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Texts, Contexts, and Visuals: Multimodal Meaning-Making in English for Nusantara Comic Strips

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Abstract: *This study investigates how meaning is constructed through verbal and visual modes in comic strips from the English for Nusantara (EfN) textbook across different grade levels. The study aims to examine how genre, register, and visual composition are integrated to support pedagogical purposes in EFL instructional materials developed in accordance with curricular guidelines. Using a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis, selected comic strips were analyzed using a coding sheet developed as the primary research instrument. The coding sheet enabled a systematic and theory-informed analysis by integrating two analytical layers: linguistic analysis based on Systemic Functional Linguistics, focusing on genre structures and register variables; and visual analysis following Kress and van Leeuwen's compositional metafunction. The findings reveal that the comic strips consistently realize pedagogical genres such as recount and report texts, with register configurations adapted to learners' developmental levels. Visual compositional resources systematically reinforce verbal meanings by organizing information and directing readers' attention. This study concludes that the coherent integration of genre-based linguistic choices and visual compositional resources enhances pedagogical coherence in purpose to supports learner comprehension. The findings provide insights for curriculum and materials development by illustrating how multimodal genre and register choices can be systematically aligned with curricular goals and learners' developmental stages.*

Keywords: *Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL), Comic Strip, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Textbook Analysis, Curriculum Development*

INTRODUCTION

Meaning is socially constructed, shaped by both immediate situations and broader cultural traditions (Jamieson, 1975) Verbal texts like spoken and written texts are also viewed in a different genre (Martin & David, 2008) in communities. These phenomena are caused by linguistic or non-linguistic aspects. The linguistic aspect is associated with how the language is used to describe text, including nominalization, lexical metaphor, grammatical metaphor, and others. The ability to comprehend linguistics aspects is able to identify the genre of the text. Non-linguistics aspects are associated with social and cultural aspects. In line, In the

process of interpretation, texts do not stand in isolation but are always situated in relation to their context (Wahyuningsih et al., 2025).

From a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) perspective, language is viewed as a resource for meaning-making, where text and context are mutually predictive (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Hyland, 2004). Texts are organized through structured arrangements of clauses and sentences that encode semantic meaning, reflecting the interaction between linguistic choices and contextual demands. Understanding text meaning cannot be derived solely from grammatical and lexical constructions, but also from the social contexts in which texts are produced and interpreted (Darong, 2022). In academic texts, use of cohesive devices contributes to text coherence between sentences (Hall et al., 2014; Yuniartiah et al., 2018).

Humans use language towards practical purposes such as in the construing of experiences and enacting of reality in dialogue/written exchange with others (Cordeiro, 2017). Language and society have reciprocal relations, as a sign system “[it] enables meaning exchange in performance of social practices” (Hasan, 2015). Simultaneously, in interacting with a greater variety of people, children learn to use language and other semiotic means to construct and maintain different kinds of interpersonal relationships with family members, peers, and teachers. These relationships and the ways they are semiotically constructed are shaped by cultural norms, such as those relating to race, class, gender, and religion (Accurso & Gebhard, 2020). This is in line with, social semiotics as a social theory of meaning making and communication, where sign systems or “semiotic resources/modes” interrelate with their users and their social context of use (Jewitt et al., 2016). An analysis of language as a semiotic resource should take into account the social context in which the communicative event is produced and enacted (Jerome, 2022). The semiotic perspective focuses on the potential resources of textbooks and can be used as a tool for figuring out how much and how the books can represent the cultural elements (Liu, 2022).

Within SFL, that see language as a semiotic resource for making meaning in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), genre and register are central concepts for understanding how language operates in context. Genre relates to the broader context of culture and refers to staged, goal-oriented social processes that are recognized by members of a community (Halliday, 1989; Motta-Roth, 2009). Register, situated within the context of situation, concerns the configuration of semantic resources associated with a particular situation type and is realized through the variables of field (what is happening), tenor (who is involved), and mode (how language is used) (Martin, 1992). These levels—genre, register, and text—form a continuum of instantiation, ranging from the abstract potential of cultural meaning to the concrete realization of language in specific situations (Matthiessen et al., 2010). As emphasized by Malinowski, language becomes fully intelligible only when it is interpreted within its situational context (Eggins, 2004). Linguistic and situational contexts facilitate the interpretation pragmatic meaning (Depraetere, 2019)

In contemporary English language education, particularly in the context of Indonesia’s curriculum reform, textbooks are expected to facilitate not only linguistic competence but also cultural understanding and learner engagement. English for Nusantara (EfN), a government-issued EFL textbook developed under the national curriculum, integrates comic strips as instructional materials across different grade levels. Comic strips function as multimodal texts that combine verbal and visual resources to convey meaning, making them pedagogically valuable for supporting comprehension, engagement, and contextualized language learning.

