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A Social Semiotic Analysis of Selected Basic Pupils' English Textbooks in Awka

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ABSTRACT

This article examines a social semiotic analysis of selected basic pupils' English textbooks in Awka metropolis. Considering the fact that textbooks are necessary tools in the classroom for both teachers and students, it is pertinent to note that without the provision of required texts, teaching and learning of the English language in our schools will be handicapped. Texts in the textbooks for instruction in nearly all levels of education most often occur in combination with images or pictures, which, in essence, depict the multimodal nature of our basic pupils' English language textbooks. In examining how these multiple modes interplay and serve as unified modes, this study relies on the notions of social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Gee, 2012) and multimodality (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, 2020). This study explores how text and images interact as unified modes within these textbooks. Data, comprising sixteen figures, were collected from six primary school English textbooks. Through a qualitative content analysis approach, findings reveal the diverse meaning-making resources employed by textbook designers to present pupils with concrete and relatable concepts. Findings from the study show that textbook designers employ several meaning-making resources to present pupils with concrete and familiar concepts that they can easily relate to. Specifically, the analysis reveals how the integration of visual representations enhances comprehension and engagement among basic pupils, facilitating a deeper understanding of English language concepts. The study contributes to research on language teaching and pedagogy in its approach to applying visuals to teaching English. The study also serves as a resource for teachers and pupils of English. The finding of this study also adds to studies on social semiotics in its incorporation of meaning-making resources in the teaching and learning of the English language by basic pupils.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in human communication and expression. It is regarded as the most important means of conveying meaning (Rezeki & Sagala, 2021). Within the realm of education, particularly in primary schools, language, whether written, spoken, or visual,

serves as a cornerstone for developing children's thinking abilities through reading, writing, and speaking. In English textbooks, the fusion of images and texts serves to elucidate ideas for pupils. Consequently, textbooks stand as vital tools in primary education, necessitating alignment with children's cognitive development at specific ages.

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Textbooks not only aid language learning but also foster an understanding of the target culture, shaping social and cultural attitudes toward differences Ahmad (2014). Moreover, they serve as conduits for promoting cultural and global citizenship ideas, embodying cultural artifacts Gray (2000).

The integration of images with texts in English textbooks holds significance for enhancing pupils' performance and understanding. This underscores the importance of social semiotics in analyzing the use of images and texts in reading comprehension, a vital aspect of linguistics. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a social semiotic analysis of selected basic pupils' English textbooks in Awka, focusing on examining the semiotics embedded in these textbooks, their utilization, and their effects on pupils.

Despite the acknowledgment of the role of social semiotics in English language textbooks, there remains a gap in understanding how these semiotic resources are employed in specific contexts, such as basic pupils' English textbooks in Awka. Prior studies have explored the role of visuals and texts in language learning materials, yet there is a need for further investigation into the nuances of social semiotics within the context of basic education. Hence, this study seeks to address this gap by delving into the complementarity and interplay of visual-textual relations within selected English textbooks for basic pupils. The research objectives: To analyze the semiotic resources embedded in selected basic pupils' English textbooks in Awka. To examine how these semiotic resources are utilized within the selected English textbooks. To assess the effects of these semiotic resources on pupils' cognitive abilities in reading and writing exercises. By fulfilling these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on social semiotics in language education, particularly within the context of primary school English textbooks. Additionally, it aims to provide insights into how the integration of semiotic resources can enhance language learning outcomes for pupils.

In this study, we build upon these insights by conducting a social semiotic analysis of basic pupils' English textbooks in Awka metropolis, focusing on the interplay between semiotic resources such as colors, gestures, facial expressions, layouts, fonts, and written texts. Grounded in Halliday's (1978) notion of social semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's

multimodal perspective, our analysis seeks to unravel how these resources contribute to the cognitive development of pupils in reading and writing exercises. By exploring the ways in which these textbooks harness semiotic resources to convey meaning and engage young learners, we aim to shed light on the intricate dynamics of language pedagogy in primary education contexts.

