

Research article

Understanding Functions of Typography in Teenage Novels

Yusnita Febrianti

Universitas Negeri Malang

ORCID

Yusnita Febrianti:

Abstract.

This study explores the functions of typography in teenage novels. Typography is a form of multimodality that rarely gains attention. It is considered multimodal because it facilitates the construction of meaning of two modes i.e. written language and its visual presentation. The preliminary stage of this study is an observation on teenage novels, which revealed the use of a combination of standard computer-produced fonts and ornamental hand-writing like fonts in their pages. Therefore, the study aims to elaborate the functions of typography found in these teenage novels. The data analyses were conducted using Stöckl's framework in typography analysis, which posit that based on its position in the text, typography can occupy different domains of microtypography, mesotypography, and macrotypography. Further, the different forms of typography found in these levels will be elaborated based on the functions relative to the main plot of the story in the novels. The result of the study will provide insights on the functions of the typography for the possible reading mechanism of teenage novels.

Corresponding Author: Yusnita
Febrianti; email:
yusnita.febrianti.fs@um.ac.id

Published 28 March 2022

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

© Yusnita Febrianti. This article
is distributed under the terms of
the [Creative Commons](#)
[Attribution License](#), which
permits unrestricted use and
redistribution provided that the
original author and source are
credited.

Selection and Peer-review under
the responsibility of the iNETAL
Conference Committee.

Keywords: typography, font, hand-writing, microtypography, teenage novels

1. Introduction

This study explores a multimodal aspect in teenage novels, specifically those related to the use of fonts in the presentation of the written language in the novels. The basic principle foregrounding this study is multimodality developed on the basis of Systemic Functional Linguistics theory. In this view, multimodality is defined based on the observation of communication development that always includes a combination of semiotic modes to contribute to one unified meaning. Today, communication forms use the full repertoire of meaning-making resources such as visual, spoken, gestural, written, three-dimensional, and others, depending on the domain of representation in different contexts, and on developing means that show how these are organized to make meaning [1]. Multimodality, hence, concerns the way a text utilizes different semiotic modes in its presentation. In this case, the study looks at the presentation of written language in teenage novels. Written language is the orthographic representation of a

OPEN ACCESS

language. While the common terminology for the current production of written language produced using computerized technology is known as typeface, in multimodal analysis, it is more technically known as typography.

Typography is multimodal. It is essentially a combination of two semiotic modes, namely language and 'visual' modes. Language is clearly a semiotic mode that represents meanings through its structure and syntactic elements. When produced using a computer technology, written language or writing is presented using graphic means in the form of typeface and type style [2]. Both modes, namely the language and its visual appearance in typography, convey meanings beyond its function for language encoding [3].

In terms of methodological analysis, a framework for understanding the system of meaning in typography has been developed by Stöckl [3]. He proposed that the arrangement of typography in a document occupies a number of domains in which a typographic sign system operates, including microtypography, mesotypography, and macrotypography. Each of the domains represents the space where typography is found. Microtypography relates to the design of fonts and individual graphic signs. In the next domain, mesotypography, typography is seen as configurations of graphic signs in lines and text blocks. Finally, macrotypography deals with the graphic structure of the overall document wherein the typography is presented. It is worth noting, however, that the general arrangement of typography, much like other types of texts in the Western culture, is arranged horizontally left to right [4]. This aspect will also be accounted for in the data analysis for this study.

As a presentation of written language, typography has different forms based on its method of production. The diverse forms of typography are presumed to have different meanings. Meanings manifested in typography are dependent on the other semiotic resources in the immediate environment [3, 5, 6]. Each choice comes with a prescribed description; for example, italicised fonts can suggest dynamism and energy, tight fonts can suggest thriftiness or rigidity, and sentence case can suggest neutrality or objectivity. To some extent, Damayanti and Febrianti [7] suggest that colours may help typography to stand out in pages of a picture book. In the case of this study, colours may not be extensively analysed. But considering that the data consist of novels presented in black-and-white and coloured formats, it may be nudged in the analysis section.

