

Unveiling Intersemiotic Relationships in Pakistani Children's English Language Textbooks through Barthes's Notion of Intertextuality

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Abstract

This study looks at the intersemiotic relationships in Pakistani children's English language textbooks through Barthes's notion of intertextuality, recognizing that incorporating Barthes's intertextuality in ESL young learners' textbooks is a better way to learn and comprehend the English language. While there are many methods for teaching English language to ESL learners, however, there is a need to understand how intersemiotic relationships in children's English books enhance their language learning. Therefore, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the intersemiotic relationships in Pakistani children's English language textbooks through Barthes's notion of intertextuality. In addition to answering the question: 'How do semiotic elements (illustrations and visual aids) interact with the text to convey meaning through Barthes' notion of intertextuality 1967 in the Cambridge Reading Adventures textbooks used by young ESL learners in Pakistan?' this study also wields qualitative method to focus on the thematic analysis of the intersemiotic and textual elements. Moreover, the study utilizes five of the Cambridge Reading Adventures textbooks used by young ESL learners in Pakistan for analysis. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of which language teaching method should be integrated for developing the competence of ESL learners. All in all, this research sheds light on the evolving nature of language pedagogy shift and intersemiotics. To conclude, the study's findings have implications for scholars of language pedagogy, teachers, and social sciences department.

Keywords: Intersemiotic, Pakistani children, ESL, Cambridge Reading Adventures, and textbooks.

Introduction

This study aims to highlight the intersemiotic relationship in young English as a second

language learners' textbooks. For this study, 'young learners' refers to children learning English as a second language (ESL). Throughout the research, the terms 'young learners' and 'ESL learners' will be used interchangeably, unless otherwise specified. Illustration and text act as an intersemiotic translation in young learners' textbooks, as visual elements translate the verbal text and vice versa. Intersemiotic translation in young learners' textbooks is significant as the interaction of text and illustrations together, along with the interactive stimuli enhances the meaning-making capability of young second language learners. It therefore, lays the foundation for language development. Henceforth, this makes it a worthy-research topic. Thus, it is important to analyze how illustrations and verbal text in young second language learners' textbooks interact along with interactive stimuli to enhance the meaning-making process. This study employs Barthes's Notion of Intertextuality: The Death of the Author to examine this interaction. There are various ways to learn English as a second language; nonetheless, learning it in a natural environment with low stress level, visual aids, and interactive environment is the best way.

Background of the Study

The English language is the most learned second language in the multilingual world because many people around the globe are influenced by the significance of it. Therefore, learning English language becomes a need for learners to communicate effectively, have more career opportunities, and for elevating their social networking. Henceforth, it is significant to have a strong foundation of the English language from the start. For this purpose, the practice of acquiring it, is initiated at a very young age in many countries.

As discussed above, the practice of acquiring English language initiates at a very young age in many countries. Subsequently, young learners are rushed into schools at a young age. However, the formal and uninviting schools with their monotonous and conventional education system, neither help in developing the individuality of its young learners nor in making them feel at home. Consequently, it leads the young learners to lose interest in studies (Saiyidain, 1935). Thus, the environment of the schools must be fashioned in a creative way to make language learning easier and fun for young learners.

As mentioned previously, the environment of the schools immensely impacts the language learning process for students, especially young learners. Thus, the education system of a country should impart certain strategies for alleviating the issue i.e. young learners losing interest in studies due to monotonous environment; for instance, the teaching methods, teachers' training, and textbooks' content should be improved.

Notably, one of the ways to elevate language learning in learners is to impart the right teaching method. According to Joseph Payne, "There may, therefore, be many good methods of teaching; but no method is good which does not recognize and appreciate the pupil's natural method of learning" (Payne, 1883, p.64). It suggests that Payne was an early advocate of the natural approach for language learning, emphasizing that learners should acquire a second language in the same way as their mother tongue or first language: through exposure and interaction rather than rote memorization.

Eventually, Payne's notion of natural approach in language learning was further developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when they came up with "the natural approach: a method of language teaching". In other words, this progression from Payne's early insights to Krashen's comprehensive framework highlights the continued significance of naturalistic approaches in language education.