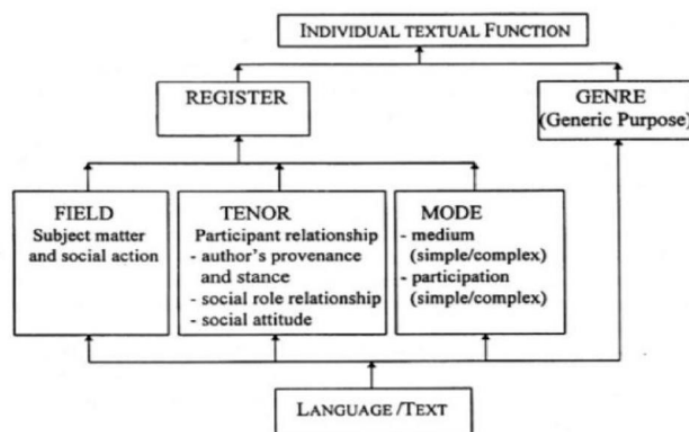


Figure 1 Halliday’s Register Analysis: Field, Tenor and Mode

To analyze such multimodal texts, this study adopts Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as its primary theoretical framework, viewing language as a meaning-making resource embedded in social, cultural, and situational contexts (Emilia, 2014). In addition, the study incorporates the visual grammar framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), particularly the concept of compositional meaning, which examines how visual elements are arranged to create meaning. The multimodal semiotic resources extensively employ structural condensation through implicit lexical reiterations and the paradigmatic and syntagmatic sense relations (Alyousef, 2017). This ‘visualisation’ of discourse requires researchers in discourse analysis to consider visual forms of communication – not only in their own right, but because, on the view of language to be presented here, to do so will provide better insight into the meanings communicated via language (Hart, 2016).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), spatial arrangements such as left–right (given new) and top–bottom (ideal–real) structures play a significant role in guiding readers’ interpretation of visual information. This study is further grounded in SFL-based Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFL–MDA), which enables systematic examination of how multiple semiotic resources language and image interact to construct meaning within a single text (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O’Halloran, 2011).

The linguistic analysis in this study draws on SFL to examine genre and register within the EfN comic strips (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Martin & Rose, 2008). Genre analysis focuses on identifying the communicative purposes and schematic structures of the comic strips, while register analysis explores the contextual variables of field, tenor, and mode. These analyses aim to reveal how discourse organization and language choices reflect interactional roles, cultural values, and pedagogical intentions embedded in the texts. Complementing the linguistic analysis, the visual analysis examines compositional meaning to understand how visual arrangements support and reinforce the construction of meaning and cultural representation in the comic strips.

Previous studies on English textbooks have largely examined either verbal or visual elements in isolation. Some studies have focused on narrative or linguistic aspects of textbook texts (Suhartini, 2019; Maghfiroh, 2021), while others have concentrated primarily on visual design and imagery (Nuriskia, 2021; Febriana, 2021). Although these studies contribute valuable insights, they tend to treat language and image as separate semiotic systems. Consequently, the intersemiotic relationship between verbal and visual modes in English textbook comic strips remains underexplored. Moreover, comic strips as multimodal cultural texts in EFL textbooks have received limited scholarly attention, particularly in relation to how genre and register are jointly realized across different educational levels.

Addressing these gaps, this study offers a multimodal analysis of comic strips in the English for Nusantara textbook by integrating SFL-based genre and register analysis with visual grammar. By examining how linguistic and visual resources interact to construct meaning, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of multimodal textbook design in EFL contexts.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze how genre and register are employed in the comic strips of English for Nusantara to construct meaning through the interaction of verbal and visual modes. Specifically, the study investigates the genre structures, register configurations, and compositional visual features that support communicative purposes and cultural learning across different grade levels.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design within the framework of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). The research was grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), integrating it with Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar. A qualitative design was selected to allow in-depth interpretation of meaning-making processes across semiotic resources, focusing on the cultural, linguistic, and visual elements embedded in the educational materials. This study adopts a textual analysis approach that is interpretive in nature, emphasizing the construction of cultural values as represented in educational discourse.

