Playing with Language and Possible Worlds on a *Field Trip to the Moon* – Talking about Wordless Picturebooks in German- and Italian-Speaking Primary Schools

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Abstract

Play as an anthropological constant of human beings is closely linked to children's acquisition of language and literature, in which playing with language and with possible worlds is of central importance (Andresen, 2013; Bruner 1986). Wordless picturebooks can be used in all languages and encourage language play and imaginative play in particular. In the context of primary education, shared reception situations in classroom interactions offer opportunities for the playful appropriation of stories. This article focuses on picturebook discussions from the study *IMAGO. Picturebooks – Multilingual, Rhyming and Wordless – In Kindergartens and Primary Schools in South Tyrol* (Hoffmann, 2024a; 2024b) about the wordless picturebook *Field Trip to the Moon* (Hare, 2019b). It shows how wordless picturebooks are playfully appropriated in dialogic reception situations in Italian- and German-speaking primary schools in the multilingual province of South Tyrol. By analysing transcribed key incidents, this contribution investigates how wordless picturebooks invite children to engage in language play and imaginative play, and which forms of play can be reconstructed in the picturebook discussions. It is shown that even with different didactic approaches, common patterns of play can be found across languages, which highlight the diverse opportunities and ways of playing with language and possible worlds.

1. Introduction

Stories in pictures open up narrative spaces for the imagination and invite us to play with possibilities within the framework of fiction (Hoffmann, 2018; 2020) from early childhood and family literary socialisation to primary school, where they can be received together in dialogue with each other (Dammann-Thedens, 2020; Wieler, 2024). This creates a shared imaginative space in which the participants move within play, where language(s) and literature, self and world are acquired (Mayer, 2018; Dehn, 2019). How this play with the *as if*, with *possible worlds* (Bruner, 1986), with the "draft-character of self and world" (Ulich & Ulich, 1994, p. 827, translation JH), is realised in different linguistic-cultural educational contexts will be shown by analysing transcribed *key incidents* (Kroon & Sturm, 2007) from dialogic picturebook discussions about the wordless picturebook *Field Trip to the Moon* (Hare, 2019b) which was read both in a German-speaking (*Ausflug zum Mond*, Hare, 2019a) and in an Italian-speaking (*Gita sulla luna*, Hare, 2019c) primary school.

The data in this research paper is part of the ethnographically-orientated study *IMAGO. Picturebooks – Multilingual, Rhyming and Wordless – In Kindergartens and Primary Schools in South Tyrol* (Hoffmann, 2024a; 2024b), which aims to reconstruct the conditions for language and literature learning in multilingual contexts.

The picturebook tells the story of a school trip to the moon, where a child is accidentally left alone, encounters aliens, and finally returns to earth. It is about loneliness and community, loss and responsibility, strangeness and friendship, curiosity and courage. This experientiality (Dehn et al., 2014; Fludernik, 1996) characterises the story and makes it meaningful for children. The narration in monoscenic images and sequences of images is expressive and colour-symbolic in terms of both the *landscape of action* and the *landscape of consciousness* (Bruner, 1986). The ambiguity of the images enables playing with possibilities.

As different as the literary approaches of the respective reception situations may be – more literary or more grammar-orientated – they nevertheless have in common a communication-oriented dialogue, plus a focus on language and the playfulness of the imagination (Wulf, 2020). The article uses key incidents from both picturebook discussions to differentiate playful

ways of dealing with literature and multilingualism, in which the close inter-weaving of play and literature (Stenger, 2014) is documented.

Firstly, from an anthropological perspective (Chapter 2), play is didactically and empirically located in the context of language and literature learning (Chapter 3). This is followed by an insight into the ongoing empirical-qualitative study *IMAGO* (Chapter 4) and the wordless picturebook *Field Trip to the Moon* (Chapter 5). In the central section of the paper, key incidents on imaginative play and language play in German- and Italian-speaking primary schools are analysed (Chapter 6). Finally, these forms of play are differentiated and their potential for language and literature learning is reconstructed (Chapter 7).