Regarding this, Krashen and Terrell's natural method of language acquisition emphasizes the meaning over grammar. In other words, learners must be exposed to such an environment which enhances their meaning-making and communicative competence, rather than merely focusing on grammar comprehension. For this purpose, the input in the natural method of learning should be comprehensible by providing the learners with visual aids, interactive stimuli from the environment, and using multimodality. Moreover, one of the key aspects of Krashen and Terrell's natural method

of language acquisition is that learners should be exposed to the language slightly beyond their current level while keeping their stress environment (affective filter) low. It implies that learners must learn a second language by interaction: communicating effectively rather than rote memorization, inferring the message behind visual aids, and being in a stress-free environment.

Indeed, it suggests that Natural Approach should be used for teaching English as a second language so that young learners use their critical thinking skills, rather than any traditional method: Grammar Translation Method (GTM).

As far as Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is concerned, it has been argued that the GTM is used widely for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) due to its focus on grammar accuracy and writing (Chang, 2011; Saima, 2021). However, research overwhelmingly suggests that although GTM is used widely due to its focus on grammatical accuracy and writing, it lacks communicative competence development (Karakas, 2019; Milawati, 2019; Kirn et al. 2021).

From the above discussion, it can be assumed that for teaching a second language, Natural Approach (NA): developed by Krashen and Terrell, is the best method to adopt as it is a student-centered approach, encouraging the learners (of English as a second language) to develop communicative competence. On the other hand, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a teacher-centered approach, lacking communicative competence, although it is grammatically accurate. Therefore, we can conclude that Natural Approach should be adopted for learners of English as a second language (ESL) at a basic level as it provides the learners with comprehensible multi-modal input - visual aids and interactive stimuli - to develop their communicative competence, active engagement, and meaning-making rather than rote memorization.

As mentioned earlier, to develop young learners' communicative competence, active engagement, and meaning-making rather than rote memorization, the Natural Approach is used. This approach implies that meaning-making in ESL classrooms does not rely solely on words but rather on intersemiotic translation, where meaning is conveyed through multiple semiotic modes such as visual aids, gestures, and digital media. By utilizing intersemiotic translation, learners engage with both verbal and non-verbal signs, fostering deeper comprehension and interaction in the language-learning process.

Therefore, it means if multimodal learning is essential for ESL learners, then teachers must be trained in inter-semiotic strategies to maximize its effectiveness. However, many educators lack competence regarding the incorporation of different semiotic modes—such as visuals, gestures, and digital media—with young learners to facilitate meaning-making.

A teacher with profound language proficiency and inter-semiotic knowledge will impact the students in a positive way and make their language learning a fun and interesting thing.

Therefore, English language teachers' training is important as their insufficient knowledge can have detrimental consequences on the students' learning outcomes (Liao, 1996). This asserts that young learners' language learning is highly dependent on the capability of teachers to teach and interact correctly. For instance, if a teacher knows the right way to interact with the young learners by integrating multi-modal, the students will easily acquire it as it is their natural way of learning. Thus, keen training of language teachers is necessary in building the proficient comprehension of students in language.

On the other hand, it is argued that even proficient English language teachers, at times, fail to make language learning fun for students due to students' lower socio-economic backgrounds, which make them incompetent in learning the English language. It is stated that students who belong to lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to have less confidence, weak communication skills, and a great level of anxiety (Akram & Ghani, 2013). Henceforth, it implies that young learners' incompetence, less confidence, and negative attitude towards English language negatively influence their English learning skills, rather than teachers' less proficiency or limited guidance.

For this reason, Metmari et al. (2022) state that there is no doubt that students' lower socio-

economic status does impact their motivation towards English language learning; nonetheless, teachers' role in addressing the emotional and educational setback is pivotal. It means one cannot deny the significance of learners' socio-economic background while learning English language; nevertheless, an educator's rightful role - by incorporating multi-modal teaching - can motivate students in enhancing their English language learning skills.