The main data sources were the comic strips embedded within the English for Nusantara textbook series for Grades 7, 8, and 9. A total of three comic strips were selected one from each grade level based on their richness in both visual and verbal content and their explicit inclusion of Indonesian cultural references. The selection criteria included the presence of clear cultural markers and balance of dialogic interaction (verbal texts) and illustrative detail (visual texts).

To facilitate a systematic and theory-informed analysis, a coding sheet was developed and used as the primary research instrument. The coding sheet was structured to integrate three layers of analysis: (2) linguistic analysis using Systemic Functional Linguistics (genre structures and register variables), and (3) visual analysis following Kress and van Leeuwen's compositional metafunction (information value, salience, and framing).

Data collection involved several steps. First, the entire set of EfN textbooks was reviewed to identify comic strips across the three grade levels. Each comic strip was scanned and digitized for detailed analysis. A total of three comic strips were selected based on the criteria that has been mentioned in data source. Each strip was then broken down into individual panels, which were treated as separate analytical units combining verbal and visual elements. For each panel, both the dialogue (verbal text) and the illustrative components (visual text) were transcribed and annotated. Verbal data included character speech, narration, and any onomatopoeic or symbolic text. Visual data were described in terms of layout, color, gaze, salience, and spatial organization. To ensure accurate interpretation, the researcher created a coding sheet that facilitated the simultaneous analysis of verbal and visual components. The coding sheet was designed based on the theoretical frameworks of SFL and Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved verbal analysis based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). After the comic strips were transcribed, each strip was analyzed using the genre framework proposed by Martin and Rose (2008) to identify its genre structure. This analysis aimed to determine how genre stages contribute to meaning-making and support the representation of cultural themes. Subsequently, the register variables Field, Tenor, and Mode were examined to explain the social context of each interaction. Linguistic features such as vocabulary choice, speech acts, and modality were analyzed to reveal how cultural meanings were expressed and how the values identified in the genre

analysis were reinforced. All findings were systematically recorded in a coding sheet, with each utterance aligned with its corresponding genre and register features.

The second stage consisted of visual compositional analysis based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework. Each comic panel was examined using three compositional principles: information value, salience, and framing. This analysis focused on how visual elements reinforced, extended, or contrasted with the verbal text and the cultural meanings identified in the first stage. Observations from the visual analysis were documented alongside the verbal coding to enable integrated interpretation.

Following the completion of both stages, data from the verbal and visual analyses were synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of how comic strips in English for Nusantara construct meaning multimodally. This integrated analysis directly addressed the research objective by explaining how genre and register are employed through the interaction of linguistic and visual elements to realize communicative purposes and convey cultural meanings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. English for Nusantara Grade 7



Figure 2. English for Nusantara grade 7, Ministry of Education, 2022

Dad : Today is special. I have cooked special food for our lunch.

Daughter : Wow! What's so special, Dad?

Dad : Your mom has got a promotion from her office.

Daughter : Congratulations, Mom!

Mom : Thank you, dear

Daughter : So, what's the special lunch?

Dad : They're rice, rica-rica chicken, orange juice, fruit salad, and pudding.

Daughter : They look delicious! Let's eat then.

Dad : Let's say grace

Contextual Description:

Setting : At home, during lunchtime.

Characters : Dad, mom, and daughter are engaged in the conversation. Another girl, likely a second daughter, is present in a wheelchair but does not speak.

Activity : The family is celebrating the mother's job promotion with a special lunch. The silent girl's presence suggests inclusivity and reflects the representation of people with disabilities as part of everyday family life.

Genre: Recount (Personal/Family)

Genre: A recount text typically retells events or experiences from the past. In this personal/family recount, the structure follows three main stages: orientation, record of events, and personal comment. The purpose of the text is to retell a meaningful family experience—specifically a celebration of the mother’s promotion—in order to inform and emotionally engage the listener, while reinforcing family values such as gratitude, support, and togetherness through a structured recount of past events

Table 1. Analysis of Genre on Comic Strip within EfN grade seven

Stage	Function	Indicators
Orientation	Introduces characters, setting, and situation	“Today is special. I have cooked special food for our lunch”
Record of Events	Describes what happened in sequence	“Your mom has got a promotion....” “They’re rice, rica-rica chicken....”
Personal Comment	Shows reactions and feelings	“Wow!” “Congratulations, Mom!” “They look delicious!”