This increase in the use of the term 'social semiotics' as a resource for making meaning has given birth to several studies where social semiotics now serve as a tool for linguistic analysis. Studies, therefore, show that social semiotics as a branch of semiotics has expanded in scope and now incorporates semiotic systems in social practice Hodge (1988). For example, Kadhim (2021), in their study on "A Semiotic Study of Selected Images of English for Iraq Textbook", observe that "English for Iraq" textbook relies heavily on the use of images to help the students better understand the requirements of the English curriculum. The study uses Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model of visual-social semiotics to examine how three types of meanings: representational, interpersonal and compositional are embedded in the selected texts to communicate with the students and show the values and principles of the topics of study.

Also, a study on text and image interplay in selected primary school English textbooks in Ekiti State by Ayoola, Bankole (2022) confirms the vital role of visual-verbal elements in primary school English textbooks. Using quantitative and qualitative in their analysis, the study employed Martinec and Salway (2005) system of image-text relations as a framework for analysis. Findings from the study show that inter-semiotic relations between visuals and verbal texts enhance language learning as the combinations of text-image interplay help to produce a visual-verbal narrative.

Makinde and Mgbodi (2022) also conducted a study on "A social semiotic discourse analysis of gender expressions in selected Nigerian newspapers". From a social semiotic lens, the study investigates how visuals and other semiotic resources, such as gender expressions, are employed in communication in the selected Nigerian newspapers. In their analysis, they adopt a qualitative research design. Also, the analysis was conducted by applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) visual semiotic drawn from Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to multimodal discourse analysis. Findings from the study show many complementarities between visuals and textual

elements used in the representation of data presented. The study concludes that texts and images, with different semiotic resources, have been employed in the process of meaning-making to project how gender expressions are explored in each of the analyzed data.

The current study provides an insight into a social semiotic analysis of selected basic pupils' English textbooks in Awka metropolis as we look at the complementarity as well as visual-textual relations existing in the semiotic resources such as colours, gestures, facial expressions, layouts, fonts and the written texts that are found in the visual images present in the selected English textbooks.

This study is theorised around social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Gee, 2012) and Kress and van Leeuwen's view of multimodality. In highlighting the role of social semiotics in language, Halliday (1978), in his *Language as Social Semiotic*, notes that languages develop as systems of "meaning potential" or as collections of tools that affect the speaker's ability to use language in a specific social setting. This points to the idea that social semiotics is a branch of semiotics that studies meaning-making as a social practice. Social semiotics studies the media of dissemination, and the modes of communication people use to develop their understanding of the world (Ballaynte, 2018). Citing Kress et al. (1987), Bezemer and Jewitt (2011) submit that social semiotics hold that the process of sign-making is subject to the interest of sign-makers, the availability of semiotic resources and the aptness of such resources to the meaning which they wish to realise. Different versions of social semiotics have emerged since Micheal Halliday's "Language as social semiotic", published in 1978. It is on this note that we apply Gee (2012) and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, 2020) notion of social semiotics in the analysis of our data on basic pupils' English language textbooks as we examine what resources are employed in these textbooks and how such resources enhance pupils' cognitive abilities in reading and writing exercises.

II. METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design. Data for this study, obtained through secondary sources, are sourced from Macmillan New Primary English Basic 2, 3 and 4, Evans Modular English Course for Basic 5 and 6, and Nigeria Primary English Pupils' Basic 5. The

qualitative approach allows for a deep exploration of the textual and visual elements within these textbooks. Data collection involves gathering both pictures/images and texts from the selected English textbooks, which are then subjected to thorough analysis. Data comprising pictures/images and texts sourced from the various English textbooks were collected for analysis.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data presented here are purely on the uses of social semiotics, how it is used in English textbooks and some implications it has on pupils. Using various research questions, the use of signs and symbols has been given attention to determine the extent to which their meanings are realised.

Meaning-making resources in basic pupils' English textbooks

According to Kress (2012), social semiotics involves examining visual and linguistic elements of texts, how they work to create meanings, and the resources used to organize our understanding of the world around us. These meaning-making resources, such as colour is conveys information and emotions, add visual appeal, images/pictures is enhance comprehension, provide visual context, signs is symbolic representations, aid communication, font size is emphasizes importance, mapping and text is spatial organization information and wrtiten content conveying messages, convey information or messages. Meaning-making resource is a powerful tool that can help pupils understand complex information quickly and effectively. The pictures below show how meaning-making resources are realised in basic pupils' English textbooks.