2. Anthropology of Play

Play, language and literature are closely interwoven, as the literary scholar Gundel Mattenklott aptly puts it:

> If we consider poetry as play, we are not only emphasising an activity familiar to the child, but also one of its essential performative aspects. The word *play* denotes two things: something predetermined, finished – an ensemble of rules [...] – and something possible, a process that is always to be carried out anew, which follows the predetermined rules, but in the course of which they can also be changed, expanded or even destroyed. [...] Related to this is language with its grammatical system of rules that we revitalise, change or destroy with every sentence. Poetry is no different: as a work, it is historically self-contained and at the same time it actualises itself anew and differently in the process of each reading. It is created by following rules or destroying them, and it produces new rules – impulses for other works. With language play, the child not only plays his/her way into language, but also into literature. (Mattenklott, 1996a, p. 344)

In the following, I will take a closer look at children's *playing into language* and *playing into literature*. From an anthropological perspective, play as an anthropological constant (Stenger, 2012) is part of being human. It is integrated into

performative actions (Wulf, 2020), and can be considered a central education-al medium. In play, children can explore *possible worlds* (Bruner, 1986), work on their *action-guiding themes* (Bachmair, 1994) and move within the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1966/2016).

Different forms of play can be distinguished: on a diachronic level in child development, there exists *functional play*, *constructive play*, *symbolic play* and *games with rules play* (Piaget, 2013). On a synchronous level, there exists play in the form of *competition*, *chance*, *simulation* or *vertigo* (Caillois, 1958/2001; Huizinga, 1938/2016). With regard to play relating to language and literature, this contribution focuses on symbolic play and games with rules plays, which are particularly important at kindergarten and primary school age, as well as simulation, the play of transformation.

The different types of play are based on common structural elements, which have been differentiated by the educational anthropologist Christoph Wulf (2020). Without going into the individual elements in too much detail, their central importance in dealing with language and literature must be em-phasised. Various aspects of literary learning, as formulated out of the per-spective of literature didactics by Kaspar H. Spinner (2019), first published in 2006 in his frequently quoted *Praxis-Deutsch* article, can be found here (Ta-ble 1).

Table 1 – Connections between playing and literary learning

Structural elements of play	Aspects of literary learning
Space and time	Imagination when reading and listening
Rules	Subjective involvement and accurate
Imagination	perception
The as-if	Linguistic composition
"Flow" and sensory experience	Perspectives of characters
Mimesis	Narrative and dramaturgical logic of action
Performativity	Consciousness of fictionality
Practical knowledge	Metaphorical and symbolic language
Community	Inconclusiveness of meaning construction
Functionlessness	Literary discussion
Play utensils	Genres as prototypes
Uncertainty of the outcome of the playing	Awareness of literary history
(Wulf, 2020)	(Spinner, 2019)

The connections between playing and literary learning can be found, for example, in the importance of imagination and in dealing with fictionality (the as-if) in the playing as well as in the reading and listening process, in the acquisition of rules (or, rather, narrative structures and genres), the awareness of space and time or of literary history, the significance of the social community for playing or literary discussions, and in the openness of the play or interpretation process: the uncertainty of the outcome of the play or the inconclusiveness of meaning construction.

In addition to structural similarities in the processes of playing and literary learning, stories and their shared reception also serve as a collection of materials, a *fund of stories* (Dehn et al., 2014) that provides inspiration for children's play.

> [...] looking at picturebooks, stories, images, theatrical productions, songs and dances provide rich material and open up horizons of meaning, which can then be processed and transformed into their own interpretation of the world through free play. (Stenger, 2014, p. 273)

At the same time, imaginative and traditional play can serve as an inspiration for stories and storytelling (Berti, 2023; Hoffmann, 2018). How this playful approach can in turn be made didactically fruitful for language and literature learning processes is explored below.

3. Playing with Language and Literature

Looking back at the language and literature didactic discussion of the last 20 years, not only in the German but also in the English-speaking context, we can find a lively debate on playfulness concerning the titles of monographs: *Interaktion, Sprache und Spiel* (Andresen, 2002), *Schreibspielräume* (Kohl, 2005), *Playing with Picturebooks* (Allan, 2012), *Mit Sprache(n) spielen* (Belke, 2020), *Poesie und Grammatik* (Belke, 2021), *Spielräume der Ordnungen* (Morrin, 2023); of edited volumes: *Literatur als Spiel* (Anz & Kaulen, 2009), *Postmodern Picturebooks. Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality* (Sipe & Pantaleo, 2012), *SpracheSpielen* (Andresen & Januschek, 2013), *Poetische Spielräume für Kinder* (Ritter et al., 2013), *Children's Play in Literature* (Kelley, 2018), *Varieté der Vielfalt: Äs-*

thetisches Lernen in Sprache, Spiel, Bewegung, Kunst (Mayer et al., 2018), *Children's Literature and Intergenerational Relationships: Encounters of the Playful Kind* (Deszcz-Tryhubczak & Kalla, 2021); and of special issues of scientific journals: *Spielen mit Sprache* (Die Grundschulzeitschrift – Kohl, 1998), *Spielen in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (kjl&m – Roeder, 2008), *Child and Play. Imagination – Expression – Education* (Filoteknos – Waksmund et al., 2019), *Kinderliteratur und Kinderspielkultur* (kjl&m – Schmideler, 2021), *Literalität und Spiel* (Leseforum – Tresch & Monnier, 2022), *Lust auf Sprache – Neue Spielräume eröffnen für und mit Literatur* (JuLit – Arbeitskreis Jugendliteratur, 2023), *Playing in and Through Children's Books* (Bookbird – Malilang, 2023). Selected key findings of this discussion are summarised as follows.

