

Semiotic Analysis: The Interpretation of Visual Sign in Senior High Schools English Textbook Cover

**Ni Wayan Swarniti, Ni Made Dwi Utari Pusparini, Komang Satria Wirasa,
Paulinus Nanggang, Marselinus Nagot**

Universitas Dwijendra, Bali, Indonesia

Correspondence email: swarniti12@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author:

Ni Wayan Swarniti,
email: swarniti12@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research aims to fill that gap by conducting a comprehensive semiotic analysis of visual signs on the covers of senior high school English textbooks used in Indonesia. This research used qualitative method by using descriptive analysis technique to reveal and describe the meaning on visual signs in the senior high school English textbook cover used through the Pierce's semiotics theory (1931). The research found that the pictures and symbols on high school English textbook covers send important messages about culture and learning. They showed that English is useful for global communication, understanding other cultures, and personal growth. These images help students see English as important and connected to real life.

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of educational materials, particularly textbooks, visual elements play a pivotal role in conveying messages, shaping perceptions, and facilitating learning. The cover of a textbook serves as the initial point of interaction, offering insights into the content and setting expectations for the reader (Mahrudin, et. all, 2023). Book covers have a big role in visually determining whether readers are interested or not in continuing to open and read a book (Marzuqi, 2023).

Language was an important tool in communication (Faturahman, 2014). Linguistics plays a vital role for the development of a language (Swarniti, 2021). Semantics is a grand theory in the field of linguistics that deals with the study of meaning in language (Swarniti, 2024). Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation, provides a robust framework for analyzing these visual components (Derakhshan, 2024). Using a semiotic resources of multimodal discourse analysis, the reader can interpret the covers design of the English textbook with a combination of pictures, colors, text, and text layout on combination pictures and colors (Novi, 2022). By examining the signs embedded in textbook covers, we can uncover underlying messages, cultural representations, and educational values conveyed to students.

Saussure (1959) provides an important foundation in understanding visual communication through his explanation of the sign, which divides the sign into two main aspects, namely the signifier as the physical form of the sign and the signified as the concept it represents. The significance of semiotic analysis in educational contexts has been underscored by various scholars. Chandler (2007) emphasizes that semiotics enables a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed and interpreted through signs, which is essential in educational materials where visual and textual elements intertwine. Furthermore, Barthes (1977) introduces the concept of denotation and connotation in visual analysis, highlighting how images can convey explicit information and implicit cultural meanings simultaneously.

Recent studies have applied semiotic analysis to textbook content to explore cultural and social representations. Isnaini, Setyono, and Ariyanto (2019) conducted a visual semiotic analysis of multicultural values in an Indonesian English textbook, revealing how images promote cultural appreciation and diversity. Similarly, Syafiqurrakhman and Ciptaningrum (2023) examined cultural dimensions in English coursebooks for Indonesian senior high school students, identifying the extent to which multicultural values are embedded in visual materials. These studies underscore the importance of visual elements in textbooks as conveyors of cultural norms and values.

Despite the growing body of research on semiotic analysis in educational materials, there remains a gap in the specific examination of visual signs on the covers of senior high school English textbooks. The textbook cover is not merely decorative; as the learner's first semiotic encounter with the material (Wang & Hemchua, 2022), it frames expectations about what the book is and for. The elements that are often overlooked are non-verbal and visual language elements (Pusparini, 2021). Visual choices images, color palettes, typography, spatial layout, and cultural iconography can cue perceived difficulty, relevance, and affective appeal, all of which influence students' initial motivation to engage (Zulia, et. all 2022). Where the visual sign is the image or the picture where it is a product or result that consciously create by people (Swarniti, 2023). At the same time, covers often encode representations of culture, identity, and educational values (e.g., global English, national identity, inclusivity, technology-driven learning) that position learners within particular ideological narratives. By examining these semiotic resources systematically, we can uncover how textbook covers communicate implicit messages about language learning priorities, cultural hierarchies, and curricular intent messages that may support or subtly contradict stated pedagogical goals.

This research aims to fill that gap by conducting a comprehensive semiotic analysis of visual signs on the covers of senior high school English textbooks used in Indonesia. By employing the theoretical frameworks established by Peirce's theory (1931) on visual sign and supported by Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006) on visual grammar, this study dissected the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings embedded in these covers (Paneru, 2022). The findings are expected to provide insights into how visual elements align with educational objectives and cultural representations, contributing to the broader discourse on the role of visuals in language education.

