



## A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CULTURE IN THE ENGLISH COURSEBOOK FOR INDONESIAN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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### Abstract:

Culture and language cannot be separated because it is believed that learning a language will be more successful when the culture is included. In Indonesia, this area of cultural content issues in English coursebooks can benefit further exploration. Therefore, this study is deemed necessary as it can give insights to society. Specifically, this study aimed to (1) identify and give descriptive knowledge about cultural dimensions and aspects of the pictures in the *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook and (2) identify the multicultural values of the pictures in the *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook. The data for the study were taken from pictures in the *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook, a coursebook for senior high school students in grade XII in Indonesia. The study reveals two findings. Firstly, the total of 102 data showed that the coursebook had been dominated by the perspectives dimension with 90 data frequencies, followed by the products and practices dimension with 88 and 82 frequencies, respectively. Person and community dimensions are exposed less than other dimensions in this book. It makes sense since the curriculum in Indonesia has developed character-building. Secondly, for the multicultural values, it is found that the coursebook lacks multicultural values because, from the 102 data, the most significant frequency of the multicultural values is shown by AOPP twenty-six times only. The pictures were expected to have a large frequency of multicultural values because they could effectively deliver the materials about culture to the students and gain intercultural competence.

**Keywords:** *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook, culture dimensions and aspects, multicultural values

### 1. Introduction

Language and culture are connected, and it is believed that learning a language can be more successful if the culture is included (Seven, 2020). Language is important in human life as a person and within a community. A sign is also a human language. A sign takes the forms of images or pictures, words, and objects. Languages are a system that is used for human communication. In written communication, a sign has important roles in the human in their

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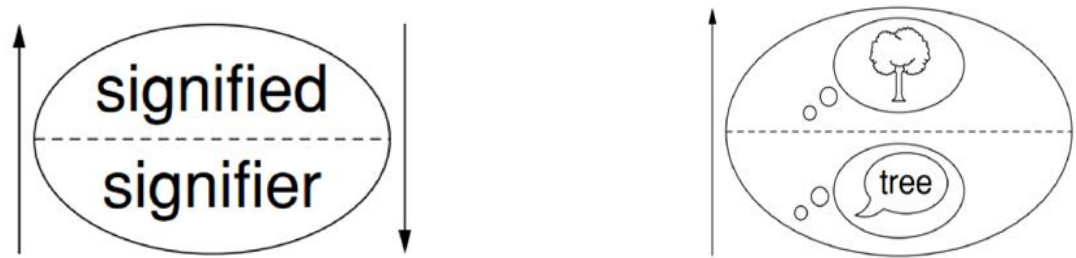
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community and life. Languages are a system that is used for human communication. According to Planer and Sterelny (2021), humans utilize signs and symbols to share information with others who share their values, beliefs, and goals. On the other hand, not everyone will be able to figure out what it means. That is why a study of the meaning of semiotics was conducted. This study investigates how culture was employed in the *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook through pictures. The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia published the coursebook and used for 12th-grade students.

According to data from Ethnologue (2019), the most spoken language in the world is placed at the top first if both native and non-native speakers are counted as the English language. In Indonesia, English language is used as a foreign language. Related to this phenomenon, Hidayat and Mason (2023) claimed that learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) country have more opportunities to meet and communicate with non-native English speakers than the native ones. The primary objective of English Language Teaching (ELT) has evolved from communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) due to the increasing usage of English as an international communication medium. The capacity to communicate effectively and properly in cross-cultural settings is essential for success in ICC (Saini & Ardhy, 2023). Because English is utilized as a medium to convey and teach local customs, practices, and cultural values in multilingual outer-circle nations, EFL students must understand both the cultures of native English speakers and non-native English speakers to acquire ICC (Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2011). To acquire and learn the language, some so many resources and media can be used. One of them is coursebooks.

