

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS' COVERS FROM TWO COUNTRIES: A VISUAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis explores the visual discourse in English textbooks' covers at the junior high school level in two different cultures, namely Indonesia and Japan. This research focuses on the art style, typography, color choice, and cultural representation that appear on the cover. Two textbooks from each country were analyzed through descriptive analysis. From the analysis that has been carried out, it was found that the Indonesian cover displays a simple cartoon style with plain letters and colors, incorporating explicit cultural symbols. In contrast, Japanese covers adopt a modern manga style, combining fonts, bright colors, and subtle cultural nuances. These findings highlight distinct cultural imprints, emphasizing the role of visual elements in conveying cultural identity in educational materials. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural differences in English textbook design and enriches the global discourse on language education.

Keywords: *Visual Discourse, English Textbooks, Comparative Analysis, Art Style, Typography, Color Selection, Cultural Representation*

A. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, technological developments have revolutionized the world of education. This transformation not only includes the way we access information but also encompasses the evolution of textbooks, as highlighted by Loffreda (2017). Alongside these advances, we are witnessing significant changes in textbook design and content, with visual discourse becoming an increasingly pivotal element. As a helpful and beneficial tool in teaching and learning activities, textbooks play a vital role in education.

The evolution of textbooks reflects profound changes in the way we convey and receive information. This change must be paid attention to by teachers and used as a consideration in determining which textbooks will be used in class, as stated by Chegeni (2016). Nowadays, textbooks are not only used as a teaching tool but also as a medium for developing students' cultural awareness. According to Rahmah et al. (2018), textbooks are not just a collection of facts but also serve as records of cultural values and norms that have developed over time. In this context, the visual elements of textbooks, especially their covers, are no longer just aesthetic but stand as a reflection of the intricate cultural complexity behind each page.

Textbook covers, serving as the initial encounter for readers, have become a crucial aspect

in shaping a book's identity and reception. As emphasized by Akhmad et al. (2022), the cover is one of the criteria for a good textbook since it plays a role in developing students' interest and motivation. The cover design not only mirrors graphic design trends but also provides insight into the values the publisher wishes to convey. Therefore, a comparative analysis of visual discourse in English textbook covers from various cultures can offer an even more in-depth understanding of the cultural differences inherent in these designs.

This research is not only relevant in an academic context but also holds a broader impact on global education. Understanding how culture influences visual discourse in textbooks can significantly enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning in various cultural contexts. Thus, this research is not merely a visual analysis; it constitutes an in-depth investigation aiming to transcend cultural boundaries through visual language, thereby enriching the cross-cultural learning experience.

The importance of textbook covers in shaping students' perceptions and engagement with educational materials has been highlighted by research. Akhmad et al. (2022) discussed the criteria needed for a textbook to be considered 'good' and found that one of the most critical aspects is the cover itself. The cover page is the first thing students see and plays a crucial role in building their interest and motivation to learn. A good textbook cover must be culturally relevant to the students, thereby influencing their initial perception and willingness to engage with the content. This recognition underscores the cover's pivotal role in shaping students' engagement and interest in the educational material.

Similarly, the role of visuals, especially in the form of images in textbooks, has been emphasized through multimodal discourse analysis. Research by Mushtaq et al. (2022) analyzed English textbooks in Pakistan and concluded that culturally relevant images make textbooks more interactive and supportive of student learning. Muhassin et al. (2022) also examined the representational meaning of visual resources on textbook covers, finding that cohesive relationships among visual elements convey meaningful messages. Additionally, Xiang and Agbaw (2019) conducted a critical content analysis of English textbooks used by Mongol students in Inner Mongolia, China, highlighting the need for a critical multicultural perspective in textbook content to reflect diversity and address power dynamics.

