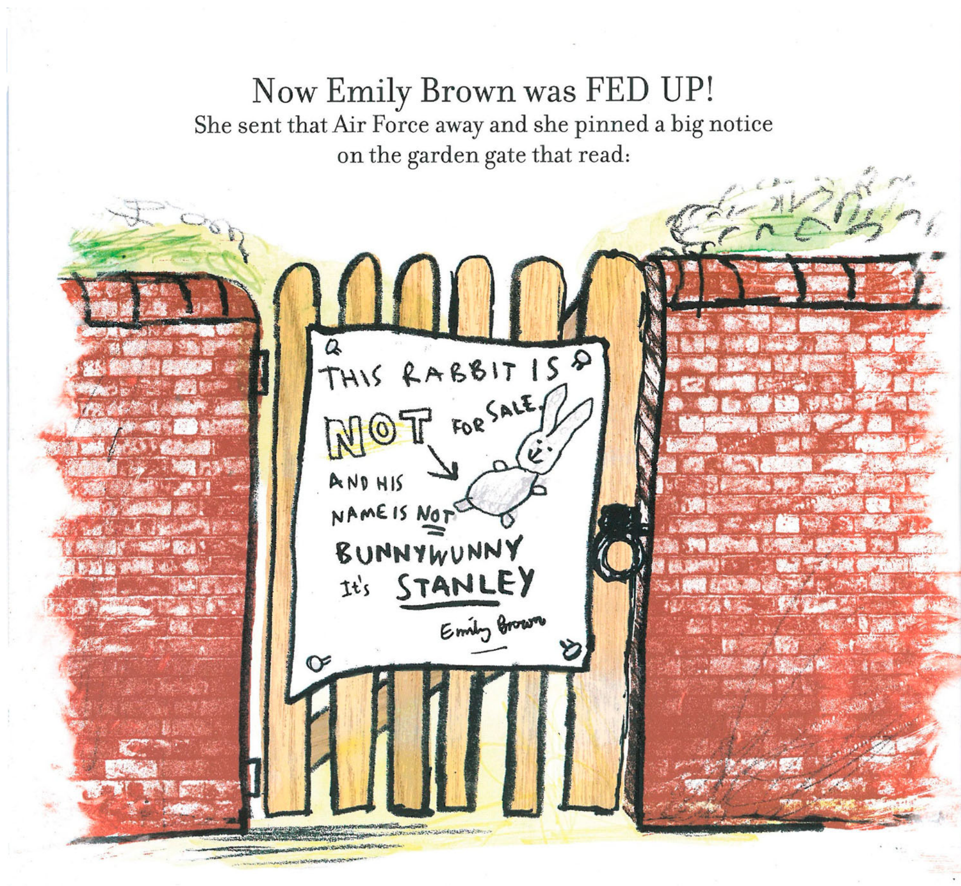

Figure 4. A poster in the main text. Reprinted from *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, © Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton.

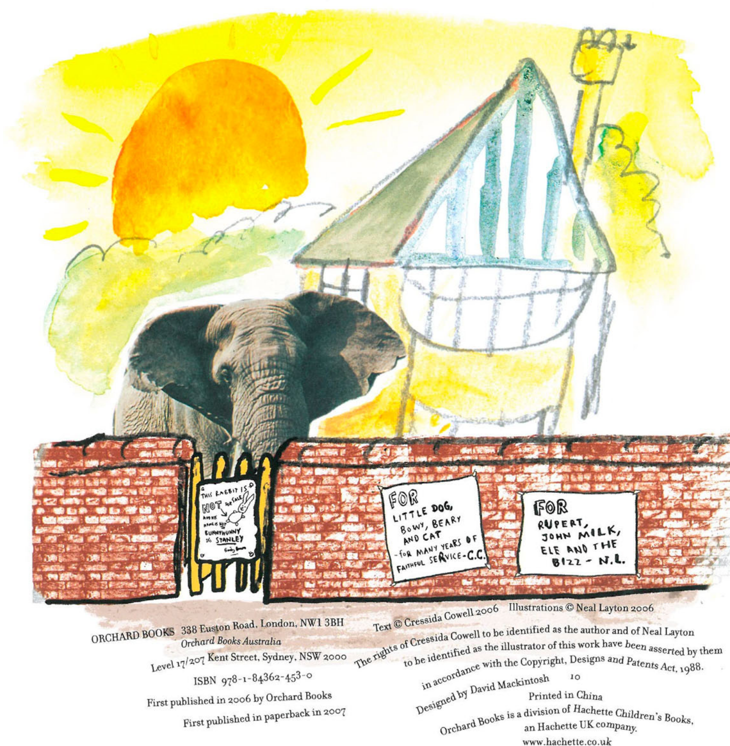

Figure 5. Copyright page. Reprinted from *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, © Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton.

