



A Study of the Visual Meaning in the Comic *Hai Miiko* by Ono Eriko (Based on Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the *Hai Miiko* comic, popular among Indonesian teenagers, which tells the story of Miiko, a cheerful fifth-grader experiencing puberty. Using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, the research analyzes the comic's visual elements, language, and context to uncover deeper meanings and symbolism. Key concepts such as synchronic and diachronic analysis, langue and parole, signifier and signified, syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures, and denotation and connotation are applied to dissect the semiotic aspects of the comic. The findings reveal that *Hai Miiko* not only depicts the daily lives of teenagers but also serves as a visual representation of the journey to adulthood. Through symbolic imagery and a distinct artistic style, Ono Eriko effectively portrays emotional growth and self-discovery, inviting readers to reflect on childhood nostalgia and the challenges of growing up. This study emphasizes that comics, beyond being entertainment, can convey profound meanings and cultural insights through their visuals and narratives.

Keywords: semiotic analysis; *Hai Miiko* comic; adolescence and puberty; visual symbolism; Ferdinand de Saussure.

I. INTRODUCTION

Comics are a series of images that form a narrative through the interaction of characters, creating storylines or specific events. As a form of creative expression, comics provide a platform for comic artists to convey stories or messages to readers (Qois & Arifrahara, 2012). In general, comics are an effective visual communication medium with a strong ability to deliver information.

In Indonesia, Japanese comics, or what is commonly known as *manga*, have become one of the most popular types of comics. The popularity of manga in Indonesia began in the 1980s, as explained by Laine Berman in the book *Illustrating Asia*, edited by John A. Lent. During that decade, manga translations such as *Dragon Ball*, *Candy Candy*, and *Kung Fu Boy* entered the Indonesian market. These mangas captured readers' attention with storylines that emphasized Eastern cultural values. Meanwhile, during the same period, the local comic industry in Indonesia experienced stagnation. Even comic strips published in Indonesian newspapers were largely translations of Western comics, reflecting the challenges faced by local comic artists at that time.

During this period, Japanese comics, or *manga*, gained significant popularity in Indonesia. Following the success of *Dragon Ball*, other mangas began to emerge, including *Hai Miiko*, the comic examined in this study. *Hai Miiko* is highly popular among Indonesian teenagers due to



its relatable protagonist, Miiko, a cheerful fifth-grade student. The comic *Hai Miiko* tells the story of Miiko, an energetic teenage girl. It explores the challenges she faces, including physical and emotional changes during puberty, her relationships with the opposite sex, as well as issues involving her family and friendships.

Semiotics is the study of the relationships between signs and aims to provide meaning to texts. A text is essentially a collection of signs transmitted from a sender to a receiver using specific codes found in various media, such as books, magazines, television, radio, newspapers, and posters (Gusti et al., 2019). Understanding semiotics helps individuals become more aware of signs and interpret the true meaning conveyed within a text.

The development of semiotics today has been influenced by various other disciplines, including the field of Fine Arts. In the context of Fine Arts, semiotics falls under visual semiotics, as it focuses on the study of visual language. Visual semiotics specifically investigates meanings conveyed through visual perception (Budiman, 2011).

This study aims to help readers understand comics as a visual medium while uncovering hidden messages, symbolism, and social critiques embedded within them. Furthermore, it seeks to expand readers' knowledge of how to interpret meaning in comics using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach and identify visual changes present in the *Hai Miiko* comic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "semiotics" originates from the Greek word *semeion*, meaning "sign," or *seme*, meaning "to interpret signs." Semiotics is the study of anything that can be considered a sign, referring to elements that can significantly replace something else (Eco, 2009). In essence, signs are the building blocks of communication, and understanding their function is essential to interpreting meaning.

As explained by Sumbo Tinarbuko (2013), semiotics focuses on understanding how signs operate and generate meaning. In contrast, semiology, a branch of semiotics, examines the role of signs within society. This field studies the various types of signs and the principles that govern their formation (Budiman, 2011). By analyzing signs in context, semiology reveals how they reflect cultural values and social structures.

Ferdinand de Saussure, a key figure in semiotic theory, provided several important classifications for analyzing signs. These include the concepts of synchronic and diachronic, langue and parole, signifier and signified, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, and denotation and connotation. According to Saussure, signs and the meanings they convey are deeply connected to the social context in which they exist. The meaning of a sign is not solely determined by its inherent characteristics but is also shaped by the societal conventions and cultural norms within which it is used (Risi & Zulkifli, 2022).

As discussed in semiotics, signs play a crucial role in communication, and understanding their meaning goes beyond surface-level observation. In this context, visual studies aim to uncover deeper meanings and insights within works of art. According to Kartika (2010), the purpose of visual studies is to discover and comprehend the underlying significance of a piece of art. Visual analysis is not merely about seeing, but also involves examining and understanding



various aspects of an artwork to provide valuable information for making critical judgments about it.

Visual elements refer to anything that can be seen with the eyes, such as objects, people, places, or even abstract ideas. These visuals serve as powerful tools for communication, storytelling, or simply providing aesthetic enjoyment. Jim Supangkat (2002:25) explains that visual art, often referred to as *seni rupa*, encompasses art that emphasizes visual aspects within a broader scope. By examining these visual elements, one can better understand how they function to convey meaning and evoke responses from the audience.

III. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis to uncover the visual meaning embedded in the comic *Hai Miiko*. Qualitative methods are often referred to as artistic methods due to their flexible and less structured processes. Additionally, this method is known as interpretative because it focuses on analyzing and interpreting data obtained in the field. It is also considered constructive as it aims to gather scattered data and organize it into a more meaningful and easily understood theme (Sugiyono, 2010).