Language play exists in all cultures. The literariness of literary texts or other narrative forms, which is expressed in tonal, rhythmic, syntactic, lexical and semantic patterns, differs fundamentally from functional everyday language, which is embedded in communicative contexts of action. This aesthetic dimension of language is of fundamental anthropological importance and invites children to become aware of linguistic structures, develop language awareness and reflect on language (Mattenklott, 1996a; 1996b; 2009). In addition, repetition in the form of stanzas and verses in songs and poems and in the form of repeated reception of language play in radio plays and read-aloud situations with picturebooks all support children in the acquisition of language and literature, also in the area of second language and written language acquisition (Belke, 2006, 2011).

Based on this central importance of language play for the acquisition of language and literature, Gerlind Belke has developed a linguistic didactic approach of playing with language(s) as part of integrative German lessons in primary schools, which combine language and literature learning and open up scope for participation for children also in multilingual contexts.

> Language play as a form of elementary literature makes it possible to combine the acquisition of literature and language: systematic linguistic learning should always include aesthetic and playful elements – literature lessons should always be language lessons as well. The proximity of poetry and grammar, known since antiquity and almost forgotten today, can be utilised for German lessons that are integrative in many ways and also help to make grammar lessons in the *mother tongue* more inviting and attractive. (Belke, 2006, p. 302)

Kasper H. Spinner (2016) argues in favour of using poetic language play to build on early childhood literary language play experiences in the early years of school and summarises the basic procedures of poetic language use as follows: *repetition structures, onomatopoeia, rhymes, rhythmising, breaking norms and rules, decontextualisation, interaction, imitation* and *variation* (Spinner, 2016, pp. 48–50).

If we look at the empirical research on the importance of play in language and literacy acquisition, our attention is drawn in particular to the work of Helga Andresen (2005, 2013). She traces the elementary importance of *role play* at kindergarten age for decontextualised language use, the linguistic marking of fictionality and the adoption of different perspectives (Andresen, 2005). If we look at discussions about literature, similar phenomena can be observed. These can be described as *imaginative play* in which imaginations and interpretations of literary stories are tentatively formulated and negotiated, thereby marking fictionality. At primary school age, *language play* also takes on a special significance: from *renaming play, word formation play,* and *reverse world play,* to *language jokes* and *riddles* as well as *secret languages*. These language play forms are based on rules that open up room for playing by either (excessively) adhering to them, breaking them or reinventing them (Andresen, 2013). Imaginative play, word formation play and secret languages will play a central role in the discussions on the wordless picturebook.

In discussions about picturebooks, *image play* (Grünewald, 2012) and *image language play* (Grünewald, 2005) can stimulate imaginative and language play. When transforming the material image (picture) into a mental image (image), discrepancies can lead to increase in knowledge, as Mechthild Dehn (2019) has shown in German didactic research. Didactically, this requires focusing on the first glance, such as the transformation of images into language, writing, scenic play or other aesthetic forms of expression. The language with which visual narratives are interpreted is characterised by *fictionality signals* (Dehn, 2019) that can be *descriptive-relativising, cognitive-perspectivising* or *imaginative-generating,* as differentiated by the empirical reception research of graphic picturebooks (Hoffmann, 2019).

4.   The *IMAGO* Study

In order to analyse the key incidents concerning language play and imaginative play in wordless picturebook discussions, the context of the research project is outlined. The study *IMAGO. Picturebooks – Multilingual, Rhyming and Wordless – In Kindergartens and Primary Schools in South Tyrol* (Hoffmann, 2024a; 2024b) aims to shed light on the importance of picturebooks in an autonomous province characterised by language and cultural diversity in connection with children's acquisition of language and literature in different educational contexts.

Theoretical points of reference include narrativity (Fludernik, 1996), multimodality (Naujok, 2023; Serafini, 2022), multilingualism (Franceschini, 2011; Gogolin, 2021), materiality (Kalthoff, 2021) and resonance (Rosa, 2019). Empirical reference points include, in particular, research on the interplay between visual literacy and language learning (Dehn, 2019; Evans, 2015; Ommundsen et al., 2022).

