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## INTERPRETING VIETNAMESE PICTUREBOOKS WITH A WESTERN SEMIOTIC FRAMEWORK

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of children's picturebooks has been reported as supporting both cultural and intercultural awareness in children. One of the well-known theories accounting for contemporary analysis of picturebooks is the social semiotics. However, research on intercultural awareness to date has not examined the ways in which non-Western picturebooks can be interpreted by Western semiotic frameworks. The primary aim of this paper is to demonstrate how images in East Asian picturebooks can be analyzed by a Western semiotic framework. To do this, we analyzed several selected double-page openings in one Vietnamese picturebook with a framework developed by Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2013). The findings were that general meanings of the selected images can be interpreted with the proposed Western framework. However, the cultural meanings of these images are not revealed by using this framework. Further studies on a framework for interpreting cultural meanings of East Asian images in picturebooks are recommended. Findings and suggestions from this paper also provide helpful references for Vietnamese teachers of English to apply picturebooks in their classrooms.

**Keywords:** *picturebooks, intercultural awareness, social semiotics, East Asian images, Vietnamese teachers of English*

## INTRODUCTION

Children's picturebooks have been evident to be beneficial to develop young readers' cognitive and intercultural awareness (Budd, 2016; Chen & Browne, 2015; Levin, 2007; Styles & Arizpe, 2001). In Vietnam, young readers are more familiar with Japanese manga style comics than picturebooks. Some popular comics read in Vietnam include *Dũng sĩ Hasman (Hero Hasman)* by Nguyen Hung Lan (1992), *Thần đồng đất Việt (Vietnamese genius)* by the Phan Thi Company, *Long thần tướng (The dragon general)* by Nguyen Thanh Phong (2014). These books have Japanese manga styles (Ngo, 15 July 2011; Brown 22 June 2014; Nguyen, September 2014).

In contrast to comic books, modern picturebooks are quite uncommon to Vietnamese readers. Not very recently, few picturebooks produced by young Vietnamese artists have been introduced to international readers. Among them are *The first journey* by Phung Nguyen Quang and Huynh Kim Lien (the winner of Scholastic Picture Book Award 2015), *The whale whisperer* by Le Thi Bich Khoa (the 2<sup>nd</sup> –runner of SPBA 2017), and *The mysterious princesses (Những nàng công chúa bí ẩn)* by Khoa Le (2016). Several scholarly works have been conducted on the development of comics in Vietnam (Nguyen, September 2014; Lent, 2014). To date, however, there are very few studies using contemporary Western frameworks to explore how Vietnamese artists express meanings in picturebooks. Moreover, no theoretical framework for analysis of picturebooks about Vietnam has been established yet.

Therefore, our paper aims to fill this gap in literature about Vietnamese picturebooks. In this paper, we are particularly investigating how Vietnamese images make meaning with a contemporary Western framework for interpreting picturebooks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***The Social Semiotic Approach to Analysis of Picturebooks***

Social semiotics stems from Halliday's (1985) systemic functional grammar of English (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Serafini, 2014). Social semiotics is a structural approach for exploring possible meanings of multimodal texts with an emphasis on communicative context, text producers' concern and necessity (Serafini, 2014).

The social semiotic approach for analyzing meanings of multimodal texts is inspired by Halliday's concept of metafunction, in which every semiotic mode has the capability to convey three metafunctional

meanings, i.e. *ideational meaning*, *interpersonal meaning* and *textual or compositional meaning* (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Ideational meaning denotes the semiotic mode's ability to convey representational meaning of the world while the interpersonal meaning reveals the relations between sign producers and receivers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Textual or compositional meaning refers to meanings created through the way visual elements are arranged and distributed to produce an ordered, logical and consistent whole (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2013).

Various frameworks have been developed for interpreting picturebooks based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) work on *Grammar of visual design*. Some of these frameworks focus on interpreting meta-functional meanings of picturebooks (Painter et al., 2013), other frameworks explore ideological meanings (Serafini, 2010; 2014). Whereas these frameworks have been proven to be useful in interpreting picturebooks, especially picturebooks about Western cultures (Painter et al., 2013; Serafini, 2010; Unsworth & Thomas, 2014), very few studies examine the usefulness of these frameworks in analyzing picturebooks about Asian countries. To fill this gap in the literature, the present paper aims to explore the extent to which a contemporary semiotic framework developed by Painter et al. (2013) can be used to interpret images in one picturebook about an Asian country – Vietnam.

We will now briefly introduce the latest framework for picturebook analysis developed Painter et al. (2013), which is drawn mainly on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) early work on grammar of visual design. Such a framework is summarized in Figure 1.

### ***Ideational Meaning***

Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) discussions on representational meaning of images, Painter et al. (2013) proposed a framework for analysis of ideational meaning in picturebooks, which includes the consideration of three narrative aspects, i.e. *Setting*, *Character* and *Action* (see Figure 1).