3.1 Population and Sample

3.1.1 Population

According to Saragi et al. (Saragi Daulat, 2022), a population refers to a group of objects, subjects, or individuals that share similar qualities and characteristics. Based on this definition, the population in this study consists of all 36 volumes of the comic *Hai Miiko*, which began publication in 1995 and continues to be published as of 2024.

3.1.2 Sample

The sample for this study was selected using a *purposive sampling* method, as explained by Saragi et al. (Saragi Daulat, 2022). This method is referred to as *purposive* because the sample selection is based on specific considerations determined beforehand. For this research, the sample includes volumes 1, 24, 25, and 36. These volumes were chosen due to noticeable changes in the drawing style from the comic's initial publication to its most recent volumes.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Observation

The researcher will conduct observations of various visuals in the comic *Hai Miiko*. This observation aims to analyze and uncover the meanings embedded within the comic. The focus of the observation includes visuals in *Hai Miiko*, character changes between volume 1 and volume 36, as well as the visual meanings conveyed in the comic.

3.2.2 Literature Study

The researcher will perform a literature study by referring to books, journals, and articles to strengthen the research foundation, identify knowledge gaps, and broaden understanding of the research topic. Additionally, the literature study will also include an analysis of the comic



Hai Miiko to understand its visual meanings using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory. This step aims to provide a solid theoretical basis for the research analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method used in this study is semiotic analysis based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory. This approach is applied to explore the signs and symbols present in the research data. Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of the relationship between the signifier and the signified to uncover the visual meanings embedded in the comic *Hai Miiko*.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Synchronic and Diachronic

The synchronic approach is an analytical method that focuses on a specific moment in time without considering the processes that led up to it. Conversely, the diachronic approach examines art and language through the progression of time, observing how a work or sign develops and evolves from the past to the present (Zulkifli, 2021).

The diachronic approach involves historical analysis of signs or images, encompassing both retrospective perspectives (looking into the past) and prospective perspectives (looking into the future). For instance, when discussing a work of art or other signs, this approach outlines the journey of the work, from its origins to how it might evolve in the future (Zulkifli, 2021).

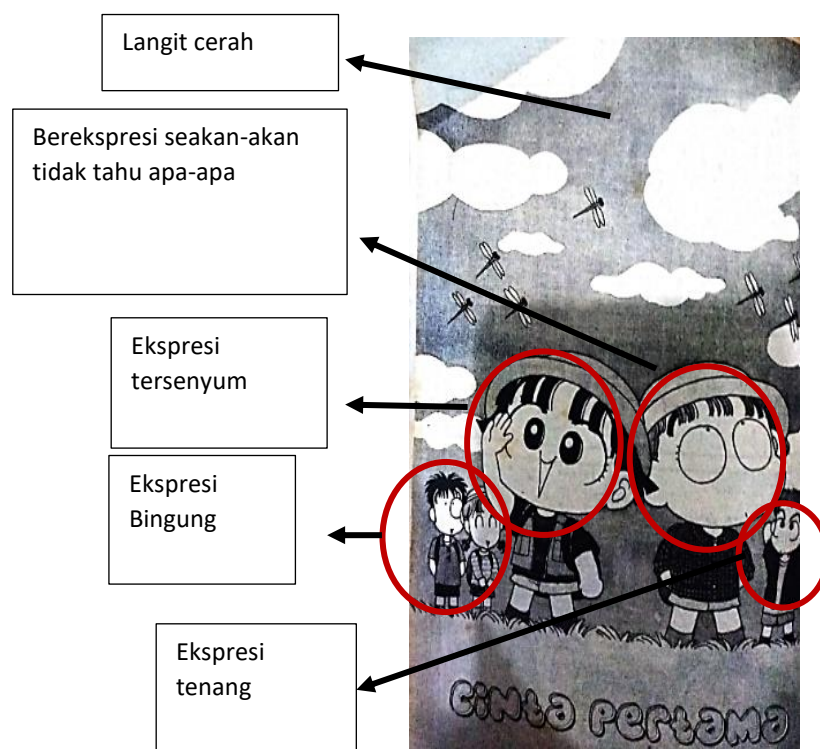


Figure 1. Each character has a different expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

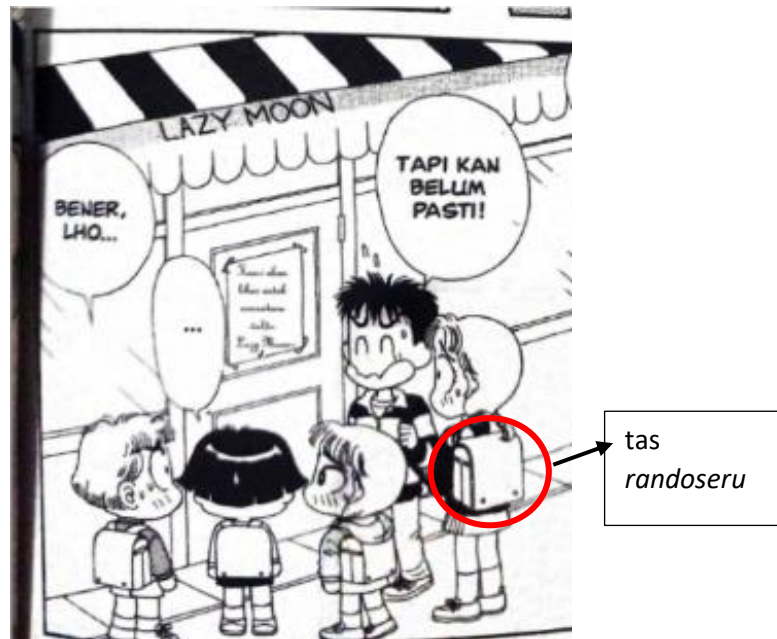


Figure 2. Hai Miiko comic featuring a traditional Japanese bag
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

