

# “IS KANCIL KIND?”: EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF VERBAL AND VISUAL TEXTS IN A PICTURE BOOK FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** Picture books have long been recognized as a valuable vehicle for language learning, offering the combination of visual and linguistic support, and despite the rise of digital media, they remain an essential resource for language learning. This study scrutinizes the relationship between verbal and visual texts in a picture book for meaning-making and explores the potential of a picture book for the teaching of English to young learners. This qualitative study uses two primary data sources: the Indonesian children’s picture book *The Kind Mouse Deer* and video-recorded teaching simulations from two elementary English teachers. The book was analyzed using the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach and the videos were analyzed using content analysis. The findings show that the book employs visual texts to repeat or complement the verbal elements. The complementarity of verbal and visual elements was found to be used by teachers to help young EFL learners understand the story in English. During the simulations, they also used a mix of Bahasa Indonesia and English, supplemented by facial expressions and gestures to convey meaning in terms of story plot and description of characters. Further research is needed to investigate classroom implementation, highlighting students’ engagement with picture books in developing their English proficiency.

**Keywords:** Indonesian young learners, multimodality, picture books, teaching English as a foreign language

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Using picture books as teaching materials to support language learning has been a topic of research for decades (e.g., Damayanti & Febrianti, 2020; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013; Reiker, 2011; Roozafzai, 2012; Wei & Ma, 2020; Xu, 2024). Picture books, as we define them, are books that feature a combination of text and pictures, “in which the story depends on the interaction

between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention” (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 22). The use of picture books in the classroom has been reported to contribute to the development of students’ multiliteracy (Arizpe et al., 2017; Ellis, 2016; Mourão, 2015; Reese, 2015) and foster a higher level of reading comprehension through the intertextuality of children’s literature (Bland, 2013). Picture books featuring imaginative characters are proven to be more effective for teaching reading to young learners compared to general texts and pictures (Flint & Adams, 2018; Hurst, 1997; Lysaker, 2019; Roozafzai, 2012; Wang & Shao, 2025).

In the light of technological advancement, picture books have also transformed into digital formats that preserve narrative strengths while enhancing interactivity and engagement. Digital storytelling incorporates multimedia elements such as voice narration, music, sound effects, and animated visuals, making it possible for learners to have immersive reading experiences (Robin, 2008; Kucirkova, 2019; Sadik, 2008). These affordances extend the pedagogical power of traditional picture books by allowing learners not only to become the consumer of technology but also to become the producer of the story (Hung et al., 2012). For language learners, particularly in a foreign language context, digital stories can support vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and comprehension through reinforcement from audio-visual elements (Yang & Wu, 2012). Moreover, digital storytelling also encourages learner agency and creativity, enabling students to become storytellers themselves (Kearney, 2011). This combination of narrative, technology, and pedagogy demonstrates that picture books, be they in printed or digital form, will remain essential and adaptable tools for the current English language teaching context.

The view that picture books are pedagogically valuable regardless of format aligns with Matulka’s (2008) assertion that a good picture series in a story links the reader to the pictures and generates the implications of the pictures, with the story and illustrations working together to advance the narrative. Nikolajeva and Scott (2013) further noted the strengths of picture books as learning materials, as they are an exciting, stimulating, and vibrant branch of children’s literature.

The nature of picture books can be seen “as a kind of miniature ecosystem” (Lewis, 2001, p. 46), suggesting that “the words and the pictures in picture books act upon each other reciprocally, each one becoming the environment within which the other lives and thrives” (Lewis, 2001, p. 48). The words and arts reflect and expand each other’s meaning. As such, picture books can scaffold the learning of complex concepts, bridge gaps between personal experiences and texts, and connect students’ existing literacy resources with those necessary for various disciplines (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006). Research on using picture books in English classrooms has shown positive results. For instance, Green and Keogh (2024) examined how different types of picture books—informational and narrative—affect children’s reading development. They found that informational picture books help children learn academic vocabulary, which is important for future reading skills. Similarly, Shao and Shih (2024) studied interactive electronic picture books and their impact on young children’s language development. They found that these books improved children’s ability to explain, describe, and express themselves. The interactive features also made reading more enjoyable and boosted children’s motivation and cognitive skills. Other studies by Ahmadi et al. (2017) and Megawati (2012) found that using picture books in the classroom creates a diverse learning environment and

enhances students' writing and reading skills and language abilities. These results might be attributed to the fact that visual aids like images and comic strips in textbooks can help students better understand and retain information (Liu, 2004). Visual art in reading materials benefits students by reinforcing what they read, making the text more understandable, clearly presenting important information, and motivating them to develop their language skills.

