

LOOKING FOR STEREOTYPICAL PORTRAYALS OF GRANDMOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICAN MULTILINGUAL PICTUREBOOKS

Maritha Snyman

Department of Information Science
University of South Africa
Pretoria, South Africa
snyman.maritha@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Picturebooks are vehicles of knowledge and socialisation for children. In portraying grandmothers in children's picturebooks, existing stereotypes are often enforced (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2014). This article set out to determine how, and if, the portrayal of grandmothers in a sample of multilingual picturebooks in South Africa is stereotyped and how possible stereotyping relates to South Africa's cultural diversity. Ten books were selected that have been translated into more than four of South Africa's 11 official languages. By using quantitative coding these texts were deconstructed by looking for stereotypical representations of grandmothers and the relationships that exist between the portrayal of cultural groups and stereotypes. The findings indicated that stereotypical portrayals of South African grandmothers do not follow the patterns uncovered in studies of a similar nature in the United States (US) and

UNISA 
university
of south africa

Mousaion
Volume 33 | Number 2 | 2015
pp. 111–127

Print ISSN 0027-2639
© Unisa Press

the United Kingdom (UK). South African grandmothers are stereotyped because of their goodness – their attitude of a positive servitude. In providing possible reasons for this deviation from the findings of similar studies elsewhere, the complex intricacies of politics and publishing activities in South Africa's are briefly discussed.

Keywords: picturebooks, portrayal of grandmothers, cultural diversity, multilingualism, ethnicity, South Africa, politics and publishing

1. INTRODUCTION

In the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), studies about the portrayal of grandmothers in children's picturebooks have consistently been published since 1977. These studies are based on the assumption that literature, and specifically picturebooks, are important vehicles through which cultures transmit social values to children. This includes attitudes towards certain groups of people, races, nationalities, classes, and so on (Hollis-Saywer and Cuevas 2013, 903).

Because picturebooks are used as 'a tool for language and literacy acquisition' (Danowski and Robinson 2012, 347), they are, in addition to other social influences like media sources and television, primary agents to provide children with information and ideas about older people (Gilbert and Ricketts 2008). Therefore, they are a source of knowledge and socialisation. Picturebooks employ, like television and electronic games, visual and textual codes. Children process the iconic images and verbal codes in picturebooks on an implicit and unconscious level. In this way long-term beliefs are formed that can either perpetuate or challenge stereotypes that exist in society (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2014, 113).

The grandparent relationship is one in which children are most likely to interact with older people. If grandparents are represented as a homogeneous group, as Sciplino et al. (2010) found, stereotypical perceptions of older people will inform the child's societal value system. Repetitive messages of a stereotypical nature are often associated with negative implications, and may create false impressions of what grandmothers are and what they look like (Danowski and Robinson 2012). Picturebooks must therefore incorporate positive and realistic images of grandmothers in children's early educational experiences. Positive images in children's picturebooks can be a significant factor to create and maintain the status of elderly people in the eyes of the young (Pinsent 2003, 48).

The findings of a recent study in the US indicated that although some picturebooks have moved away from portraying grandmothers in traditional roles, others continue to enforce existing stereotypes (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2014).

2. AIM OF THE ARTICLE

If it is assumed that picturebooks are indeed carriers of cultural values that influence young children, similar studies to those done in the US and UK can contribute to identify cultural stereotypes and values that children may be exposed to in South African picturebooks. This study, therefore, wanted to look for the stereotyping of grandmothers in South African children's picturebooks, taking into account South Africa's cultural diversity

South African society is made up of diverse cultural groups. Although the recent studies in the US and UK about the stereotyping of older women in picturebooks acknowledge the increasing diversity of the populations in these countries, there is a difference between a country where one official language and culture dominate and a multicultural society like South Africa. Studying picturebooks produced in South Africa's diverse society could make a unique contribution to this discourse.

South Africa's cultural diversity originated centuries ago. From the middle of the 1600s, in a continuing process, various groups have formed the diversity that is modern South Africa today: the indigenous San and Khoi people, various black tribes, Dutch and British colonisers as well as distinct cultural groups like the German, French, Malay, Indian and others that settled in South Africa. Western rule of South Africa came to an end in 1994 with South Africa's first democratic election. The then two official languages, Afrikaans and English, became 11 official languages, of which nine are vernacular languages of black Africans. The current composition of the South African population, as indicated by the official census statistics of 2011, consists of black African (79%), coloured (8.9%), Indian/Asian (2.5%), white (8.9%) and other (0.5%) 'population groups' (StatsSA 2012, 18).