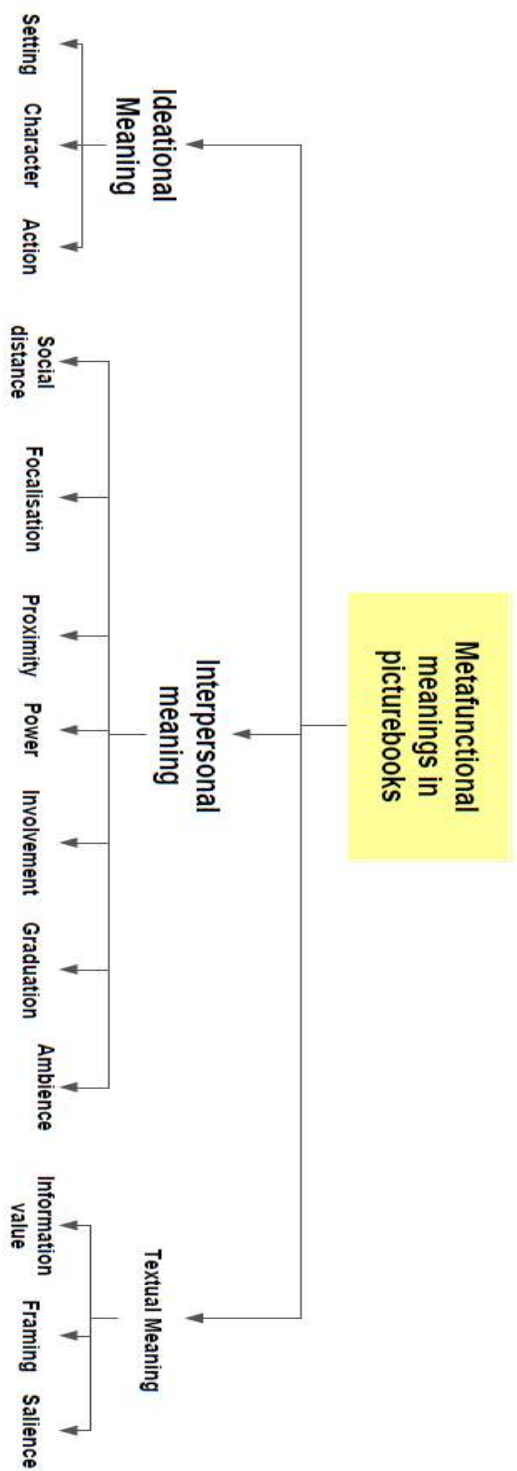







Figure 1. Summary of a semiotic framework for picturebook analysis. Adapted from Painter et al. (2013); Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)

*Setting* refers to the depicted environment or the context in which characters of picturebooks appear and act. In picturebooks, setting or the background context offers information about visual location of surrounding environment in which the characters perform (Painter et al., 2013). Setting in picturebooks should be analyzed in not only a single image but also between sequences of images. Within a picturebook narrative, setting does not always remain unchanged, but it can be either similar or different between successive images (Painter et al., 2013). Any consistency or alteration in the depiction of setting details can provide important information to readers.

*Characters* in picturebooks refer to Kress and van Leeuwen's notion of represented participants (Painter et al., 2013). The ways in which a character's physical appearance is depicted in picturebooks help readers understand other important information such as age, ethnicity, family and social status (Painter et al., 2013). According to Painter et al. (2013), characters in picturebooks can be depicted with complete features of his/her physical representation with the head and/or clothes (complete). Readers can also recognize a character from his/her part of body shadow/silhouette with the choice of metonymic.

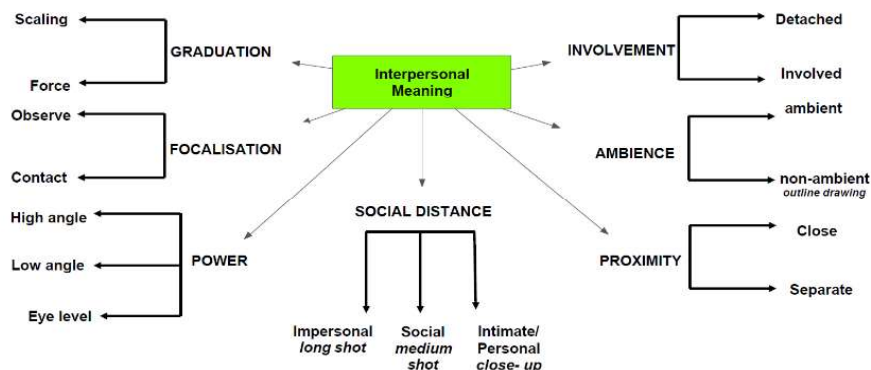
Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) discussion of narrative processes was employed by Painter et al. (2013) to refer to system of *Action* in ideational meaning of picturebooks. Narrative processes reveal depicted actions engaged by visual participants. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), a narrative process consists of participants who are linked together by means of vectors. Figure 2 illustrates various kinds of visual processes recognized by vectors. Vectors linking participants in narrative processes can be either visible such as participants' bodies, arms or means to carry out physical action or invisible in mental action such as a gaze line (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Principal type of action depicted	Example picture
1. Action (single participant: intransitive, or 'non-transactional', structure) vectors created by limbs	
2. Action (two participants: transitive, or 'transactional', structure) vector created by arm, spout, water drops	
3. Verbal vector leading to speech bubble.	
4. Mental: cognition vector leading to thought bubble	
5. Mental: perception (‘transactional reaction’ structure) vector created by line of gaze from cat to fish	