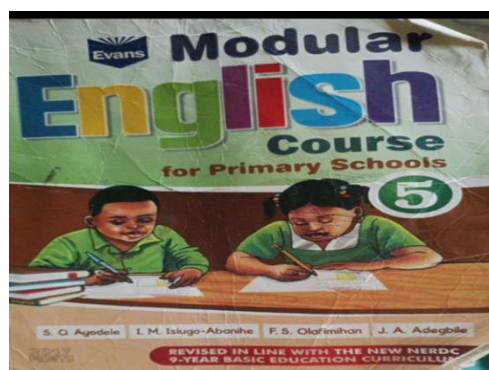


Fig. 4.1: Showing the learning process on the cover page of the Modular English textbook

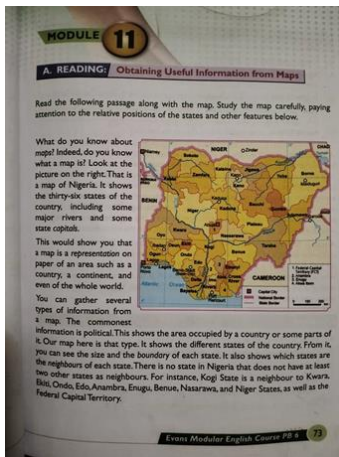


Fig. 4.2: Showing an image of the map of Nigeria

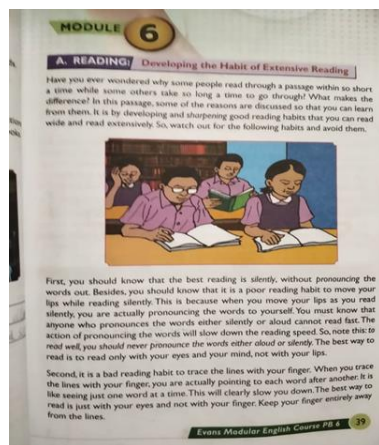


Fig 4.3: Showing a reading comprehension passage

Social semiotics, as proposed by Kress (2012), involves analyzing the virtual and linguistic elements present in texts to understand how they create meanings. These elements encompass various modes such as color, size, font size, mapping, logos, and images. In essence, social semiotics explores how different visual and textual elements within a text work together to convey messages and shape our understanding of the world around us. It provides a framework for examining the ways in which these elements interact to create meaning and communicate ideas to the audience. In the context of analyzing English textbooks for basic pupils, Kress's social semiotics helps us understand how various design elements contribute to the overall meaning conveyed by the text. For example, the use of display font and color on the textbook cover page not only enhances visual appeal but also serves to grab the reader's attention and convey the importance of the title.

In Figs. 4.1 to 4.3 above, various modes such as colour, size, font size, mapping, logo and images have been used to bring out meaning-making resources. In Fig. 4.1, the author uses a display font for the textbook's name, designed to grab the attention and mind of the reader. Another semiotic element found in Fig. 4.1 is the use of colour. The textbook's title is written using different colours, which brings out the beauty of the textbook. The cover page of the textbook depicts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) Top-Down reading direction, where the layout is segmented into three parts, resembling the framing seen in linguistic isoglosses. This segmentation creates a boundary (isogloss), with the title and company logo positioned at the top side of the frame, followed by visual representations of pupils engaged in activities, providing additional information about the textbook's content.

Furthermore, the Figure showed two represented participants. These are pictures of two pupils who are involved in some exercises in a classroom setting. The two pupils (a boy and a girl) are depicted as involved in a 'mental process' of gazing as they look directly at the book on which they are writing. Other participants are books, chairs and a table on which the pupils are writing. There is, therefore, a special kind of vector, a process that connects the human perception of an inner mental process that results in senser-phenomenon relations. Below the represented participants are the names of the authors of the text, which serves as a means of identification. This is followed by the text "Revised in line with the New NERDC 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum", indicating the author's compliance with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in designing the basic pupils' textbooks. Therefore, using semiotic materials such as framing, colours, font size, artistic designs of different texts, and top-down reading direction contributes to creating meanings for pupils' better understanding.