Picture books have long been recognized as a vehicle for language learning due to their multimodal properties; a text that combines at least two communication codes, such as verbal and visual elements, to convey meaning (e.g., Al-Yaqout & Nikolajeva, 2015; Batic & Lebar Kac, 2020; Hassett & Curwood, 2009; Schwebs, 2014). This multimodal nature allows picture books to engage students more effectively and facilitate a deeper understanding of the content (Damayanti & Febrianti, 2020). Furthermore, picture books are important resources for developing visual literacy, which involves understanding and interpreting visual elements such as images, colors, and shapes (Batic & Lebar Kac, 2020; Bus et al., 2009). The combination of verbal and visual elements in picture books allows for a range of multimodal designs, including textually dominant, composite, and visually dominant ensembles, which can be used to convey information and tell stories effectively (Al-Yaqout & Nikolajeva, 2015; Batic & Lebar Kac, 2020).

Despite the extensive investigations into the use of picture books for pedagogical purposes, little is known regarding the intricate relationship between verbal-visual resources in such books. A large number of studies into children's interactions with and responses to picture books (e.g., Grolig et al., 2019; Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer, 2015; Sipe, 2008) merely show that illustrations and text work synergistically in picture books to help create a reading experience that exceeds the sum of their parts (visual or text only). These studies also highlight that interaction between parents and children, as well as between teachers and students during picture book reading, helps children discuss themes and issues based on the craft of authors and illustrators. However, they have overlooked how the interplay between verbal and visual elements contributes to meaning-making. Furthermore, there is a lack of insight into how EFL teachers make use of these semiotic resources to teach English to young learners. Understanding the verbal-visual relationships and their pedagogical implications from EFL teachers' experiences are necessary to maximize the potential of picture books as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms, which is the objective of the study reported in this article.

Considering the affordance of using picture books in English language learning and the existing gaps, the present study aims to explore the relationship between verbal and visual texts in a picture book for meaning-making and to explore the potential of a picture book for teaching English for young learners. The following research questions are used as a guideline.

1. What verbal-visual resources in a picture book can be utilized to provide exposure to young learners in meaning making?
2. How can the verbal-visual resources in a picture book potentially be used by primary school teachers to teach English to young learners?

The results of the present study are expected to contribute to the development of English instructional materials catered for young learners in an EFL setting, which ignites students'

multimodal literacy. Thorough linguistically informed inquiry on the picture book enriched by the teacher's teaching simulation using the book can also be a stepping stone in understanding the ways teachers utilize picture books not only to engage students in reading English texts but also to leverage their early literacy.

## **Literature Review**

To further understand how picture books can be valuable learning resources to activate students' multimodal literacy, this section aims to scrutinize the elements of a picture book grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the meaning relation of verbal and visual resources from the perspective of multimodal analysis. Also, the potential benefits of picture books as viewed from the rich verbal-visual resources should be aligned with the pedagogical strategies, such as reading aloud, which provides young learners of English opportunities for interactive and critical exposure to early literacy in understanding multimodal texts.

### ***Picture Books***

Picture books are defined as books that consist of both text and images, where the story is conveyed through the interaction between written words and visuals that are usually complemented by narrative or descriptive text (Wei & Ma, 2020). The synergy between text and image is crafted with deliberate aesthetic intention, creating a unique narrative experience (Arizpe & Styles, 2003). This dynamic relationship between words and pictures can be likened to "a kind of miniature ecosystem" (Lewis, 2001, p. 46), in which each element influences and enhances the other. As Lewis (2001, p. 48) suggests, "The words and the pictures in picture books act upon each other reciprocally, each one becoming the environment within which the other lives and thrives". This mutual reflection and expansion of meaning between text and art (Cullinan & Galda, 1998) make picture books a powerful tool in learning in which it can scaffold the learning of complex concepts, bridge the gap between personal experiences and texts, and connect students' existing literacy resources with those required across various disciplines (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006).

Furthermore, the visual component of picture books plays a crucial role in introducing and explaining the world to readers in an accessible and comprehensive manner (Takacs & Bus, 2018) in which illustrations are designed to complement and enhance the verbal narrative, creating a more immersive and understandable experience for young readers (Callow, 2020). This is because the sequential arrangement of text and images in picture books forms patterns that help children make sense of the story, facilitating their cognitive development, values, imagination, creativity, and reading comprehension (Arizpe, 2013; Shao & Shih, 2024). Additionally, picture books also help children develop essential skills such as making predictions, establishing an order of events, drawing inferences, and increasing visual sensitivity (Papen, 2020; Ye, 2017; Yingchun, 2017; Yu, 2012).

Beyond offering a rich visual-verbal experience, picture books also play a significant role in helping readers familiarize themselves with new vocabulary and language structures. Moreover, engaging with picture books, as noted by Fu (2014), Fleta (2019), Reese (2015), Xuemei (2022), and Yexuan (2024), can enhance language abilities and improve oral expression

skills. This language development is particularly effective in parent-child reading sessions, where parents can explain the deeper meanings of the text, which helps children grasp the meanings of words, understand social rules and norms, and internalize social values, all of which contribute to improved oral expression skills (Chen, 2013). Therefore, the structured interplay of visual and verbal elements in picture books not only aids comprehension but also enriches the development of learners' vocabulary and text mastery, making picture books an invaluable resource for language learning.