While existing literature has emphasized the importance of textbook covers and the analysis of multimodal discourse in textbooks, there is a gap in comparative research on the visual discourse represented by textbook covers from different cultures. This study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of the visual discourse on textbook covers from two distinct cultures, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on the intersection of culture and educational materials.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This comparative analysis aimed to explore the visual discourse present on the covers of

English textbooks used at the junior high school level in two different cultural contexts: Indonesia and Japan. The study focused on key visual elements such as art style, typography, color choice, and cultural representation. Two English textbooks from each country were selected as the primary sources of data. The textbooks were chosen through a literature survey and curriculum study to ensure they were representative of the educational approaches and cultural values promoted by each country. The Indonesian textbooks analyzed were "English for Nusantara" by Ika Lestari Damayanti et al., published by Pusat Perbukuan Jakarta Selatan in 2022, while the Japanese textbooks were selected based on their prevalent use in junior high schools.

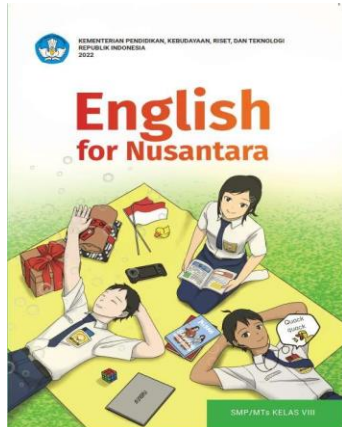
The research employed a descriptive analysis approach to examine the visual discourse on the textbook covers. This involved a detailed examination of the overall artistic design (cartoon versus manga styles), typography, color choices, and cultural representations. The analysis was grounded in Weninger's (2020) theory of multimodality, emphasizing the integration of visual and textual modes in educational materials. Each cover was scrutinized to identify distinct visual components, categorized and compared across the two cultural contexts, and described narratively to highlight cultural imprints and differences. The findings revealed that Indonesian covers featured simple cartoon styles with plain typography and explicit cultural symbols, while Japanese covers utilized modern manga styles with diverse fonts, bright colors, and subtle cultural nuances. These results underscore the role of visual elements in conveying cultural identity and enhancing engagement with educational materials.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the textbook covers revealed significant differences in the visual discourse between the Indonesian and Japanese educational materials. The Indonesian covers predominantly featured a simple cartoon art style, characterized by plain typography and the use of explicit cultural symbols. In contrast, the Japanese covers adopted a modern manga style, incorporating diverse fonts, bright colors, and subtle cultural nuances. These findings highlight the distinct cultural imprints and visual strategies employed in each country's educational materials. The differences in art style, typography, and color choice not only reflect cultural identity but also influence students' engagement and motivation to learn. This can be seen in the following parts.

By using two English textbooks' covers that were analyzed based on visual discourse analysis, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the New Horizon English we focused on the deeper analysis in this section. As stated by O'Connor (2022), New Horizon English textbook provides good coverage of materials such as grammar and vocabularies, and it is also visually interesting by using fresh art and anime-style characters. It first came out in 1966 and was published by Tokyo Shoseki. Both of English for Nusantara and New Horizon

English are used at the junior high school level.



Figures 1. English for Nusantara Textbook's Cover.



Figures 2. New Horizon English Textbook's Cover.

During the analysis process, various visual aspects can be seen in those two English textbooks' covers, such as art style, typography, color selection, and cultural representations. In the following section, the visual aspects of each textbook's cover will be explained.

Elements	English for Nusantara	New Horizon English
Art styles	Simple and common cartoon art style.	Japanese modern manga style.
Typography	Plain latin alphabet	Combination of latin and Japanese alphabet
Color Selection	Simple color	Complex color
Cultural Representation	Indonesian flag, uniform, Indonesian book.	Not found

Table 1. Results of the analysis.

Art Styles

Art style refers to the distinct manner or technique by which an artist expresses their creative vision through visual elements. This includes choices related to form, color, line, texture, and composition that collectively create a recognizable aesthetic. Art styles can vary widely and are often influenced by cultural, historical, and personal factors. In the context of educational materials, art style encompasses the visual design used in illustrations, typography, and layout, which can significantly impact how content is perceived and engaged with by the audience.