Table 2. Analysis of Register on Comic Strip within EfN grade seven

No	Register Element	Category
1	Field	Family life and celebration (promotion, food, gratitude)
2	Tenor	Informal and intimate interaction between family members (father, mother, daughter).
3	Mode	Spoken dialogue, face-to face

Table 3. Analysis of compositional meaning on Comic Strip within EfN grade seven

No.	Axis	Compositional meaning	Interpretation
1	Left-right	Left (given): the father introduces the context (promotion and food). Right (new): the daughter responds with excitement and gratitude, signalling the emotional value and outcome of the event.	The <i>left</i> side (Given) presents information that is already known or assumed by the viewer, such as the father mentioning the promotion and food. The <i>right</i> side (New) brings in the daughter’s emotional response, showing how the new information (the celebration) impacts the characters emotionally.
2	Top-bottom	Top (ideal): the celebration (promotion as a success story). Bottom (real): the meal and family gathering, grounding the abstract success in concrete actions.	The <i>top</i> (Ideal) represents abstract concepts or ideals, such as the idea of celebrating a promotion. The <i>bottom</i> (Real) grounds this with tangible

		realities—food on the table and the family gathering—which support the celebration.
3	Center-margin Center: the promotion and celebration moment. Margins: family roles and supportive dialogue surrounding the event.	The <i>center</i> highlights the key message: the promotion and celebration. Meanwhile, the <i>margins</i> contain supporting elements such as the family’s dialogue and roles, which provide context and enhance the central event.

B. English for Nusantara Grade 8

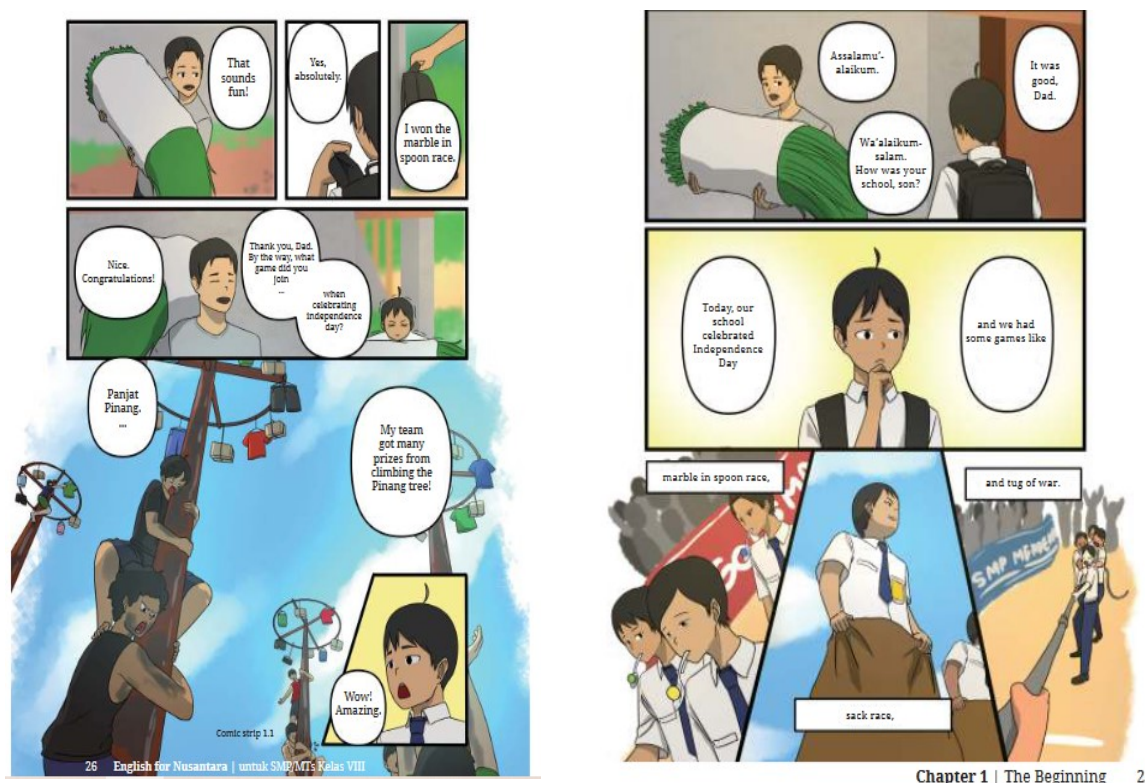


Figure 3. English for Nusantara grade 8, Ministry of Education, 2022

Son: Assalamu’alaikum
 Dad: Wa’alaikumsalam. How was your school, son?
 Son: It was good, Dad.
 Son: Today’s our school celebrated Independence Day and we had some games like marble in spoon race, sack race, and tug of war.
 Dad: That sounds fun!
 Son: Yes, absolutely. I won the marble in spoon race.
 Dad: Nice. Congratulations!
 Son: Thank you, Dad. By the way, what games did you join (dad) when celebrating independence day?
 Dad: Panjat pinang, (son) my team got many prizes from climbing the Pinang tree!
 Son: Wow! Amazing.

