

Research Article

REALIZATION OF CULTURAL VALUES AND TRANS-LANGUAGING IN THE VISUAL IMAGES OF AN INDONESIAN PICTURE BOOK

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Abstract.

This study investigated the realization of cultural values and trans-languaging in a picture book. The current discussion of trans-languaging has been focused on the verbal texts found in school textbooks, children's comics or conventional novels. On the other hand, the study offers insights into trans-languaging that is realized in a different semiotic mode, namely visual images. The primary data for the study is a picture book written by an Indonesian writer Clara Ng entitled '*Kancil Yang Baik*'. The main methodological tools for the study are Wei's (2018) concept of translanguaging and Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of the grammar of visual design, focusing on the compositional function. The data analysis is conducted to elaborate on the features of cultural values and trans-languaging in the visual image format of the picture book. Further, interpretation will be made on the implications of how these features may be used in various reading activities. The results of the study indicate that visual images in a picture book are a rich source of cultural content. Therefore, it is advisable to optimize reading activities that also focus on the visual images of picture books.

Keywords: *translanguaging, picture books, visual images, cultural values*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the ways visual images are presented in picture books to convey cultural backgrounds. As the study uses visual images as the main data, a review of theories and methodologies in understanding visual images is given to provide basic understanding of images as a semiotic mode. Approaches used in this study are adopted from theories and methodologies in understanding the inclusion of cultural values in language learning such as in CLIL. Then, it also considers the latest theoretical development in translanguaging. These will be accounted for respectively.

Picture books are an example of static multimodal text (Stöckl, 2005) that combines the use meaning making resources from two different semiotic modes. A semiotic mode is defined as any resources that are used to make meaning, which are shaped both socially and culturally (Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, & Tsatsarelis, 2014). In this case, a picture

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book combines verbal text and visual images on its pages to present meanings. While verbal text or language has been known as a common semiotic mode, visual images are also another semiotic mode that represent meaning through the use of lines, shapes, sizes, composition and placement of elements among others (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In addition, colours are also accounted for as an element attached to visual images to contribute to the meaning making in visual elements (Van Leeuwen, 2011).

To understand the cultural values in the picture book, the study revisits two important theories on the inclusion of cultural backgrounds in language learning. First of all, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which was developed to promote the preservation of linguistic and cultural heritage. It was initiated as a form of approach to encourage native speakers of one region to learn a second or foreign language, especially in regions where immigrants come to reside (Dale & Tanner, 2012; Ozfidan & Toprak, 2019). Within this approach, there is an acknowledgement that learning a second or foreign language does not diminish native culture of the learners.

In its development, CLIL has been used as a basic principle to develop the principles of translanguaging. As a terminology, translanguaging originates from a Welsh language to describe a classroom practice where the teacher and learner use two different languages to interact (Baker, 2011). In the next iteration, translanguaging evolves into a concept that goes beyond mere “two languages of additive bilingualism or interdependence” (García & Wei, 2014). Wei (2011) has posited in a previous work that human beings’ way of thinking is beyond language. Therefore, it is necessary to use a number of different cognitive, semiotic, and modal resources. Finally, Wei (2018) emphasises that the *trans* prefix to languaging are associated with transcend or the fluid practices that go beyond socially constructed language systems, the transformative capacity to process both language systems and language users’ cognition and social structures, and the transdisciplinary consequences of re-conceptualizing language with other fields of study such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education.

Note that translanguaging is different from multilingualism, code switching and code mixing. According to Deumert (2011), multilingualism is a matter of degree of competency, that is a knowledge of a few words to a full competency of more than one language. Within members of society, degree of multilingualism is seen as juxtaposing individuals with full competence in one language compared to those with limited additional or foreign language competence. Translanguaging is also different from code switching where language users communicate using more than one language in one communicative event or code mixing in which language users alternate internal patterns of utterances or clauses (Muysken, 2011). So, translanguaging is essentially a blend of

more than one language as it is influenced by the background cultures with no clear demarcation between both.