Note that in various forms of multimodal texts, typography serves as an integral part of various communication purposes. Among the research in typography and its elements include the investigation on typography as a part of presentation in PowerPoint [8], typography as a part of public discourse [9] and typography in moving images

[10]. For these communication purposes, Van Leeuwen [6] noted that the possibilities of typography interpretation can be very wide, but the meanings of typography can be narrowed down by other, co-present features, and by the context generally – a particularly important feature of the context is the genre in which a font occurs, and the expectations this sets up in the reader. In this study, typography is found in teenage novels. The particular observation will be focused on how each page of the novels may be presented in different kinds of typography styles. The specific aim of this study is exploring some categories of functions of typography in the novels for the readers. Overall, the data analysis results are expected to shed light on the understanding that typography in teenage novels is designed in such a way to help readers to be more engaged with the content of the materials.

2. Method

The data for the study are five teenage novels i.e. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The Bad Guys*, *You're Joking*, *My Parents Cancelled My Birthday* and *The World's Worst Parents*. These novels are selected based on a number of considerations, namely: (1) they are written in English, (2) based on the market segmentation, they are targeted for teenage readers, and (3) they present variations of typography. Further to the novel selection, observations are focused on the specific pages of these novels. Relevant pages are selected from the novels to use as samples for the analysis of typography. Subsequently, data analysis is conducted using the framework proposed by Stöckl [3] on the dimensions of typography, namely: Microtypography (individual fonts e.g. type face, size, and colour), Mesotypography (configuration of fonts in lines e.g. word spacing, line spacing), and Macrotypography (structure of the overall document e.g. indentations and paragraphing, caps and initials). The results of the analysis are then interpreted based on the functions as the typography presentation is found across the teenage novels.

3. Findings and Discussion

In line with the stated aim, the findings of the study are divided into two main aspects. First, the presentation of typography in macro-, meso-, and microtypography levels. Then, the functions of typography in these levels are discussed by describing how they may affect the reading process and/or readers in some ways.

The teenage novels observed in the study consisted of two main types, namely those presented in black-and-white and those in coloured pages. In both types, the

typography presentation in the novels is predominated by the use of standard computer-produced fonts, mostly in regular typeface styles. See Figure 1. As the observed novels are intended for teenagers, images are found in several pages as illustrations. Even with the presence of the images, however, the typographic presentation still dominates. More variation of typography is found in the level of mesotypography, where typography is presented differently from the majority of typography in lines and text blocks. See the example in Figure 2. This is not a conventional novel that presents a narrative of a story. While categorized as reading material for teenagers, this is a joke book that is presented in spare lines with boxes as accentuation. In this sample, it is clear that the typeface styles consist of a combination of regular, bold and italics all in one page.

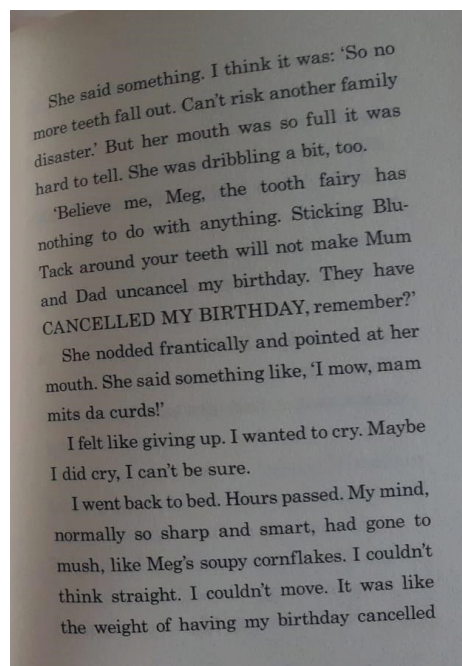


Figure 1: Regular typography in a novel page.

In Figure 3 and 4, more typography variations are found in microtypography level. Figure 3 shows the presentation of typography that resembles handwriting. This presentation is consistent in all of the pages in the novels. In Figure 4, the two pages of the sample present the variety in two pages of the novels. Combinations of regular, italic, bold, big-sized, blocked and grey-scaled typography are seen in the pages. See also Figure 5 and 6 where typography is presented in coloured pages. While the samples in these figures are presented in black-and-white, they stand out well in the pages due to the sizing. For example, in Figure 5, the size of accentuated typography is only slightly bigger than the standard typography on the page. Figure 6, on the other hand, is presented in an exaggerated size, resulting in a typography presentation that spreads across two pages.