In English language learning, English picture books serve as valuable resources by combining text with images to enhance comprehension, particularly for beginners (Xu, 2024). This is because these books typically feature short English texts paired with vivid illustrations, which are essential and work together to engage students' visual senses (Papen, 2020; Xueying, 2023; Yu, 2012). Therefore, the harmony between text and images not only supports understanding but also makes the reading experience more dynamic and engaging. Papen (2020) and Xu (2024) highlight that English picture books can help mitigate the boredom often associated with traditional textbooks because when students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or phrases, they can use the accompanying illustrations to infer the meaning, allowing them to grasp the content better. While picture books have their fair share of strengths, teacher guidance is still crucial. Through the guidance, students can develop the ability to interpret and analyze English language concepts over time (Papen, 2020; Xu, 2024; Yingchun, 2017; Yu, 2012). For instance, teachers can encourage students to predict the plot based on the pictures and then explain and practice vocabulary, grammar, and other language elements in the context of the story. This method helps to reinforce what students have learned interactively and memorably.

### ***Reading Aloud***

The use of picture books has been closely tied to the reading aloud approach to teaching English to young learners. A study conducted by Mason (2018) showed that auditory input from listening to a story read aloud became more comprehensible through the supplementation of verbal and nonverbal resources. Reading aloud, also known as read-aloud, is a teaching practice where a proficient reader presents a text to one or more listeners. This approach involves the teacher reading the text aloud to the students, aiming to engage listeners, promote an enjoyment of reading, and demonstrate the connection between language and print. A key strength of reading aloud is the student-teacher interaction with the language and text. Effective teacher-student interactions during read-aloud are critical for student engagement and comprehension because, during these activities, teachers provide a model of fluent reading, offer feedback, and encourage students to participate actively in the reading process (Nurzaman et al., 2020; Senawati et al., 2021; Sandy & Mukti, 2020). This interaction not only supports language development but also fosters a love for reading and enhances students' overall literacy skills.

Research consistently highlights the benefits of reading aloud, including improved reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and enhanced student engagement (Ledger & Merga, 2018; Nurzaman, et al., 2020; Senawati et al., 2021; Sandy & Mukti, 2020). They found that reading aloud improves reading comprehension by allowing students to engage with complex texts and develop critical thinking skills by encouraging them to analyze and interpret the text,

make predictions, and ask questions. These studies highlight that reading aloud enhances vocabulary development by introducing students to new words and phrases in context. Furthermore, reading aloud also increases student engagement by providing interactive and engaging experiences that capture students' attention and imagination.

Specifically, in the EFL context, reading aloud is particularly beneficial, where recent studies have provided empirical evidence indicating that reading benefits children by improving their comprehension and encouraging them to read. Furthermore, Ninsuwan (2015) found that reading aloud boosted students' self-confidence in pronouncing different or unfamiliar words and helped them memorize words, as observed in class and test papers. Additionally, Yusuf et al. (2018) found that using this method significantly improved students' reading comprehension in understanding descriptive texts.

Beyond utilizing reading aloud as a teaching method, teachers need the capability to effectively utilize learning materials. This capability is crucial to ensure quality learning, which is essential for effective teaching and learning activities. This is because learning materials serve as the medium through which instructions are conveyed, providing appropriate stimuli to learners and thereby making learning more effective (Mangal & Mangal, 2012). Specifically, in language learning, exposure to suitable language samples, opportunities for relevant practice, and well-designed learning materials are critical for effective learning (McGrath, 2016). Hence, the quality of learning materials can significantly influence the quality of language input and practice in the classroom, directly impacting students' learning outcomes. Considering the situation above, teaching language to non-native learners becomes harder since materials developers need to think deeply about what is "effective material" in their context.

### ***Multimodal Analysis of Picture Books***

Analyzing resources within a picture book is crucial. The analysis can be started by analyzing its genre. Genre analysis has been deemed as a way to know how a particular text is structured (Martin & Rose, 2008). In the educational field, genre refers to text types (Rose, 2017). Based on its purposes, the genre is divided into three types—engaging, informing, and evaluating (Rose & Martin, 2012). In the interest of space, this research focuses on the genre that serves to engage—the genre of story.

Story genres vary in how they achieve their social purposes. For instance, recounts share experiences, narratives entertain, anecdotes convey reactions, exemplums provide moral judgments, observations offer personal responses, and news stories report important events (Martin & Rose, 2008). Generally, story genres follow a structure based on temporal sequence, except for news stories, which are organized by the significance of the message. Story genres unfold through stages that typically begin with an orientation that sets up the action and ends with a closure (Martin & Plum, 1997). The middle section varies depending on the genre's purpose. For instance, narratives include conflicts and resolutions, which are absent in other genres (Derewianka & Christie, 2011).