Methodologically, within the framework of interpretative classroom research (Krummheuer & Naujok, 1999), picturebook reception situations are videotaped, transcribed (Selting et al., 2011) and anonymised, and selected *key incidents* (Kroon & Sturm, 2007) are interpreted using ethnographic conversation analysis (Deppermann, 2000). The sample consists of German-, Italian- and Ladin-speaking kindergartens and primary schools in South Tyrol, in which a selection of multilingual, rhyming and wordless picturebooks are read.

Research questions about play that arise from ethnographic observations of the study and in relation to the thematic focus of this edited volume are: How do wordless picturebooks invite primary school children to play with language and possible worlds? Which literary forms of play can be reconstructed in picturebook discussions in the German-Italian language context?

The analyses draw on language lessons at a German- and an Italian-speaking primary school in South Tyrol. Both third grade learning groups are characterised by heterogeneity in various dimensions (age, gender, family languages, disabilities and special educational needs) (Krüger-Potratz, 2016).

From a picturebook selection (Hoffmann, 2024b), the educators and teachers could each choose one picturebook per narrative form and create a re-

ception situation with it. The picturebooks are characterised by their expe-
rientiality (Dehn et al., 2014; Fludernik, 1996), which makes them meaning-
ful for children in kindergarten and primary school. As a wordless picture-
book, which have increasingly formed the picturebook landscape and are
recognised by children's literature studies and didactics (Krichel, 2000) as
well as empirical reception research (Hoffmann, 2019, Conrad & Michalak
2020; Dammann-Thedens, 2020), the monoscenic and sequentially narrated
Field Trip to the Moon (Hare, 2019b) was selected by teachers of all the Ital-
ian-, the German- and the Ladin-speaking primary school, with the article
focusing on the first two. The picturebook's experientiality includes loneli-
ness and community, loss and responsibility, strangeness and friendship, cu-
riosity and courage.

5.   Wordless Picturebook

Playful elements are already visible on the cover of the wordless picturebook
Field Trip to the Moon by John Hare (2019b), both at textual level (the title) and
at visual level (Figure 1). The title *Field Trip to the Moon* points to something
incompatible (at least for the time being). A "field trip to the theatre" (to the
zoo, to the museum, to the forest, etc.) would be conceivable. In the school
context, it would evoke familiar ideas of a class community in a place of lei-
sure, culture or nature, as well as the journey getting there by public trans-
port or school bus, for example. A "space flight to the moon" would also be
possible and would tend to be associated with an expert cast of space travel-
lers and a rocket. "Field trip to the moon", however, brings together irrecon-
cilable opposites: the everyday (school) excursion with the extraordinary and
(for children) inaccessible location of the moon. This contradiction is also vis-
ually portrayed: the large-format spaceship depicted on the cover against the
backdrop of outer space has the colour and shape of an American school bus.
This verbal and visual play with conventions and rules (following the rules,
breaking the rules and reinventing the rules) on the cover is an invitation to
play-based appropriation of the story told in pictures.

Figure 1 and 2 – Cover and double page spread from *Field Trip to the Moon* (Hare, 2019b). Copyrith by Margaret Ferguson Books.

The plot of the story unfolds on one of the first double page spreads after the moon landing (Figure 2): a school class goes on a trip to the moon and follows a teacher who uses sweeping gestures to draw attention to the special nature of the lunar landscape, which resembles mountain ranges in its hilly form. However, one child remains behind right from the beginning, so that the tension in the relationships between the figures becomes visible. Later in the story, this child will be the one who is left alone on the moon by the group. How this picturebook is received in the German-Italian language context of primary school is shown below using selected key incidents.

6.   Imaginative Play and Language Play

Numerous forms of playing with possibilities can be recognised in the picturebook discussions of the German- and Italian-speaking primary schools, in particular *language play* and *imaginative play*. In the language play, the children are playing with language, with writing, with images and with multilingualism. In the imaginative play (the play with possible worlds), the children deal with their own experiences as well as with the characters' landscapes of action and consciousness. In the following, key incidents on language play and imaginative play are shown, first in the Italian- and then in the German-speaking primary school.