In Fig. 4.2, the compositional structure or pattern of the image is presented in the Left-Right reading direction so that the text is displayed before the image. In this case, it is the written text which serves as the point of departure, with the image illustrating it (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2020:18). In this way, it is the map which complements the text above; therefore, Fig displays "image subordinate to text". The map is presented using boundaries and locations, which is

a symbolic representation of different places. The names of the places mentioned serve as a means of locating where one is headed, giving pupils an idea of where these places are found. The various meaning-making resources employed here enhance pupils' cognitive ability, widen their knowledge of a particular thing, and help them think speedily. The complementarity nature of the two modes – text and image – helps to create meaning as pupils compare and relate the elements of the map to the text before it. This way, pupils can relate the two modes and obtain helpful information from the map in the reading passage.

Also, Fig. 4.3 depicts the text-image relation in its representation of Developing the Habit of Extensive Reading. The Figure employed a lot of affordances such as texts, images, colours and Top-Down reading composition as resources for meaning-making in the module. The reading passage, while showing the pupils the best way of reading, presents visual elements of pupils in a classroom setting. The represented participants are involved in the going on (activity) as depicted in their gazing directly at the books and their facial expressions of different kinds reflecting on what the passage view that “The best way to read is to read only with your eyes and your mind, not with your lips” (Evans Modular English Course PB 6, 39).

Meaning-making as resources for enhancing pupils' comprehension and understanding ability

Comprehension refers to the ability to process written text, understand its meaning and integrate it with what the reader already knows. It also involves the complex cognitive process which involves an intentional interaction between reader and text in order to extract meaning. In the figure below, several semiotic resources which contribute to the meaning potentials of the texts are found in basic pupils' English textbooks under discussion.



Fig 4.4: Images showing letters of the alphabet, animate and inanimate objects

In accounting for semiotic analysis, research has shown that a social semiotic approach must focus on resources available in the corpus, describing how they are used and located in a value system. In Figure 4.4 above, framing and other affordances serve as semiotic resources in the data presented. In image 1 of Figure 4.4 above, visual elements are displayed to test pupils' ability to relate objects with the letters of the alphabet. Using three modes (Letters of the alphabet, visual images representing these letters, and textual elements that contribute to the semantic import of the first two) as semiotic resources also helps to test the pupils' knowledge and cognitive ability. Animals are used in the image for identification and location. These meaning-making resources help the pupils spell words correctly and help them identify and locate. Here, letters of the alphabet are presented, and they are taught how to pronounce them and make correct sentences with these letters of the alphabet. Animals are displayed as means of identification and location in such a way that they would be able to recognize them and their various habitations if seen.

In the second image in Fig. 4.4, we are presented with an image-text relation where items are presented with what they are made of. Items like a book made of paper, a pot made of clay, and a bucket made of plastic enhance the pupils' understanding and recognition ability. The third image activates pupils' sensory channels (visual and verbal), which can be an effective way to reduce their cognitive load and achieve pedagogical purposes. Pupils are asked to pay attention to the different faces and what each face portrayed means. This exercise enhances their reading ability.

Image 4 of Fig. 4.4 is a cover page of Basic 2 Pupils' English textbook. The image is presented in a long shot, showing the entire class with the represented participants well depicted. The image presents such affordances as a classroom setting involving teacher-pupil interaction, visual images of teacher, pupils, blackboard, flower vase and the use of colour and textual elements of different font sizes. Such textual elements as 'English 2' written boldly at the top side of the textbook cover page, the 'English Language' and 'What is a Noun?' shown on the blackboard depicted the nature of the activity that is taking place. In the Primary 2 English textbook, the font size is written in bold for

a clearer view; the use of colour in the classroom setting with a teacher teaching them all contributes to the meaning-making resources employed for this textbook cover page.

In addition, image 5 shows two different modes; these are pictures of different kinds of animals and textual elements that complement the visuals and thus serve as ways of identifying and classifying them. The last image, in Fig 4.4, depicts how animate and inanimate objects are classified based on their sizes and shapes. Therefore, visual and textual elements are classified based on their sizes and shapes for pupils' identification. These affordances are resources for making meaning, aiding pupils' cognitive ability.