Coursebooks are one of the popular teaching materials and media used in Indonesia and other EFL countries. Therefore, a coursebook should contain cultural content in many aspects to effectively enhance the students' understanding of cultures from both the target and source languages. The students can access coursebooks effectively in the classroom (Roohani & Sharifi, 2015). Most coursebooks now include visuals to help students better understand the material. Visualizations through pictures impact students' ability to pick up the language. Pictures, as noted by Sakkir (2020), may help students develop their creative faculties while they study English. In addition, as pictures and images reflect a slice of reality, they encourage students to focus on the relevance of experience in their own lives (Hoffmann, 2021). The pictures draw the attention of the reader, encourage deeper analysis as they analyze the text, and clarify material that could otherwise be unclear (Shabiralyani *et al.*, 2015).

Pictures can be considered as a sign. As Saussure (2011) states, a sign is the difference between a signifier and a signified. Ferdinand de Saussure made a two-part model of sign and then made a representation as an example of his sign model. Chandler (2007) represented Saussure's model of sign by using an example of a word tree (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Representation of the Saussure's sign model (Chandler, 2007)

Moran (2001) defined culture as the ever-changing way of life of a group of people, which includes a common set of activities related to a shared category of products based on a comparable set of world views and embedded social settings. Moran (2001) differentiated culture into five dimensions: products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons. Mayangsari *et al.* (2018) then adapted Moran's dimensions into sixteen aspects. The five dimensions and sixteen aspects are explained in the table below.

**Table 1:** The constructs of culture dimensions

No	Culture Dimensions	Culture Aspects
1.	Products	a) <i>Artifacts</i> : name, food, document, language, money, tool, good/things, jewelry, and hobby. b) <i>Places</i> : buildings, cities, houses. c) <i>Institutions</i> : family, law, economy, religion, education, politics, occupation, media, entertainment, and conventional institutions. d) <i>Art forms</i> : instruments, music, clothes, dancing, painting, movie, literature, and architecture.
2.	Practices	a) <i>Operation</i> : manipulation of cultural products, how to use or make the product of culture. b) <i>Acts</i> : ritualized communicative practices such as eating habits, table manner, behavior, and celebration. c) <i>Scenario</i> : extended communicative practices. d) <i>Lives</i> : stories of culture's members.
3.	Perspectives	a) <i>Intellectual values</i> : thoughts, habits, perceptions, beliefs, traditional values, etiquette, attitudes, ethics, and ideas. b) <i>Behaviors</i> : non-verbal behaviors patterns, verbal behaviors patterns, other behavior patterns, means of communication, and reactions to a particular situation. c) <i>Minor values</i> : public holidays, weather conditions, traffic rules, and travel habits. d) <i>Major values</i> : history, geography, and philosophy. e) <i>Formal values</i> : legal system, politics, and the economy.
4.	Communities	a) <i>Specific social contexts</i> include national culture, circumstances (e.g., religious ceremonies), and groups (e.g. different social clubs, organization) in which members carry out cultural practices.

According to Douglas (2000), a people's culture is their shared viewpoints, behavioral norms, technical expertise, and creative expressions and artifacts from a shared historical era. As Moran (2001) eloquently summarizes, culture may be broken down into five categories: products,

practices, perspectives, persons, and communities. Its culture heavily influences the ideals of a society. According to Dewey (1972), values are concerned with what is seen to be good, right, proper, or acceptable by an individual or a group. Accordingly, this research conceptualizes multicultural values as accepting, understanding, and tolerating the cultures of individuals from diverse ethnic, religious, political, economic, social, and geographical origins. According to Isnaini *et al.* (2019), which draws on Barthes's (1977) visual semiotic theory, categorized multicultural values into four groups: respecting other people's traditions (ROPT), appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP), appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP), and appreciating women's equal rights (AWER).