While stages provide a broad overview of texts, phases represent smaller, flexible units of meaning at a more detailed level. According to Martin and Rose (2008), phases allow for dynamic text development and engage readers by guiding them through different experiential

domains, perspectives, and voices (Macken-Horarik & Sandiford, 2016). Possible phases include settings for describing identities, events for outlining actions, effects for detailing outcomes and attitudes, problems for creating tension, and solutions for resolving it (Martin & Rose, 2008). This list is not exhaustive, as other phases may emerge that are more relevant to specific story sequences. This current study uses genre analysis to reveal how the story of *Kancil yang Baik* unfolds by looking more closely at its stages and phases.

As picture books use not only verbal texts but also images, analyzing picture books can then be explored by scrutinizing the relationship between verbal and visual texts. Being aware of the complementarity of both resources in making meaning can help teachers explore picture books as part of the teaching material for language learners (Chia & Chan, 2017). One of the ways to explore the verbal and visual resources in a picture book is by administering a multimodal analysis.

Multimodal analysis has been defined as a means to explore how verbal and visual texts process meaning as representation (Weninger, 2020). It has been enlightened by the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as proposed by Halliday (Damayanti et al, 2021). SFL is described as a social theory of language that emphasizes the concept of language functions (Emilia & Hamied, 2015). One of the premises of SFL asserts that every natural language includes three metafunctions comprising ideational (the “going on” or the content of the communication), interpersonal (the roles and relationships between participants in a communicative event), and textual (the way communication is conveyed) (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Royce, 1998, p. 29).

Built upon SFL theory, Royce (1998) formulated Intersemiotic Complementarity as a framework to relate the verbal and visual meanings in multimodal analysis. This framework can be utilized to find the interconnectedness between verbal items and visual message elements in a multimodal text (Ibrahim & Damayanti, 2024). It can help EFL teachers expand their multimodal literacies so that they can outline a pedagogical metalanguage (Damayanti & Febrianti, 2020). The framework accounts for Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual relations in multimodal texts; this research, however, focuses on the Ideational metafunction to elaborate how experiential meanings are constructed and connected across verbal and visual resources in picture books.

Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity outlines how verbal and visual text represent the “going on”, namely to elaborate the Identification, Activity, Circumstance and Attributes as represented in verbal and visual resources of multimodal texts (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Meaning Relation of Verbal and Visual Resources (Royce, 1998, p. 31)**

| <b>Ideational Intersemiosis</b> | <b>Visual Meanings</b>  | <b>Verbal Meanings</b>                              |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Identification                  | Who or what the represented participants (actor, recipient, goal)? Who or what are they interacting with? Are the participants interacting? (vectors) | Who or what is involved in any activity or process? |

| <b>Ideational Intersemiosis</b> | <b>Visual Meanings</b>   | <b>Verbal Meanings</b>   |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Activity                        | What action is taking place, events, states, type of behaviour (gestures, facial expressions, stance, physical moves)? | What action is taking place, events, states, type of behaviour?          |
| Circumstances                   | Where, who with, and by what means are the activities being carried out (setting, means, accompaniment)?               | Where, who with, and by what means are the activities being carried out? |
| Attributes                      | What are the qualities and characteristics of the participants?  | What are the qualities and characteristics of the participants?          |

The aspect of Identification involves recognizing the participants involved in a Process. It can be identified visually through represented participants and their interactions (e.g., vectors) and verbally through phrases identifying actors or entities. Activity refers to the actions, events, or states. It can be found visually through gestures, facial expressions, or movement, and verbally through Processes. Circumstances relate to the contextual details such as place, means, and accompaniment. It is shown in visual texts through background settings or additional objects, and in verbal texts through prepositional phrases or adverbials. Lastly, Attributes convey the qualities or characteristics of participants. It can be seen through visual cues like clothing, posture, or expression, and through verbal descriptors such as adjectives or descriptive clauses.

Ideational Intersemiotic Complementarity, further elaborates how verbal and visual texts can construct meaning cohesively through various lexico-semantic relationships comprising Repetition (R), Synonymy (S), Antonymy (A), Hyponymy (H), Meronymy (M), and Collocation (C). See Table 2.

**Table 2. Type of Relationships in Ideational Intersemiosis (Royce, 1998, p. 31)**

| <b>Type</b> | <b>Definition</b>  |
|-------------|--|
| Repetition  | identical experiential meaning   |
| Synonymy    | the same or similar experiential meaning                                 |
| Antonymy    | opposite experiential meaning  |
| Meronymy    | the relation between the part and whole of something                     |
| Hyponymy    | the relation between a general class of something and its sub-classes    |
| Collocation | an expectancy or high probability to co-occur in a field or subject area |

Repetition occurs when the identical experiential meaning is conveyed in both verbal and visual texts. They reinforce each other. Synonymy is found when the verbal and visual texts express similar meanings, although they are in different signs. Antonymy refers to the use of contrasting meanings between the verbal and visual texts. Meronymy represents part-whole relationships. One mode might show the meaning of a whole entity, and the other highlights a part of it. Hyponymy refers to a relationship in which one mode presents the meaning of a general class and the other shows a specific subclass. Lastly, collocation occurs when the meanings in verbal and visual texts are commonly associated or tend to co-occur within the same field or subject area. Note that not all the elements will be applied to a text at any time, given that they depend on the complexity of or the type of text (Royce, 1998).