As the mother had already drawn the child's attention to the image of the poster on the copyright page (Figure 5) before beginning to read the main text, the child was able to establish a connection between the presentations of the image in two different places (Figures 4 and 5). If the main text presented in a book and its paratexts (including book cover, title, front matter and back matter) are considered as separate texts, following Genette (1997), this connection can be interpreted as a kind of intertextuality. Children's ability in making such connections during shared reading could not only support them in developing an understanding of print conventions (e.g. learning about the function of the copyright page). It may also "be seen as the early manifestation of the type of abstract, educational knowledge which will be drawn on throughout the formal education system" (Torr 2007, 86).

4.2.3. Framing the performance of a text

By contrast to shared reading in real life, reading aloud on television does not include reference to specific life experiences or particular texts. As a mass medium, television by default addresses the general public; it cannot, and need not, fulfil the needs or take

into account the life experiences of any specific audience or person. Such programmes aim to increase their own ratings and popularity, and frequently serve as a marketing vehicle to advertise related products such as the book itself, soft toys, lunch boxes, videos, and clothing (Buckingham 2003).

The readings which take place on *Bookaboo* and *CBeebies* go beyond the picture book text in other ways. The two shows frame the televisual shared reading interactions in relation to social practices such as overcoming stage fright on *Bookaboo* and coaxing children into going to bed on *CBeebies Bedtime Stories.* These draw on cultural values in order to legitimise the practice of reading aloud as having the power to build children's confidence and acculturate them into acceptable routines.

The stories read on the show *Bookaboo* are framed in the story of Bookaboo, the drummer puppy, and the social practice of shared reading is framed in the practice of overcoming anxiety related to stage performance. Once the celebrity presenter (representing the implied expert adult-reader) has read a story to Bookaboo (the implied child/emergent reader), Bookaboo gathers the courage to join his band on stage. This framing, together with the "magic" power of story and the intimacy of shared reading, is captured in the show's slogan: "A story a day or I just can't play."

CBeebies Bedtime Stories frames the story telling performance in the social practice of coaxing children into going to bed. This is encapsulated in the programme's title. Also, at the end of each episode, most presenters suggest "you", the implied child-viewer, go to bed, and all wish viewers "Good night", or its baby-talk equivalent "Night-night". The show thus lends itself to being perceived as a substitute for parents' reading or telling bedtime stories to their children.

The framing of the reading aloud performance in other practices in the two programmes legitimises the social practices of shared reading and storytelling though mythopoesis, "legitimation conveyed through narrative whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions" (van Leeuwen 2008, 106). On *Bookaboo*, the reward for shared reading is confidence. On *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*, storytelling creates calm and helps send children to bed.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The comparison of the multimodal construction of shared reading performances presented in this paper reveals similarities as well as differences between *Bookaboo* and *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*, the analysed children's TV shows, on the one hand, and between read-alouds in these shows and real-life shared reading interactions involving mothers and their children on the other. These similarities and differences highlight the potential and limitations of such TV shows for promoting shared reading and supporting children's language and literacy development.

While both shows present the same picture book to their audience, *Bookaboo* represents all the defining elements of shared reading as a social practice – the adult-reader, the listener, and the picture book being read. *CBeebies Bedtime Stories*, by contrast, deletes the listener and tells the story without showing the picture book as a physical artefact. *Bookaboo* thus offers a more naturalistic representation of shared reading, which also enables it to draw attention to print conventions. Consequently, it provides a model of shared reading that can be of value especially to those families with limited experience

in this social practice. *CBeebies Bedtime Stories* tells the story presented in the book directly to the TV audience, without even showing the picture book, which is in stark contrast to both *Bookaboo* and real-life shared reading interactions. *CBeebies* can therefore be viewed as a substitute for parents' engagement in telling or reading bedtime stories to their children, and misses the opportunity to apprentice children into recognising print conventions.

At the same time, the two TV programmes and the real-life shared reading interactions all follow the implicit script provided by the picture book, *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, in similar ways. All adult-presenters/readers employ different voice qualities for the narrator and different characters, and embody some of the actions and gestures described in the book (e.g. knocking on the door, hugging someone tight). This equips both TV shows with the potential to engage children through vivid representations of character qualities and interactions and thereby to enhance children's comprehension of the story. Children's comprehension and developing narrative literacy are supported also through real-life and TV performers' use of the story's generic structure to guide children in following the plot. This illustrates the effectiveness of *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown* as a script and suggests that selecting suitable books for reading aloud in TV shows such as *Bookaboo* or *CBeebies Bedtime Stories* is an important prerequisite for the ability of such shows to achieve their purpose of promoting early literacy and engagement with books and stories.

In addition, the adult-readers in both real life and on television convey certain social values and ideological messages that are embedded in the picture-book story to the child listeners using semiotic resources such as gesture and voice quality, although as Zhang, Djonov, and Torr (2016) argue, the resources of animation, sound effects, and camera movement that are used to represent the picture-book pages on the screen subtly change the ideologies in the original book.