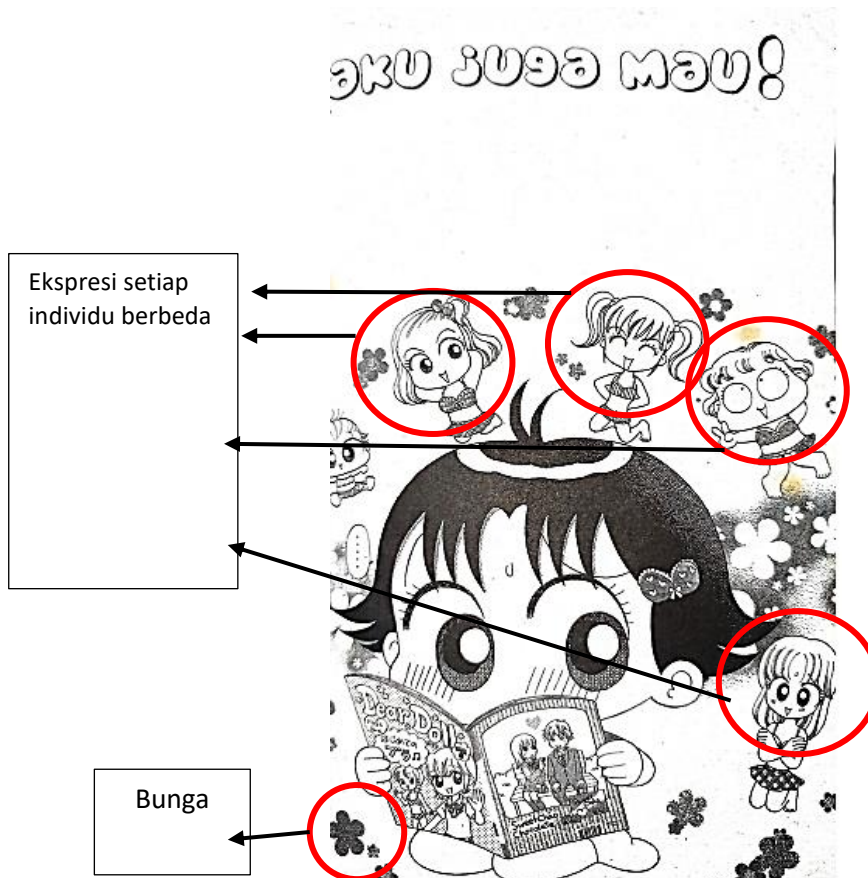


Figure 3. Each character has a different expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2012)

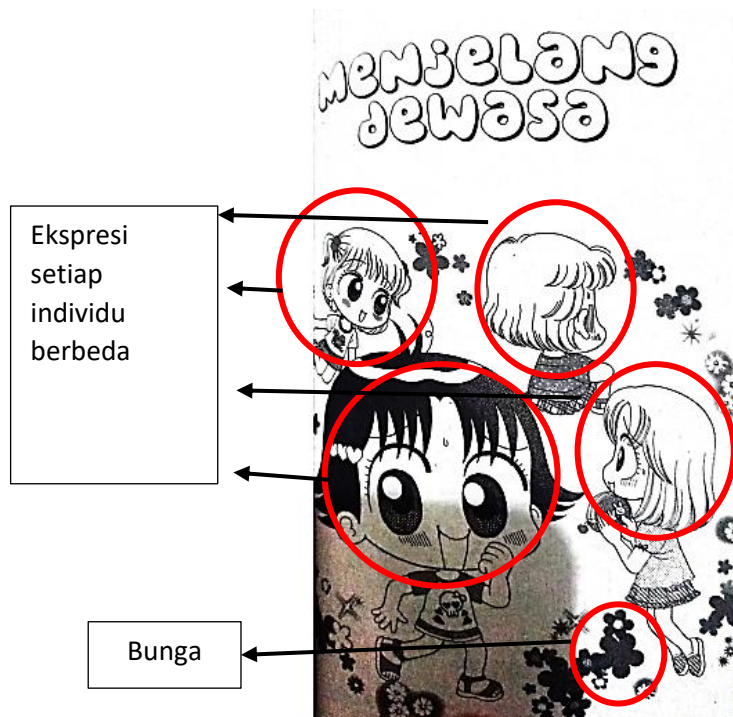


Figure 4. Each character has a different expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2013)

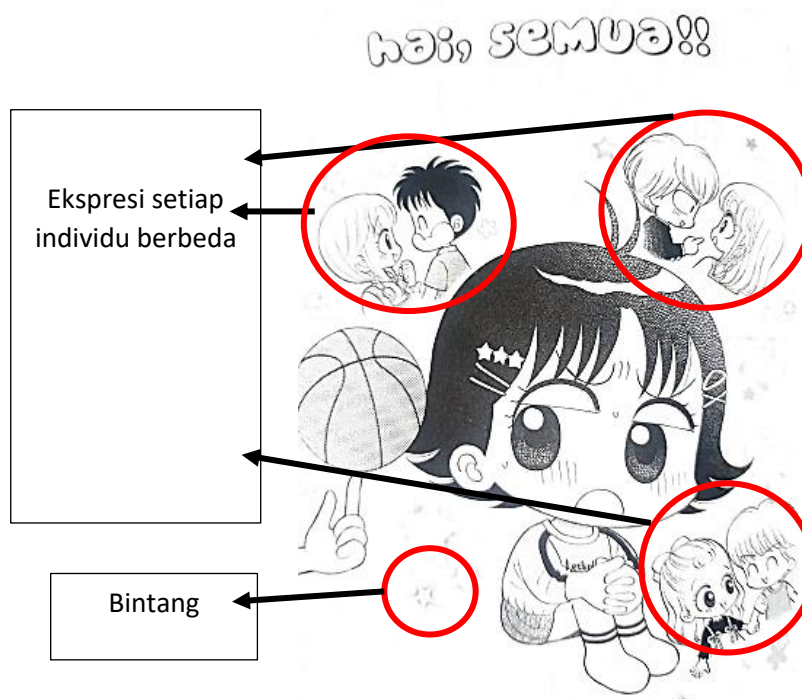


Figure 5. Each character has a different expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2023)