6.1   Italian-Speaking Primary School

The focus of the lesson at the Italian-speaking primary school was on reading aloud or rather talking about the pictures in the form of a literary discussion (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Picturebook discussion in the Italian-speaking primary school (grade 3)

The starting point was looking at the book cover together with the teacher asking the students to look very closely: "la *gita sulla luna* cosa vi immaginate guardate un po' guardate anche l'illustrazione cosa vedete qui ((...)) cosa vedete di particolare", ("the *field trip to the moon* what do you imagine look at the picture what do you see here ((...)) what do you see in particular?") Based on this invitation to observe, a discussion about the place and the plot of the story unfolds. On the one hand, the play on language in the title is taken up and deconstructed: space travel to the moon can be described as a trip, a journey or a flight to the moon, but not as a "field trip" in the sense of a school trip. On the other hand, the imagery of the spacecraft in the shape and colour of an American school bus is taken up and transformed into a *language play* as can be seen in the following key incident in the discussion about the front and back covers (in the transcripts the teacher is abbreviated to T, the names of the pupils are replaced by pseudonyms):

"un autobus spaziale." – "a space bus."

		Original	*Translation*
50	T:	((...)) aha adesso ve lo apro così vedete meglio? ((opens the book, showing the front and back cover))	((...)) aha i open it for you now so you can see it better? ((opens the book, showing the front and back cover))
51	Child:	u: u: u: bello-	ooh: ooh: ooh: beautiful-
52	Child:	(-) u: [bello.]	(-) ooh: [beautiful.]
53	Child:	[bellissimo.]	[wonderful.]
54	T:	(3.0) vediamo ancora cosa notate. (-) anna?	(3.0) let's see what else you notice. (-) anna?
55	Anna:	e:m:- (7.0)	uhm:- (7.0)
56	T:	mattia?	mattia?
57	Mattia:	una porta.	a door.
58	T:	una porta sì? (-) abbiamo già detto che escono da questa porta escono e? (.) passano-	a door yes? (-) we've already said that they exit through this door they exit and? (.) they pass-
59	Leonardo:	dentro.	inside.
60	T:	dentro? (.) nel [tubo?]	inside? (.)in the [tube?]
61	Child:	[tubo.]	[tube.]
62	Anna:	[un] tunnel-	[a] tunnel-
63	T:	e arrivano?	and they arrive?
64	Federico:	(-) all'autobus.	(-) at the bus.
65	T:	hm:. (.) un po' strano no?	hm:. (.) a bit strange right?
66	Children:	sì-	yes-
67	T:	non è proprio un autobus normale o è [normale?]	it's not exactly a normal bus or is it [normal?]
68	Child:	[no-]	[no-]
69	Child:	[no-]	[no-]
70	Luca:	[un autobus] SPAziale.	[a] SPACE bus.
71	Child:	no.	no.
72	T:	eh: un autobus spaziale eh:? ((...))	yes a space bus isn't it? ((...))

The spaceship is perceived by the children as an "autobus nello spazio" ("a bus in space") and thus becomes an "autobus spaziale" ("space bus"). This neologism follows the word formation rules for compound words in Italian, but represents a break on a semantic level. The correct term for the vehicle would be "navicella spaziale" ("spaceship"). Through the word formation play with the usually incompatible components, the strange, extraordinary and playful aspects of the fictional space is brought into consciousness. The participants now move within this playful space.

After the children have entered the fictional space of the story through dialogue, the teacher opens up a space for *imaginative play* by asking questions, like in the following key incident about the first double page spread where the "space bus" takes off:

"come vi sentireste?" – "how would you feel?"

		Original	Translation
120	T:	((...)) allora secondo voi. (3.0) dove stanno andando? (3.0) secondo voi susi siediti em vieni un po' più in qua sennò copri:-	((...)) so according to you. (3.0) where are they going? (3.0) according to you susi sit down uhm come a little bit over here otherwise you cover:-
121	Silena:	nella luna.	in the moon.
122	T:	SULla luna eh: SULla luna. (.) hm-	TO the moon right: TO the moon. (.) hm-
123	Salvia:	stanno [partendo.]	they're [leaving.]
124	T:	[e secondo] voi che viaggio sarà? (1.0) pensate pensate a voi che (.) magari entrate su questo autobus-	[and in your] opinion what kind of trip it will be? (1.0) think think of yourself (.) maybe getting on this bus-
125	Leonardo:	wow che bello.	wow how beautiful.
126	T:	e andate sulla luna.	and you go to the moon.
127	Cristina:	sarebbe molto bello-	it would be really beautiful-
128	T:	aha? (.) come vi sentireste?	aha? (.) how would you feel?
129	Luca:	a:-	uh:-
130	Leonardo:	emozionato-	excited-
131	T:	emozionati vero?	excited right?
132	Luca:	sarebbe fantastico-	it would be fantastic-
133	T:	aha-: (.) che meraviglia e cosa pensate di trovare- (.) che avventura pensate che- (2.0) di avere forse uguale a questa di queste persone- (.) anna?	aha-: (.) how wonderful and what do you think you would find- (.) what kind of adventure do you think you would have- (2.0) maybe the same as these people- (.) anna?
134	Anna:	e:- e:m. (3.0) vediamo pianeti.	uh:- uh:m. (3.0) we see planets.
135	T:	m_hm?	m_hm?
136	Rimaz:	da trovare una cometa-	to find a comet-
137	T:	trovare una cometa.	find a comet.
138	Stefano:	gli aglie- (-) gli:::	the alie- (-) the:::
139	T:	gli [alieni?]	the [aliens?]
140	Stefano:	[(alieni)] sì.	[(aliens)] yes.
141	T:	chi sono gli alieni?	who are the aliens?
142	Luca:	i mostri.	the monsters.
143	T:	i mostri [chissà-]	the monsters [who knows-]
144	Children:	[( )]	[( )]
145	T:	chissà che se li trovano (.) anche loro eh:? ((...))	who knows if they also find (.) them there right? ((...))