**Figure 2.** *Visual processes with vectors (adopted from Painter et al., 2013, p. 69)*

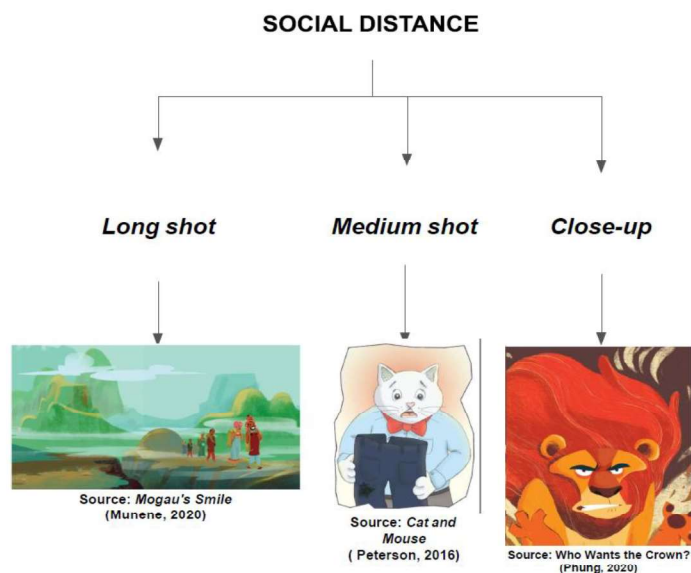
### ***Interpersonal Meaning***

Interpersonal meaning in picturebooks refers to the analysis of relations between writers/illustrators and readers; relations between writers/illustrators and depicted characters; relations between characters and readers. The system for exploring interpersonal meaning in picturebooks proposed by Painter et al. (2013) is summarized in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Summary of analytical systems of Interpersonal Meaning in picturebooks. Adapted from Painter et al. (2013); Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)

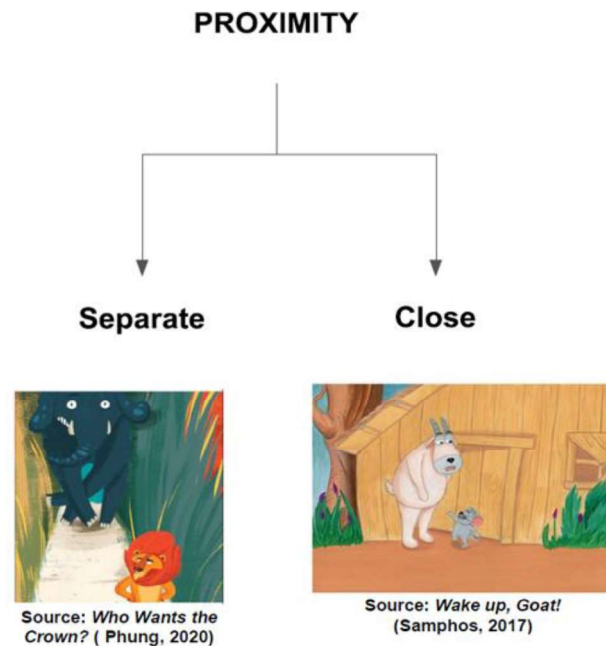
As can be seen from the diagram, six analytical systems should be considered to explore interpersonal meaning in picturebooks. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the variations in the size of frame reveal the *social distance* or the relations between depicted participants and the viewer. Three common ways of presenting visual participants are *close shot*, *medium shot* and *long shot*, as illustrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Common types of shot in picturebooks

A close shot indicates intimacy or close relation between depicted participants and the viewers. By contrast, the long shot suggests impersonal relation whereas the mid-shot reveals a moderate or social relation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Along with Kress and van Leeuwen's system of social distance, Painter et al. (2013) proposed the system of Proximity to refer to the relationship between picturebook characters based on their depicted distance (Painter et al., 2013). Two types of social distance in picturebooks are illustrated in Figure 5.

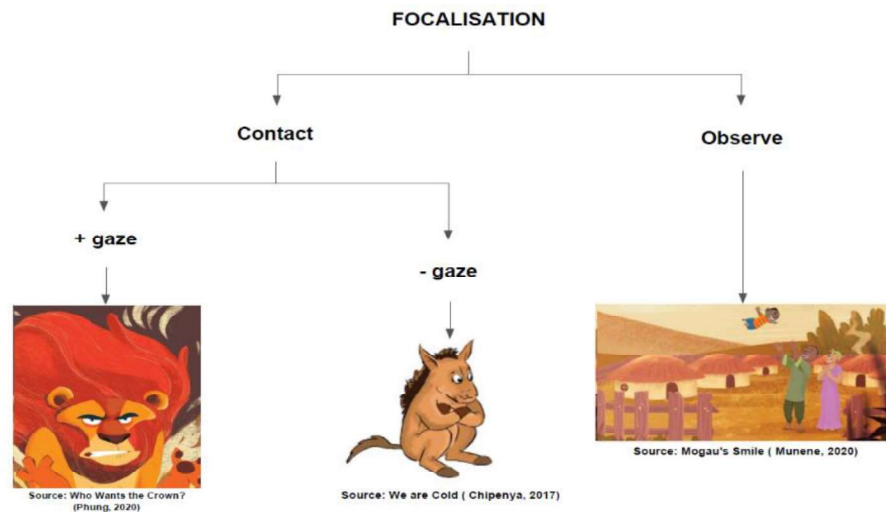


**Figure 5.** *Common types of Proximity in Picturebooks*

According to (Painter et al., 2013), when characters are placed at a far distance from each other, it suggests some issues in their relationship such as a quarrel, whereas characters in close personal relationship are positioned in close distance such as touching each other.

Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's system of *Contact*, Painter et al. (2013) proposed the term *Focalisation* to explore the interaction between depicted characters and readers in picturebooks (as illustrated in Figure 6).