4.1.1 Synchronic

The illustrations in the *Hai Miiko* comic have their own distinctive characteristics. Although relatively simple, they are highly expressive, as shown by the diverse expressions of each character in a single frame. For example, in Volume 1 (Figure 4.23), there are four characters, each with different expressions. The clean lines and bright backgrounds, such as the cloudy sky and dragonflies flying around, create a cheerful atmosphere.

This pattern is also evident in Volumes 24, 25, and 36. In Volume 24, the characters' expressions remain varied, while the background featuring blooming flowers enhances the joyful impression. Overall, *Hai Miiko* highlights the daily lives of teenagers, especially teenage girls, with a light yet relatable approach.

The illustrations in this comic adopt the typical style of 90s mangaka, characterized by simplicity and minimal detail. This style has remained consistent from the first volume, published in 1995, to the latest volume released in 2024. This simplicity is a hallmark of Ono Eriko, the mangaka, who is known for her depiction of cute and charming characters. This unique style appeals to readers of all ages.

4.1.2 Diachronic

The *Hai Miiko* comic illustrates the development of its main character, Miiko, as she journeys from childhood to adolescence. In Volume 1, Miiko is depicted as an elementary school student with a chubby appearance, a simple bob haircut, and plain clothing, reflecting her carefree childhood where appearance was not a concern. The *randoseru* backpack she carries also symbolizes her status as a Japanese elementary school student, rooted in traditions dating back to the Edo period.

As the story progresses, Miiko's visual portrayal evolves to reflect the changes in her character. In Volume 24, Miiko begins to show an interest in her appearance by wearing a ribbon hair clip, giving her a more mature impression. In Volume 25, Miiko and her friends are shown wearing more fashionable and casual clothing, keeping up with modern trends. By Volume 36, Miiko appears more mature and skilled in styling herself, signifying her growth and transition toward adulthood.

These visual changes effectively depict Miiko's journey of adapting to the physical and social transformations she experiences during puberty, offering a relatable narrative of personal growth.

4.2 Langue and Parole

Langue refers to the system of codes that is collectively understood and agreed upon by a community. It is a social construct, much like a national language or a dictionary, which represents a shared consensus for communication.



In contrast, *Parole* pertains to the individual use of language, manifesting in concrete expressions. It involves the selection of specific elements and styles in a person's speech or communication (Zulkifli, 2021).



Figure 6. Each character has a shouting expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

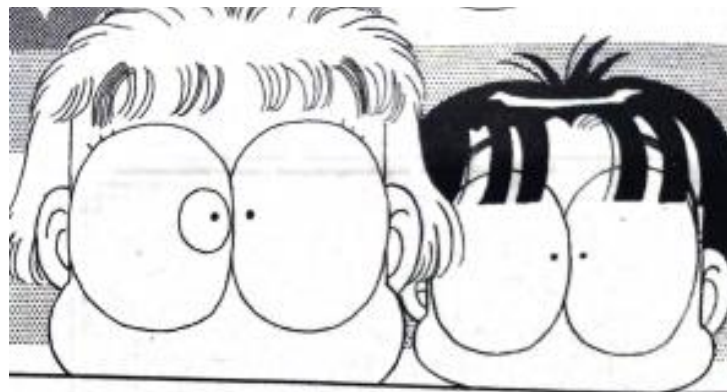


Figure 7. Each character has a surprised expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)



Figure 8. Each character has a shouting expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2012)



Figure 9. Each character has a surprised expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2012)



Figure 10. Each character has a shouting expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2013)



Figure 11. Each character has a surprised expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2013)



Figure 12. Each character has a shouting expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2023)



Figure 13. Each character has a surprised expression
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2023)

4.2.1 Langue

In the illustrations of the *Hai Miiko* comic, there are typical elements often found in comics, such as wide-open mouths when characters are shouting. Additionally, the text balloons for characters who are shouting feature sharp, jagged edges, indicating that the character is passionate and full of energy.

Characters showing a surprised expression are typically depicted with wide-open eyes and contracted pupils, creating a dramatic and startled effect. Ono Eriko, the mangaka, is highly consistent in her illustration style. This can be seen from Volume 1 to Volume 36, where the expressions depicted remain consistent and true to her unique style.

4.2.2 Parole

Miiko is portrayed as a cheerful and active character, which is reflected in the wide range of expressive visuals shown throughout the comic. Her many different facial expressions make



her seem lively and full of energy, contrasting with the more indifferent and sometimes mischievous nature of her counterpart, Tappei.



Figure 14. Miiko's various expressions
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)



Figure 15. Tappei's various expressions
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

In Volume 1, Miiko's joy is depicted with a wide-open mouth, emphasizing her cheerful personality. In contrast, Tappei's happiness is shown with only a subtle smile, a slight curve of his lips, which gives him a calm and reserved demeanor.

In Volume 24, both Miiko and Tappei are shown in the same frame, happy about something. While other characters smile broadly like Miiko, Tappei's smile remains minimal, just a slight upward curve, further reinforcing his calm nature.

It's not just their facial expressions that highlight the contrast between Miiko and Tappei. When Miiko is happy, her surroundings are arranged to resemble a star, enhancing the impression that she is enthusiastic and full of energy. Meanwhile, Tappei's background remains empty, subtly conveying that he is less spirited than Miiko.