METHOD AND THEORY

This research used qualitative method by using descriptive analysis technique to reveal and describe the meaning on visual signs in the senior high school English textbook cover used through the Pierce's semiotics theory (1931). The type of this research was qualitative research. In addition, Sugiyono (2009) claimed that "the

researcher in qualitative research is as human instrument; his function is to determine the research focus, to determine the informant as source of data, to collect data, to assess quality of data, to analyze data, to interpret data and to conclude of the findings”.

The data in this research comes from the analysis result of visual sign in senior high school English textbook cover. Senior high school English textbook cover was chosen as data source in this research because there remains a gap in the specific examination of visual signs on the covers of senior high school English textbooks. The cover, being the first point of contact, holds substantial influence over students' perceptions and motivations (Rezeki & Sagala, 2021). Analyzing the semiotic elements of textbook covers can reveal the implicit messages conveyed about language learning, cultural identity, and educational priorities.

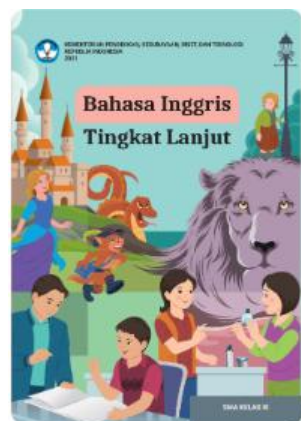
In collecting the data, the technique used was observation. The writer used the following procedures. First, finding out and determining the visual signs of senior high school English textbook cover from academic year 2024-2025 until academic year 2025/2026. Second, analyzing the semiotic signs found on the visual signs of senior high school English textbook cover. Third, Interpreting the meaning or the message conveyed by the visual signs of senior high school English textbook cover. Fourth, Drawing the conclusion based on the result of the analysis.

In analyzing the data, the writer was used the Pierce's semiotics theory (1931). The non-statistical analysis is used in this research. Because of this research used qualitative method, the non-statistical is the best choice to analyze these data. The researcher tried to determine and describe which one the icon and symbol of the senior high school English textbook cover using the triangle of Peirce. After that, the researcher draws the meaning of the senior high school English textbook cover.

The important direction in making conclusion was not only for “checking” the analysis effort, but also for learning process (Wirasa, et. all 2021). Furthermore, after performing the whole flows of data collecting and data analyzing, the writer was able to draw a conclusion about this research. In this process, the writer found explanation by gathering information to verify the data found on visual signs and the meaning itself in the senior high school English textbook cover.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Eight covers in the English textbook for senior high school used as data source in this research. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be described in the following description. Each analysis discussed in detail.

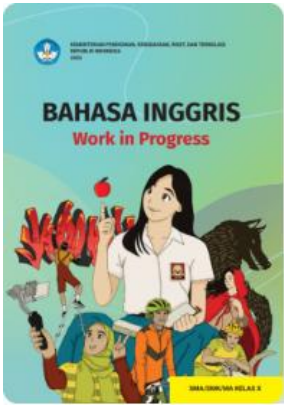


Picture 1

Table 1

Object	There are several illustrations on the cover: the first illustration depicts a fairy tale or classic European fiction setting; the second illustration depicts fictional characters, including a flying dragon and a large lion reminiscent of Aslan from The Chronicles of Narnia; the third illustration depicts students and teachers discussing and conducting experiments; and the fourth illustration depicts a salesperson promoting her products to potential buyers.
Interpretan	The book cover indicates that the material presented contains narrative texts from Western culture, such as fairy tales and English classical literature. The presence of fictional characters supports a literacy approach that is rich in moral values and imagination, as well as fostering intercultural awareness. This book applies communicative, interactive, and project-based learning. In addition to narrative texts, there are also functional texts such as promotions (expository texts). This book is intended for advanced students ready to tackle English language material in more complex contexts, such as literature, debate, and scientific presentations.

In [table 1](#), semiotic analysis based on Peirce's theory shows that the cover of this book is not merely an aesthetic design, but is laden with meaning and symbols designed to reflect the pedagogical approach of the book. Through rich visual representations, objects that refer to literature and education, and interpretants that stimulate students' imagination and intellectuality, this book has the potential to be a fun yet profound learning medium.



Picture 2

In [table 2](#), the cover of the textbook illustrates that high school students have many opportunities to explore their potential and prepare for their future, whether they choose to continue their education or enter the workforce. The images represent various future careers, with a central focus on a high school student as the main character, symbolizing personal development. The message conveyed is that students are still growing "a work in progress" and education is a holistic journey that involves academic learning, creativity, culture, and character building. English plays a key role in this process, serving not just as a subject, but as a tool to open doors to a broader, more connected world.