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The present study employed a qualitative research design. In particular, a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach was used to address the first research question regarding the verbal-visual resources in the picture book. The MDA approach focuses on how meaning is represented by integrating multiple modes of communication (Jones, 2013; Kress & Bezemer, 2023). This resonates with the purpose of this study, aiming to scrutinize the meaning relation between verbal and visual resources in a multimodal text, which is possibly applicable to be used in the teaching of English to young learners. Meanwhile, video-recorded teaching simulation sessions and a stimulated recall interview were applied to address the second research question related to how the potential use of verbal-visual resources in the picture book is manifested in the teaching simulation session.

### **Data Sets and Data Collection**

This qualitative study collected data from two sources: Indonesian children's picture book titled *Kancil yang Baik* [translation: The Kind Mouse Deer] by Clara Ng (2010) and video-recorded teaching simulations of two elementary English teachers. The first data set, *The Kind Mouse-deer*, tells about *Si Kancil*, a Mouse-deer who wants to change his bad reputation by being nice to the animals who have been the victims of the Mouse-deer's trickery. The picture book is selected because it contains rich visual elements, not only the textual narratives, allowing teachers to support students' reading and viewing activities by exploring the multimodal resources. Additionally, the picture book is intended to be consumed by elementary school students, which suits the professional background of the two recruited teachers.

The second dataset comprises video recordings of two teacher participants who took part in teaching simulation sessions, followed by corresponding interviews. The two teacher participants, referred to hereafter as Rudi and Tina (pseudonyms), were selected based on their willingness to take part in the study. Both teachers work at a private school in Bandung, Indonesia, where the research team has been working in partnership to support the teachers' continuous professional development. Rudi and Tina hold master's degrees in English Language

Education, with 10 years of experience for Rudi and 2 years of experience for Tina. They both teach English to primary school students aged 7 to 12.

The two teachers were tasked with conducting a simulated teaching session using the picture book ‘The Kind Mouse Deer’ to teach English to young learners through the Reading-Aloud method. To ensure whether the potential use of the picture book is reflected in the teaching simulation session, the teachers were given full discretion to prepare and execute the lesson plan and the teaching stages naturally, without any intervention from the researchers. Interviews were conducted to further explore the participants’ pedagogical decisions in using the picture book during the teaching simulation session. The interview questions focused on three core aspects: the participants’ strategies for integrating verbal-visual resources into their teaching simulations, the challenges they encountered during the process, and the opportunities they identified while using The Kind Mouse Deer as a teaching tool.

### Data Analysis

Before the textual and visual elements in the picture book were analyzed, the images were re-sketched from the original picture book to comply with the copyright issues. Although the picture book is colorful, the black-and-white sketch in this study is justified as color is excluded from the analysis process. The multimodal analysis of the first data set includes examining the ideational meanings of the verbal-visual resources. It focuses on the details of the representation of the setting, characters, and narrative staging in the story. In terms of verbal, the original story, which is in Indonesian, is translated into English to be further analyzed based on the ideational meanings in the lexical choices. The visual, on the other hand, is analysed to map the images of the actions and non-actions that constitute the representation or ideational meanings. Additional analysis includes the formulation of the narrative genre from Martin and Rose (2008). Within the narrative in the picture book, the relationship between verbal and visual resources is examined using intersemiotic complementarity (Royce, 1998). The following is a sample of data analysis results from the picture book.

**Table 3. A Sample of Results of Multimodal Analysis in the Picture Book**

| Verbal Meaning  | Visual Meaning  | Ideational Intersemiosis   | Ideational Intersemiotic complementarity   |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>“Good afternoon, sir!” said Kancil.<br/>Pak Tani was shocked when he saw Kancil. Kancil approached him and said politely, “may I help you grow cucumbers?”</p> |  | <p><b>Identification:</b><br/>Kancil &amp; Pak Tani</p> <p><b>Activity:</b><br/>Shocked, saw, approached, said, help, &amp; grow</p> | <p><b>Repetition:</b><br/>Afternoon, shocked</p> <p><b>Synonym:</b><br/>Pak Tani’s field</p> |

| Verbal Meaning | Visual Meaning  | Ideational Intersemiosis   | Ideational Intersemiotic complementarity |
|----------------|---|--|--|
|                | <p>Kancil is hidden behind the fence of Pak Tani's field.</p> <p>Pak Tani is holding a hoe, planting cucumbers.</p> <p>Kancil is talking to Pak Tani. Pak Tani looks shocked.</p> | <p><i>Circumstance:</i><br/>Afternoon &amp; Pak Tani's field</p> |  |