In Volume 25, there is an illustration of Miiko and Tappei both looking shocked. Miiko's expression is depicted with wide-open eyes and a mouth stretched so wide it goes beyond her cheeks, indicating her extreme surprise. In contrast, Tappei is shown with widened eyes, raised eyebrows drawn with curved lines, and a mouth slightly open, which gives a more typical, yet still surprised, expression. In Volume 36, when Tappei and Miiko are in their first year of junior high, Tappei's character remains calm and composed. The minimal lines used to depict his face, along with eyebrows drawn in a straight, parallel shape, emphasize his calm demeanour. On the other hand, Miiko continues to be portrayed as energetic, with her eyebrows always curved in an inverted "U" shape, highlighting her cheerful and lively personality.

4.3 Signifier and Signified

According to Saussure, a sign consists of sounds and images, referred to as the *signifier*, and the concepts associated with those sounds and images, are known as the *signified*. In communication, a person uses signs to convey meaning about an object, while others interpret those signs. For Saussure, the object is called the *referent*. He describes the *referent* as the point of reference and considers it an essential element in the process of meaning-making (Sobur, 2013).

▪ Signifier:

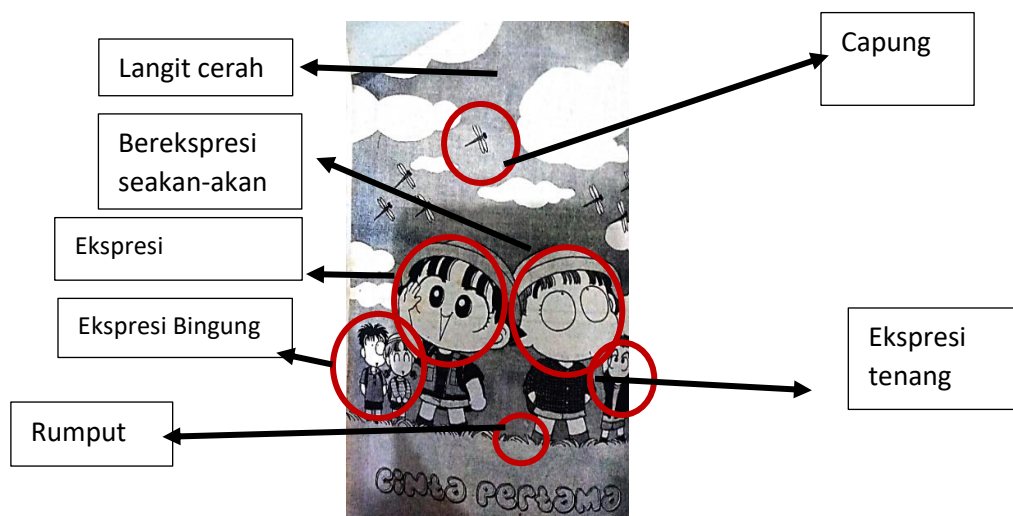


Figure 16. The signifiers in Volume 1
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

▪ Signified:

In Japan, the dragonfly symbolizes change. This is reflected in the comic's title, which revolves around a child's first love during puberty. The expression of curiosity is shown as the character seeks answers, while confusion is depicted when the character is unsure of what they are feeling.

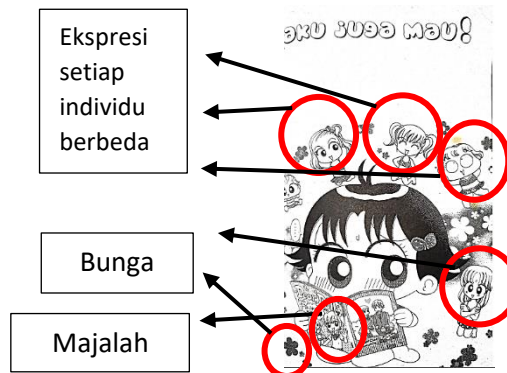
**Signifier:**

Figure 17. The signifiers in Volume 24
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2012)

Signified:

The expression of embarrassment is depicted due to the sensitive nature of the situation. Flowers, often associated with beauty, are used to symbolize femininity. The presence of a teenage magazine highlights information about the growth and development of adolescent girls, illustrating the changes a girl undergoes during puberty.

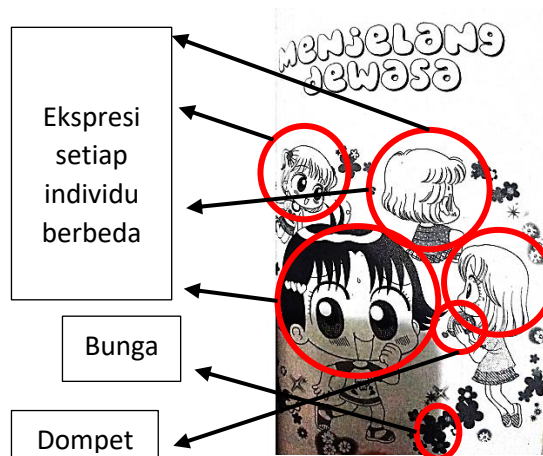
Signifier:

Figure 18. The signifiers in Volume 25
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2013)

Signified:

Flowers symbolize beauty, which is often associated with femininity. The character's curiosity about what is happening to her friend and what she is experiencing is evident. The wallet serves as a place to store items that cannot be openly shown, symbolizing something private or personal.