Complementarity in basic pupils' English textbooks

Complementarity is a relationship or situation in which two or more things improve or emphasize each other's qualities. Connecting textual messages and visuals may enhance pupils' reading comprehension skills and other reading activities. Therefore, textbook designers and language teachers are required by the unavoidable and significant inclusion of pictures in textbooks to utilize all available semiotic resources to enhance pupils' comprehension. The following figure presents how visual-textual complementarity in basic pupils' textbooks can enhance reading comprehension and understanding.

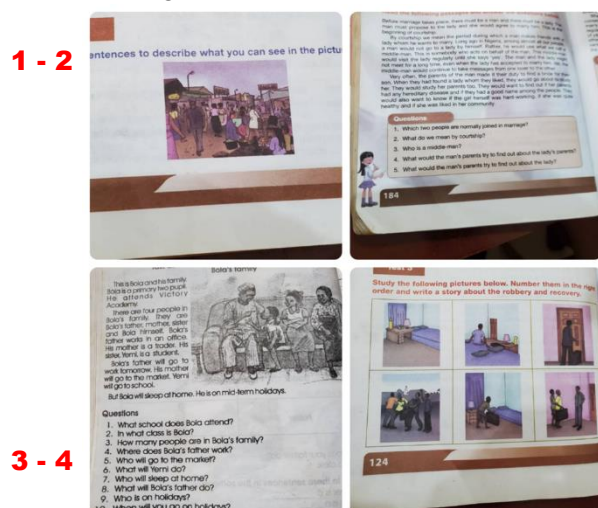


Figure 4.5: Showing complementarity in basic pupils' English textbooks

The objects in Figure 4.5 above are photographs of people engaged in various activities and diverse ways children can be taught. The first image in Fig 4.5 above presents a long shot depicting the entire market area scene, the various participants' activities, and the processes involved. The image presents a narrative process taking place in the market arena. The image showed affordances of different kinds ranging from animate and inanimate participants. As is typical with activities in marketplaces, represented participants are depicted facing different directions.

With the aid of framing, the visuals in this image are segmented into different frames. On the left-hand side are the visuals of three participants, a man and two women. They are depicted working in opposite directions, with one of the women carrying a tray of goods. On the right side, we have a visual representation of five women and some goods displayed at the market arena. One of the women is shown bending down to select some goods for purchasing, facing the two women who are selling, ready to attend to their customers. Besides these three are two other participants depicted as involved in a narrative process. A little distance from these two frames is another cluster of represented participants who have come to the market to buy or sell. With these visual representations, the pupils are required to describe the various activities depicted in the picture above.

The second image is a pure text consisting of a comprehension passage, which requires the pupils to elicit information from the passage to provide answers to questions asked in the reading exercise. In addition, there is a visual representation of a male participant strategically positioned at the down left-hand side of the frame. The represented participant is involved in a process as she gazes directly at the viewers. This gaze and the point of the finger towards the questions can be said to direct the pupils to the questions in the passage.

As Kress and van Leeuwen (2020: xiv) note, 'the visual' constantly interacts with one or more modes. Therefore, image, like all modes, does not occur in isolation; rather, it occurs and interacts with other modes to achieve meaning. In the third image in Fig. 4.5 above, visuals of a family – father, mother and two children – are depicted with textual elements in the reading passage. Following Kress and van Leeuwen's

(2020:5) view on the placement and position of each element in images, compositionally, the image presents a Left-Right reading direction with a text-image relation. In this way, the text, placed on the left, serves as the point of departure, with the image of the family on the right illustrating the element of the text; thus, the image complements the represented text. Questions that follow the passage are thus an essential part of the reading passage; the essence here is to ascertain if the pupils can relate to the meanings conveyed in the passage as they combine the two modes (images and text).

The last image presents visuals that depict a narrative process. The visuals presented here tell a story of robbery and recovery scenes. In this case, the pupils are required to study the pictures provided, number the pictures in chronological order and then provide an account of the robbery and recovery activities in the scenes provided. Such reading activity is part of the narrative process that the pupils are expected to account for as they combine their cognitive and reading abilities.