Taking the challenges of the South African reality into account, the objectives of this article were to determine:

- if, and how, the portrayal of grandmothers differs with regard to stereotyping in South African picturebooks when compared to similar studies done in the US and UK; and
- whether there is a relationship between the portrayal of culture and stereotypes in the sample of South African picturebooks.

It has to be noted that the article is based on an initial exploration with the aim to help model the enquiry design, sampling and methodology of a more expansive study. In other words, the article wanted to deconstruct South African picturebooks that feature grandmothers, by searching for socially constructed assumptions or stereotypes about older women related to children in a multicultural setting (Bothello and Rudman 2010).

3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1. Grandmothers as stereotypes and/or archetypes

The traditional depiction of older people in (mainly) western fairy tales, which are still being told and published in never ending new editions, creates stereotypes about older people, portraying them as a homogeneous group (Sciplino et al. 2010). These stereotypes mostly refer to distinctive behaviours (knitting, cooking, baking cakes, etc.) and physical descriptions (apron, grey hair in a bun, wearing slippers, etc.).

Stereotyping is considered less desirable in representations and portrayals than archetypes. Stereotypes are flat; labelling and limiting (Gibson 1988), and are defined as exaggerated beliefs about a certain group of people (Allport in Turner and Turner 1954, 36). Hamilton and Sherman (1994) describe stereotypes as a cognitive structure containing the knowledge, beliefs and expectations of a social group. Stereotypes are often inaccurate and do not portray the dynamic reality of the groups that are stereotyped.

Archetypes, in contrast, provide ‘foundations to build an endless variety ...’ (Gibson 1988, 177). According to Jung (in Gibson 1988, 177), the mother archetype appears ‘in an almost infinite variety of aspects’. Stevens (in Pinsent 2003, 5) differentiates between ‘those old people who become depressed and helpless, those who avoid this state by simply denying mortality, and those who continue to grow in maturity during this inescapable phase of human existence’. Pinsent consequently identifies three types of grandmothers in children’s books, namely: the ‘patchwork’ grandmothers who are dependent and frail; the hyperactive grandmothers to whom she also refers to as ‘witches or aliens’; and the ‘crones’ who are wise from their experience of life. According to Pinsent (2003, 52), the crone is a more accurate image of the grandmother.

3.2. A summary of findings from US and UK studies on the portrayal of grandmothers in children’s picturebooks

The accessible literature containing information about the portrayal of grandmothers in children’s picturebooks originated mostly in the US and the UK. The following aspects are repeatedly discussed in these studies.

3.2.1. Researching the portrayal of older characters in children’s picturebooks

Researching the portrayal of older characters in children’s picturebooks gained momentum in 1977 with the publication of Ansello’s study in which he analysed 656 easy readers and picturebooks. Many studies followed where the stereotyping of ageing characters, like grandparents, and especially grandmothers, were critically

investigated. The term ‘ageism’ was coined, referring to the process of stereotyping older adults on the basis of their age.

3.2.2. The issue and importance of older populations

In modern societies longer life spans and declining birth rates are contributing to an unprecedented population shift in the West in which older adults are forming a larger part of the population (Fenwick and Morrison 2009; Hollis-Sawyer and Cuevas 2013). These demographic shifts make it even more essential that children develop realistic, healthy and developmentally appropriate constructs of age and what it means to be an older adult (Silverstein and Giarusso 2010). ‘Grey power is challenging ageist stereotypes: politically, commercially and socially’ (Fenwick and Morrison 2009, 127). A marked increase in the number of books about grandparents suggests this growing awareness of the presence of older people in society (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2014, 130).

3.2.3. Stereotypical representations of grandmothers

Janelli (1988) reviewed 73 storybooks and found that while grandparents are in reality a very diverse group, this is contrary to what is depicted in children’s literature. Older characters are all doing the same things, look the same and are often depicted in the context of illness, disability and death (Hurst 1981). Most grandmothers in picturebooks are illustrated wearing aprons and slippers, and/or are knitting.