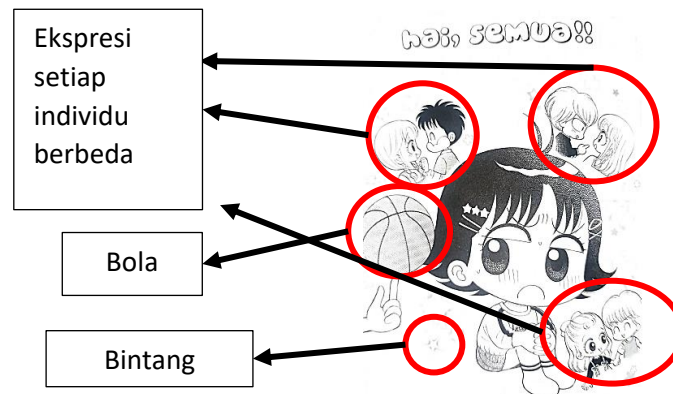
**Signifier:**

Figure 19. The signifiers in Volume 36
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2023)

Signified:

This is because the individual experiencing this shows a discontent that differs from their desires. A person who is angry typically furrows their brow, pouts their lips, and has a sharp gaze. It is similar to someone passionate about basketball. In the comic's story, they represent a couple with a deep, established bond.

4.4 Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic

Syntagmatic relations are linear, with elements present in the immediate context (in praesentia). In contrast, paradigmatic relations are associative, with elements existing in absentia, meaning they are not immediately present but are linked through their potential to substitute one another (Zulkifli, 2021).

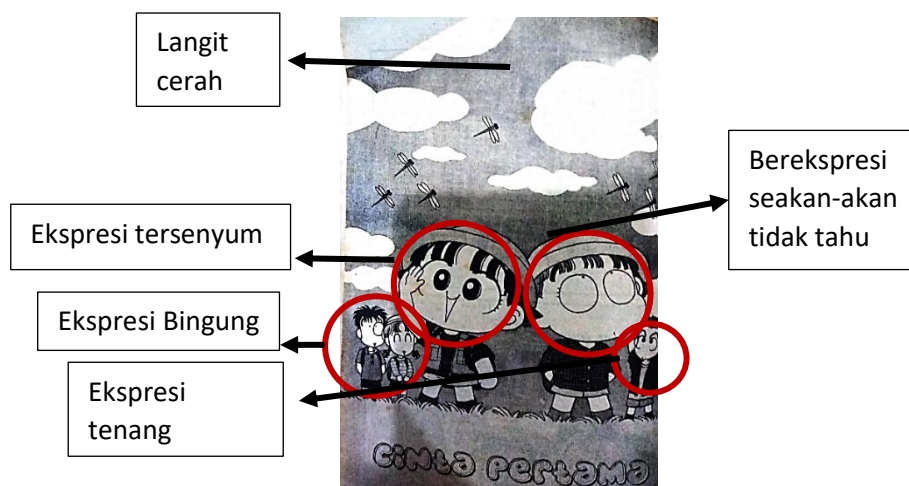


Figure 20. Image from Volume 1
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

Syntagmatic

The two main characters, the focal point of the visual, are portrayed with cheerful expressions and waving gestures, creating an atmosphere of happiness and curiosity. The background, consisting of the sky, clouds, and dragonflies flying, reinforces themes of



freedom and childhood nostalgia. The placement of elements like the dragonfly adds a natural context that supports the visual narrative. On the left, a group of younger children adds spatial depth and contrast, highlighting the main characters while also showcasing interactions within the story. Together, these elements convey a shared experience in a joyful natural setting, evoking nostalgia for first love, and creating a harmonious and meaningful narrative.

▪ Paradigmatic

The two cheerful children serve as the central focus, set against a background of dragonflies that evoke a natural, free, and joyful atmosphere. From a paradigmatic perspective, altering elements such as characters, background, or facial expressions can shift the visual meaning. For instance, replacing the children with adults would make the theme of first love appear more serious, while swapping the dragonflies for falling leaves could introduce a tone of maturity or reflection. The cheerful facial expressions of the characters enhance the lively mood, but changing them to sadness would evoke a sense of nostalgia and reflection on childhood memories. Each visual element is carefully chosen to convey a lighthearted, nostalgic experience, demonstrating how every component plays a crucial role in shaping the story's themes and messages.

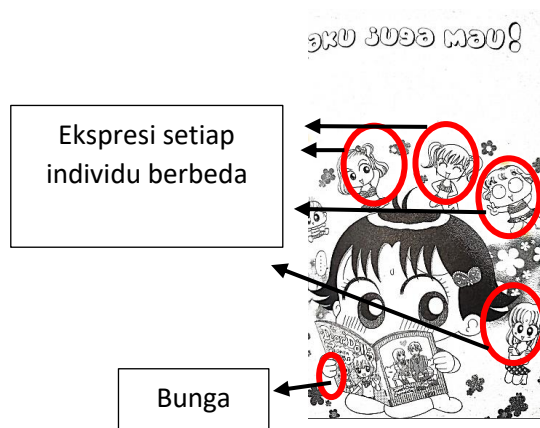


Figure 21. Image from Volume 24
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2012)

▪ Syntagmatic

The main character, with short hair and an enthusiastic expression, has wide eyes and a slight sheen of sweat, indicating surprise or excitement while reading the comic book titled "Dear Doll." Around them, several smaller children appear joyful, smiling, and jumping above the character's head. The placement of the children above the head can be interpreted as a representation of the character's imagination or desires, creating a cheerful atmosphere that reflects their enthusiasm and creative energy.

▪ Paradigmatic

The main character displays an enthusiastic and amazed expression, which can be interpreted as an attraction to the love story they are reading. From a paradigmatic



perspective, if the character's expression were changed to sadness or confusion, the interpretation of the image could shift from a desire to experience romance to something more emotional, like melancholy or doubt about romance.

The smaller characters can be seen as representations of desires or hopes. Paradigmatically, they could be replaced with other symbols, such as hearts (which more directly represent love) or other abstract elements like stars or blooming flowers. If these characters were replaced with more abstract elements, the meaning of the image would become more implicit, rather than explicit, shifting from joy and imagination to a more subtle message.