García and Wei (2014) also acknowledge that translanguaging covers a multiplicity of signs and issues without privileging one over the other. Translanguaging is useful for learners to become more knowledgeable as language practices continue to expand. Based on this argument, this study is interested in exploring forms of translanguaging in different signs, including in visual images. In addition, another argument is built from a recent study by Istighfaroh, Yannuar, Febrianti, Choiron, & Basthomi (2022) that explores translanguaging aspects in the visual and verbal modes of a bilingual comic for children. The study found that the visual and verbal modes in the comic books are useful to introduce language elements as well as cultural values in two languages to attract readers' engagements. While the research was conducted on a comic book, it did not specifically address the roles of visuals to convey cultural values and translanguaging. Hence, the present study aims to elaborate the realisation of cultural values and translanguaging in the visual element of a picture book. Further, interpretation will be made on the implication of these elements for the reading activities.

2. METHOD

The study uses a children picture book by an Indonesian writer as the main data, namely *Kancil yang Baik* by Clara Ng (2010). This book features a popular Indonesian folk story of a mousedeer or *Kancil* and his adventure in the forest. Traditionally, the character of Kancil is known to be cunning, mischievous and smart in interacting with bigger, more dangerous animals in the forest. In this book, however, the character is portrayed as a good character. The first stage of the data analysis includes an observation of the visual images contained in the picture book. At this stage, the observation is focused on the visual images in the book that features cultural values and/or translanguaging elements. The analysis of cultural values and translanguaging elements in the images are conducted using the parameters from Wei's (2018) concept of translanguaging. In the next stage, the visual images are analysed using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) concept of grammar of visual design. The focus of the analysis is on the placement or positioning of the images in the book pages. The result of the analysis will provide insights on how the images in the picture book have been designed by considering the inclusion of cultural values and translanguaging features in the The translanguaging elements in the images are conducted using the parameters from Wei's (2018) concept

of translanguageing. In this way, interpretations can be made on the usefulness of considering these elements in various reading activities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis on the picture book shows that there are elements of the visual images that contain cultural values and translanguageing on the pages of *Kancil yang Baik*. Note that the story of *Kancil yang Baik* is written fully in Indonesian and the study acknowledges the important role of the verbal text elements. However, as the study is focused on the analysis of the visual images, the verbal text element is set aside from the discussion.

3.1. Features of Cultural Values and Translanguageing in Visual Images

As described in the previous section, translanguageing is essentially a 'blend' of languages produced as influenced by different background cultures. The data analysis results show that a similar manifestation of the blend culture is shown in the form of visual images. Throughout the book, the use of a blend of two different cultures is evident. In the first instance, Figure 1a and 1b show the identity of the book, namely the Indonesian local cultural content. Kancil is a popular story with a familiar storyline which involves the character of an old male farmer and a cunning mousedeer. This is shown in the use of these two main characters in the images.



Figure 1a. Farmer Character in the Story (1)



Figure 1b. Farmer Character in the Story (2)

Figure 1

Contrary to the original story where they were told as enemies, this book shows the two characters as being friendly to each other. In Figure 1a, however, the two characters are shown to be involved in a scene where they are friendly to each other. This shows a

twist in the story to promote more understanding and respect among people of different ages. Then, general Indonesian identity is shown in the outfit worn by the farmer. In both Figure 1a and 1b, the farmer is shown wearing pants featuring the Indonesian traditional motif of *batik*. In addition, the farmer is shown to wear a traditional straw hat. This type of hat is typically worn by farmers in Indonesian rural areas. This small feature strengthens the representation of Indonesian national identity in the visual images.

Another traditional Indonesian identity is also shown in Figure 3a. The character of a mother in this image is shown to wear batik dress, a typical dress worn by common mothers in Indonesia. A subtle Indonesian culture is also shown in the image of *sarong* worn by the elephant character in Figure 3b. In a more specific observation, a more contemporary Indonesian identity is shown in Figure 3b. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) the most salient image on the page is positioned in the centre of the image. In Figure 3b, readers are attracted to the cap on top of Kancil's head. Also, on this page, the striking red colour of the cap image stands out among the other softer colours. Even though the size of the image is small, both the positioning and the colour helps the image to stand out. In terms of culture, it is clear that the cap bears a logo of an Indonesian school. This logo, combined with the colour red signify the meaning of Indonesian primary school level. Hence, it can be inferred that Kancil is portrayed as a primary school student in the story.