Table 2

Object	The illustration of students with various attributes (gray and white uniforms, books, laptops, apples, etc.) is an icon of high school students in Indonesia. The images of laptops, books, and stationery are icons of learning activities and educational tools. The black building in the background (resembling a mountain or large rock) can be interpreted as an icon of challenges or the environment in which students find themselves.
Interpretan	The red apple floating above the student's hand indicates thinking or teaching activity, indexing knowledge, as apples are often associated with symbols of teachers or moments of scientific discovery. A student pointing upward can be an index of the process of thinking, ideas, or the pursuit of knowledge. The text "Work in Progress" indicates that the learning process is still ongoing the student is in a developmental stage and not yet final. Various characters and backgrounds depicting activities in art, sports, technology, and culture serve as indices of diverse interests, potential, and interdisciplinary learning.



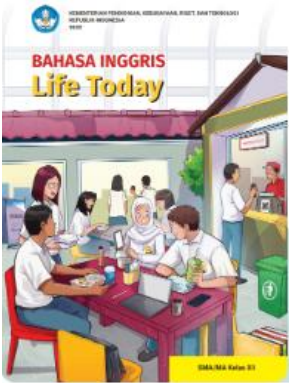
Picture 3

Table 3

Object	The picture features four students from diverse academic and professional fields: technology, sports, science, and medicine each holding discipline related tools (a laptop, headphones, test tubes, and a badminton racket). In the background, a school building and the Indonesian flag are clearly depicted.
Interpretant	This visual signifies the role of English as a unifying and empowering force across disciplines, symbolizing education, innovation, and national development. The presence of the Indonesian flag is deliberate: it anchors the message in a national context, implying that English language learning is not only about global access but also about contributing to Indonesia's progress. The flag functions as a cultural and ideological sign, reinforcing national pride and identity, even while promoting international communication. The school setting further emphasizes that this transformation begins with education. Thus, the image interprets English as both a global bridge and a tool for fostering Indonesian youth's potential in diverse fields aligned with the national educational vision.

In [table 3](#), the illustration of four students from different fields such as technology, sports, science, and medicine. Each student is confidently holding tools of their

expertise. The object is the role of English in empowering youth across diverse disciplines, promoting education, innovation, and national pride, as seen in the background with the Indonesian flag and school building. The interpretant is the idea that English is a key driver of change, enabling students to grow, collaborate, and contribute to both local and global progress. The title reinforces this by positioning English as a tool for transformation.



Picture 4

Table 4	
Object	The image portrays a diverse group of young people seated around tables in a contemporary food court setting. Some students are focused on laptops and smartphones, suggesting academic work or digital learning, while others are chatting and enjoying beverages. Their clothing, body language, and relaxed atmosphere indicate an informal, youth-oriented environment, typical of urban lifestyle. The visible signage and interior layout (tables, chairs, café-style elements) help situate the scene in a social, semi-public space rather than a traditional classroom.
Interpretant	This picture reflects the dynamics of contemporary youth culture, where learning and socializing are no longer confined to formal academic spaces. The choice of setting a food court suggests a shift in learning behaviors, highlighting the growing integration of education, technology, and lifestyle. The coexistence of study tools (digital devices) and leisure elements (drinks, conversation) represents how students blend productivity with relaxation. This indicates a broader semiotic message: English language learning is not restricted to classroom environments, but has become embedded in everyday life and informal contexts.

In [table 4](#) shows that a contemporary youth culture in current life style. It also shows how students today balance education, technology, social interaction, and leisure by learning in a public place. The interpretant is that English learning now extends beyond formal settings, becoming part of everyday communication and interaction. The title "*Life Today*" reinforces the idea that English is essential for navigating modern life.



Picture 5

Table 5

Object	The picture features a visually diverse group of students: one wears traditional Papuan attire representing eastern Indonesian culture, another is portrayed in a wheelchair symbolizing inclusion of people with disabilities, one holds a DSLR camera reflecting artistic interest, a female student is depicted behind window like bars symbolizing online learning or isolation, and another wears a hijab while smiling brightly, representing cultural and religious identity. These portraits are deliberately individualized and emotionally expressive, suggesting that each student brings a different story and background.
Interpretant	This visual strongly reflects the principles of multiculturalism and gender equality in education. The use of diverse cultural attire and personal accessories illustrates recognition and celebration of Indonesia's cultural plurality, particularly the representation of minority identities such as Papuan students and Muslim women. Gender equality is also implied through the equal visibility and active participation of both male and female students, shown confidently and positively regardless of attire or activity.