Figures 3. The comparison of artstyles.

The main difference between these two English textbook covers lies in their art styles. According to Lee and Cha (2016), an art style is the unique way an artist creates their work, encompassing everything from drawing lines to the finishing process, all executed with the artist's distinct style and technique. The art style is a crucial element, often considered the most defining feature of a work of art.

From the analysis, it was revealed that there were significant differences in the visual discourse between the Indonesian and Japanese educational materials. The Indonesian English textbook employs a simple cartoon style on its cover, characterized by semi-realistic

characters and plain color selection. The Indonesian textbooks predominantly featured a simple cartoon art style, with straightforward, easily recognizable characters and settings. These illustrations were designed to be culturally familiar to Indonesian students, directly conveying cultural symbols and educational themes. This straightforward approach aims to be relatable and visually appealing to Indonesian students, featuring recognizable cultural symbols and educational themes. In contrast, the Japanese English textbook uses a modern Japanese manga style. Razak (2022) explains that manga, a popular form of entertainment in Japan, refers to comic books or graphic novels. This style includes detailed and dynamic illustrations, expressive characters, and intricate backgrounds, capturing students' attention with a sense of energy and excitement.

In contrast, the Japanese textbooks adopted a modern manga art style, a culturally significant style in Japan. The manga style on the covers included detailed and dynamic illustrations, with expressive characters and intricate backgrounds. This art style also incorporated a wide range of visual effects, such as motion lines and exaggerated facial expressions, to capture students' attention and convey a sense of energy and excitement.

These differences in art styles underscore the role of visual elements in reflecting and reinforcing cultural identities in educational materials. The choice of a cartoon style in Indonesian textbooks and a manga style in Japanese textbooks indicates how each country leverages its cultural assets to enhance the appeal and relevance of educational content. By aligning the visual design with students' cultural contexts, these textbooks aim to foster a more engaging and motivating learning environment.

Typography

Another noteworthy distinction between the Indonesian and Japanese English textbook covers is their types of typography. Typography refers to the art and technique of arranging type to make written language legible, readable, and visually appealing. It involves the selection of typefaces, point sizes, line lengths, line-spacing, and letter-spacing, as well as adjusting the space between pairs of letters. Yadav (2014) defined typography as the art or process of setting and arranging typefaces to stylize their appearance. Typography, as a pivotal element in design, encompasses the style and arrangement of type. Typography plays a significant role in the overall design and effectiveness of textbook covers. This can be seen in the analysis below.



Figures 4. The comparison of typography.

In the Indonesian textbook cover, a straightforward approach is taken with the use of a plain Latin alphabet. The simplicity of the lettering contributes to a clean and easily readable aesthetic. According to Weninger (2020), the use of plain and simple alphabet in textbooks aims to convey a firm and formal impression and make it easier for readers to understand the text. On the contrary, the Japanese English textbook employs a unique blend of Latin and Japanese alphabets in its typography. According to Kurniawan (2021), Japan has its own unique alphabets known as hiragana and katakana. Hiragana is used only to write words that are originally from Japan, and Katakana is often used to refer to terms that are issued in foreign languages. This fusion reflects the cultural intricacies of Japan, where the integration of diverse writing systems is a common practice.

Thus, we may sum up that the Indonesian and Japanese English textbook covers show a clear contrast not only in their visuals but also in the way they handle typography. The Indonesian cover goes for simplicity, using a plain Latin alphabet for a clean and readable look. Meanwhile, the Japanese cover takes a more intricate approach, blending Latin and Japanese alphabets, including hiragana and katakana. This choice not only reflects Japan's distinct writing systems but also highlights the cultural richness embedded in these language learning resources.

Color Selection



Figures 5. The comparison of color selection.