Many studies have conducted semiotics studies in prior studies. To begin, Sahraee (2018) has done a study entitled *Semiotic Analysis of Culture in ELT Curriculum*. Culture is present in both subtle and blatant ways in textual and visual forms, as discovered by Sahraee's research. The analyzed coursebook focused more on outer circle cultural content than the source language culture. The study also found that cultural diversity was not a major thing to be discussed in the coursebook. Both Sahraee's and this study are conducting a semiotic analysis of culture. What makes Sahraee's study different from this study is that she analyzes a coursebook of English as an International Language (EIL) country for junior high school. In contrast, this study analyzes a coursebook on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries. Sahraee analyzes a coursebook that is used in Iran, while this study analyzes a coursebook that is used in Indonesia. While Sovič and Hus (2016) did a semiotic study of an English textbook, their focus was on textbooks for elementary and middle school students. The focus of their research was similarly mostly descriptive and qualitative. They looked at the pictures in the grade school textbooks. In their analysis of three textbooks, Sovič and Hus found that revisions were necessary considering children's cognitive growth and visual perception.

Gogić (2019) addressed the semiotic analysis of cultural norms in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook for high school students. The research confirmed that although there is enough cultural material in EFL coursebooks, its potential is not fully used since most assignments are exclusively linguistically oriented. There is an obvious difference between Gogić's study and this study. Although both researchers analyze cultural content represented in the coursebook through semiotic analysis, Gogić analyzes three coursebooks that are used in Croatia, while this study analyzes the coursebook that is used in Indonesia and published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia.

This study analyzes the cultural components of a coursebook written in one language with those written in another. Students of English as a Foreign Language might benefit from a better cross-cultural understanding if they are exposed to both the source and target cultures via the EFL textbook (Arslan, 2016).

Based on this phenomenon, this study introduces a semiotic approach to analyzing the representation of the cultural dimensions, aspects, and multicultural values through pictures from the EFL coursebook. Based on this phenomenon, two research questions are formulated as follows:

- a) What are the dimensions and aspects of culture that are represented in the displayed content (pictures) of the coursebook?

- b) Are there any multicultural values represented in the pictures of the coursebook? If any, what are they?

## 2. Research Method

The purpose of this study is to analyze the cultural contents of the *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook. This study used descriptive content analysis to examine the coursebook.

The primary source used for this study is a coursebook entitled *Bahasa Inggris*, an English coursebook written for students in the 12th. The data of this study were in the form of pictures. The study looked at how the coursebook reflected various dimensions and aspects of culture and multicultural values.

The researcher employed document analysis to compile the data. The goal of document analysis, a subfield of qualitative research, is to systematically examine and interpret documentary material to address research questions. The results of a document analysis research may be utilized alone or as part of a broader qualitative or mixed methods study, often used to corroborate the results of another data collection technique (Frey, 2018).

In general, the procedures for conducting this study are formulated as follows:

- a) Classifying the displayed contents (pictures) of the coursebook entitled *Bahasa Inggris* based on the cultural dimensions, cultural aspects, and multicultural values.
- b) Analyzing and interpreting the data to answer the research question.
- c) Applying the validity of the data.
- d) Reporting the findings in the form of textual description.
- e) Drawing the conclusion based on the results of the research.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Culture Dimensions and Aspects

The pictures in the coursebook effectively portray the many cultural dimensions and aspects covered. In addition, the researcher has examined the coursebook and found that the frequency varies considerably across all dimensions and aspects. Information is available in the following table.

The table shows that the distributions of the cultural dimensions are imbalanced. The perspectives dimension had the biggest portion with 88.2%, and that was good because character education is a fundamental part of the school system in Indonesia. This evaluation is aligned with that of Mendez (2005), who said that teaching values via an English textbook is significant since it fosters more accepting and respectful students. By including the perspectives dimensions in the course material, the authors of the coursebook were able to provide students with meaningful opportunities to learn about and practice values like respect, tolerance, and acceptance of variety. The coursebook's emphasis on culture helps students learn how to act in ways that are respectful of other people's beliefs and customs.

