

## **“Go the F\*\*k to Sleep”: An SFL-based multimodal analysis of meaning choices in a children’s book parody**

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### **Abstract**

Go the Fuck to Sleep, a 2011 bestselling parody of a children’s bedtime picture book, found a huge audience in frustrated parents whose young children refuse to go to bed. Alongside illustrations of children and nature which are typical of a children’s picture book, stanzas of poetry laden with profanity convey the hidden frustration of parents who wish their restless children would succumb to sleep. The feeling of community of parents who suffer through the bedtime routine nightly is nurtured by this in-joke of explicit language which must remain unsaid in front of the child. Working from a systemic functional linguistic perspective, this paper uses a combination of analyses – verbal (cf. Martin & White 2005) and visual (cf. Painter, Martin & Unsworth 2013) – to provide multimodal evidence for how the images and words contribute to construal of meaning in a parody of a children’s book. Together, the pictures and poetry show the child taking the power role in the bedtime routine in a middle-class Western household. Although the visual choices are similar to those in a conventional bedtime story, they nonetheless show the child increasingly at the centre of the images. In the verbal evaluations, parents initially refuse to give their child the items or activities they seek to delay the bedtime routine, but the parents later give in to their child’s demands. Following the parent narrator’s mounting frustration and desperation, the verbal evaluations shift from the idea of the child sleeping securely to questioning the child’s honesty, to a harsh critique of his or her ability as a parent. The role-reversal in the book (and the parent narrator’s explicit language when speaking to the child) provides parents with some relief from their guilt of being considered ‘bad parents’ because they lose authority over their child at night. However, it also highlights the ideological issues at play at bedtime.

**Keywords:** appraisal; multimodality; picture books; parody

### **References**

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