The book being read by the character contains a love story. If this book were replaced with a different genre, such as an adventure or horror novel, the theme of the image would shift entirely. This romance comic plays a significant role in setting the context for the character's romantic desires.

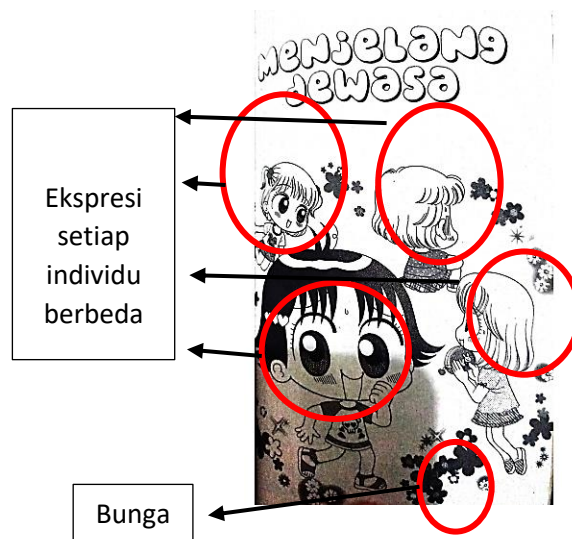


Figure 22. Image from Volume 25
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2013)

▪ Sintagmatic

The central character, with short hair and a confused expression, conveys a sense of nervousness about navigating a new phase of life toward adulthood. Positioned at the center, the character's placement emphasizes their role as the focal point, while the surrounding supporting characters, particularly two cheerful female figures, reflect external influences that appear more accepting of the changes. Decorative elements, such as small flowers, symbolize innocence, the beauty of childhood, and a cheerful transition despite the challenges. The main character's expression, with sweat on the face and a hand placed on the chest, highlights uncertainty or hesitation in facing these changes, contrasting with the confident demeanor of the supporting characters. The title "Approaching Adulthood" and the accompanying visuals together illustrate the journey of understanding the transition into maturity, balancing a mix of apprehension and optimism.



▪ Paradigmatic

This image portrays the journey toward adulthood by blending visual elements that evoke a mix of enthusiasm and uncertainty. The main character's confused expression captures the ambiguity of approaching maturity, while the cheerful supporting characters emphasize this transition as a natural and positive process. If elements such as the expression or background details, like the small flowers, were replaced with more dramatic visuals such as lightning or dark clouds, the meaning could shift toward a more serious or melancholic tone. The small flowers symbolize gentle growth and transition, highlighting a positive outlook. Replacing elements like expressions or supporting characters with adult figures could introduce themes of societal expectations or the pressures of maturity. Overall, the carefully chosen visual elements work together to narrate a story of change—challenging yet imbued with optimism and hope.

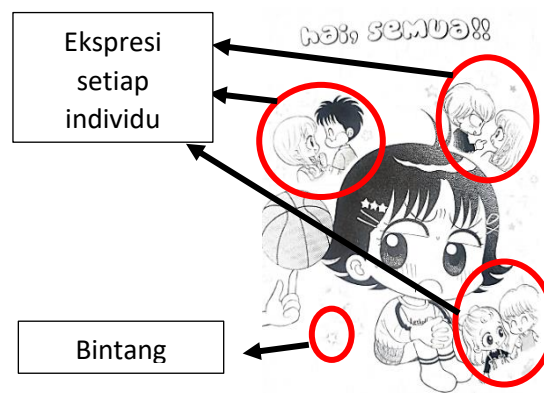


Figure 23. Image from Volume 36
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2023)

▪ Syntagmatic

The image features the main character seated with an expression of worry or confusion, positioned at the center of the composition to emphasize their role as the focal point. Surrounding the main character are additional visual elements, such as two pairs of small characters on the upper left and right sides, and a hand holding a basketball in the lower left corner. The main character's apparent lack of interaction with the other paired characters creates a contrast, highlighting their sense of isolation or anxiety amid a more relaxed and active environment.

The text at the top, "*Hai, Semua!!*" (Hello, Everyone!!), conveys a warm and welcoming tone, potentially indicating the start of a story or an introduction, but it contrasts with the main character's confused expression. This juxtaposition between the text and the visuals underscores the theme of uncertainty or awkwardness experienced by the main character, while the other elements hint at the surrounding social dynamics and activities.

▪ Paradigmatic

The main character displays a worried expression with sweat droplets on their face, signaling feelings of anxiety or confusion. If this expression were replaced with a smile or a look of confidence, the image's tone would shift toward a more positive or cheerful interpretation.



Similarly, the two pairs of interacting characters on the left and right sides could be replaced with a single character to emphasize a simpler, more intimate social interaction.

These changes in elements would significantly alter the image's social dynamics and emotional undertone. For instance, replacing the anxious expression with a confident one would suggest a sense of control or self-assurance, while simplifying the background interactions might focus more on the main character's personal journey rather than their relationship with a larger social group. Each visual element plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative and thematic resonance of the image.

4.5 Denotation and Connotation

Denotation refers to the straightforward or literal meaning of something, describing it exactly as it is, or what can be considered as an objective fact. In contrast, connotation refers to figurative or indirect suggestions, pointing toward a secondary or implied meaning beyond the literal interpretation (Zulkifli, 2021).



Figure 24. Image from Volume 1
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2003)

▪ Denotation

The image literally depicts four young children outdoors with dragonflies flying around them. Two of the children appear to be looking at each other. The text "First Love" explicitly refers to the experience of a romantic first encounter.