Illustration in [table 5](#) shows that it represents the diversity of student identities, thoughts, and ways of expressing themselves in today's world. It highlights inclusivity in terms of region, ability, interests, gender, and culture. The interpretant is that learning English is a tool for self expression, creativity, and connection across differences. The textbook's title "*Train of Thoughts*" reinforces this idea by metaphorically positioning English as a vehicle for exploring ideas, stories, and personal reflections. It encourages students to value their individual perspectives while engaging with others. English becomes more than just a subject. It becomes a means of forming identity, telling stories, and participating in global conversations while remaining rooted in local diversity.



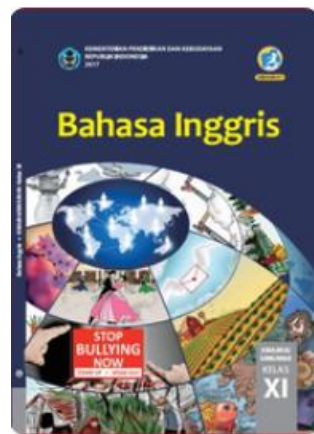
Picture 6

Table 6	
Object	The cover of the English book for Grade X features various visual objects representing different parts of the world, such as hot air balloons, airplanes, and sailing boats, along with a row of iconic buildings including the National Monument (Monas), the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, the Sydney Opera House, Big Ben, and Pyramids. Additionally, the top-left corner displays the official emblem of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, <i>Tut Wuri Handayani</i> , while the top-right corner features the Kurikulum 2013 logo. At the middle of the cover, the book title <i>Bahasa Inggris</i> is prominently displayed, and at the bottom, the grade level <i>Kelas X</i> is marked within a gray rectangular frame.
Interpretan	This cover communicates a powerful semiotic message: learning English is a gateway to global understanding, mobility, and intercultural exploration. The juxtaposition of international monuments from both Western and non-Western cultures emphasizes the role of English as a lingua franca a common medium for engaging with diverse cultures, histories, and ideas. The presence of Monas alongside these international icons signals that while English opens access to the world, the learner remains grounded in their national identity.

The cover of the English book for Grade X features various visual objects representing different parts of the world (table 6), such as hot air balloons, airplanes, and sailing boats, along with a row of iconic buildings including the National Monument (Monas) from Indonesia, the Statue of Liberty from the United States, the Eiffel Tower from France, the Sydney Opera House from Australia, Big Ben from the United Kingdom, and the Pyramids from Egypt. All these elements are neatly arranged against a bright blue background, creating a broad and dynamic global atmosphere.

The buildings depicted on the cover represent various countries or cities, and the row of these structures symbolizes the connectivity between nations. Based on Lynch (1960), landmarks are fixed visual cues that serve as external points of reference and significant symbols within the city image, helping individuals orient themselves, construct mental maps, and convey meaning beyond their physical form to enhance the legibility and identity of the urban environment. beyond their physical form to enhance the legibility and identity of the urban environment. Thus, these visuals imply that learning English is not merely about studying the language itself, but also about gaining

access to the global realm. The representation of transportation modes and famous world landmarks builds the association that mastering English facilitates international connectivity and encourages the spirit of exploring the global world.



Picture 7

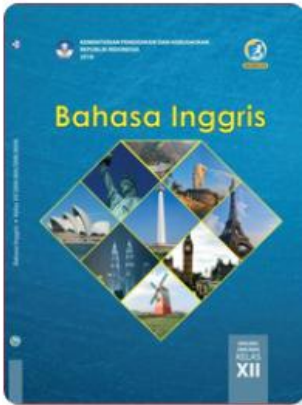
Table 7

Object	The cover of the English Language textbook for Grade XI features a visual design with dark blue background. The cover centered on a globe, surrounded by segmented illustrations that depict various elements such as the “Stop Bullying Now” poster, rice fields, performing arts, and a winged envelope. Additionally, the top-left corner displays the official emblem of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, <i>Tut Wuri Handayani</i> , while the top-right corner features the Kurikulum 2013 logo. At the middle of the cover, the book title <i>Bahasa Inggris</i> is prominently displayed, and at the bottom, the grade level <i>Kelas XI</i> is marked within a gray rectangular frame.
Interpretan	It constructs a narrative that positions English not merely as a tool for academic advancement, but also as a medium for understanding cultural diversity, promoting humanitarian values, and facilitating global interaction.