Such portrayals of grandmothers may prevent children from viewing the ageing process in a positive light, especially now that people are living longer than before. Dellman-Jenkins and Yang (1997) compared 95 award-winning books. Their research shows an array of positive attributes that older people in picturebooks portray, but that the negative stereotypes are, nevertheless, maintained. More recent research has indicated a shift away from blatant stereotyping and previous traditional roles for grandmothers. Grandmothers are now portrayed in a wider range of activities than in previous studies, but books that continue to enforce the stereotypes have not disappeared (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2013; Danowski and Robinson 2012; Fenwick and Morrison 2009, 127). Although Fenwick and Morrison (2009, 127) indicated that the physical appearance of grandmothers ‘shows a marked increase of positive elements’, Sciplino et al. (2010) found, a year later, that 59 per cent of grandmothers have grey hair and more than 50 per cent are still sedentary.

Over the span of 30 years, grandmothers have become younger, fitter and more active. This is balanced, however, by portrayals of grandmothers who are fairly sedentary. Although Fenwick and Morrison (2009, 142) note that it is ‘the widening range of possibilities that is important rather than the changes’. Sciplino et al. (2010, 312–314) found that the images of grandmothers in picturebooks do not seem to adequately represent the multiple realities of most grandmothers of

preschool children. Although grandmothers appear to be rather active and healthy, they are still represented as a homogeneous group and older than the average age of young children's grandparents in reality. It is further suggested that representations of younger and more energetic grandparents may make grandchildren feel closer to their grandparents. In this way dominant stereotypes can be challenged (Sciplino et al. 2010). Yet, as late as 2014, portrayals of grandparents were found to lack variety with regard to forms of employment, hobbies and child custody arrangements. This was particularly true for grandmother figures (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2014, 140).

3.2.4. Cultural or ethnical diversity

The cultural or ethnical diversity of grandmothers is not a major discussion point in any of these studies. In the past grandparents in US children's picturebooks, have been portrayed as mainly white and of unspecified heritage. Hollis-Sawyer and Cuevas (2013), however, report in their US study an increasing depiction of other cultural groups in terms of race and ethnicity. Crawford and Bhattacharya (2014) also acknowledge this trend. They do contend, however, that it has not reached the level proposed by many studies over the past three decades.

Sciplino et al.'s (2010) study specifically reviewed the cultural mixture of grandparents in picturebooks. They compared images of grandparents in the UK, Italy, Greece, Finland and Poland and found that there are significant variations. Grandmothers are, for instance, significantly older in Greek books than in UK books. Yet, the grandparents represented in this study are still similar with regard to cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Very few US and UK studies reflect on grandparents of diverse cultures.

Global societies are being challenged by increasingly culturally diverse environments. It is important for young people to understand the diversity of the world around them. This diversity includes a whole range of aspects, namely, language, cultural contexts, gender and age. From a young age children formulate attitudes and stereotypes that remain a directing force in their life (Klasmeier and Ripple in Danowski and Robinson 2012). The challenge is to instil positive values in children about diversity. Dealing with diversity in age can act as an example of how to address cultural diversity (Crawford and Bhattacharya 2014, 128).

4. METHODOLOGY USED IN ANALYSING THE DEPICTION OF GRANDMOTHERS IN MULTILINGUAL SOUTH AFRICAN PICTUREBOOKS

The studies included in the literature review above all employed a quantitative content analysis of the images and texts in selected books as a research method. The

studies did not include an interpretation of the text or images, but mainly commented on the quantitative findings based on deductive quantitative content analysis. The present study used the same methodology and employed similar ‘prior formulated, theoretically derived coding units’ (Mayring 2000) as used in the above-mentioned studies.

The coding for the South African study was developed by mainly using Sciplino et al.’s (2010) broad coding units, namely, appearance, accessories, activities with grandchild and health of grandparents. Crawford and Bhattacharya’s study (2014) brought to the coding form certain issues, such as the role grandmothers play in the grandchildren’s life and the grandparents’ lifestyle. Some of Danowski and Robinson’s (2012) physical characteristics; the distinction between positive, neutral and negative personality traits of grandmothers; and the extent of the grandmother’s role as a character in the story were also incorporated. The content analysis had to address the following questions:

- Are grandmothers portrayed as stereotypes?
- Which cultural/ethnic markers can be identified (e.g. black African, white, Indian/Asian and coloured)?
- What is the relationship between the portrayal of culture and stereotypes?

4.1. Sampling

Finding picturebooks that provided a representative picture of the South African reality was the first problem. There is a dearth of books in most of the vernacular languages. It was consequently decided to use multilingual picturebooks as a departure point assuming that these books would be prone to reflect the diversity of the South African reality. The research population was therefore limited to books that were published after 1994 in four or more of South Africa’s 11 official languages and in which grandmothers are portrayed in image and text.