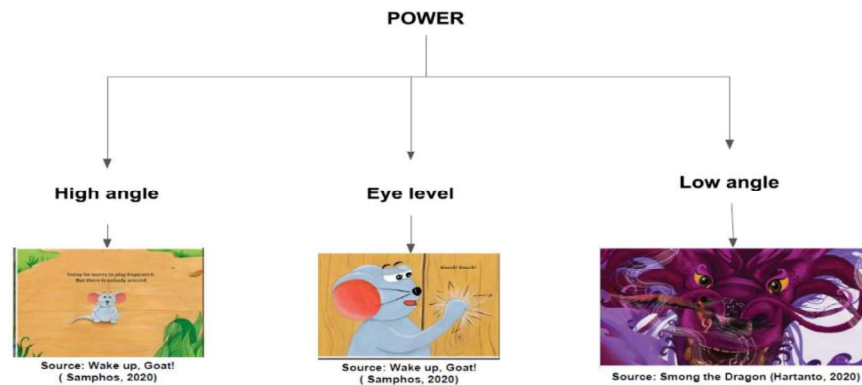




**Figure 6.** *Focalisation in Picturebooks*

When characters in picturebooks are depicted as gazing out at the readers, “an effect similar to the making of eye contact” will be established (Painter et al., 2013, p. 19). When there is no gaze such as a scene or character, readers are not “called on to acknowledge, affirm or contest” (Painter et al., 2013, p. 19). In particular, when the characters are depicted as looking at the readers, an effect of eye contact is created making the readers to engage into the world of the characters while the choice of *observe* suggests readers to observe the story world (Painter et al., 2013).

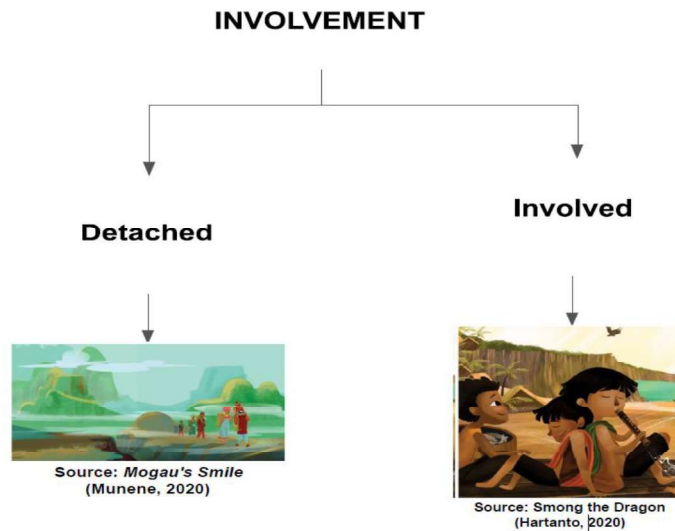
The system of *Power* refers to the use of vertical camera angles to reveal power relations between depicted participants and the viewer. There are three types of camera angles (i.e. high, low, and eye-level). They indicate three different power relations between represented participants and the viewer, as illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.** *Uses of Camera Angles in Picturebooks*

If the viewer looks up at the depicted participants (low angle), then the depicted participants are placed at the position of power in comparison to the viewer. By contrast, if the viewer looks down on the depicted participants (high angle), then the viewer has power over the represented participants. For images in which depicted participants are seen at eye level, there is no difference in terms of power between represented participants and the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In picturebooks, young characters are often depicted as vulnerable with the use of high angle and father characters at the position of superiority when they are seen at low angle (Painter et al., 2013).

The system of *Involvement* refers to the viewer's position based on the variations of horizontal angles (Painter et al., 2013). If represented participants are seen from an oblique angle, then the image producer and viewer position themselves as not part of the depicted participants' world or not involved with them. On the contrary, if the represented participants are put in the frontal angle then the producers and viewer position themselves as part of the world of the depicted participant or involved with them (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) as illustrated in Figure 8. In picturebooks, where young readers are encouraged to keep away from characters' inappropriate behaviour, the depicted characters are placed at oblique horizontal angle (Painter et al., 2013).



**Figure 8.** *Choices of Involvement in Picturebooks*

The subsystem of *Graduation* is used as means to enhance readers' emotional responses to the depicted characters or events in picturebooks. In picturebooks, the choices of Graduation are realized through two subsystems namely *Quantification* and *Force*. They can be realized through the extent of repetition of depicted visual elements and the amount of space occupied by these elements on a picturebook's spread (Painter et al., 2013). For instance, the depicted dragon (*Smong the Dragon*, Hartano, 2020) in Figure 9 takes up most of the available space of the frame with the Quantification choice of extent and upscaled Force.



**Figure 9.** *Extent Quantification and Upscaled Force from Smong the Dragon (Hartano, 2020)*

The term *Ambience* refers to a system revealing the ways colour is used to create mood in depicting picturebooks' setting (Painter et al., 2013). A picturebook with bright light colour will create significantly different effects on readers' emotion in comparison to one with darkness depictions (Painter et al., 2013). For instance, characters in a state of happiness might be depicted in bright, warm reds and yellows, whereas characters facing turmoil might be depicted in dark blues and purples.

### ***Textual or Compositional Meaning***

Textual meaning reveals the ways visual elements are arranged and distributed to produce an ordered, logical and consistent whole (Painter et al., 2013). Compositional meaning can be explored through three integrated systems, as illustrated in Figure 10.