There are also many differences between the real-life interactions and the televisual performances. First, in contrast to the mother–child dyads in this study, the performers on television do not discuss specific words or images or other semiotic resources used in the story. The TV shows thus deny children the opportunity of extending their skills in interpreting the meaning of specific verbal or visual choices made in the picture book.

Another difference is that the shows make no reference to the life experiences of their audience or to other texts. Making autobiographical and semiotic intertextual connections during shared reading provides significant support for children's emergent reading and narrative literacy skills and learning about the world more generally (Cochran-Smith 1984; Sipe 2000; Torr 2007). The ability to connect knowledge built through engagement with books or life experiences, whether from text to life, life to text, or text to text, is a key quality distinguishing expert from less developed readers (Heath 1982).

The manner of interaction between reader and listener/s constructed in the TV shows differs starkly from that in real-life interactions. The mother–child interactions analysed for this paper regularly use the Initiation/Question–Response–Feedback/Evaluation structure typical of classroom discourse (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). Similarly to teachers, who due to being more experienced and knowledgeable are in charge of asking questions or initiating interactions and evaluating students' responses in educational settings, the mothers actively initiated conversations with the children and offered feedback to children's contributions. By contrast, the *CBeebies Bedtime Stories* presenter does not address any

questions to the audience, while in *Bookaboo*, it is Bookaboo who asks questions rather than the presenter/reader. The presenter, moreover, does not respond to these questions; rather, some of them are answered by the text she reads next. Bookaboo's questions and comments are thus heavily scripted and function to facilitate the reading as they occur at narrative turns and at the end of narrative phases, rather than interrupt it in the way a child's questions tend to. Thus the TV shows are unable to provide their child viewers with the types of experiences which can socialise them into the structure of classroom interactions, which shared reading at home has been shown to present (Heath 1982). Additionally, *Bookaboo* fails to convey the significance of adult-readers being responsive to children's questions and comments, paying and drawing attention to the semiotic resources employed in picture books, and encouraging children to make connections between the book and their own experiences or other texts. Bookaboo's performance as the "listener" may give rise to unrealistic expectations of the ways children should participate in shared reading interactions too; namely, that they should not interrupt the reading and would correctly interpret narrative staging and predict the way a story would unfold.

The inability of television programmes to make explicit reference to the individual child-viewer points to the different purposes inherent in parent–child shared reading in comparison with readings on television programmes. Parent–child shared reading is effective pedagogically as it combines both affective and educational elements in the one emotionally intimate, entertaining context. While aiming to encourage reading to children and literacy in the domestic space, the television programmes also market the books they incorporate and themselves to a mass audience of both children and adults such as parents, caregivers, and educators. To achieve this, such TV programmes mobilise substantial multimodal resources and legitimisation strategies, which reflect the marketing imperative governing the ways they represent storytelling and the reading of picture books.

While the television programmes may not effectively model dialogic shared reading as it occurs in naturalistic contexts, they may nevertheless serve to promote positive attitudes towards and engagement in shared reading. First, on both shows, the practice of shared reading is framed as a recurring ritual (bedtime stories in *CBeebies*) or an emotional imperative (Bookaboo's recurrent stage fright), such that reading aloud brings rewards (calm in *CBeebies* or confidence in *Bookaboo*), thereby legitimising reading as a valuable practice. Secondly, both shows construct reading aloud as a performance that entertains by drawing not only on a picture book story but also on semiotic resources (e.g. animation and sound effects) not available on the page. This construction reflects the attitude of "books and book-related activities as entertainment", rather than instruction (Heath 1982, 53). In Western cultures, this attitude has been shown to surround the children who grow up to become successful readers, and typically come from families with high levels of parental education and socio-economic status (cf. Heath 1982; Lynch et al. 2006).

Considering the above-discussed similarities and differences between real-life and televisual shared reading, we arrive at the conclusion that the TV programmes representing reading aloud are better to be viewed as a supplement to rather than a substitute for the family practice of shared reading.

In conclusion, this article has presented a critical multimodal analysis of the social practice of reading aloud as a performance, comparing the manner in which the same picture

book is read aloud by parent–child dyads in real life and by actors on two scripted television programmes for children. The analysis reveals some of the similarities and differences between real-life and televisual performances of shared reading, based on which we outline the benefits and disadvantages of such television shows in promoting young children's engagement with books and reading as well as their literacy development. The present study was based on two case studies. Future research may investigate in greater depth the perspectives of both parents and children in terms of the potential of television programmes to promote reading aloud in the home, with benefits for young children's emerging literacy development and appreciation of literature.

Note

1. The television programmes also employ other strategies in representing the generic structure, for example, drawing upon semiotic resources such as animation, music and sound effect (Zhang, Djonov, and Torr 2016). In this article, we only focus on the strategies used by the presenters/performers who read or tell the story.

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