The second dataset, the video-recorded teaching simulation sessions, supported by the interview data, was analyzed using the principles of content analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009; Spurgin & Wildemuth, 2009). The focus of the observation is on the ways the teacher participants utilized the verbal-visual resources in the picture book for teaching and learning activities. Although analysis on students' engagement could enrich the finding, this study was limited to the teacher's perspectives due to accessibility constraints. The stages of content analysis were adapted from Krippendorf (2018). For the video recordings, the analysis began by identifying the events in which the teachers utilized the verbal-visual resources during the teaching simulations. An iterative coding process was employed based on the theory of stages of story reading, which consists of pre-story reading, while-story reading, and post-story reading (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Damayanti, 2017). The coding process was conducted to investigate the stages of activities and the teaching strategies conducted by the teachers in each stage. Similarly, the interview data were analyzed using the same analytical framework, with the coding process focusing on the teacher participants' challenges and opportunities of using the picture book as teaching materials.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### *Verbal and Visual Elements in the Picture Book*

The first aim of the study is to show the verbal-visual resources in a picture book that can be utilized to provide exposure to young learners in meaning-making. The data analysis reveals that it is arguable that *Kancil* book is designed in such a way to present the narrative using a combination of two different semiotic modes, which complement each other to augment the meanings in the *Kancil* picture book. This is evident in terms of narrative staging, setting, as well as character development. In some instances, visual representations are used to strengthen the meanings from the verbal resources in the story, i.e. whether meanings in the verbal elements are repeated, supplemented or compared to the visual representations.

In the Orientation stage, the story was set by introducing Kancil as the main character. Due to the page arrangement, the visual resources predominate the presentation of the character (see Figures 1 and 2). In Figure 1, readers are oriented with the visual representation of Kancil wearing his school uniform, raising his hand, signifying for actively participating in the classroom. This image is accompanied by the verbal expression of: *Once, there was a mouse deer named Kancil. He was a very good boy.* As such, the visual represents the repetition of a 'good boy'. But, as a popular character in Indonesian folk story, *Kancil* is known to be mischievous or 'naughty' and Figure 2 presents a visual collocation of the word 'naughty' with the portrayal of a foregrounded image of *Kancil* being excluded by a group of friends. This scene highlights the intertextual connection between *Kancil's* portrayal in this story and the depiction in other *Kancil* stories.



**Figure 1. Introduction of Kancil as a character in the Orientation stage.**



**Figure 2. Visual representation of verbal 'naughty'**

Other elements of the Orientation were mostly represented in visuals, namely to inform readers of the background locations of the story. But then, it was noted that in the overall narrative, verbal resources played a role such as in the identification of key wordings which focus on doing (verbs) to develop events in a story, people and things (noun) for describing characters or setting that can evoke imagination, emotion (adjectives) for engaging with readers.

This was then linked to the beginning event of the Complication stage expressed in the verbal form of: *"Good afternoon, sir!" said Kancil. Pak Tani was shocked when he saw Kancil,* which was then visualized in a scene of Figure 3 as Repetition.



**Figure 3. Beginning of Complication stage**

As an Indonesian original character, Kancil is well-known for his mischievous shenanigans in many versions of stories. Because Kancil is a popular character, his characterization as set in the orientation stage is quite expected. In this particular book, however, Kancil's character was turned into a different one during the complication stage. The exchanges between the characters of Kancil, Pak Tani (the farmer) and Buaya (the crocodile), in both Excerpts 1 and 2, hinted at the turn of Kancil's character.

***Excerpt 1:***

"No!" replied Pak Tani.

"I don't need the help of a mouse deer! You will definitely trick me!"

Kancil smiled and kept saying softly, "Let me help you. Really, I can be trusted to work in this field!"

Pak Tani took his hoe and drove the mouse deer away.

"Go away Kancil! I do not believe you!"

***Excerpt 2:***

He then decided to go to the river to visit Buaya, the crocodile.

At the time, Buaya was sunbathing on the edge of the river, his eyes were closed, and he looked sleepy.

"Good afternoon, Buaya. So you're taking a break, huh? Are you tired? Do you want to get a massage?" asked Kancil.



**Figure 4. Kancil cried in the Evaluation stage.**

In the excerpts, the verbal resources in the exchanges showed that Kancil was not trusted for his good intentions. These exchanges are completed visually by Repetition, in which Kancil shows disappointment by running away and crying. The accumulative reaction is more clearly shown in the Evaluation stage, where Kancil wallowed and cried (Figure 4).

The narrative of Kancil in this picture book concluded with a series of resolutions in which he was shown to do many different kinds of deeds for Pak Tani and Buaya to show his change of character.