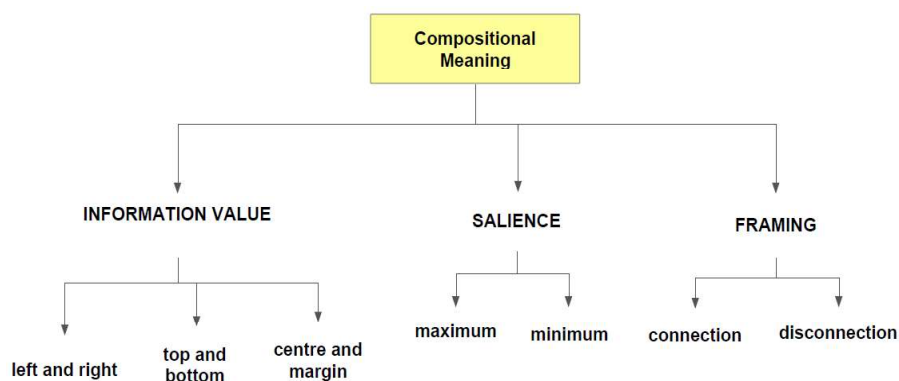


Figure 1. *Three integrated systems of compositional meaning. Adapted from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)*

As can be seen from the diagram, three integrated systems to be analyzed in compositional meaning are those of *Information value*, *Saliency* and *Framing*. The system of *value* of depicted participants in images can be realized through three main zones in the images. In particular, elements placed on the left side carry less important information than those on the right side of the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Given or already given information is put on the left side whereas new or key information is placed on the right side of an image. Therefore, viewers of an image often pay much attention to depicted elements in the right side (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Similarly, two opposing information values can be realized through the choices of *Top* and *Bottom*. The contrasting information value of the top and bottom choice is expressed in Kress and van Leeuwen's terms of *Ideal* and *Real*. Visual elements at the highest position contain "idealized

or generalize essence of the information” whereas elements at the lower part carry more practical and detailed information (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 187). For the choice of Centre and Margin, the element placed in the middle carries the most important information (Centre) and the surrounding elements (Margins) represent less salient information (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the system of *Saliency* provides viewers with recognition of order of importance among depicted elements despite differences in the locations they occupy in an image. Viewers can identify the most important element of an image through their differences in positions (foreground vs background), sizes, uses of contrasting colours and so on (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). For instance, in Figure 9, the dragon is the most important element in comparison to other depicted elements.

Visual elements can be realized as being connected or disconnected together using *Framing*. In picturebooks, Painter et al. (2013) proposed two basic types of framing, namely bound and unbound images or images with/without border (Painter et al., 2013). Unbound images suggest no difference between the young readers’ world and depicted world in picturebooks (Painter et al., 2013). By contrast, a sense of separation between the readers’ world and the story world is created with bound images. Details of sub-options of bound and unbound images in picturebooks are discussed and summarized by Painter et al. (2006, p. 103).

In sum, the current semiotic framework for interpreting picturebooks explores three main types of meta-functional meanings based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) work on visual grammar. However, the contemporary framework on visual analysis has its cultural constraints within the Western cultures (Kress, 2006). For instance, Jewitt (2001) found that the Japanese perceive given information in the right and new information in the left of the examined photographs. This pattern of visual realization is contrasting contemporary theories for analyzing images in which new information is recognized on the right while given information is realized on the left (Jewitt, 2001). Other points of contestations identified by Huynh, Thomas and To (2018; 2019) relating to interpersonal meanings. Particularly, in several images of picturebooks about Vietnam such as *The first journey* (Phung, 2017), although the main characters are seen from a low angle, they have no power in the narrative world (Huynh et al. 2018; 2019). These findings suggest that it’s worth examining the extent to which using a Western semiotic framework can be applied to interpret other picturebooks

about Vietnam.

### **Research questions**

This paper aims to explore the extent to which a contemporary framework for visual analysis can be applied to interpret non-Western images in Vietnamese picturebooks. Based on this research purpose, the present study aims to seek answer to the following research question:

*To what extent can a framework developed by Painter et al. (2013) for interpreting picturebooks be applied to analyze images in Vietnamese picturebooks?*

### **METHODOLOGY**

Based on the research purposes and research question, this study was conducted as a qualitative research. The main source of data in the present study are gathered from three selected images of one picturebook about Vietnamese culture written and illustrated by a Vietnamese artist - Khoa Le (2016). These images were selected based on their high significant levels in terms of content and quality. The three images correspond to three important stages of the story (which will be discussed further in the analysis section). The images were analyzed and interpreted within the analytical framework for picturebook developed by Painter et al. (2013), which is drawn from the theoretical framework of social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

#### **Data collection and analysis**

In terms of procedures for content analysis, images were analyzed in accordance with the following steps:

- Step 1: All images in the selected picturebook were analyzed by the first author with the Western framework developed by Painter et al. (2013).
- Step 2: The first author sent the first draft of the paper applying the Western framework developed by Painter et al. (2013) to the second and the third author for reviewing and cross-checking of the analysis.
- Step 3: The first author revised the analysis in response to the comments and feedback of the co-authors.
- Step 4: When the three authors reached mutual agreement on the analysis, all of the authors worked together to figure out the

most three significant images in the book to develop this paper.

### Setting and Participants

As mentioned, the primary material used in this paper is a picturebook titled *The mysterious princesses* (Le, 2016). This book was selected because it meets our criteria on picturebook selection in terms of artistic quality and popularity. First, the book is written and illustrated by a Vietnamese artist (Khoa Le), and no attempt in interpreting images in this book with a Western semiotic framework was reported to date. Second, images in this book have high artistic quality which are quite different from images in an illustrated story or a comic book. In our view, images in picturebooks have an equal importance to written text. Therefore, visual elements in picturebooks are required to do much more of the storytelling work. An illustrated story does not necessarily need to use images to tell so much of the story, and visual elements in an illustrated story often simply reflect the same meaning as the words without differences in meanings. Moreover, the selected book has been published by the highly acclaimed Vietnamese publishing house of children's literature (The Kim Dong Publisher). The book is also published in various languages including French, Italian, and Chinese.