On the one hand, she asks questions about the progress of the story "dove stanno andando" ("where are they going") in the landscape of action, using the progressive tense, which refers to actions that are currently taking place. On the other hand, she formulates questions about the experience of the sit-

uation in the landscape of consciousness, "che viaggio sarà" ("what kind of journey it will be?"), in the future simple tense, which represents a (still unknown) future. The teacher also makes a connection to the children's own experiences, "come vi sentireste" ("how would you feel"), expressed in the Italian conditional tense. This tense is used to express conditions in connection with uncertainty: longings, wishes, doubts, assumptions, requests or polite expressions. This makes it a predestined tense for literary discussions that move in the realm of possibility of fiction. The indeterminacy of the image and the uncertainty of the spectator (Dehn, 2019) can be expressed linguistically. So, the children get involved in the conversation in this tense and play with possible feelings: "sarebbe molto bello", "sarebbe fantastico" ("it would be very nice", "it would be fantastic"). The question "cosa pensate di trovare" ("what do you think you will find") triggers imaginations that also play with the fantastic: "vediamo i pianeti", "trovare una cometa", "alieni", "mostri" ("we see the planets", "find a comet", "aliens", "monsters"). The sequence is finally closed by the teacher with a "chissà" ("who knows") and then reconnected to the fictional story "chissà che se li trovano anche loro" ("who knows if they also find them there"). Room is left for imagination.

6.2   German-Speaking Primary School

In the German-speaking primary school, the focus of the discussion while regarding the picturebook is not on its literariness, but on the acquisition of punctuation, in this case punctuation for literal speech (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Picturebook discussion in the German-speaking primary school (grade 3)

Even though this focus is more on language structure, space is given also to the literary story. The pictures are looked at together, a possible story is imagined in conversation and, as in the Italian-speaking primary school, references are made to the children's experiences in the *imaginative play*, demonstrated in the following key incident about the book cover:

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"maiausflug zum mond" – "may trip to the moon"
                    Original                Translation
22  T:          ((...)) wer von euch    ((...)) who of you would
                würde denn gerne zum- (.) like to- (.) go on a on a
                einen einen maiausflug  may trip to the moon-
                zum mond machen-
23  Children:   ((raising their hands)) ((raising their hands))
24  Emma:       [<<directed at Emil>    [<<directed at Emil>
                möchtest du zum mond     would you like to go to
                fahren?> ((takes his arm the moon?> ((takes his
                and raises his hand))]   arm and raises his
                                         hand))]
25  T:          [lea schon emma schon-  [lea yes emma yes- (-)
                (-) simon auch    ]      simon too] <<surprised>
                <<erstaunt> ALle.>       EVERYone.>
26  Simon:      ober i bin mir a net so  but i'm not so sure
                sicher-                  either-
27  Emma:       [i a net.    ]          [me neither.]
28  T:          [warum bist du] dir nicht [why are you] not so sure
                so sicher simon.         simon.
29  Simon:      jo wenn wenn wenn        yeah if if if somewhere
                irgendwo äh epes schiaf  uh something goes wrong.
                geaht. (-) [sem konn-  ] (-) [then-          ]
30  Emma:                  [jo wenn wos]      [yes if something]
                passiert.                happens.
31  Simon:      jo. (-) eben.            yes. (-) exactly.
32  T:          so ein bisschen ein      so a bit of an
                [mulmiges-  ]            [uneasy-       ]
33  Simon:      [(wenn epes)] passiert   [(if something)] happens
                jo.                      yes.
34  T:          es könnte was passieren  something could happen
                ja natürlich gel? (.)    yes of course right? (.)
                weiß man nicht was da los you don't know what's
                ist. (.) wir werden jetzt going on there. (.) we're
                schauen was was dieser   going to see now what
                schulklasse da passiert  what happens to this
                was DIE erleben- (...)   school class what THEY
                                         experience- ((...))
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The connection between the fictional world and real experience is created with the language play "maiausflug zum mond" ("may trip to the moon"). This language play picks up on the title of the picturebook *Ausflug zum Mond* (*Field Trip to the Moon*), linking it to the class excursion in schools in spring, known in South Tyrol as *Maiausflug* (May trip). In the imaginative play that follows, in the space of possibilities of their own feelings, some children