Contextual description:

Setting : At home, in the afternoon after school.

Characters : A father and his son are having a conversation.

Activity : The son shares his excitement about participating in Independence Day games at school, including winning a race. The Father responds with enthusiasm and reminisces about his own childhood experience of playing traditional games like panjat pinang, showcasing intergenerational bonding and the cultural continuity of Indonesian Independence Day traditions.

Genre: A recount text typically retells events or experiences from the past. In this personal/family recount, the structure follows three main stages: orientation, record of events, and personal comment. The purpose of the text is to share a personal experience (Independence Day celebration) and highlight traditional Indonesian games and intergenerational bonding.

Table 4. Analysis of Genre on Comic Strip within EfN grade eight

Stage	Function	Indicators
Orientation	Introduces characters, setting, and situation	“Assalamu’alaikum” “Wa’alaikumsalam”
Record of Events	Describes what happened in sequence	“Today, our school celebrated independence day and we had some games like..”
Personal Comment	Shows reactions and feelings	“That sounds fun!” “Yes, absolutely” “Nice, congratulations”

Table 5. Analysis of Register on Comic Strip within EfN grade eight

No	Register Element	Category
1	Field	A casual discussion between a father and son about school events and traditional Independence Day games.
2	Tenor	A warm and informal interaction between a father and his son..
3	Mode	Spoken dialogue, face-to face

Table 6. Analysis of Compositional Meaning on Comic Strip within EfN grade eight

No.	Axis	Compositional meaning	Interpretation
1	Left-right	Left (given): The son recounting his school experience and the Independence Day celebration (e.g., games, his achievement) Right (new): The father's response and his own memory of <i>panjat pinang</i> , a traditional game	The verbal flow mimics a left-to-right reading path, where the son’s story (Given) leads to the father’s response (New), creating a flow from personal to cultural memory, from present to past.
2	Top-bottom	Top (ideal): Celebration of Independence Day, winning games, and shared excitement Bottom (real): Specific activities: marble-in-spoon race, sack race, <i>panjat pinang</i> (climbing the slippery tree)	The dialogue moves from ideals (joy, celebration) to real, embodied experiences (games), showing how national identity is practiced through tradition.
3	Center-margin	Center: The shared moment of celebrating Independence Day, especially across generations Margins: Specific details like types of games, expressions (“Wow! Amazing”)	The core message is unity in diversity—despite generational or activity differences, both generations value and engage with the same cultural event.

C. English For Nusantara Grade 9



Figure 4. English for Nusantara grade 9, Ministry of Education, 2022

Teacher : All right, get your VR goggles, guys, I will play a program to take you to a special place

Male Students 1 : Wow. It is amazing, where are we?

Male Students 2 : Wow!

Female Students 1 : I think we are in a rainforest.

Female Students 2 : Galang, look! Is that the helmeted hornbill?

Male Students 2 : Where?

Female Students 2 : Over there. On the branch of the old tree to your right.

Male Students 2 : That's right. It is a helmeted hornbill.

Female Students 1 : Its neck is white.

Male Students 2 : So, that must be a female. If it is a male, the neck is red.

Female Students 2 : It is a beautiful bird.

Male Students 1 : It is also a unique bird. It is the only hornbill with a casque made of keratin.

Female Students 2 : What is casque?

Female Students 1 : The bird's helmet.

Female Students 2 : I think she is feeding her chicks now. What do they eat?

Male Students 2 : I'm not sure, but their main foods are figs.

Female Students 2 : Is it an endangered animal?

Female Students 1 : It is critically endangered now. Illegal hunting makes helmeted hornbills' numbers decrease rapidly.

Contextual description:

Setting : In a classroom equipped with virtual reality technology.

Character : A teacher and a group of students – two male and two female – actively participating in the experience

Activity : The teacher uses VR googles to immerse students in a virtual rainforest environment. The students observe and discuss the helmeted hornbill, a critically endangered species recognized as a cultural fauna of Indonesia. Through this immersive experience, they develop a deeper understanding of the bird’s unique traits and its role in the country’s natural heritage, fostering both environmental awareness and appreciation for Indonesia’s biodiversity.