*The mysterious princesses* (*Những nàng công chúa bí ẩn*) consists of 21 double-spreads. It tells a story about a mysterious kingdom which is ruled by six mysterious princesses. Each of the princesses has one magical skill. One day, the kingdom was in danger as there was a giant and aggressive dragon spitting out fire everywhere. The dragon is the sixth princess, Hope. She is the youngest one among the six mysterious princesses. The sisters had to use all their magical skills to help their little sister. Finally, they were successful when the dragon calmed down and turned into a little princess. The story ends with the reminder that the little princess will turn into an aggressive dragon to destroy the kingdom whenever the children do not behave well. Therefore, children should be good in order to keep the small kingdom happy and peaceful.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Three double-spreads (11, 16, 19) of *The mysterious princesses* (Le, 2016) were selected for the analysis of this paper due to their high level of significance and contribution to the meanings of this book. Three types of meta-functional meanings namely *ideational meaning*, *interpersonal meaning* and *textual meaning* were analyzed in these spreads.

## Meta-functional Meanings in Spread 11th

### *Interpretations of Spread 11th*

In terms of *ideational meaning*, the setting of the 11th spread consists a dark background which contrasts with the bright foreground (with the use of red and orange colours) created by fires coming out from a giant dragon – The sixth princess of the kingdom. The dragon is presented in the manifestation choice of *complete* (i.e. the dragon's body stretches both sides, and it is placed in the middle of the double-spread). Although this is its first depiction, the dragon's appearance is illustrated in a very impressive way with a giant body shape and large streams of fire coming out from its big mouth destroying everything beneath. In terms of visual actions, the combination of non-transactional (the dragon is flying) and transitional action (the dragon is breathing fire down on the mountains and forest) evokes the feeling of frightening and dangerous in this image. The choice of inter-event relation by using an unexpected scene in comparison to the previous ones helps to strengthen the threat and fear caused by the dragon's actions.

For *interpersonal meaning*, in its first appearance, the dragon is depicted in a medium shot and the viewers look at the dragon at an eye-level angle. One of the dragon's eyes is widely opening and facing the viewers to invite contact from the viewers with the focalising choice of contact. Such a of establishing character-reader relationship makes the viewers understand that the dragon is getting extremely angry and aggressive. Moreover, the choice of middle social distance with the giant dragon flying in the foreground helps the viewers be "imaginarily located within the landscape" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 128). The choice of graduation (extent) in which the dragon takes up the large amount of available space of the frame. This strengthens the overwhelming superiority of the dragon. The extent of the dragon power and its destruction are also highlighted with the ambience choice of infuse, activated warmth, and vibrant in which most of the setting is covered with warm colours (red and orange). This evokes the feeling of the heat created by fires.





CHARACTER		ACTION		SETTING	
Character manifestation	Character appearance	Visual Action	Inter-event relations	Circumstances	Inter-circumstance
Complete	Appear: The first depiction	Transactional: A giant dragon spitting out fire everywhere non-transactional: The dragon is flying	Unfolding succession between sequences Second of two images depicts unexpected next action or state	Background: dark foreground: bright in warm colour (orange) and covered by a giant dragon and natural setting in fire	Reoccur: Setting shifts to new location from previous image

INTERPERSONAL MEANING					
FOCALISATION	SOCIAL DISTANCE	PROXIMITY	POWER	INVOLVEMENT	GRADUATION (Force: QUANTIFICATION)
Contact: invited gazing character turns eyes to face viewer mediated inferred (extreme affective reaction of depicted character)	medium	x	eye level	involved	extent (ideational item takes up large amount of available space - the dragon)
					intense activated; Warmth: warm (red, orange); Familiarity: Familiar

TEXTUAL MEANING		SALIENCE	
INFORMATION VALUE	FRAMING		
Left-Right Top-Bottom	Unbound: Contextualised (setting tiles depicted page)	The dragon has the highest salient level (moved towards the top, left, foregrounded, size, blue vs red and orange colours)	

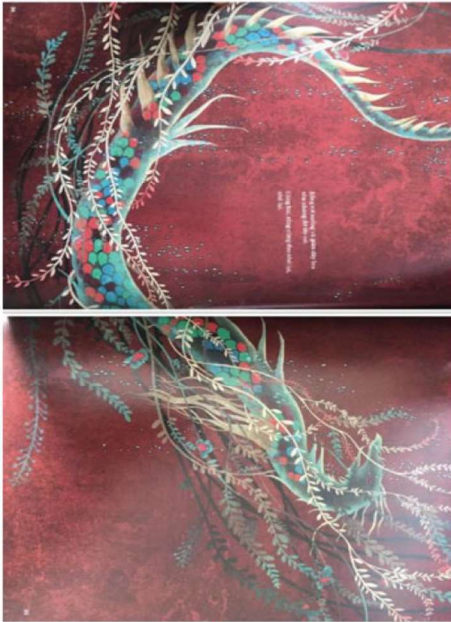
Figure 11. Analysis of Meta-functional Meaning in Spread 11th

Regarding *textual meaning*, the use of unbound framing in combination with the quantification choice of extent make the viewers feel the vast of the setting (nature scenes). Moreover, the power of the dragon is expressed in terms of its body shape, size, and the enormous amount of fire. Readers are also invited to share the feeling, emotions of the characters in the story world using unbound images across the analyzed spreads (Painter et al., 2013). For instance, the readers can have the frightened feeling when facing scene in which the giant dragon is spitting out fire everywhere. With respect to the salience, the depictions of the dragon in the 11th spread have the highest salient level. In this scene, the dragon has the largest size among other visual elements. Such a depiction highlights the power of the dragon and creates the feeling of frightening. In terms of information value, the dragon's body is placed in the foreground and depicted unusually big with the choice of left-right in combination with top-bottom. This makes the dragon's body reach both sides of the spread. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), visual elements on the left of an image carry old information and elements on the right present new information. In the 11th spread, the new information can be either the dragon (its first appearance within the story) and the fire spitted out from its mouth. However, the large stream of fire is placed on the very left of the spread instead of the right. This suggests that the viewers will be surprised with not only visual elements on the right, but also on the left, and even on the top due to such a special depiction of the dragon.