Sampling was purposive, in the sense that specific multilingual picturebooks for children were selected (Leedy and Ormrod 2014, 141) and that books translated and published in four or more of South Africa’s official languages were deemed suitable. A small sample of ten books, mainly books used in schools, was selected. Biblionef’s publication, *Children’s books in African languages* (Heale 2012), was used. This book lists 220 children’s picturebooks that are available in more than four of the 11 official languages. Five books in the sample of books were found here. The other five books were found by consulting children’s books experts and by using keyword searches. This sample does not contain all the books that might have matched the criteria of the study, but since this was an exploratory, pilot study in a genre where multi-lingual children’s books are few, the sample was considered adequate to come

to provisional findings that could show the way forward to continued research in this field.

The sample consisted of the following books: *Granny's story*; *A song for Jamela*; *The day Gogo went to vote*; *Not so fast Songololo*; *Thandeka's gift*; *Ouma Ruby's secret*; *Lena's bottle tree*; *Remembering Grandmother*; *Noshipho comes to stay*; and *My granny can read and write*.

4.2. Data analysis

The data was analysed manually and individually by three researchers. One of the researchers was a black African who could identify and explain cultural contradictions and markers. Coding units were added to the coding form in the course of the analysis. After the data analysis the frequency of the coding units was counted and explained.

5. FINDINGS

The findings based on the analysis of the coding sampled books on the coding forms are presented below. The discussion is ordered by using the main coding units.

5.1. Population groups

Eighty per cent of the grandmothers depicted in the stories are black African and 20 per cent are coloured. The other population groups are not represented at all.

5.2. Appearance

A song for Jamela is the only book where all the characters wear fashionable modern clothing. This includes the grandmother, who despite her apron, wears high heels and fashionable clothing. In *Ouma Ruby's secret*, Ouma is dressed neatly and in an old-fashioned manner. The rest of the grandmothers' clothes (80%) are coded as traditional (for a specific culture) and old fashioned (as in not modern).

They all wear hair coverings, mainly scarves, and one wears a knitted hat. This was coded as cultural clothing since black African women wear hair coverings to show respect for themselves and other people. Although some black African women deviate from this custom, it still applies today. In *The day Gogo went to vote*, the very old grandmother does not, however, wear a hair covering. This is not according to the custom for a woman of her age. Instead her hair is combed in a modern way and pulled into a bun. *A song for Jamela*, one of the books in which the grandmother's hair is not covered, is set in a township where all the characters are thoroughly modern. A strong western influence is, for instance, signified in the name of the show, 'Afro Idol', that features in the book.

Other than in the western studies, only 50 per cent of the grandmothers are depicted with wrinkled skin; 40 per cent have a smooth skin; and only one grandmother's skin shows signs of sagging.

Stereotypical accessories (glasses, apron, bun, knitting) depicted in western picturebooks are more or less absent. Only Ouma Ruby takes glasses from her handbag when she needs them and only the gogo who goes to vote wears her hair in a bun. Only the granny in *My granny can read and write* knits; and only the modern grandmother in *A Song for Jamela* wears an apron to cover her beautiful dress. The only accessory used in illustrations is a handbag on the arm of four of the grandmothers. Two also wear earrings.

5.3. Activities

Again, in contrast to the findings of the western studies, eight of the grandmothers are highly active, both physically and mentally. The activities of the grandmothers vary. Four do housework, four tell stories, two practise crafts and three go shopping. None of the grandmothers performs only one activity.

Eight of the grandmothers are in good health. One grandmother dies during the story and the other one is not active because the story's plot revolves around the many years she had to live before she could vote. In both these cases, non-activity is central to the story lines.

5.4. Relationships with grandchildren

All the grandmothers are depicted in positive relationships with their grandchildren, and 50 per cent are also specifically coded as loving and understanding. They fulfil various roles in their grandchildren's lives. Five are the main caregivers: two because of mothers who have died and one because of a father who works far away. Four grandmothers are also portrayed as custodians of the family and/or cultural wisdom in their role of story tellers. Three (30%) are coded as fun seekers. The relationship between grandmother and grandchild is mainly portrayed as close. In four cases the children live with their grandmothers and in three cases the grandmothers live with their children. Two of the grandmothers live in close proximity to their grandchildren.