The above argument shows that while students' lower socio-economic status may negatively influence their attitude towards English language learning, it is widely accepted that a teacher's guidance can ward off learners' negative attitudes and motivate them to study

Additionally, English language teachers should be trained profoundly for using multimedia and technology in their classrooms as it enhances their natural way of learning; moreover, a lack of technological proficiency further limits their ability to integrate digital tools that enhance intersemiotic translation. Intersemiotic translation is a complex and dynamic process influenced by cultural and semiotic constraints (Dusi, 2015). It has been stated that effective use of technology using strategies influences language learning in students; therefore, teachers should guide the students properly for using technology (Zhou & Wei, 2018). It implies that the English language teachers should be properly trained in using technology as the students depend on them for using technology effectively.

Moreover, Ahmadi (2018) asserts that effective use of technology enhances students' motivation and language skills. It means the integration of modern strategies can make the English language learning easy for learners. Therefore, language teachers require proper training and support in using technology to make their teaching process captivating and innovative for young learners. Furthermore, in the era of technology, sticking to traditional methods of teaching is not effective. It is stated that the role of technology in promoting language skills and 21st century skills is crucial (Shadiev & Wang, 2022). It implies that the role of technology does not only make the English language learning easy for learners, but promotes 21st century skills as well, helping the learners in a better learning.

In a nutshell, it is stated that the use of technology is essential for English language teaching; therefore, the teachers should be well-equipped with the use of it, for making the English language teaching fun. This leads to intersemiotics in technology-enhanced English Language Teaching (ELT), which refers to how multiple modes of meaning-making—such as text, images, audio, video, and digital tools—interact to facilitate language learning. In other words, if teachers are trained in inter-semiotics, they can better understand how words and illustrations interact in young learners' books. This understanding enables them to use illustrated textbooks effectively to enhance learning.

Illustrated young learners' books are inter-semiotic texts because they juxtapose verbal (text) and visual (illustrations) elements to convey meaning. The interaction between these modes can either complement, elaborate, or even contrast each other, shaping how young readers interpret the story. A trained teacher can guide students in decoding these multimodal messages, fostering critical thinking and communicative competence in ESL learners. Therefore, Inter-semiotics translation (both ways) plays a significant part in enhancing the English language learning for young learners.

Inter-semiotic translation is the process of translating verbal signs into non-verbal signs (or vice versa) (Jakobson, 1959). It has been argued that using intersemiotic translation and multimodality in EFL classrooms can enhance student engagement and comprehension (Branco, 2014).

On the other hand, some may argue that inter-semiotic translation could be challenging due to its complexities and translations of cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and preservation of voice style (Saeed, 2024; Dusi, 2015). Nevertheless, research strongly suggests that illustrations significantly impact young learners' book preferences and comprehension, with bright, realistic illustrations being the most effective (Brookshire et al., 2002). Moreover, Aguiar and Queiroz (2013) state that intersemiotic translation is inherently linked to cognitive processes, supporting a broader

application beyond verbal-to-visual translation. Henceforth, it can be assumed that although inter-semiotics translation is a complex and dynamic process, if used effectively, it has immense benefits for young learners.

In a nutshell, the review of literature underlines the growing global significance of the English language and how people around the globe are learning / acquiring it at a very young age. Nonetheless, the formal and monotonous school environments does not prove to be helpful, but frustrates the young learners of ESL in learning English. Therefore, the incorporation of the right English language teaching method, proficient training of English language teachers, and inter-semiotic relationship in young learners' - ESL students- textbooks becomes vital. Among these, inter-semiotic translation plays a crucial role in enhancing the English language learning of the young learners of ESL by providing them with an abundant relationship between text and illustrations. Henceforth, young learners' English language textbooks as inter-semiotic texts enable young learners of ESL to learn English in a natural way, think critically, and develop themes.

Research Objectives

To examine how semiotic elements (illustrations and visual aids) interact with the text to convey meaning through Barthes' notion of intertextuality 1967 in the Cambridge Reading Adventures textbooks used by young English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Pakistan.

