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How to represent sex? Picture books about sex for children

Our presentation gives an analysis of two non-fiction picture books for children published in 2019, one in Denmark and one in Norway: *What is sex? A book about kisses, intercourse and love for children and adults* by Sabine Lemire and Rasmus Bregnhøi and *How to make a baby* by Anna Fiske. The books are about sex, love, human propagation, and development of the body. The background for the analysis is to find out how a sensible topic like sex is presented to children in the two books. The focus is on two research questions: Which strategies are used to inform children about sex, and how is the semantic load distributed between image and text in spreads about intercourse? To answer the first question, the analysis investigates among other things the use of humour and the choice of words for sexual activity in the two books, while a social semiotic multimodal model is used to answer the second question. The analysis shows that humour in verbal text and images is a prominent strategy in both books. The Danish book combines humour with oral expressions for sexual activity, expressions that many would perceive as taboo words. The Norwegian book avoids taboo expressions, and use several words for emotions. Regarding the second question, the analysis shows that both verbal language and images carry a rather equal semantic load when intercourse is taken up. Recent research on picture books about human propagation (Maagerø and Øines 2019) showed that picture books from the last decades let the verbal text carry more meaning about the intercourse than the images. The images contributed more to the setting and atmosphere. It seems that these two books break a certain tradition and introduce a new 'trend' where images are allowed to be more concrete and direct than earlier. The discussion will integrate changes in society and research conducted by Liang et.al. of picture books in Chinese about the same topic.

Keywords: picture books, non-fiction, multimodality, semantic load

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Anne Marie Øines is Assistant Professor at the University of South-Eastern Norway. She teaches Norwegian language and literature for student at the teacher education. She has written articles about picture books, reading-aloud practices in kindergarten and about bilingual children. For almost ten years she has arranged a festival about picture books for students and kindergarten/school teachers at the University of South-Eastern Norway. The festival presents authors and illustrators of new and modern picture books, and it presents researchers at the field.