Color selection refers to the process of choosing specific colors and combinations to be used in a design or artwork. This involves considering the psychological and emotional effects of colors, their cultural significance, and their ability to create contrast, harmony, and visual interest. In the context of textbook covers, color selection can significantly influence a student's perception and engagement with the material. Apart from the different ways they look and the fonts they use, the Indonesian and Japanese English textbook covers also stand out in the colors they use. According to Suriadi et al. (2021), the use of color has a certain psychological impact and is an important attribute in design. So the color selection aspect is considered the most impactful aspect of displaying visual meaning.

For instance, the Indonesian English textbook employs simple and plain colors that complement its cartoon art style, making it approachable and easy to understand. In contrast, the Japanese English textbook uses bright and varied colors, reflecting the vibrant and dynamic nature of the manga art style, which can captivate students' attention and stimulate their interest in the subject matter, giving it a lively and dynamic feel. According to Bori (2018), the color selection in a textbook creates its own characteristics for the book, and can make the textbook more attractive. This difference in color choice plays a big part in making each cover unique.

Shortly, the Indonesian and Japanese English textbook covers not only look different and use various fonts, but they also stand out in the colors they use. The Indonesian one is simple with plain colors, while the Japanese cover is vibrant with bright and complex colors. This color difference makes each cover unique and adds to the overall visual appeal of these language learning resources.

Cultural Representation

The last important key aspect of this analysis is the use of symbols or elements on the textbook cover as cultural representation. Cultural representation refers to the portrayal and depiction of cultural elements, values, and identities within a particular context, such as literature, art, media, or educational materials. According to Setyono and Widodo (2019), a textbook often uses cultural symbolism in order to build cultural awareness among the students. It can be said that cultural representation is how textbooks present their culture by using symbols such as flags, landmarks, traditional costumes, etc. In the context of textbook covers, cultural representation encompasses the inclusion of symbols, imagery, and themes that reflect the cultural heritage, traditions, and diversity of the target audience.



Figures 6. The comparison of cultural representations.

In this context, the Indonesian English textbook may feature cultural symbols and motifs specific to Indonesian traditions, history, or folklore, aiming to resonate with and engage Indonesian students. The Indonesian cover explicitly includes national identity components into its artwork, including an Indonesian book and the country's flag, as well as a model of the local uniform. This intentional addition offers visual respect to Indonesia's educational background and culture. According to Wulandari, et al. (2016), These authentic materials can contribute achieving the aim of the course.

Similarly, the Japanese English textbook may incorporate elements of Japanese culture, such as traditional attire, landmarks, or festivals, to appeal to Japanese students and foster a sense of cultural pride and connection. By incorporating culturally relevant content, textbook

covers can promote inclusivity, respect cultural diversity, and enhance students' sense of identity and belonging. It offers a more understated strategy, relying on its unique typography and art direction to communicate the nuances of culture. This is in line with Lee (2014) who stated that Japanese textbooks usually emphasize the use of a unique art style and distinctive typography to show their cultural side. The lack of explicit cultural representations implies that Japan's rich cultural background is being reflected primarily through these artistic components. The way these textbook covers represent culture is different and essential. The Indonesian one includes the country's symbols, like the flag and local uniform, showing respect for its culture. The Japanese cover, on the other hand, does it more subtly with unique fonts and art, reflecting Japan's culture in a different way. Both covers use different approaches to share their cultural identity.

D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of Indonesian and Japanese English textbook covers reveals distinct differences in art style, typography, color selection, and cultural representation. The Indonesian cover opts for a simple cartoon style with plain letters, plain colors, and includes explicit cultural symbols like the flag and local uniform, reflecting a straightforward and respectful approach. In contrast, the Japanese cover embraces the modern manga style, uses a mix of alphabets including hiragana and katakana, vibrant colors, and relies on subtle cultural nuances through unique art and typography.

These differences not only make each cover visually unique but also reflect the cultural richness embedded in these language learning resources. The study highlights how visual elements play a significant role in conveying cultural identity in educational materials, contributing to a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts represented in English textbooks from Indonesia and Japan.

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