5.5. Grandmothers and narrative techniques in picturebooks

Different to the western studies, 60 per cent of the grandmothers are the main characters in the story. Four are relegated to minor characters because the main plot does not focus on them.

In nine of the books, a third person narrator is used. In *Granny's story*, the author uses dramatic dialogue – probably because the grandmother is presented as a narrator who comes to the school to tell the learners about her young days. This

is presented in a question and answer format. Fenwick and Morrison (2009, 127) also found that ‘few grandmothers are the narrator’. Adult narrators are not likely to be used when writing for children where the aim is to create characters with whom young readers can identify.

5.6. Setting

This aspect was not present in any of the coding forms used in the western studies, but was added while coding the books, because it seems to play a significant role in the portrayals of the grandmothers. There are marked differences between the portrayal of grandmothers living in rural areas and those who live in townships. Rural or urban settings are not explicitly stated in the texts, but are inferred by visual signs like washing and swimming in the river, cooking outside, collecting wood, and so on. In rural areas these are not signs of poverty, but signs of wealth.

The wealth of *black* Africans is signified by the animals they own. Cooking outside and eating together signify a custom of sharing and not poverty. Townships are signified by signs, such as small, colourful shops and bustling street scenes. Township grandmothers wear handbags and go shopping. More rural grandmothers wear hair coverings than those who live in townships and urban areas. The only exception is Songololo’s grandmother who lives in a township and wears a knitted hat and old fashioned clothes. All the grandmothers who live in rural areas wear old fashioned and/or traditional clothing.

6. DISCUSSION

It seems as if stereotyping with regard to appearance in the South African sample might be influenced by setting – the urban/rural divide – rather than age or population groups. The economic inequality of the South African population, that is of the highest in the world (StatsSA 2014, 13), probably plays a role here. There is, for instance, little similarity in appearance between the flashy township characters in *Not so fast Songololo* and the books set in rural areas. Two dominant cultural markers could be identified that are not discussed in the western studies, namely: living in an extended family; and wearing head coverings.

The extended family signifies the black African culture (Airhihenbuwa and Webster 2004). In all but one of the books, the grandmothers are portrayed as part of an extended family. In the extended family the grandmother traditionally stays with her children.

The coding of the sampled books reflects, however, a change in this tradition. In 40 per cent of the sampled texts, the grandmothers are looking after their grandchildren in their own homes and do not stay with their children. This portrays the current reality in South Africa where grandmothers are often solely responsible

for their grandchildren due to financial reasons; parents who are migrant workers; and grandchildren orphaned due to HIV/AIDS.

The only sign regarding appearance that stands out is the use of head coverings, a cultural marker of the black African woman that is not necessarily associated with age. This cultural sign is disappearing from urban life, as is reflected in the sampled books, but is still a prominent sign in rural areas.

Both the cultural marker of the extended family and head coverings are also present in the portrayal of coloured grandmothers who live in a rural area. Both of the signs can consequently be regarded as cross-cultural signs.

Not being able to read is also depicted across cultural borders. The black grandmother in *My grandmother can read and write*, and the coloured grandmother in *Ouma Ruby's secret* (a true story told by her grandson) in an urban setting, share the same secret: they cannot read. Whether this can be regarded as a cross-cultural code is doubtful. In a country where reading proficiency is very low, this is probably more of an attempt to motivate young readers to learn to read.

A comparison between the studies conducted in the US and UK and the South African pilot study indicated intrinsic differences. In the western studies the main concern is the homogeneous portrayal of grandmothers that excludes diversity and leads to a stereotyped depiction of age, mostly experienced as negative and referred to as ageism.

South African grandmothers are also stereotyped, but in a different way. It is not the grandmothers' appearance, activities or life style that is stereotyped in the South African picturebooks. Pinsent's (2003) patchwork granny is also not present in any of the South African texts. In general the grandmothers are portrayed as lively and active and not sedentary. Three of the South African grandmothers (30%) can be typified as 'hyperactive' – archetypes that are called 'witches or aliens' by Pinsent (2003, 52).

The grandmothers depicted in the South African texts are mostly independent and resourceful. They are portrayed as the 'helpers' resembling Pinsent's (2003, 52) 'cronies' which he describes as women 'who are wise from their experience of life ... (and) a more accurate image of the grandmother'.