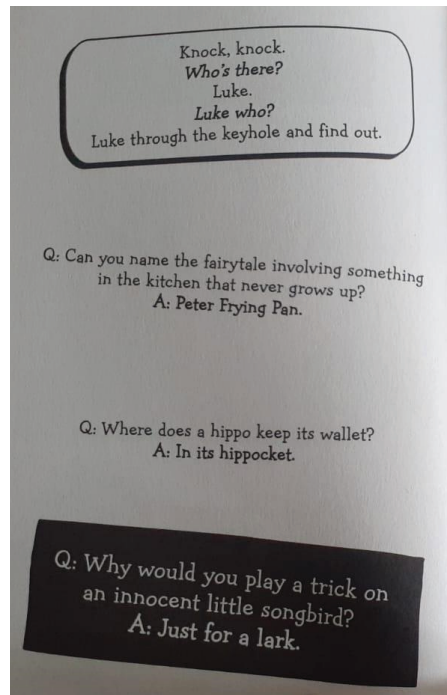


Figure 2: Regular, bold and italics typography in a novel page.

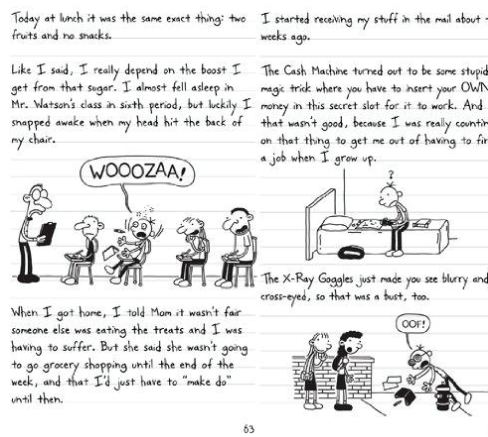


Figure 3: Handwritten-like typography in a teenage novel.



Figure 4: Ornamental typography in a graphic novel.

The next observation beyond the presentation of typography in the observed teenage novels is how the different types of typography serve different functions that may be useful for the readers. In this study, three broad categories of functions are drawn; they are: providing hints into the intonation patterns for certain contents, bringing impact on the content of the story, and directing the reading path for the content story.

One hypothesized function of the typography presentation in the teenage novels is related to the way certain words may be pronounced with a certain intonation, emphasis or stress. In Figure 1, the use of capitalized questions amidst the regular fonts works as a clue for the readers to read the question with a different emphasis. To follow the storyline, it can be read in a surprised manner. Another example is well shown in Figure 4. As readers, we can see that different font presentations affect us to read the words in different ways. Look, for example, the wording for the graphic novel panel in Figure 4. Regular and italic font combinations in: 'What was *that*? Are you trying to give him a heart attack? **WHAT?** I was, like, being totally cool ...' take us to read the whole utterance using a different emphasis and stress every time we encounter the words written in italics or capitals. This is also similar to when, for example, we read 'WOOOZAA' in Figure 3. We can really feel the shock experienced by the character in the novel, especially as the image of the character is giving a similar hint.

Observation on some pages of the teenage novels leads to the hint of impact to the story as a result of using different typography presentations. As discussed, Figure 3 uses a handwritten-like typography to suit the character in the story. This is a good example of how typography contributes to the characterization of the main cast. Also, the selection of typography is suitable to the overall contents of the novel about a teenage life. In a broader sense, the handwritten-like typography that is used in the overall novel then characterizes the novel as a teenage novel. This typography selection would also function as a way to attract potential readers from the intended readers' age group.

In the following example (Figure 5), the different typography is used to indicate different characters in the story. On this page, still the main typeface is the regular font. But in certain parts, different variations of typography are used to highlight speech from different characters, especially in some emphasized words. First, cursive italic is used by the character 'Boby', indicating a soft, slow tone when he said 'beautiful'. Second, regular bold in wide font is used to highlight the opinion from a character named 'Ping' who sensed that the 'cheese smelled bad'. Then the uppercase, big sized font is used to emphasize the way Ping called her 'dad'. In response, the spoken word of the dad character is represented in thin, tall, italic fonts to say 'shush'. With this presentation, readers would read the word 'shush' in a softer tone, as if knowing how it would be

said in the spoken form. Generally, for readers, following a written story presented in this way is more interesting to follow rather than a somewhat boring regular typography presentation.



Figure 5: Different typography for different characters.