Genre: Report

Report texts typically describe generalized participants and non-sequential factual information, which this text accomplishes through student observations and explanations. The purpose of the text is to describe and provide factual information about the helmeted hornbill in an educational setting.

Stage	Function	Indicators
Orientation	Introduces the context of exploration	“Get your VR googles.. I will play a program..”
Observation	Students identify and describe features	“It is a helmeted hornbill” “Its neck is white”
Explanation	Provides clarification or elaboration	“If it is a male, the neck is red.” “Casque is the bird’s helmet”.

Register Element	Category
Field	A classroom activity using virtual reality to explore a rainforest and learn about wildlife.
Tenor Mode	Teacher-student interaction, peer-to-peer learning Spoken dialogue in a semi-formal academic context.

Axis	Compositional Meaning	Interpretation
Left-right	Left (given): Rainforest background or setting Right (new): the bird	The rainforest is the base context, while the helmeted hornbill is the new, targeted focus that learners are guided to notice and explore more deeply.
Top-bottom	Top (ideal): the used of VR Bottom (real): student watching and talking	The ideal (VR use) becomes meaningful because it is grounded in active participation students not only observe but co-construct knowledge through conversation and shared attention.
Center-margin	Center: the helmeted hornbill Margins: human participant and environmental	The hornbill is framed as the main concern, both visually and conceptually, while the surrounding human and natural elements provide the social and ecological context of that concern.

Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on either linguistic features (Suhartini, 2019; Maghfiroh, 2021), or visual elements (Nuriskia, 2021; Febriana, 2021) in isolation, this study adopts an integrated SFL–MDA framework to examine how genre, register, and visual composition work together across different grade levels to support meaning-making. In result, the analysis of the three comic strips from the English for Nusantara (EfN) textbooks for Grades 7, 8, and 9 revealed a meaningful integration of genre and register elements with compositional visual strategies to support multimodal learning. Each comic strip utilized genre structures relevant to its thematic focus and communicative goals: personal/family recounts for Grades 7 and 8 and a factual report for Grade 9. These genres were contextually appropriate and pedagogically aligned with students' cognitive development and cultural engagement levels. Register analysis demonstrated that each strip had a distinct configuration of field, tenor, and mode, reflecting the situational context and the social relationships between characters. For example, the intimate, supportive dialogue between family members in Grades 7 and 8 emphasized values such as gratitude, intergenerational connection, and national identity. In contrast, the Grade 9 text reflected a semi-formal educational setting in which students actively observed, described, and asked questions showcasing knowledge-building through experiential learning.

Shabrina et al. (2025) focus on cognitive processes as categorized by Bloom's Taxonomy, whereas this study foregrounds how meanings are semiotically constructed through the interaction of verbal and visual modes using Systemic Functional Linguistics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The visual analysis using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) compositional metafunctions information value, salience, and framing showed how the images reinforced and extended the meaning of the verbal text. The left-right and top-bottom orientations consistently conveyed 'given-new' and 'ideal-real' relationships that guided learners' focus. Notably, the central positioning of culturally important elements such as the helmeted hornbill in Grade 9 demonstrated how the design prioritized meaning and learning emphasis.

Importantly, the integration of inclusive characters, national traditions, and local biodiversity revealed a deliberate design to promote cultural awareness and identity. By presenting such content in multimodal form, the comic strips not only supported language learning but also engaged students in higher-order thinking processes like evaluating, reflecting, and questioning. These findings support the relevance of SFL-MDA in textbook analysis and reaffirm the educational value of multimodal texts in language and culture instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how genre and register, coupled with visual composition, work synergistically to construct meaning in the English for Nusantara comic strips. Findings indicate that the EfN textbook series effectively utilizes multimodal design to enhance language learning while fostering cultural identity and engagement. The consistent use of appropriate genre structures recount and report combined with context-sensitive register variables (field, tenor, and mode) ensures that the content is both linguistically and socially relevant. Additionally, visual design elements strategically support the verbal message, helping learners interpret and internalize meaning more effectively.

The comic strips serve as more than just language practice; they act as vehicles for cultural education, emotional connection, and cognitive development. The inclusion of themes such as family, national celebrations, environmental awareness, and social inclusivity illustrates the textbook's alignment with holistic educational goals. Overall, this study underscores the importance of a multimodal approach in EFL material development and provides a strong case for integrating SFL-MDA in evaluating educational resources. Further

research might expand the scope to other genres or media types to explore broader implications for curriculum design.

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