The Coda is a wrap-up of the story in a visual showing the characters of Kancil, Pak Tani, and Buaya in a picture-perfect image (Figure 5). A verbal representation comes along as Collocation, stating a supposedly explicit moral value of the story: *It turned out enemies could become friends again through kindness.*



**Figure 5. Coda of Kancil's story**

The overall analysis of the visual and verbal resources in the picture book leads to the justification of the Kancil picture book as a rich text that can be explored from two different departure points, either from the verbal or visual resources. This picture book provides relatively congruent semiotic resources between verbal and visual elements. Most of the meanings in verbal elements are reproduced visually. Therefore, it is suitable for teaching to beginning learners as pictures can be used to assist readers/learners in understanding the language used in the story. Their use in the teaching and learning activities was showcased in a reading-aloud activity, among others.

### ***Teaching Simulation Sessions***

Once the verbal-visual resources were scrutinized, the picture book was simulated in a trial classroom by two primary English teachers. This teaching simulation was intended to capture

whether the verbal-visual resources in the picture book can ignite teachers' awareness of pedagogical practices oriented to students' reading and viewing skills. The video analysis shows that both teacher participants utilized the visual elements contained in the picture book to prepare learners for reading the written texts in English. The visual elements were used to make sense of what is going on in the story by discussing characters, settings, and events depicted in the picture book. In addition to that, a mix of Indonesian language and English was used to introduce the written forms of the key elements of the story, such as descriptions of characters (e.g., good versus bad) and main events (e.g., action verbs).

The way the verbal-visual resources are potentially used by the primary English teachers was further confirmed by the interviews, highlighting two main opportunities. First, both teachers agreed that the interplay of verbal-visual resources coupled with reading aloud activities enriched the meaning-making process of young English language learners. Second, they believed that the rich visual resources have the potential to prepare young learners' understanding of the story, which is later delivered in the verbal form of English.

Apart from the potential use of visual elements to spark students' initial understanding of the story, both teachers expressed that using printed materials was quite challenging since today's students are already familiar with digital technology. An elaboration of materials generated from digital technology is deemed beneficial to enrich the while-reading activities and the utilization of other elements such as sound and spatial elements to retain the students' active engagement.

### ***Rudi's teaching simulation***

The way Rudi maximizes the potential use of verbal-visual elements in the picture book was identified in each reading stage. In the pre-story reading stage, he focused on the description of the characters. For example, he used the word *sad* and translated it back into Indonesian to ensure students' understanding of the meaning of the word. In the whole-story reading stage, Rudi strengthened students' understanding of the meaning of the word using gestures and relevant facial expressions. While visual, verbal, and gestural resources have been used to introduce and strengthen the vocabulary to the students, Rudi also creatively added a song containing key vocabulary in the picture book. At the post-story reading stage, Rudi reproduced and separated the images of the characters in the picture book and highlighted each of the characters using a type of collage to introduce the individual character. In sum, in utilizing verbal-visual resources, Rudi was not only focused on exploiting visual resources to prepare students for accessing the English written forms, but also consolidated the meaning of the words through a variety of activities. To maximize the teaching process, Rudi also utilized several strategies, such as using students' native language, gestures and facial expressions, and a song.

### ***Tina's teaching simulation***

In a similar vein, Tina exploited visual elements before the verbal ones. It was noticeable that her strategy was to present the story in smaller chunks, highlighting the patterns of how the plot is developed. The story was elaborated based on the staging and phasing, which were useful to highlight the narrative structure. In the pre-story reading stage, she focused on the visual

elements of the cover depicting Kancil, Pak Tani (the farmer), and Buaya (the Crocodile). She then talked about the conflict between Pak Tani and Kancil, along with its bad reputation. In guiding the students to the next stage of the story, she gave a preview of the story in which Kancil's character transformed from naughty to helpful. In the whilst-story reading stage, she extended the exploitation of visual elements from talking about what is going on to making predictions about what will happen in the proceeding phases of the story. In sum, Tina has attempted to see the intertextuality in reading this story during the teaching simulation session so that they can relate their background knowledge about Kancil, not only to understand the plot of the story but also to empathize with Kancil's effort to change and Pak Tani and Buaya's unpleasant experiences with Kancil in the past.

Apart from the opportunities mentioned before, the teachers also face challenges. Insufficient and less appealing materials for young learners are what challenge Rudi most in using printed picture books. Rudi considered that the sole use of the picture book is less appealing for young learners who are familiar with digital technology. Rudi, therefore, decided to digitize the picture book using digital collage, digital story makers, and animation. Resonating with Rudi's response, Tina noticed that the book's small size is unsuitable for classroom use. Thus, she thought that she needed to transform the conventional book into a more accessible digital format or to have each student get access to the book.