Figure 2a. Features of *Batik* in the Visual Image Elements



Figure 2b. Indonesian Primary School Cap

Figure 2

On a few other pages, the features of translanguaging are shown in the visual images that show a combination of Eastern and Western culture. For example, Figure ??a shows an idea of translanguaging namely the picnic activity which is not quite common in Indonesian culture. Kancil and the crocodile as the representation of Indonesian folk story characters are shown to be engaged in a fun Western-style picnic featuring barbecue over fire and music playing. Similarly, Figure ??b presents a scene of a modern form of a birthday party celebration. In both images, the characters from the Indonesian

traditional story of Kancil feature in the visual images. This is how the Indonesian cultural background blends with more modern or Western cultures in the visual images.



Figure 3a. Picnic Activity



Figure 3b. A birthday Party Celebration

Figure 3

Now that the cultural values and translanguaging elements have been described, it becomes necessary to understand how these elements would contribute to language learning. In relation to the data in the study, the discussion of the implication is focused on its implementation on reading activities using children picture book.

3.2. Implications on the Use of Cultural Contents and Translanguaging in Children Picture Book

Data analyses on the reflection of translanguaging has been presented in the previous section. A question that remains, however, is whether translanguaging elements in the form of visual image have a contribution towards the language learning process. That is, first of all, it is useful to consider whether the visual images play a role in the development of reading skill. Secondly, in regards to the use of a blend of languages, it is arguable that the visual images can promote the development of two different languages through the reading activities conducted using the picture book.

To discuss the first issue, the study adopts a statement given by Brouillard, Dubé, and Byers-Heinlein (2022) in regards to the benefits of using a bilingual book for reading activities. In their research, they found that bilingual books are useful for promoting children's learning of words. Following this analogy, the value of visual images in the picture books is somewhat similar. Visual images are always associated with words that correspond to them. One idea is to help children relate the visual images and the accompanying verbal text. Then, another idea in the reading activities is to involve talk-around-text activities that can be conducted to supplement the reading with additional words obtained from image discussion, rather than a mere word-reading activity.

Further, Brouillard et al. (2022) also mention that bilingual books are useful to promote the development of two different languages, regardless whether they are used dominantly or not. On this basis, reading activities using picture books can be done to ensure that the visual images can be optimised by relating them to the languages that children understand, for example in a foreign language and the local language. Although the verbal elements in the book are presented in Indonesian, there are opportunities to optimise the book for the teaching of more than one language. This would pose a special challenge, however. The reading activity would require a patron to read with the child who is capable of using both Indonesian and an additional language when using this type of material in reading activities. While the book in question is not trialled in reading activities with any participants, there is enough evidence that visual images in children picture book can be explored much more rather than be considered as a mere illustration for the book.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of the study indicate that visual elements in a picture book are a rich source of cultural contents. As a form of semiotic mode, images carry meanings, which value is comparable to other forms of semiotic mode such as language. Following Joyce and Gaudin (2007) teachers, or other reading patrons, should find a way of talking about visual images and how they are composed to provide meanings for the viewers. Therefore, it is advisable to optimise reading activities that also involve the use of visual elements in picture books. To this purpose, reading activities can be adjusted. For example, rather than only focusing on reading for words, reading activities can make use of the visual images for vocabulary matching to the language resources and talk-around-text topics. Although the verbal elements in the book are presented in Indonesian, there are opportunities to optimise the book for the teaching of more than one language.

The study is a simple observation limited to only one picture book which is designed, produced and marketed in Indonesia. Further explorations are open to investigate, for example, into cultural values and translanguaging in picture books produced in English speaking countries for migrant children. Alternative research can be directed into a more theoretical approach. Since translanguaging was developed as a theory to describe how language use comes to its form of blended cultural background, a consideration should be made into establishing a terminology that may be more suitable to use when describing the phenomena of translanguaging in the form of visual images.

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