The South African grandmothers are, however, so wise, nurturing, good and caring, that Pinsent's 'crone' becomes a stereotype in the South African texts – a stereotype of the helper and the nurturer. The South African grandmothers are stereotyped by being depicted as too good to be true. Ironically, they are stereotypes of women living a life of servitude according to the age old patriarchal African tradition. Depicted as such, their portrayals seem bland and lifeless,¹ as if there were puppets in the hands of authors and illustrators. These stereotypical portrayals are inaccurate and do not portray the dynamic reality (Hamilton and Sherman 1994). South African grandmothers portrayed in the selected sample, do not reflect 'the

widening range of possibilities' in depicting grandmothers (Fenwick and Morrison 2009, 142).

A comparison between the books in the selected sample and unilingual trade picturebooks in South Africa that portray grandmothers, shows marked differences.² At least four recent Afrikaans trade picturebooks feature grandmothers as the main character. All four books are set up explicitly to protest against western stereotypical portrayals of grandmothers. In *My ouma is 'n rockster* (2004) [My grandma is a rock star]; *My ouma is cool* (2005) [My grandma is cool]; *My ouma is 'n filmster* (2014) [My grandma is a film star]; and *Die coolste ouma op aarde* (2015) [The coolest grandma in the world], the grandmothers do not conform to the norm and live their lives in various interesting ways. In *Die coolste ouma op aarde* (2015), the characters selected in the text reflect the variety of South Africa's population in contrast to the books selected in the sample where ethnic groups are portrayed in isolation of the rest of South Africa. In the sample of multi-lingual books 80 per cent of the grandmothers depicted are black African and 20 per cent are coloured. No white and/or Indian grandmothers are depicted in the books of the selected sample.

The reasons for these unexpected findings might be found in the way South Africa's multi-cultural society is governed and how politics is influencing the publishing industry and consequently those books prescribed for schools.

7. ETHNOCENTRISM VERSUS MULTICULTURALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

A multicultural approach is 'the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity which involves religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race', writes Song (2010). The South African population is, however, governed in broader ethnic terms that are called 'population groups'. Ethnocentrism is, in practice, the paradigm used to govern South Africa despite the view that 'language and religion are at the heart of ... cultural diversity and [that] race has a more limited role in multicultural discourse' (Song 2010). 'Population groups' are indicated in government documents as black African, coloured, Indian/Asian and white. It is this reality in which South African multi-lingual children's picturebooks are produced. This reality is, however, a reaction to the previous reality of apartheid. Although apartheid disappeared with the new democracy in 1994, the political situation in South Africa is still influencing the publishing industry.

The following bird's eye view of South Africa's publishing history indicates its close relationship with South Africa's political history. After the Dutch colonised South Africa in 1652 they brought literacy with them. After a while a pidgeon language was formed in the Cape that later became known as Afrikaans. The first written Afrikaans

material was found in religious Arabic texts printed by Muslim slaves in the Cape (Davids 1987). In 1875, the white, Afrikaans population started advocating for the recognition of Afrikaans as an official language and created publishing houses that would help to develop the new language. After the British colonised South Africa in 1806, books in English were imported in great quantities to the new British colony. When the National Party came into power in 1948, Afrikaans was supported by the government and publishing in Afrikaans grew. The democratisation of South Africa in 1994 caused the demise of a number of publishing houses. Publishing in Afrikaans and English, nevertheless, continued for an established market.

Today, more than 20 years later, there are still no books available for back African leisure readers whose mother-tongue is neither Afrikaans nor English. 'Authors prefer to write in English in order to get published, and to ensure a wider audience' (Möller 2013, 10). This is one of the reasons why 'statistics clearly show a healthy production of Afrikaans and English literature in comparison to a very meagre output in the nine different African languages' (Morgan 2006, 183). According to the 2011 Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) report, only 5.3 per cent of authors responsible for books sold in South Africa are black, while 94.7 per cent are white (Struik and Le Roux 2012). Perhaps the bland portrayal of grandmothers in the sample of multi-lingual books is the result of authors and illustrators who are outsiders in relation to the cultures they portray. Eighty per cent of the authors of the selected sample of picturebooks are white, while 80 per cent of the grandmothers portrayed in the selected sample are black Africans. Their portrayal of grandmothers of a culture that is not their own, may differ from an insider's perspective in whom the stereotypes of a specific culture is embedded.