▪ Connotation

The main character's anxiety is conveyed through their confused expression and sweat on their forehead, symbolizing uncertainty or a lack of self-confidence, possibly tied to feelings of being left behind by their peers. The magazine cover featuring a romantic couple hints at the main character's longing for love or social connections—something they desire but have yet to attain. The cheerful small characters around them represent freedom, happiness, or achievements that others have already accomplished, creating a stark contrast to the main



character's unease. The surrounding flowers introduce a positive tone, symbolizing hope, joy, and potential growth, balancing the mood and offering a sense of optimism despite the underlying tension in the journey toward maturity.



Figure 25. Image from Volume 24
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2012)

▪ Denotation

Literally, this image depicts four children wearing women's underwear, while one child appears embarrassed and is holding a magazine featuring a middle school student, as indicated by the uniform worn by the model in the magazine. The text "I also want to" directly suggests that the main character has not yet experienced what their friends have.

▪ Connotation

The main character's anxiety is conveyed through their confused expression and beads of sweat, symbolizing uncertainty or a lack of self-confidence, potentially stemming from feelings of falling behind their friends. The magazine cover featuring a romantic couple suggests the main character's longing for love or social connection, something they desire but feel has yet to be achieved. The cheerful small characters surrounding them symbolize freedom, happiness, or milestones that others have already reached, creating a contrast with the main character's anxiety. The flowers encircling the image bring a positive tone, representing hope, joy, and life's potential, balancing the mood and offering optimism despite the unease that comes with growing up.



Figure 26. Image from Volume 25
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2013)

▪ Denotation

The image literally depicts children with various expressions, surrounded by floral decorations, with the text "*Menjelang Dewasa*" (Towards Adulthood) above them. This provides the context that the theme of the image is related to the journey toward maturity. The main character appears nervous, stepping forward, while the other characters around them have more relaxed expressions.

▪ Connotation

The image portrays the journey toward adulthood through the symbolism of characters and visual elements. The main character's nervous expression, with sweat on their face, reflects the anxiety and uncertainty often experienced during the process of growing up. In contrast, the other characters, who appear more relaxed and cheerful, represent various attitudes toward change, ranging from enthusiasm to calm enjoyment of childhood. The scattered flowers symbolize growth, beauty, and life's transitions, representing hope and potential despite the challenges. The character on the right holding an item, such as a wallet, may hint at aspirations toward responsibility or independence, reinforcing the theme of gradual maturation in this visual narrative.



Figure 27. Image from Volume 36
(Source: Hai Miiko Comic, 2023)



▪ Detonation

The image literally depicts a young girl with black hair and large eyes, wearing a sports t-shirt and shorts. In the left corner, there is someone holding a basketball, and above the image, the text "Hi, everyone!!" indicates someone greeting others. Her expression shows confusion or irritation. Three pairs of children, likely representing couples, are either showing affection or simply interacting with each other.

▪ Connotation

The main character's annoyed expression reflects someone who feels disturbed, frustrated, or uncomfortable by the presence of the couples around her. The text "Hi, everyone!!" presents a cheerful greeting, contrasting with the little girl's expression, highlighting the disconnect between her mood and the overall tone of the story. The words "Let's play" on her shirt hint at a desire to join in, despite the character appearing uncertain or anxious.

Using a semiotic theory approach, a clear development of the characters in *Hai Miiko* can be observed from one volume to the next. In a diachronic sense, in the first volume, Miiko and her friends are depicted as elementary school children, identifiable by the randoseru bags they carry, a characteristic of Japanese schoolchildren. The character markers in this volume also show them with flat bangs and no accessories. However, in volume 24, significant changes are evident in their appearances. Miiko and her friends are now more skilled in grooming, wearing accessories like ribbons in their hair, and sporting more stylish haircuts. The illustration in volume 24 also shows physical changes, with them wearing girls' undergarments, signaling a shift in their bodies as they grow.

In volume 25, Miiko and her friends are nearing the end of elementary school and appear much more fashionable in terms of clothing. They wear outfits adorned with ribbons, flowers, and casual yet stylish shoes. In this volume, the story also highlights the anxieties of the girls regarding changes in their bodies, which is visually indicated by the presence of a wallet, potentially symbolizing a place to store personal or secret items.

By volume 36, Miiko and her friends are in middle school. They have undergone many changes, with their fashion now more daring and sophisticated, enhanced by stylish accessories and trendy clothes. In this volume, Miiko's friends have started showing interest in the opposite sex and attempting to form relationships. However, Miiko seems uncomfortable or unhappy, possibly due to not having experienced the same developments as her friends.

V. CONCLUSION

Ono Eriko's *Hai Miiko* comic mirrors the protagonist Miiko's journey from childhood to adolescence, analyzed through Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach. The synchronic analysis reveals visual and symbolic changes across volumes, with elements like dragonflies and flowers symbolizing Miiko's transformation and life transitions. In the early volumes, bright backgrounds and simple elements reflect the joy of childhood, while later volumes feature more complex expressions and settings, reflecting Miiko's emotional depth and maturity.



Through the concepts of *Langue* and *Parole*, the comic maintains a consistent visual style, adhering to common expressive conventions, such as jagged speech balloons and wide-open mouths when characters shout. At the same time, specific expressions reveal character personalities—like Miiko's cheerful, wide smile compared to Tappei's calm demeanor. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic analyses show how the arrangement of elements in panels strengthens the story's focus, such as positioning Miiko at the center, while supporting characters add emotional depth to the narrative.

Visual symbols carry both denotative and connotative meanings, enriching the story with layers of significance. For instance, the dragonfly denotes childhood freedom but also evokes a nostalgic sense of first love. With its simple yet meaningful visuals, *Hai Miiko* not only tells lighthearted everyday stories but also explores the process of maturation through symbolic signs, offering readers both a nostalgic reflection on childhood and a glimpse into the challenges of growing up.

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