In addition to the analysis and interpretation of typography, the study notes the importance of typography presentation in giving hints about reading path. Following research conducted by Damayanti and Febrianti [7], the arrangement of typography in the novels provides a clue to describe the reading path in the teenage novels. In this case, it has been observed that to some extent a variation of typography may give some indications to how the reading path in a teenage novel is arranged. In conventional novels, it has been understood that the direction of the reading is from left to right. Generally, then, this applies for all texts produced within this culture, including in novels that involve the use of images. Typography analysis in this study shows that in the macrotypography level, the novels are predominated by regular fonts arranged for the reading direction of left to right. A clearer example, however, is found in Figure 6. Here, the use of ornamental typography depicts a bombastic size of ornamental typography of 'bleurgh'. It is presented in an ascending direction from left to right, across two pages as an exaggeration of onomatopoeia. This is taken from the sound made by a character when vomiting. Readers' eyes will follow from the left to right to read the word. Accentuation of typography on these pages takes the reader to get the augmentation of the exaggeration in the scene being depicted in the story.

Overall, the data analysis results imply that the functions of typography in teenage novels are closely related to its appeal for readers in approaching the story. Variety of typography in teenage novels is used as a way to present variations in what otherwise would be boring novel pages with regular fonts. This will attract potential readers', i.e. teenagers, interest in reading the novels.



Figure 6: Bombastic typography on a spread of a novel.

4. Conclusions

The overall data analysis results provide insights on the understanding that typography in teenage novels is designed in such a way to get readers to be more engaged with the content story. The study showcased a simple observation on typography in teenage novels from a multimodal point of view i.e. focusing on how the presentation of typography in the novels gives more meaning to the language that tells the story. As discussed, it has elaborated the features in typography that make them stand out among the regular typography namely bold, italics, size, handwriting imitation, and ornamental or artistic styles. Relevant to their distinctive features, the functions of typography may be related to its use as a reading material. Therefore, they may function to provide hints about the intonation patterns for certain contents, bringing impact on the content of the story, and directing the reading path for the content story.

While the study is mainly descriptive, one important implication can be drawn into the contribution that teenage novels may bring into the extensive reading activities. Teenage novels are often more appealing than school textbooks. Therefore, they are potentially a good resource to be used as extensive materials. This study has showcased that the features of teenage novels are useful to enrich students' reading experience. As found in a study by Renandya et al. [11], students are suggested to read books from a wide range of topics produced by different authors to gain more vocabulary and more complex grammatical structures. By doing so, students will also learn English in terms of structures and various ranges of writing styles. Accordingly, research in this area can be expanded into a more applicable implementation of varieties and functions of typography, for example in the area of pedagogy. When linked to the

activities in extensive reading, investigations can be made to highlight how typography may contribute to the teaching and learning of reading.

References

- [1] Jewitt, C. E. *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London: Routledge; 2011.
- [2] Kress, G. *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London: Routledge; 2010.
- [3] Stöckl, H. Typography: body and dress of a text-a signing mode between language and image. *Visual Communication*, 2005;4(2):204-214. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1470357205053403>
- [4] Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London: Routledge; 2006.
- [5] Van Leeuwen, T. Typographic meaning. *Visual Communication*, 2005;4(2):137-143.
- [6] Van Leeuwen, T. Towards a semiotics of typography. *Information Design Journal & Document Design*, 2006;14(2):139-155. <https://doi.org/10.1075/idj.14.2.06lee>
- [7] Damayanti, I. L., & Febrianti, Y. Multimodal literacy: Unfolding reading path in children's picture book and its potential for EFL classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2020;9(3):616-627. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v9i3.23212>
- [8] Zhao, S., Djonov, E., & Van Leeuwen, T. Semiotic technology and practice: A multimodal social semiotic approach to PowerPoint. *Text & Talk*, 2014;34(3):349-375. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2014-0005>
- [9] Djonov, E., & Van Leeuwen, T. Between the grid and composition: Layout in PowerPoint's design and use. *Semiotica*, 2013;197:1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2013-0078>
- [10] Van Leeuwen, T., & Djonov, E. Notes towards a semiotics of kinetic typography. *Social Semiotics*, 2015;25(2):244-253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2015.1010324>
- [11] Renandya, W. A., Krashen, S., & Jacobs, G. M. The potential of series books: How narrow reading leads to advanced L2 proficiency. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 2018;11(2):148-154.