### **Meta-functional Meanings in Spread 16<sup>th</sup>**

#### ***Interpretations of Spread 16<sup>th</sup>***

With respect to *ideational meaning*, the 16th opening depicts a contrasting image of the dragon in comparison to its first appearance in the 11th spread. In its second depiction, with the choice of re-appear and varied descriptive details, the dragon is still shown in full body description, but with a smaller body size. The setting of the 16th spread is dark background and cool foreground.



The Mysterious Princesses (Spread 16th)

CHARACTER		IDEATIONAL MEANING		SETTING	
Character manifestation	Character appearance	Visual Action	Inter-event relations	Circumstances	Inter-circumstance
Complete	Re-appear: varied: attribution: descriptive detail (smaller size)	Non-transactional actions: sleeping, lying on clambering flowers	Unfolding: succession between sequences of two images depicts unexpected next action or state	Background: dark, foreground: cool with a blue dragon and flowers	Change context: Relocate Setting shifts to new location from previous image

INTERPERSONAL MEANING					
FOCALISATION	SOCIAL DISTANCE	PROXIMITY	POWER	INVOLVEMENT	GRADUATION (Force: QUANTIFICATION)
Observe	medium	x	eye-level	involved	extent (idealised item takes up large amount of available space - the dragon)
					Intense: activated: Warmth: warm (reddish brown background); Activated: warmth: Familiarity: Removed

TEXTUAL MEANING		
INFORMATION VALUE	FRAMING	SALIENCE
Left-Right	Unbound: Contextualised (setting files depicted page)	The dragon has the highest salient level (placed in the middle of the frame, stretches towards left and right, blue against reddish brown background: long and big)

Figure 12. Analysis of Meta-functional Meaning in Spread 16th

This suggests that there is no more fire as the depicted scene in the first appearance of the dragon (spread 11th). Moreover, the choice of non-transactional visual action (the dragon is lying on clambering flowers) makes the dragon become less active and frightening as shown in the previous spread. This is an unexpected event which is illustrated by the choice of unfolding and succession. Also, the choice of inter-event relation together with the choice of inter-circumstance of changing context (relocate) help the readers understand that there are changes in setting as well as the dragon behaviour.

For *interpersonal meaning*, in comparison to the 11th image, the 16th spread depicts a completely contrasting image of the giant dragon. The dragon in this opening is peacefully lying on a 'hammock' made of clambering flowers. The viewers can see one of the dragon's eyes which are closing and falling into sleep through the focalising choice of *observe*. This is contrasting the wide-opening eyes as presented in the 11th spread. The dragon in this image is again shown at an eye-level angle indicating an equal power between the depicted character and the viewers. The social distance choice of *medium* makes the viewers engage (involved) with the world story to understand the peaceful atmosphere in which the dragon is enjoying. The dragon in this scene is depicted with a smaller body size (in comparison to the 11th spread) with the choice of *extent* in quantification evoking the feeling of completely collapsed and relax. The background is dark, but it is covered in warm colours (reddish-brown). This creates a harmonious combination with the cool colours of the dragon's body and the flowers. All visual elements seem to create an ideal condition for the dragon to relax and fall into sleep just like a baby lying on a hammock.

In terms of *Textual meaning*, the viewers may feel secured and peaceful just like the dragon's feeling in the 16th spread. Such a feeling is created by the ways the dragon is depicted in this spread. In particular, the dragon's long and big body stretches towards left and right of the spread without outstanding colour (blue) against the dark background (reddish brown). This makes the dragon be received the most attention (the highest salient element) from the readers when facing this spread. For the choice of arranging visual elements, in the 16th spread, the new information appears on the right in which the upper part of the dragon (head, eyes) informs the readers that the animal is going to sleep.

## Meta-functional Meanings in Spread 19th

### Interpretations of Spread 19th



IDEATIONAL MEANING			
CHARACTER		ACTION	
Character manifestation	Character appearance	Visual Action	Inter-event relations
Complete	Re-appear, varied ; attribution; descriptive detail the (dragon turns into a princess)	Transactional action: the princess gazing out; kids looking and chasing others; Non-transactional action: dragon flying, kids crying, sitting angrily	Undoing: succession between Second of two images depicts unexpected next action or state
		Appear: First depictions of the children	Circumstances: Background: dark; Foreground: a princess gazing out; midground: kids crying and getting angry
			Inter-circumstance: Relocate: Setting shifts to new location from previous image

INTERPERSONAL MEANING					
FOCALISATION	SOCIAL DISTANCE	PROXIMITY	POWER	INVOLVEMENT	GRADUATION (force QUANTIFICATION)
The princess: Contact: gaze direct (frontal gaze); mediated: lateral The kids: Observe	Close ; 'The princess Far the kids	separate eye-level		involved (the princess) detached: the kids	upscaled/amplified and extent
					Intense, activated: cool with Warmth: warm (red, orange, blue, white); Familiarity: Familiar

TEXTUAL MEANING		
INFORMATION VALUE	FRAMING	SALIENCE
Left/Right	Unbound: Contextualised (setting: hills depicted page)	The princess has the most significant level of salience; occupies half of the spread; outstanding eyes, hair and horns on both sides of the head.