(even if interested in a "may trip") formulate less of a fantastic thirst for adventure and more of a worried view of a journey that is not without danger. The teacher closes this sequence with the use of the subjunctive "es könnte was passieren ja natürlich" ("something could happen yes of course") and her own lack of knowledge "weiß man nicht was da los ist" ("you don't know what's going on there") and re-establishes a link to the fictional story: "wir werden jetzt schauen was was dieser schulklasse da passiert was DIE erleben" ("we're going to see now what what happens to this school class what THEY experience").

With the teaching focus on punctuation for literal speech, the picture-book is playfully transformed into a comic by equipping the characters with thought and speech bubbles. In this way, the characters' landscapes of action and landscapes of consciousness are developed in a literary way. This results in the *language play* in the following key incident about the double page spread, where the school class is walking along the hilly landscape of the moon led by the teacher:

"mond everest junior." – "moon everest junior."

		Original	Translation
80	T:	((...)) und der lehrer. (-) oder die lehrerin? ((makes a movement to the right with the right hand, palm facing up, then points to a spot in the book))	((...)) and the teacher. (-) or the female teacher? ((makes a movement to the right with the right hand, palm facing up, then points to a spot in the book))
81	Leander:	hier geht_s lang-	this way
82	T:	m_hm? (.) hier geht_s lang zum beispiel könnte er sagen- <<taking an empty speech bubble and a pen from a box> hier geht_s lang oder was könnte er noch sagen?>	m_hm? (.) this way for example he could say- <<taking an empty speech bubble and a pen from a box> this way or what else could he say?>
83	Rena:	ähm: [da ist ( )]	uhm: [there is ( )]
84	Emma:	[ähm das ist der] hügel- ((gestures with her hands)) keine ahnung wie-	[uhm there is the] hill- ((gestures with her hands)) no idea how-
85	T:	((writing)) ah ja:: ein-	((writing)) ah yes:: a-
86	Leander:	oder geht mir nach?	or follow me?

87	T:	((writing)) geht mir nach kommt bitte nach genau lauter so lehrerinnen- (.) und lehrersätze oder wie könnte denn der hügel heißen? ((points to a spot in the book)) dass er den berg da benennt.	((writing)) follow me please come exactly just like those- (.) teacher phrases or what could the hill be named? ((points to a spot in the book)) so he names this mountain.
88	Rena:	ähm: (1.0) vielleicht noch der schuale?	uhm: (1.0) maybe after the school?
89	Emma:	<<directed at Emil> wie heißt der berg?>	<<directed at Emil> what is the name of the mountain?>
90	Emil:	mond everest-	moon everest-
91	T:	der mount der der MOND everest <<laughing> okay->	the mount the the MOON everest <<laughing> okay->
92	Rena:	((laughs quietly))	((laughs quietly))
93	T:	<<writing> der MOND everest.>	<<writing> the MOON everest.>
94	Emma:	<<directed at Emil> [super emil.]>	<<directed at Emil> [great emil.]>
95	Leander:	[der mount-] (.) mond everest junior.	[the mount-] (.) moon everest junior.
96	T:	((shows the speech bubble to he children)) und zwar so geschrieben wirklich wie der <<directed at Leander> der MOND everest JUNior> weil er ein bisschen kleiner ist okay- (2.0) <<writing> junior> (--) also die sprechblase für den lehrer- ((places the speech bubble on the picture in the book)) *hier geht_s lang das ist der mond everest junior.* ((...))	((shows the speech bubble to the children)) and really written like this just like the <<directed at Leander> the MOON everest JUNior> because it is a bit smaller okay- (2.0) <<writing>> junior> (--) so the speech bubble for the teacher- ((places the speech bubble on the picture in the book)) *this way this is the moon everest junior.* ((...))

Emil and the teacher are working together to develop the language play "mond everest" ("moon everest") as a possible name for the mountain. While on a phonetic level the similarity to the real mountain Mount Everest is maintained, thus taking up the similarity to the visual representation of the hilly landscape in the picturebook and also complying with the word formation rule, the rule is broken again on a semantic level: the moon is a celestial body whereas Everest is the name of the highest mountain on earth – the two do not actually collocate and that is precisely the point of the language play. The extension to "mond everest junior" ("moon everest junior") by Leander again utilises linguistic-cultural knowledge and brings the highest real mountain and the small fictional hilly landscape closer together.