**Table 2:** The findings of the culture dimensions and aspects

No	Culture Dimensions and Aspects	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	<b>Products</b>	<b>88/102</b>	<b>86.2%</b>
	a. Artefacts	81/102	79.4%
	b. Places	11/102	10.7%
	c. Institutions	51/102	50%
	d. Art forms	6/102	5.8%
2.	<b>Practices</b>	<b>82/102</b>	<b>80.3%</b>
	a. Operation	72/102	70.5%
	b. Acts	25/102	24.5%
	c. Scenario	2/102	1.9%
	d. Lives	6/102	5.8%
3.	<b>Perspectives</b>	<b>90/102</b>	<b>88.2%</b>
	a. Intellectual values	38/102	37.2%
	b. Behaviors	62/102	60.7%
	c. Minor values	13/102	12.7%
	d. Major values	1/102	0.9%
	e. Formal values	2/102	1.9%
4.	<b>Communities</b>	<b>9/102</b>	<b>8.8%</b>
	a. Specific social contexts	9/102	8.8%
5.	<b>Persons</b>	<b>48/102</b>	<b>47%</b>
	a. Personal identity	46/102	45%
	b. Life history	2/102	1.9%

The product dimension was the second most prevalent, with 86.2%. The cultural products expectedly became the common dimension because the product dimension can be found all around the society and quite easy to display. The practice dimension also had a big portion, with 80.3%, but this dimension did not have a big impact on the student's ability to acquire the language and to understand the culture except for the aspect of life in it. The life aspect could be used to deliver some materials from the outer-circle countries or cultures that occur in the target language. Next, the dimension of a person makes up less than half of the total data and is, therefore, far less well represented than the dimensions of perspectives, products, and practices. At the same time, the person dimension allows the authors to grow the student's character through the biography of someone or the story of great people that could inspire the students. Furthermore, the community scale dimension is underrepresented. The authors of the coursebook appear to have ignored the significance of the social aspect of culture, even though this is an increasingly salient issue in the current world.

For the culture aspects from 102 data observed by the researcher, it was found that the frequency and percentage of each aspect in the pictures are different in number. Three aspects stand out, namely artefact, operation, and behavior, with 79.4%, 70.5%, and 60.7%, respectively. The following pictures are examples of how to analyze the cultural dimensions and aspects.



**Figure 2:** Artefact aspect of product dimension

The picture above shows a group of people doing ice skating. The picture contains Saussure's model of a sign because it shows a woman who is thinking about a sport, namely ice skating. The signified concept is shown in the picture of a group of people who are doing ice skating, while the signifier is the two words "ice skating". Ice skating is not only a sport but also a hobby. Ice skating is considered a sport, and according to Peralta (2014), it can be categorized as a nation's culture. In addition, good/things are also shown by ice skating clothes and the tools used by the people who are doing the ice skating in the picture above. Furthermore, the picture contains the artifact aspect of the product dimension.



**Figure 3:** Behavior aspect of perspective dimension

The picture above shows a doctor and a nurse checking their patient's eyes. Checking the patient's condition is categorized as non-verbal behavior. Furthermore, the picture contains the behavior aspect of the perspective dimension.

### 3.2 Multicultural Values

The study shows all the groups of multicultural values that Isnaini *et al.* (2019) suggested. Based on the diversity of the country's population, it paints a picture of the country's social and cultural



phenomena and offers insight into the lives of its citizens. Students may improve their abilities to communicate across cultural boundaries, as shown by the study's results. Information is available in the following table.