Figure 13. Analysis of Meta-functional Meaning in Spread 19th

Regarding *Ideational meaning*, in the 19th, the sixth princess together with the dragon are presented verso (the left) in the choice of *metonymic manifestation* with head, two horns and full face of the princess and half-body of the dragon flying out from her head. This suggests that the dragon has turned into a princess, and in fact they are two kinds of the princess' appearance (i.e. she can turn into a dragon breathing fire). This is the magical power of the sixth princess. In addition to the images of the princess and the dragon, there are 5 children presented on the recto. These young characters are getting angry, crying, and chasing each other. There are two types of visual actions used again in this spread namely transactional (the princess is gazing out at the viewers; one child is chasing another while another kid is kicking at the other) and non-transactional (the dragon is flying out of the princess' head; kids are crying, sitting in anger). Such a use of both transactional and non-transactional visual actions creates a feeling of messy just like that in the 11th spread. Two series of characters' actions are depicted in two opposite openings in the setting choice of dark background with the princess gazing out in anger in the foreground and the children are behaving badly in the middle ground. This indicates that there is a connection between the children's behaviours and the princess' negative emotion.

For *interpersonal meaning*, the 19th spread depicts actions and emotions of two separate groups of characters (i.e. a girl - the sixth princess) and the children. The princess is presented in the foreground with two wide-opening eyes revealing her anger and uncomfortable facial expression through to contact choice of gazing out to the readers. This choice is to request the viewers to establish "an imaginary relation" with the presented character (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 89). In other words, the viewers may understand and directly feel the princess' emotions. Such an interpretation is strengthened by the close shot (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The use of eye-level indicates the main character (the princess) and the viewers have the same level of power. There is still a blurred image of the dragon flying up from the princess' head. The dragon is again shown suggesting that the princess can transform into a powerful dragon and vice versa. On the recto (the right) of this spread, there are several children presented in various actions (i.e. crying, getting angry, and being naughty). The children's mood in this spread is very negative as we can see from facial expressions of the children and the princess. Moreover, the children are presented in an oblique angle with the social contact choice of *observe*. This means there is a wide distance between the young viewers and the children. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), when the character of an

image is depicted by a long shot, the character is understood as a stranger. In other words, the presented character does not belong the viewers' world. This suggests that young readers should not have similar behaviours of the depicted children in the scene.

With respect to *textual meaning*, the most prominent visual element in the 19th spread is not non-human, but human character (i.e. the princess). The depiction of the princess has the highest level of salience in this spread as it occupies almost half of the verso (the left). Her two widely opening eyes, which attract the viewers' attention the most, are gazing out to the viewers requesting them to establish contact. Other visual elements having a less significant level of salience are the depictions of the children presented in various actions on the recto (the right). For information value, in the 19th opening, the dragon transforms into a princess who is presented in the foreground on the left of the spread. With reference to the previous turning page, the princess is the old information (as she appears on the right in the previous turning page which is not analysed). This suggests that the viewers already get acquainted with the princess although this is the first time the princess' face is shown in full. The depictions of the children, which is placed on the right of the spread, indicate that their behaviours also need attention from the viewers.

### **IMPLICATION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we analyzed selected non-Western images in one children's picturebook about Vietnam based on a recent framework for interpreting picturebooks developed by Painter et al. (2013). Our analysis demonstrated that three types of meanings namely ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning can be explored via the application the framework proposed by Painter et al. (2013). Moreover, no point of contestation was identified through our analysis of selected images. As can be seen in the analysis, all analytical systems proposed by the framework of Painter et al. (2013) appear to work well with selected images. This is different from findings reported in other studies on other Vietnamese picturebooks (Huynh et al., 2018; 2019). This also suggests that further studies on the usefulness of Western framework in interpreting Vietnamese picturebooks should take more books into consideration.

Results of our study provide Vietnamese teachers with a reference to implement the use of picturebooks in teaching of intercultural generally and foreign language specifically. In particular, teachers can explicitly teach Vietnamese learners of English with metalanguage for

interpreting picturebooks. After that, students can use these terms to express their comprehension of visual elements/images illustrated in picturebooks. Teachers can also guide students to use the Western semiotic framework developed by Painter et al. (2013) for various activities such as making draws and writing their interpretations of the drawings, describing images illustrated in textbooks and so on. Such activities will help learners develop their use of English vocabulary and grammatical structures as well as learning to express their visual understanding. These activities can be organized in either writing or speaking lessons. Additionally, the Western framework for interpreting images can be integrated into the curriculum of pre-service English teacher education programme. This will help Vietnamese teachers English gain understanding of the ways Western images are presented and how to explore their meta-functional meanings in images. Such a knowledge in visual literacy will support Vietnamese teachers of English in their using of visual aids for teaching vocabulary, reading, listening, speaking and writing lessons.

However, the small number of selected images is one limitation of this paper. Therefore, future studies can take more images in various books to validate the usefulness of the framework used in this paper. Moreover, when applying the framework of Painter et al. (2013) to interpret selected images in this study, no culturally specific meanings were revealed. For instance, the images of dragon (spread 11th) and the hammock (spread 16th) are significant cultural images of Vietnamese cultures (Huynh et al., 2019; 2020), but the semiotic framework used in this study can't account for cultural meanings of these images. According to Serafini (2010), there should be more analytical frameworks to explore culturally specific meanings in picturebooks. Therefore, we recommend using an additional framework that cultural meanings of images can be revealed in addition to the current semiotic one. Future studies can consider developing or applying other frameworks to explore cultural meanings of images in Vietnamese picturebooks.

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