Cultural and global representations in basic pupils' English textbooks

Culture is regarded as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group. Also, culture is a set of patterns of behaviour that people exhibit within a community or social group as well as the symbolic frameworks that interpret these behaviors. Culture in other words is peoples' way of life, behaviours, beliefs and values. All of these elements are passed across with the use of language. The Figure below is an example of a typical culture practised in Nigeria.

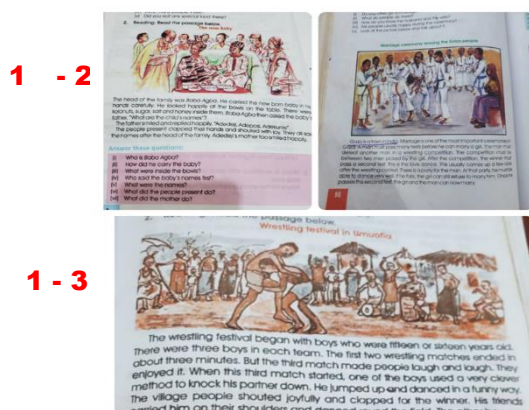


Fig. 4.6: Image portraying culture

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In the first image in Fig. 4.6 above, a type of culture, a naming ceremony, is portrayed. This is a typical Yoruba culture. This is seen through their mode of dressing, the name of the head of the family, their language, their way of carrying the newborn, and the items presented, like salt, kolanut, and honey; salt, as used here, signifies that the child's life will be full of flavour, happiness; also, kolanut is used here to repel evil in the child's life; similarly, the use of honey symbolises that the child's life would be sweet and the name of the newborn, all portray Yorubas culture of which naming ceremony is seen as an important culture among the Yorubas.

Image 2 depicts another aspect of culture. The visual depicts the way the Gaza people perform their traditional ceremonies. There is a clear difference between the Yoruba Culture and Gaza culture. The third image shows a wrestling festival in Umuofia, and this is typical Igbo culture, whereby two boys wrestle, and one of the boys uses a very clever method to knock his opponent down. These are aspects of culture whereby pupils are taught things about a particular culture, which gives them a piece of knowledge on diverse cultures and, at times. It makes it easier for them when they come across foreign cultures through language.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study has endeavored to elucidate the interplay of social semiotic analysis within primary school English textbooks in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, drawing upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) framework as the analytical basis. Through observation and interaction with pupils, it became evident that semiotic resources significantly enhance comprehension and understanding abilities. The integration of text and images was observed to improve pupils' cognitive skills, pronunciation, and spelling proficiency. One significant finding of this study is the undeniable relationship between text and image in primary school English textbooks. The symbiotic nature of this relationship, where images exemplify the written text while the text modifies the images, provides pupils with concrete and relatable concepts. Consequently, pupils' attention, interest, reading speed, and comprehension are heightened. Moreover, understanding the inter-semiotic relations between images and texts can inform the

design of more effective textbooks and aid educators in eliciting teaching content and enhancing learners' acquisition of multimodal literacy.

However, it's imperative to acknowledge certain limitations of this study, such as the specific context of Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, and potential sample biases. These constraints may affect the generalizability of the findings to other settings. Future research endeavors should consider expanding the scope of investigation to encompass a broader geographic and cultural context, as well as employing more diverse sampling strategies to enhance the study's validity.

In terms of practical implications, this research offers valuable insights for textbook designers and educators. By recognizing the importance of integrating text and images in educational materials and teaching practices, educators can create more engaging and effective learning experiences for pupils. Additionally, curriculum developers can utilize these findings to inform the design of future educational materials and instructional strategies, thereby enhancing the overall quality of primary school education.

Concluding, this study underscores the inseparable relationship between text and images in meaning-making within primary school English textbooks. By shedding light on the nuanced interactions between these modalities, this research contributes to our understanding of how different modes of communication facilitate language learning and comprehension. Moving forward, further exploration into the intricacies of social semiotic analysis in educational contexts holds promise for advancing pedagogical practices and improving learning outcomes.

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