The cover of the English Language textbook for Grade XI features a central visual design in the form of a globe (table 7), surrounded by segmented illustrations that represent various aspects of both global and local life. Among the visual elements depicted are the “Stop Bullying Now” poster, symbolizing a social issue; an illustration of rice fields, representing agrarian life and local culture; performing arts imagery that reflects cultural expression; and a winged envelope that suggests cross-border communication. In addition, the upper-left corner displays the *Tut Wuri Handayani* symbol as the official emblem of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, while the upper-right corner features the Kurikulum 2013 logo, indicating that the textbook is aligned with the most recent national curriculum. The book title *Bahasa Inggris* appears at the top of the cover, and the label *Kelas XI* is placed within a grey rectangular frame at the bottom.

This interaction between symbol and observer allows visual signs to function as a bridge, connecting individual cognition with broader cultural contexts and thus facilitating complex layers of understanding and communication (Short, 2007).

Collectively, these visual elements construct a narrative that positions English not only as a tool for strengthening academic competence, but also as a medium for understanding cultural diversity, expressing humanitarian values, and fostering interaction in a global context. From a semiotic perspective, each visual object on the cover functions as a representamen referring to a specific referent, and is interpreted collectively as an encouragement to develop language competence that is not merely instrumental, but also reflective and transnational.



Picture 8

Table 8	
Object	The cover of this textbook is designed with a blue background and features a range of architectural icons and cultural symbols from various countries, arranged symmetrically around the Monumen Nasional (Monas) at the center. Among the icons displayed are the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, The Petronas Towers, a windmill, the Statue of Liberty, the Merlion, and the Sydney Opera House. In addition, the top-left corner features the <i>Tut Wuri Handayani</i> emblem, while the top-right corner contains the Kurikulum 2013 logo. The title <i>Bahasa Inggris</i> appears at the middle of the cover, and the label <i>Kelas XII</i> is positioned at the bottom within a gray rectangular frame.
Interpretan	The textbook cover conveys a balanced ideological message, portraying English as a bridge between global engagement and national identity. The central placement of Monas, surrounded by international landmarks, symbolizes how English education can promote intercultural communication while reinforcing Indonesian cultural pride. The inclusion of educational emblems and symmetrical layout reflects the integration of national values within a global framework, aligned with 21st-century competencies. Ultimately, the design promotes “glocalization,” positioning English not merely as a foreign language, but as a tool for navigating both local and global contexts through culturally responsive learning.

According to Short (2007), Peirce’s triadic model of the sign suggests that visual symbols serve not only to represent objects but also to evoke meanings interpreted by the viewer, fostering richer cultural and cognitive associations. The cover of this book features a dark blue background. As clearly illustrated, on the middle of the cover there

is the National Monument (Monas), serving as the main focal point and symbolizing Indonesia's identity. Surrounding Monas are neatly arranged various architectural icons and cultural symbols from around the world, such as the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, Petronas Towers, Dutch windmills, the Statue of Liberty, the Merlion statue, and the Sydney Opera House. The symmetrical arrangement of these icons reflects global cultural diversity and international connectivity. Additionally, the *Tut Wuri Handayani* symbol, the official emblem of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, is included. The title English Language and the class level XII clearly indicate that this book is intended for 12th-grade students (table 8).

Overall, the cover portrays English learning not only as language acquisition but also as an integration of understanding various world cultures. The use of architectural icons and cultural symbols from multiple countries around the National Monument emphasizes the relationship between national identity and global context. Thus, this book provides a learning approach that highlights the importance of cultural insight in mastering the English language.

CONCLUSION

This research, based on semiotic analysis of eight English textbook covers for senior high school in Indonesia, reveals that these visual designs are not merely decorative, but intentionally constructed to convey ideological, cultural, and pedagogical meanings. Using Peirce's triadic model (sign, object, interpretant), the study identifies that the covers consistently reflect themes of national identity, multiculturalism, global connectivity, youth culture, and inclusive education.

Each cover strategically combines local symbols such as Monas, Tut Wuri Handayani, and traditional attire with global icons like the Eiffel Tower or Statue of Liberty to position English as both a gateway to international engagement and a medium rooted in Indonesian values. Several covers also reflect 21st-century competencies by highlighting informal learning spaces, student-centered practices, and the integration of technology.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive visual-semiotic exploration of state-approved English textbook covers, an area that has been largely underexamined in Indonesian ELT scholarship. Unlike previous studies focusing primarily on textual or curriculum content, this study foregrounds the visual discourse as a powerful pedagogical and ideological tool that shapes how students perceive English, culture, and identity.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that English textbook covers in Indonesia are semiotic landscapes that construct and promote educational ideologies aligned with glocal (global-local) values. These covers act as multimodal texts that support the national agenda of developing globally competent but locally grounded learners through culturally responsive English language education.

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