Research Questions

How do semiotic elements (illustrations and visual aids) interact with the text to convey meaning through Barthes' notion of intertextuality 1967 in the Cambridge Reading Adventures textbooks used by young ESL learners in Pakistan?

Problem Statement

Teaching English as a second language (ESL) to Pakistani students (young learners) can be tough. The educational institutions in Pakistan devise a mechanical and monotonous teaching plan: utterly non-creative, making the students fed up. Language learning classrooms are supposed to be student-centered; whereas, many Pakistani schools incorporate teacher-centered approaches for the English language teaching, leading the young learners to stop thinking critically. Many schools usually inculcate inter-lingual translation or Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to teach English language to students, which is utterly wrong. This paper, therefore, explores how inter-semiotics - by communicating messages and themes - can be used to teach English language to young learners. While the existing research papers focus on the implication of inter-semiotics in young learners' literature, they do not cover the short stories aspect, its significance in laying foundation for strong communication skills, and theme development. This creates a significant need for exploration in this regard; thus, this study seems to address the gap efficiently.

Significance of the Study

The impact of the study is rooted in making English language learning innovative for young learners of English as a second language (ESL). Its implications in academic life are reflected in making English language learning interactive for young learners through multimodal ways, enhanced critical thinking, and theme development. In the professional realm, the research contributes to providing insights for mastering English language teaching through using technology, communicating effectively, and providing accurate guidance for ESL students. Henceforth, the findings of the study are crucial for broadly strengthening the English language teaching and learning.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher analyzed how the interaction between the text and illustration in young second language learners' textbook facilitates the meaning-making process with the lens of Barthes' notion of intertextuality. This study is limited to young learners of ESL. Moreover, the intersemiotic translation i.e. interaction between verbal text and visual aids can be analyzed differently from everyone's perspective; therefore, this research may have imparted subjective bias. Lastly, the

findings of the research cannot be completely implied in every school due to the economic infrastructure.

Theoretical Framework

The Death of the Author is a conceptual framework, initially penned as an essay by Ronald Barthes: a French critic, in 1967, where he used the phrase “death of the author” metaphorically to assert that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author”. It suggests that a reader must ignore the intention and biography of the author, and solely depend on the language (verbal text and illustrations) of the text to decipher the meaning. Significantly, he claims that a reader should develop the meaning of the text by their own lens, liberating themselves from the author’s intention, as a text is multidimensional and no longer remains an author’s property once it is published. It means that the readers must detach themselves from the author’s intention and solely depend on the text’s references to devise diverse creative meanings as texts after publication open up to multiple and dynamic interpretations. Therefore, according to Barthes, it is the language of the text - implicit and explicit references - that communicates with the reader, rather than the author’s intention. Henceforth, the argument that the language is the true author of a text rather than the author himself is what Barthes advocates.

The framework consists of eight points:

1. **Select the Text for Analysis**
The first step of the framework is to select the specific text for analysis. The significant thing to note is that the text must contain illustrations along with the verbal text.
2. **Identify the Explicit and Implicit References**
The second step is to identify the explicit references - the written text - and the implicit references - the illustrations - in the text. It means to analyze whether the both references are getting along or not. For instance, if the text says, “the girl was sad”, the illustration has to show a sad girl.
3. **Research the Contexts of the Texts**
The third step involves stating the context of the text. This step mentions the time period, genre, and audience for which the text has been written.
4. **Analyze How These References Shape Meaning**
Fourth step involves analyzing how the implicit and explicit references are getting along.
5. **Consider the Reader’s Role**
It asserts that the reader, with the help of the text’s language and interactive stimuli, infers meaning, by evading the author’s intentions.
6. **Examine the Text’s Interactions with Other Media**
It involves that either the text is interacting with other media, i.e. music, film, or media etc. or not.
7. **Apply Barthes’s “Death of the Author”**
It implies analyzing the role of the reader in decoding the text along with evading the author’s intention.
8. **Synthesize Findings into a Critical Analysis**
The last step involves synthesizing the findings into a critical analysis.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research employs a content analysis approach. This approach is rooted in how Pakistani young learners - ESL students - develop meaning through the inter-semiotic approach: interaction between text and illustrations, used in their books. Moreover, the primary data - the population - of the current paper has been taken from Cambridge Reading Adventures with the sample of five books. Whereas, scholarly articles and theories on inter-semiotics in young learners’ literature and interviews of educators serve as the secondary data. Additionally, the article applies