**Table 3:** The findings of the multicultural values

No	Multicultural Values	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Respecting other people's traditions (ROPT)	2/102	1.9%
2.	Appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP)	26/102	25.4%
3.	Appreciating other people's cultural products (AOPCP)	9/102	8.8%
4.	Appreciating women's equal rights (AWER)	11/102	10.7%

According to the results of the study's analysis of the data, the researcher discovered the frequency and the percentage of each value which are observed in the pictures are different in number, but the difference is not as much as in the culture dimensions and aspects. The smallest number is owned by the value of respecting other people's traditions (ROPT), with 1.9%. The biggest frequency is in appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP), with 25.5%. Although the cultures and the traditions that are highlighted contain more about the domestic culture or inner-circle countries compared to the outer circle and not all the pictures have multicultural values proposed by Isnaini *et al.* (2019), this book is good enough because all the multicultural values have been conveyed very well and easy to understand.

Although all the categories of multicultural values are represented in the pictures in the coursebook, the results are still too small in number. The biggest frequency is owned by the value of appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP) with 25.5%, and it still does not take up more than half of the total data. The pictures were expected to contain a large amount of frequency because it could effectively deliver the materials about culture to the students to appreciate and understand cultural diversity. Here are the following pictures as examples of analyzing multicultural values.




**Figure 4:** Respecting other people's traditions

The picture shows a conversation between Hamada and Diana. They talk about a birthday party, celebration, or tradition. The picture contains a multicultural value called appreciating other people's traditions (ROPT) because Diana is offering help to Hamada to



prepare Hamada's grandmother's birthday party. This indicates that Diana respects the traditions of Hamada's family.

At the end of this chapter, ask yourself the following questions to know your learning progress.



1. Do you know how to offer a help/a service?

2. Do you know how to respond to an offer/a service?

3. Do you know how to accept an offer/a service?

4. Do you know how to refuse an offer/a service?

If you answer "no" to any of the questions above, please discuss it with your friends or consult it to your teacher.

Source: freepik.com

**Figure 5:** Appreciating other people's perspectives

The picture above shows a teacher asking her students about the reflection of chapter 1. It means that the teacher allows the students to feel free to share their perspectives, and it means that the teacher appreciates her student's perspectives or opinions. The picture contains a multicultural value called appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP).

#### 4. Conclusions

It is crucial to give attention to the cultural content of English textbooks since it may motivate students to achieve the goals of the 2013 education curriculum. There are so many dimensions and aspects of culture from the pictures in the *Bahasa Inggris* coursebook. Although the difference in frequency in each category is very significant, all five culture dimensions proposed by Moran (2001) and sixteen culture aspects argued by Mayangsari *et al.* (2018) as the adaptation of Moran's theory is provided. The cultural dimensions and aspects need to be included in English learning materials in order to facilitate the student's comprehension of the target language. Without cultures, it would be impossible for students to acquire the language they are learning. This is because all cultural dimensions and aspects may be included in the learning material without compromising the essence of language acquisition. The coursebook entitled *Bahasa Inggris* for the twelfth grade has previously addressed the cultural component and thoroughly explored its numerous facets.

The coursebook shows all the multicultural values proposed by Isnaini *et al.* (2019), but they are still small in number. It is proven that appreciating other people's perspectives (AOPP), the most frequent of the multicultural values represented in the pictures of the coursebook only has 25.4% percentages or showed twenty-six times out of one hundred and two data. Then, respecting other people's traditions only showed up two times in the coursebook, with 1.9%. It can be concluded that the coursebook lacks the multicultural values because from the one hundred and two data, the biggest frequency of the multicultural values is shown by AOPP with

twenty-six times only. The pictures were expected to be repeated frequently because it could effectively deliver the materials related to the cultural contents to the students. Besides, an active role from English teachers, such as offering extra activities connected to the coursebook's pictures, is necessary to boost the usage of multicultural values represented in the classroom. This may be accomplished by engaging students in activities that compare the differences and similarities between other cultures and nations, such as problem-solving, role-playing, and/or case studies, which can develop students' intercultural awareness and ICC.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The authors agree with the contents of this paper and have no financial interests to disclose. The authors affirm that the submission is original and not currently under review by any other publication.

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