

Semiotic of Layout Elements and Layout Principles on A Novel Cover

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the meaning of the signs that can be identified as layout elements and principles on the book cover, namely text element, visual element, invisible element, sequence principle, emphasis principle, balance principle and unity principle using semiotic. The data that is used in this research is the book cover of Magnus Chase and the Sword of Summer. The method that is used in this research is qualitative method since it does not have a statistical data. The result shows that the book cover has all those kinds of elements and principles mentioned above applied on it. The text elements that have been found are decks, title, subtitle and byline. There are two visual elements that is found on the cover is artworks. And the invisible elements that can be found are margin and grid. All four principles are found in the book cover are sequence, emphasis, balance and unity. The research shows that the layout elements and principles appeal the prospective readers by showing the meaning behind the layout elements and principles are what is the story about.

Keywords: semiotic, book cover, layout elements, layout principle

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1. Introduction

Novel has been an image of literature work for a long time. Even though literature works were not limited to novel, it is one of the most recognized as an amusement of those who enjoy reading as a hobby. Started in eighteenth century--when novel starting to become popular as a realistic prose fiction (Hasan, 2015), novels already become popular enough that they can be found anywhere with vast genres. Along with time the development of language also advanced. Since the early novels, kinds of novels also improved in term of quantity and quality. It no longer needed to be enjoyed by advanced literate people. Many novels can even be enjoyed by teenager or even younger which usually have lower interest in reading. Now, the fiction works does not need to be realistic anymore. In fact, fantasy novels are not less popular than the realistic ones.

One of the known fantasy novels today are novels written by Rick Riordan. Even though the target market of his novels started with teens and young adults, by now the young adults may have become adults already since his first book was released in 2005. Since then, other series that act as the continuation still ongoing until now. This shows that Riordan's books still popular. One series that act as a standalone series and the continuation of the first series is Magnus Chase series. The series' last book was released in 2017. The first book--titled Magnus Chase and the Sword of Summer--was released in 2015. To date, the first book has been translated into many languages.

This success is without a doubt because of the story align with the readers' interest. But is there another factor? For novels, when a person wants to have them, usually you must buy them. So, the factor that you might encounter when it comes to buying must be the front cover or the back cover. What is displayed in bookstore usually is the former. This front cover can be another factor that makes the buyer-to-be to be the buyer. So, the cover cannot be presented without any meaning. It needs to be interesting and can convey the message of what is the story about.

To do that, semiotic is needed to identify the meaning of the signs on the cover. Semiotic is known as the science that study about signs. But, such definition would, especially for whom are stranger to the literature or language study, makes one wonder what kind of signs that are studied? Is it the study of sign languages since it is about signs and language, or is it studying signs that we see on daily basis? Both are not wrong. But that could lead to a believe that this study talks about signs that have a visual nuance. That is not wrong. But it will be if they believe it consists of only visual signs. Signs in semiotic can be in various forms such as images, words, sounds, object and gestures (Chandler, 2007).

Then we will be faced with one question if we want to identify signs on the book cover: what should be treated as signs from the entire cover? This is where science of layout takes place. This study will show us the elements of layout and their actual functions. First of all, layout can be described as placing of design elements in a media to support its concept or meaning. And it is divided into text element, visual element and invisible element. All those layout elements have many kinds of element which names may be unfamiliar to us. Generally, every design graphics that function as media identities contain all or some of the layout elements. There are also layout principles. The four principles are: sequence, emphasis, balance, and unity. (Rustan, 2014).

The current study's objective is to identify the meaning of the signs that can be identified as layout elements and principles on the book cover. Specifically, the book cover of *Magnus Chase and the Sword of Summer* which written by Rick Riordan. This is important not only to know the meaning, but also identify the signs by knowing the functions of each elements and principles. For example, usually we identify an element, say word or illustration, without knowing its real function in the point of view of layout. By knowing the function, we can determine the meaning properly.