the framework of “Barthes’ Notion of Intertextuality: The Death of the Author” on the primary data by employing textual and visual content analysis along with thematic and semiotic analysis, by exploring meaning-making and symbolism. Furthermore, the research maintained validity by ensuring credibility through alignment with previous studies, conformability through direct examples from the sample books, and transferability by demonstrating that findings can be applied to other young learners’ literature.

Data Analysis

The selected texts are:

- Pterosaur by Jon Hughes
- Connections by Scoular Anderson
- Ships, Boats, and Things That Float by Scoular Anderson
- World of Deserts by Kathryn Harper
- Earthquakes by Kathryn Harper and Venetia Dean

Step 1: Select the Text for Analysis

All the selected books share the same genre, that is, children’s literature -to educate young learners of ESL. However, despite belonging to the same genre, each and every book has its specific domain. The specific themes include prehistoric life, Stone Age, nature, and disasters.

Step 2: Identify the Explicit and Implicit References

This step of Barthes’s Notion of Intertextuality examines the explicit references and implicit references for weaving the detailed and focused meaning of the entire book. As each and every book has its own specification, every book has its own references.

- Pterosaur by Jon Hughes

In Pterosaur by Jon Hughes, the explicit textual references include “winged lizard” frequently and the visual references are seen in the pics of dinosaurs. Implicitly, the narrative structure echoes the presence of pterosaurs in the ancient times and their way of living, creating a deeper layer of meaning. These inter-textual cues invite the reader to dig deeper in the ancient times, enriching the overall thematic resonance of the book.

- Connections by Scoular Anderson

In Connections by Scoular Anderson, the explicit textual references include stone age”, microchip, spears, ropes, roof of house, basket, bags, nets, and abacus; whereas, visual references are seen in the pics: comparison of a stone in stone age and contemporary era, dress code of people in ancient times, hunting a deer with spears, the accessories, weaving a basket by grass and leaves, and use of abacus to do calculation. Implicitly, the narrative structure echoes the stretch of huge difference in the stone age and contemporary times. It shows how the actions were done in the past and now. These inter-textual cues give insights to the reader about the time difference between the two eras: stone age and contemporary times, enriching the overall thematic resonance of the book.

- Ships, Boats, and Things That Float by Scoular Anderson

In *Ships, Boats, and Things That Float* by Scoular Anderson, the explicit textual references include ancient people, swamps, kayak, coracle, reeds, bamboo, clinker-built boats, Vikings, sails, big boats, ships, steam engines, paddles, propeller, cargo; whereas, visual references are seen in the pics of ancient people, swamps, kayak, coracle, reeds, bamboo, clinker-built boats, Vikings, sails, big boats, ships, steam engines, paddles, propeller, cargo. Implicitly, the narrative structure echoes the evolution of ships, boats, and other things since the ancient times till now. It shows how the actions were done in the past and now, creating a deeper layer of meaning. These inter-textual cues give insights to the reader about the time difference between the two stone age and contemporary times, enriching the overall thematic resonance of the book.

- World of Deserts by Kathryn Harper

In *World of Deserts* by Kathryn Harper, the explicit textual references include very dry, sand, dunes, cold deserts, humps, thick waxy leaves of deserts' plants, spikes, yurt, sandstorm, oasis, solar farms, wind farms; whereas, visual references are seen in the pics of sand, dunes, cold deserts, humps, thick waxy leaves of deserts' plants, spikes, yurt, sandstorm, oasis, solar farms, wind farms. Implicitly, the narrative structure echoes the different types of deserts present in the world and the types of species (plant and animals) that reside there, creating a deeper layer of meaning. These inter-textual cues give insights to the reader about the different types of deserts in the world and what species of plants and animals live there enriching the overall thematic resonance of the book.