## **Discussion**

Reflecting on the findings, the picture book *Kancil yang Baik* exemplifies a harmonious integration of verbal and visual elements, providing congruent semiotic resources to convey meanings. This alignment between text and imagery makes the book particularly well-suited for teaching beginning learners, as the visual elements significantly aid in understanding the language used in the story. The potential use of picture books can be attributed to the symbiotic relationship between visual and verbal components, where each element influences and enhances the other, creating a cohesive narrative (Mourão, 2015).

The mutual reinforcement of verbal and visual elements in picture books serves as a resource for scaffolding the learning of complex concepts, bridging gaps between personal experiences and texts, and connecting students' existing literacy resources with those required across various disciplines (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006; Takacs & Bus, 2018). With this in mind, picture books not only introduce and explain the world to readers in an accessible manner but also complement and enrich the verbal narrative, creating a more immersive and understandable experience for young readers (Callow, 2020). Students can develop not only their language skills but also build their vocabulary. This notion is supported by studies (Ahmadi et al., 2017; Green & Keogh, 2024; Megawati, 2012; Shao & Shih, 2024; Xu 2024) highlighting the critical role of verbal-visual synergy in supporting key areas of linguistic growth.

Beyond improving students' language comprehension, the *Kancil yang Baik* picturebook can be used as a valuable resource for teaching narrative structure by emphasizing the staging and phasing of the story's plot. This is because the picture book engagingly guides readers through Kancil's transformation from a mischievous character with a bad reputation to a virtuous

and kind-hearted mouse deer. This progression can help students identify patterns in storytelling. This learning process aligns with Chen's (2013) idea that guiding children through the deeper meanings of a text helps them grasp words, social norms, and values more effectively, ultimately enhancing their overall text comprehension.

The use of visual elements contributes to making the verbal messages more comprehensible and engaging, which is particularly important for young learners. Teachers can facilitate this process by encouraging students to predict the plot based on illustrations and then using the story to explain and practice vocabulary, grammar, and other language elements, as well as to discuss the story's underlying values. In line with Benjamin's (2023) statement that when students engage with content aligned with their interests and understanding, such as exploring the representation of the main character, they become more invested in the learning process.

Identifying keywords in a picture book is another valuable strategy for teachers. It allows them to tailor their focus based on specific learning objectives. Teachers, for example, can emphasize verbs using images and gestures to help students understand how events unfold in a story. Xu's (2024) study highlighted that guided reading of picture books aids students in gradually developing their ability to interpret and analyze English language concepts. In guided reading practice, students can be encouraged to predict the plot based on illustrations. Additionally, studies by Green and Keogh (2024), Nurzaman et al. (2020), Senawati et al. (2021), and Sandy and Mukti (2020) highlight that guided reading can help improve students' reading and vocabulary development by introducing students to new words and phrases in context.

Another thing to note is that the visual representations in picture books play a crucial role in helping young readers understand the meanings conveyed in the story, whether these meanings are repeated or supplemented by the verbal elements. The harmonious relationship between visuals and written text creates an immersive reading experience, engaging the readers' imagination and helping them make sense of the narrative through a connected visual-verbal understanding (Arizpe, 2013; Callow, 2020; Shao & Shih, 2024; Yang, 2015).

Last but not least, the integration of educational technology in teaching has gained significant traction, with research indicating that presenting picture books in a digital format can further enhance the learning experience. Xu (2024) highlights that teachers can leverage multimedia teaching resources to present the content of English picture books more vividly and engagingly. This transformation of traditional media into interactive and digital formats through multimedia tools enriches students' learning experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the potential of the picture book *Kancil yang Baik* as a tool for language learning and literacy development in young readers. The symbiotic relationship between verbal and visual elements provides a useful resource for teaching young language learners. As a multimodal text, this *Kancil* picture book presents the verbal and visual meaning in such a way that complements each other to augment the meanings narrated. The interplay between verbal and visual exemplifies ideational intersemiotic complementarity, particularly through Repetition, where verbal and visual meanings align, and Synonymy, where similar

meanings are conveyed through different terms or images. Furthermore, the book's use of narrative staging, setting, and character development contributes to a deeper meaning-making process. Given these features, picture books offer rich linguistic and cognitive resources that can be explored by English teachers to support their students' foreign language learning.

As indicated in this study, using picture books remains a valuable practice. Findings from the teaching simulation sessions show that picture books can be used as tools for enhancing young learners' reading and viewing skills in English. Both teachers in the study leveraged the visual-verbal resources to facilitate the students' understanding of the story. In addition, this study suggests that printed picture books can be used in combination with picture books in a digital format to cater classrooms with a large number of students. Future research is encouraged to explore the potential of picture books in classroom implementation, highlighting students' engagement with the books in developing their English proficiency. More studies with experimental design are required to measure the effectiveness of teachers' strategies in using the interplay of verbal and visual elements in multimodal texts and to obtain objective feedback from the students in an actual EFL classroom.

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