As in the apartheid years, books in black African languages are still relegated to the school system. In 2011, nearly all turnover by African language books (98%) was generated by children's books [for educational purposes], while adult books in African languages contributed 1.6 per cent to all turnover (Struik and Le Roux 2012, 80). Due to the dearth of black African authors, most of the books for educational purposes are written and conceptualised by white authors and merely translated into a few or all of the African languages – as has been confirmed in the sample of selected children's books used in the study.

The content and writing style of school books are also restricted by the prescribed requirements of the Department of Basic Education. Books for educational purposes are chosen according to standards like correctness of language (language level as well as politically correct terms), for instance, texts that are free of sexism, and the number of illustrations that will offer an appropriate representation of the South African diversity. There is political pressure on publishers to provide books within these parameters, but this counters creativity.

8. CONCLUSION

The objectives set for the article have been realised. As was seen above, the stereotypes of grandmothers found in South African children's picturebooks differ intrinsically from the findings of similar studies in the US and UK. The stereotypes are fashioned along ethnic rather than cultural distinctions. Although the sample was small, it is not foreseen that more books (if more books that match the criteria of the study can be found) would yield conspicuously different results.

The outcome of the study foregrounds the complex language and cultural reality in South Africa. It highlighted the influence of political decisions that do not follow Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act no. 108 of 1996) which prescribes that the state must take 'practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of the indigenous languages'. The official African languages clearly do not enjoy 'parity of esteem'. The underdevelopment of nine of the official languages is thus in discord with the South African Constitution.

This is probably the most important reason why South Africa's publishing landscape has not changed over the past 16 years (Möller 2013, 10) and why multi-lingual picturebooks are mainly written by a small section of the population. It is probably the relegation of the indigenous languages to the back benches in favour of English that is reflected in the bland, stereotyped representation of the grandmothers found in the sample of South African picturebooks.

The article does not only point to many research options and possibilities, but also raises alarm bells for the continued existence of South Africa's cultural diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to acknowledge Prof. Felicité Fairer-Wessels of the University of Pretoria and Ms Eulenda Sebida of Unisa for their invaluable help in the coding process.

NOTES

1. This statement excludes Chris van Wyk's heart-warming rendering of an autobiographical story in *Ouma Ruby's secret* and the touching *The day Gogo went to vote*.
2. It should be noted that these books are published for the established Afrikaans readership and are not published with the aim to be prescribed at schools.

REFERENCES

- Airhihenbuwa, C. O. and J. de W. Webster. 2004. Culture and African contexts of HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support. *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS* 1(1): 4–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17290376.2004.9724822> (accessed June 12, 2011).
- Ansello, E. F. 1977. Age and ageism in children's first literature. *Educational Gerontology* 2: 255–274.
- Botelho, M. S. and M. K. Rudman. 2010. Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature: Mirrors, windows, and doors. *International Research in Children's Literature* 3(2): 229–231. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2010.0114> (accessed July 7, 2015).
- Crawford, P. A. and S. Bhattacharya. 2014. Grand images: Exploring images of grandparents in picturebooks. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 28(1): 128–144.
- Dada, F., G. Mhlope and L. Hofmeyr. 2002. *Thandeka's gift*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Daly, N. 1985. *Not so fast Songololo*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.
- Daly, N. 2009. *A song for Jamela*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Danowski, J. and T. Robinson. 2012. The portrayal of older characters in popular children's books in the US. *Journal of Children and Media* 6(3): 333–350. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2011.630741> (accessed July 7, 2015).
- Davids, A. 1987. Arabic–Afrikaans. A view of the written Afrikaans of the Cape Muslim during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *South African Journal of Linguistics* 5(1): 24–40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10118063.1987.9724243>
- Dellmann-Jenkins, M. and L. Yang. 1997. The portrayal of older characters in award-winning literature for children. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 12: 96–100.
- Fenwick, G. and A. Morrison. 2009. Images of grandparents in young children's picturebooks in the United Kingdom. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 7(1): 127–145.
- Gibson, L. R. 1988. Beyond the apron: Archetypes, stereotypes and alternative portrayals of mother in children's literature. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 13(4): 177–181. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/chq/summary/vO13/13.4gibson.html> (accessed July 4, 2015).
- Gilbert, C. and K. Rickets. 2008. Children's attitudes towards older adults and aging: A synthesis of research. *Educational Gerontology* 34(7): 570–586.
- Hamilton, D. L. and J. W. Sherman. 1994. In *Handbook of social cognition*, ed. J. R. S. Wyer and T. K. Srull, 1–68. 2nd ed. Hillside, NY: Macmillan.
- Heale, J., ed. 2012. *Children's books in African languages*. Pinelands: Biblionef. <http://biblionefsa.org.za/about-us/#sthash.iaTTzYsG.dpuf> (accessed August 3, 2015).
- Hollis-Saywer, L. and L. Cuevas. 2013. Mirror, mirror on the wall: Ageist and sexist double jeopardy portrayals in children's books. *Educational Gerontology* 39(12): 902–914. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2013.767650>
- Hurst, J. B. 1981. Images in children's books. *Social Education* 45(2): 138–142.
- Jacobs, J. 2004. *My ouma is 'n rockster*. Pretoria: Lapa.
- Jacobs, J. 2014. *My ouma is 'n filmster*. Pretoria: Lapa.
- Janelli, L. M. 1988. Depictions of grandparents in children's literature: A revisit. *Educational Gerontology* 14: 193–202.