2. Methods

The source of the data that is used in this research is a book cover of *Magnus Chase and the sword of Summer* written by Rick Riordan. the data is chosen because its popularity and it has all three kinds of layout elements, namely text element, visual element, and invisible element, also four kinds of principles. The aim in this study is to find out how the book cover appeal the customers-to-be. To achieve it, the researcher will use qualitative method. Edi Subroto (1992) said that qualitative method is a method of assessment and there is no design for statistical procedures. Furthermore, he said that this method is descriptive with data in words, sentences, videos, pictures, and others. The researcher will use semiotic to understand the meaning. The signs will be selected by determining each element and principle and their functions as described by Rustan in his book *LAYOUT, Dasar & Penerapannya*. After that the meanings should be found out by considering its functions. The result will be described in order of text elements, visual elements and invisible elements from the top of cover to the bottom. The principles will come after that.

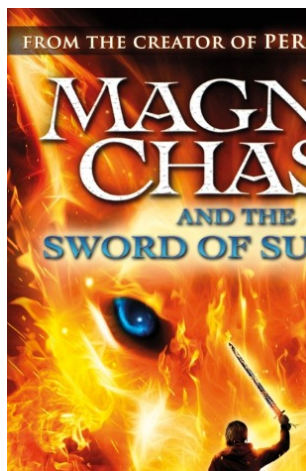


Figure 1, The Book Cover of *Magnus Chase and the Sword of Summer* (taken from www.penguin.co.uk).

3. Result and Discussion

Magnus Chase and the Sword of Summer was released in 2015. The book is written by Rick Riordan. It is categorized as a novel for young adult. In the Figure 1, we can see six text elements and two visual elements.

The text elements from top to bottom are: 'FROM THE CREATOR OF PERCY JACKSON', 'MAGNUS CHASE', 'AND THE SWORD OF SUMMER', 'RICK RIORDAN', 'EPIC HEROES' AND 'LEGENDARY ADVENTURES'. The visual elements are an artwork of fire shaping the face of a wolf or dog and a human holding a sword facing the fire wolf or dog. As said in previous chapter, the discussion would be done in accordance to it.

The text 'FROM THE CREATOR OF PERCY JACKSON' is called deck. Deck is a brief view of what is the body text--the story--is about. Normally, you would not find the text as a deck. But, in this case, as the creator of Percy Jackson, Rick Riordan is famous for having similar settings. This deck is made for those who have experienced Percy Jackson series. They would know what this novel is about. In other words, this sign is used to use the popularity of the previous works to make it for the people that have been enjoying Rick Riordan's work as the creator of Percy Jackson. The name Percy Jackson even sells enough for those who have enjoyed the movies. Even though some argued the movie is less interesting for those who have enjoyed the novels first, there are people who do not enjoy the novel first and enjoy the movie, they would know what novel is this about.

The next text is 'MAGNUS CHASE'. This text is called title. Title is a brief word or words that are put in the beginning of the text and it is usual to have it written in a bigger scale than the body text. The title in a novel is like the identity of the whole novel. It is not unusual to have it to tell the prospective readers of what the novel is about, which is the case for this novel. This sign, being the first novel of the series is very well known at the time it was published. But this is the identity of the novel. When it is known by many people, people will try to find the novel by its name. That is why this sign is made bigger than most of the text in the cover. It used a white color too which makes it more stand out by making it contrast with the background.

'AND THE SWORD OF SUMMER' is the text that is being called subtitle. Subtitle may refer to the title of each chapter in the novel. But, in this case, the subtitle works as the complementary of the title above it. It is used to differentiate the novel with similar title in the future as this is the first book. It is a complementary identity, that is why even though it is placed just below the title which attract most attention, this sign does not have the same color. Instead it used blue color which less stand out and blend better with the back ground than the white color.

'RICK RIORDAN' is the text that come next as a byline. Byline is a text element that works as the text that consist of author's name. Even though this name is put on the most bottom part of the cover, it has the biggest scale out of all the text elements. This is done because this is actually most selling text in the cover. The name is no stranger especially for those who have read his previous works.

The next text is 'EPIC HEROES'. This also a deck text element. Different than the previous deck, it actually shows for those of both the ones who have enjoyed the previous series and the ones who are new to Riordan's work. From the text we know this sign tells the prospective reader what this novel is about.