7.   Conclusion

In the conclusion, the research questions will be answered after providing overviews of further examples of *language play* and *imaginative play* in classroom discussions in the German- and the Italian-speaking schools.

Table 2 – Language Play

Playing with …	German-language	Italian-language
language	"mond everest junior" ("moon everest junior")	"autobus spaziale" ("space bus")
writing	"wenn es ein Comic wäre" ("if it were a comic")	"se ci fossero state le scritte" ("if there had been writing")
image	"jetzt können wir uns bunt anmalen" ("now we can paint ourselves colourful")	"poi un alieno colora un: desiderio" ("then an alien paints a wish")
multilingualism	"nanutschu wersn des" ("wellnow who's that")	"gli alieni non riescono a capirlo" ("the aliens can't understand")

Alongside the play with spoken language (see 6.1 and 6.2), the children play with writing by exploring what difference it could make, if there were writing in the visual narrative "wenn es ein comic wäre" ("if it were a comic") – "se ci fossero state le scritte" ("if there had been writing").

They play with images, for example by imagining the significance of colours for extraterrestrial life "jetzt können wir uns bunt anmalen" ("now we can paint ourselves colourful") – "poi un alieno colora un desiderio" ("then an alien paints a wish").

They play with multilingualism by staging secret languages "nanutschu wersn des" ("wellnow whos that") or by putting themselves in the shoes of beings who speak other languages "gli alieni non riescono a capirlo" ("the aliens can't understand").

Table 3 – Imaginative Play

Playing with …	German-language	Italian-language
own experiences	"maiausflug zum mond" ("may trip to the moon")	"come vi sentireste" ("how would you feel")
landscapes of consciousness	"hilfe was soll ich jetzt tun" ("help what should i do now") "yeah ich bin frei" ("yeah i'm free")	"molto triste" ("very sad") "impaurito" ("scared") "tanta paura" ("a lot of fear")
landscapes of action	"was denkt ihr was tut es dreht es sich um oder nicht" ("what do you think it does does it turn round or not")	"lo riportano in dietro" ("they bring it back") "stanno insieme e fanno amicizia" ("they stay together and make friends")

Alongside the play with own experiences (see 6.1 and 6.2), other imaginative play forms in the discussions include playing with the landscapes of consciousness by exploring potentially different ways of experiencing "hilfe was soll ich jetzt tun" ("help what should i do now") or "yeah ich bin frei" ("yeah i'm free") or looking for different formulations for an experience "molto triste", "impaurito", "tanta paura" ("very sad", "scared", "a lot of fear"). The landscapes of action are also played with tentatively: "was denkt ihr was tut es dreht es sich um oder nicht" ("what do you think it does does it turn round or not?") or "lo riportano in dietro" ("they bring it back") and "stanno insieme e fanno amicizia" ("they stay together and make friends"). The teachers frame these imaginative play as "die andere möglichkeit" ("the other possibility") or "altre idee" ("different ideas"). With this in mind, we return to the initial research questions.

How do wordless picturebooks invite primary school children to play with language and possible worlds? Wordless picturebooks, which are characterised by ambiguity and experientiality, open up spaces of possibility for children in which they can experiment linguistically and imaginatively. Language play and image play in wordless picturebooks (in the title and in the pictures) offer numerous opportunities for storytelling and dialogue and invite children to play their own language play and imaginative play. This requires time, space and a community.

Which literary forms of play can be reconstructed in picturebook discussions in the German-Italian context? Even if the approaches are diverse, more linguistic or more literary, focusing more on the appropriation of (written) language or the practice of literary discussions, they both open up a variety of literary forms of play. Both the *imaginative play* with personal experience and with landscapes of action and landscapes of consciousness, as well as the *language play* with language, writing, image or multilingualism, demonstrate the importance of aesthetic language and literary experiences, the power of imagination and the pleasure of playing together.

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Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions are based on GAT 2 (Selting et al., 2011).

[ ]	Overlaps and simultaneous speech
[ ]	
(.) / (-) / (--) / (---)	shorter pauses up to one second
(1.0)	pauses in seconds
: / :: / :::	elongations
JUNior	focus accent
? / - / .	pitch rising, staying the same, falling
((laughs quietly))	(extra-linguistic) actions
<<writing> junior>	speech-accompanying actions, interpretive comments
(if something)	presumed wording
( )	incomprehensible
((...))	omissions