

Illustration, interaction and text in interactive books for early readers

The topic of our research is the co-existence of different media: (interactive) illustrations and (written and/or spoken) text in (interactive) books for early readers. While it seems to be evident that there is no story-book for kids of 4-7 without illustrations, and these illustrations do contribute largely to the (financial and other) success of the book, one falls short when the quality of the illustration and their role in „reading” have to be pinpointed, either on the level of reading the given story, or in more general, turning the child towards reading and books. The question becomes far more complex if we look at the interactive books, where multimedia elements (moving images, sounds, music, text read) come to life either automatically, or initiated by the reader by the well known tap or other more sophisticated gestures by the hand, or by other modalities (e.g. blowing).

In our presentation, based on earlier work [1], we propose a reference framework to be able to describe and compare static and interactive illustrations and particularly, their relationship to the text illustrated. First, we give a framework to be able to describe static illustrations along the following dimensions:

1. The inter-referential relationship of text and illustration
2. Illustration as a medium enhancing the free valences of the text, and thus, contributing (or contradicting) to its interpretation, and possibly also, going beyond what the story tells
3. Levels of analogies: factual, metaphorical, ironical, emotional
4. Aesthetics (composition, usage of rendering style and colours)

We have collected 8 Hungarian editions (book and dia film) of the well-known folk tale “Little Rooster and his Diamond Halfpenny”, from the past 50 years. We use this body to illustrate the options in each of the above dimensions. Though the text is (almost) identical in all the materials, the illustrations make for very different interpretations (for a sample, see the illustrations below). It is also striking that the (in Hungary) commercially successful versions are neither the artistically most appealing nor from an interpretive point of view most proper ones.



A kiskakas gyémánt félkrajcárja, - Bp.: M. Diafilmgyártó Váll., 1957., Magyar Foto Dia-Osztálya, 1954. Macskássy Gyula



A kiskakas gyémánt félkrajcárja. /ill. Bihari Mariann és „Medve” – Debrecen: Tóth Könyvkereskedés, 2000.

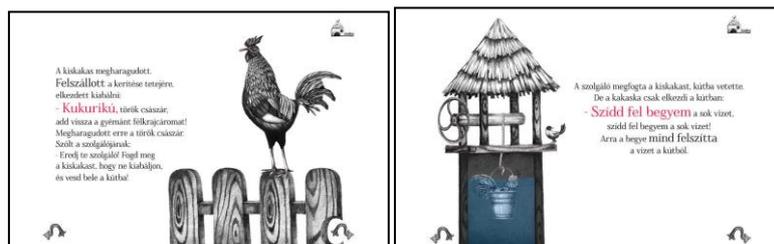
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Then, we look at the time-dependent nature of interactive illustrations.

1. Timing and effect
2. Role in of an interactive feature with respect to the story and reading process
3. Modalities used: single-multiple, their interplay, sound effects, ..
4. Way of activation, affordances and help
5. Visual style and aesthetics (with respect to the digital medium)
6. “Beyond print” features of the text

The freedom in the design dimensions is huge. We will show – from recent apps – good and bad examples, and invite the audience for discussion. Particularly, we will look at the – still often advocated – practice of imitating the book layout on an interactive tablet. Finally, we will discuss the different design choices made in turning the tale “Little Rooster and his Diamond Halfpenny” into an interactive book, occasionally giving different role for the “interactive” [2] , for snapshots see below.



(This interactive book is subject of a series of empirical evaluations [3], also to be discussed in another article submitted.)

We believe that with our presentation, and with active feedback from the interdisciplinary audience, we can contribute to a very much needed reference framework to start discourse and evaluation of interactive books, and the time-based multimedia content.

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Basic references:

1. Varga Emőke (2012). The Illustration in the Theory, the Criticism and the Education (book in Hungarian). – Bp.: L' Harmattan, 2012.
2. MOME TechLab website with info about the interactive app „Little Rooster and his Diamond Halfpenny”: [http:// techlab.mome.hu/felkrajcar](http://techlab.mome.hu/felkrajcar)
3. Ruttkay, Zs., Bényei, J., Sárközi, Zs. (2013) Evaluation of Interactive Childrens Book Design, in Proceedings of EbuTel Workshop, 13 September 2013 Trento, Italy, Springer. (to appear)