The last but not the least text element in the cover is also a deck. The text is 'LEGENDARY ADVENTURES' which also explains to the prospective buyers what this novel is about. The last two decks are placed between the text 'RICK' and 'RIORDAN' not only for aesthetical purpose, but also indicate that the author's works is about epic heroes and legendary adventures.

After the text elements, we would discuss about the result we find in the visual elements. There are two artworks used in the cover for the visual elements. The first one is a big flame shaped into the head or face of a wolf or a dog. It can be seen as big by comparing it to the size of the other artwork that pictured human. The first picture used an artwork instead of real photo because it is hard--if not impossible to have a photo where a wolf or a dog is in fire and calmly facing the camera. This is why the artwork is used instead of photo, to show that this work is the work of a fiction. Then, why should the wolf be in a big fire? A big fire is usually not a good thing, it can be considered as an enemy. It may portraits the bad. It is especially the case when pictured with the second artwork.

The second artwork is pictured as a human holding a sword and while the back facing the reader and face to face with the burning wolf or dog. The sword most likely is the sword of summer as implied by the subtitle text element. The artwork means that the story likely to be about the human who was holding a sword and facing the enemy in shape of wolf or dog. It means the artworks are the ones that work as the signs to explain what the story is about the most.

Now we would talk about the element that is invisible to the eyes: invisible element. The first invisible element is the margin. Margin is used to decide the space between the media and the layout elements that will fill the media. In this book cover, the margin is the edge of the book cover itself. It is done because it will look awkward to have space on the edge as the cover of a novel.

The second invisible element is the grid. Grid ease the placing of other layout elements in the media. If we look carefully, this sign made both the text elements and visual elements to be in the center, it balances both the right side and the left side. This balance will be discussed in the layout principles.

When we talk about layout principles, each media would have four principles applied on them, they are

sequence, emphasis, balance and unity. Sequence is the order of attention. The sequence that is used is 'Sequence I'. This sequence makes the people read from top to the bottom. Even though the most selling points of the book is in the byline in the bottom of the cover, we know that when we look closer, we will undoubtedly look from the top to the bottom. This sign means the order manner in the cover to represent the story in a good order manner.

The next is the emphasis principle. Emphasis means giving emphasis. we already know that the word 'MAGNUS CHASE' will be read first because it is on the top of the cover and since it will be read first on the closer look, the subtitle will be read next. And then, the text 'RICK RIORDAN', then the artwork, the rest can be read from the top to the bottom. The text is having the most emphasis since it is put in front of the artworks and have a brighter color. This sign shows the most selling points lies in the words instead of the artworks.

The next principle is balance. The balance that is used is mirroring, symmetrical type. This sign shows the modernity, friendliness, and youthful suited for the characteristic of the story. It means to imply that this novel is a solid, trustworthy and experienced.

The next principle is unity. For the unity, we can see the message more clearly if we know what we might expect. Looking back at the previous works, this story will be about the myth that still lives on in this modern age. We can see that the letters use a serif style. According to Rustan (2014) in his book titled *Font & Tipografi*, serif is additional hook-like-form. This form is used first time in Roman time. The opposite of serif is sans serif, which lack the hook-like-form on letters about 18's century. That means we know that serif style, though still used until now, is come from medieval time which matched with the story where myth is popular in medieval time.

4. Conclusion

By applying semiotic approach on the layout elements and layout principles, the research shows how the book cover appeals to the prospective readers. The text elements of the book cover are 'FROM THE CREATOR OF PERCY JACKSON', 'MAGNUS CHASE', 'AND THE SWORD OF SUMMER', 'RICK RIORDAN', 'EPIC HEROES' AND 'LEGENDARY ADVENTURES'. Respectively, the text elements stand for deck text element, title text element, subtitle text element, byline text element, deck text element and deck text element. There are also visual elements on the book cover, they are an artwork of wolf or dog in fire and an artwork of human holding a sword. The invisible elements that is used is the cover of the novel are margin and grid. The cover also has four principles applied on it, they are sequence, emphasis, balance and unity. All elements and principles of layout appeal the prospective readers by 'speaking' what the novels is about.

However, this research is only analyzed one book cover of the series which until now consist of three books. In the future, next researches may compare between the first book and the other books.

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