- Earthquakes by Kathryn Harper and Venetia Dean

In *Earthquakes* by Kathryn Harper, the explicit textual references include tremor and earthquake, layers of earth, cracks, waves, small and big earthquake, earthquakes under ocean, tsunamis, measures, earthquake drills; whereas, visual references are seen in the pics of tremor and earthquake, layers of earth, cracks, waves, small and big earthquake, earthquakes under ocean, tsunamis, measures, earthquake drills. Implicitly, the narrative structure echoes what are earthquakes and the reasons that bring earthquakes, and differences between tremor and earthquakes. These inter-textual cues give insights to the reader about the different types of earthquakes that occur and the consequences they bring, enriching the overall thematic resonance of the book.

Step 3: Research the Contexts of the Texts

The third step involves stating the context of the text. This step mentions the time period, genre, and audience for which the text has been written.

These books are written in the contemporary era, but the themes of the books are based on different eras. The genre of the books is children's literature, and the audience includes ESL children.

Step 4: Analyze How These References Shape Meaning

In the above examples, it is very evident that the pics and the text are going along with each other, enhancing the meaning of the story and making it comprehensible for the learners. In other words, whatever is written in the text is shown in the pics to make the concept evident for the learners. For example, the jargon 'Vikings' is written in the text and then the picture of Vikings is provided to let the students know who they are. In another example, 'people of stone age' comes in the text; to make the meaning more clearly, the living style of the people of stone age is given. All these

examples show that how the text and picture complement each other and enhance the meaning of the story for young learners.

Step 5: Consider the Reader's Role

The visuals and illustrations provided along with the written text in the book helps the reader to acknowledge the concept. Reader is an active learner as he constantly uses his mind and interacts with the teacher and then develops the meaning out of the text.

Step 6: Examine the Text's Interactions with Other Media

All texts employ multimodal design — illustrations, diagrams, color-coded sections, and typography — to complement and enrich the written word. This aligns with media trends in children's publishing, echoing styles seen in educational apps, animated content, and classroom resources.

Step 7: Apply Barthes's "Death of the Author"

The authors have written the book with a lot of visual and verbal information and made it easy for the learners to decipher the meaning. Author's intention is not present in the text, rather the role of learner is encouraged to develop meanings. This supports Barthes's notion that the text is independent of its creator, and meaning is generated in the interaction between the text and the reader, especially through the layered use of images and signs.

Results and Discussions

The data shows that how the visual and verbal elements get along, encouraging learner's meaning making process. The analysis shows that the visual and verbal elements in a story or any literary piece get along with each other, enhancing the understanding of the readers and also help in vocabulary retention.

Conclusion

The study has explored how pictures and text together help in vocabulary retention and develop competence in young second language learners. After the detailed exploration, by tapping into Barthes's notion of intertextuality and The Death of the Author, this study highlights the role of these text and semiotics in creating the ideal classroom environment. In traditional ways, language teachers are focused on the verbal nature of the lecture, which seems to underestimate the potential role of visual learning aids in language classrooms. This study has pointed out that visual learning aids help provide comprehensible input to young learners in second language classrooms. Visual art, being creative, presents the easy association between words and their meanings, which enables young learners to absorb complex vocabulary most easily. In addition, the incorporation of visual aid and interactive stimuli in second language classrooms sets the low affective filter of young learners by scaling down their anxiety levels. This is because of the repetitive patterns of rhymes that result in vocabulary retention easily and their non-competitive nature which results in reduced pressure of peer comparison. Therefore, young learners, with visual aids, are stimulated to memorize the words subconsciously by memorizing the stories. It engages the second language students in the vocabulary learning activity lightheartedly as it is fun and effective in psychological motivation. Consequently, the strategy of integrating rhymes in second language learning serves as a mnemonic device to retain vocabulary in the minds of young learners where anxiety takes the backseat and learning secures the front seat, setting the low affective filter. Moreover, the captivating power of pictures acts as a comprehensible input for enhancing vocabulary in a second language. These psychological dynamics nurture the ideal environment for vocabulary learning in a second language.

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