- Leedy, P. D. and J. E. Ormrod. 2014. *Practical research and planning*. 10th ed. Harlow: Pearsons.
- Maartens, W. 2004. *Lena's bottle tree*. Pretoria: Lapa.
- Mayring, P. 2000. Qualitative content analyses. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1(2): Article 20. http://scholar.google.co.za/scholar?hl=en&q=Mayring%2C+P.+2000.+Qualitative+content+analysis.+Forum.+Qualitative+Social+Research%2C+1%282%29+%28Article+20%29.+&btnG=&as_sdt=1%2C5&as_sdtp= (accessed May 20, 2015).
- Möller, J. 2013. The state of multilingual publishing in South Africa. *Publishing Diversity in South Africa and the United Kingdom* 11(1). <http://erea.revues.org/3507> (accessed July 15, 2015).
- Morgan, N. 2006. Revisiting the South African book market: Towards a change of tongue? *Acta Academica Supplementum* 2: 179–196.
- Naidoo, D. 1996. *My granny can read and write*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.
- Oosthuizen, S. 2007. *Noshipho comes to stay*. Somerset West: Nation Rising.
- Pinsent, P. 2003. Crone or alien: The image of the grandmother in some recent picturebooks and illustrated texts. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 9(1): 41–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1361454032000232095>
- Republic of South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act no. 108 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Sciplino, C., P. K. Smith, H. Hurme, M. Rusek and P. Bäckvik. 2010. Representations of grandparents in children's books in Britain, Italy and Greece, Finland and Poland. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 8(3): 298–316. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2010.498760>
- Silverstein, M. and R. Giarrusso. 2010. Ageing and family life: A decade review. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 27: 1039–1058.
- Sisulu, E. B. 1997. *The day Gogo went to vote*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Slingsby, M. 2001. *Granny's story*. Cape Town: Baardskeerder.
- Song, S. 2010. Multiculturalism. In *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. E. N. Zalta. Spring edition. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/multiculturalism/> (accessed July 17, 2015).
- Statistics South Africa. 2012. *Census 2011 statistical release*. Report P0301.4. Pretoria: StatsSA.
- Statistics South Africa. 2014. *Poverty trends in South Africa: An examination of absolute poverty between 2006 and 2011*. Report-03-10-06. Pretoria: StatsSA.
- StatsSA see Statistics South Africa.
- Stewart, D. 1999. *Remembering Grandmother*. Cape Town: Cambridge University Press.
- Struik, W. and B. le Roux. 2012. *Annual book publishing industry survey report 2011*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria. http://www.publishsa.co.za/downloads/industry-statistics/PASA_Survey_2011.pdf (accessed July 17, 2015).
- Turner, P. and S. Turner. 2011. Is stereotyping inevitable when designing with personas? *Design studies* 32(1): 30–44. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2010.06.002> (accessed July 7, 2015).
- Van der Vyver, M. 2015. *Die coolste ouma op aarde*. Pretoria: Lapa.
- Van Wyk, C. 2006. *Ouma Ruby's secret*. Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARITHA SNYMAN is a research fellow in the Department of Information Science, University of South Africa (Unisa). She obtained her master's degree and DLitt from the University of Pretoria (UP). At UP, she worked as an associate professor and was appointed as the managing director of a publishing house from 2008 to 2013. Her research interests include South African children's literature, reading promotion and reception studies in the widest sense of the word.