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USING POPULAR CULTURE'S MEDIA OF INDONESIAN - ENGLISH PICTUREBOOKS AS A WAY OF REACHING MORE VEGETABLE CONSUMING CHILDREN¹

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Abstract: A questionnaire and interview recently given to 5-8 year old children and their parents show that consumption of vegetables is low. One of the factors for the low consumption is due to the lack of creativity in making various menu and creative media to obtain children's interest in wanting to consume vegetables. In Indonesia, if young children can be taught to actively use the English language, it will be a great advantage for their future's education. Based on these backgrounds, through the various media available in today's popular culture, picturebooks that can increase children's ability to read English language texts in addition to consume vegetables is created. A picturebook project is regarded highly relevant for teachers who specialize in English language, visual communicative design and food technology. This article shares how with a bilingual picturebook, a reader will know how to pronounce the English language well because there is a

¹ This article is based on a presentation entitled "Teaching Children English through Bilingual Picturebooks: A Popular Culture And Visual Language Case Study" that was delivered at the 4th Celt International Conference: English in the Professional World, 12-13 March 2014, held by the English Department, Faculty of Letters, at the Theatre Room, Thomas Aquinas Building, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, Indonesia. It is written to actualize the *Ipteks bagi Masyarakat* funding received from the Ministry of Higher Education in Indonesia. Note: the name of Faculty of Letters has recently changed into the Faculty of Language and Arts.

phonetic transcription guide provided at the back of the book. Also at the back of the book is a menu for the vegetable that becomes the main character of the book. With this strategy, the book is projected to be popular to readers who want to also create attractive vegetable menus for children. The picturebook that is packed with simple yet interesting visual language is also a way to show how creative one can be in designing lovable vegetable characters. This article discusses the reasonings of creating the picture book.

Key words: popular culture, vegetables, children, bilingual picturebook, visual language

***Abstract:** Kuesioner dan wawanwara pada beberapa waktu diberikan kepada siswa berumur antara umur 5-8 tahun dan kepada beberapa orang tua menyatakan bahwa konsumsi sayuran dalam keluarga cukup rendah. Salah satu penyebabnya mungkin adalah kreatifitas yang tidak cukup bervariasi melalui macam menu untuk mendapatkan perhatian siswa dalam rangka mengkonsumsi sayur. Di Indonesia, jika anak-anak dapat diajari untuk memakai bahasa Inggris secara aktif, hal itu akan menjadi keuntungan yang besar ke pendidikannya kelak. Berdasarkan latar belakang ini, maka melalui macam media dalam budaya populer saat ini, buku cerita bergambar yang dapat meningkatkan kemampuan anak untuk membaca bacaan dalam bahasa Inggris selain mengkonsumsi sayur akhirnya disengaja untuk diciptakan. Proyek pembuatan buku cerita bergambar ini sangat cocok bagi guru-guru yang mempunyai keahlian dalam bahasa Inggris, Desain Komunikasi Visual dan Teknologi Pangan. Tulisan artikel ini bermaksud untuk mengsosialisasikan bagaimana melalui buku bilingual para pembaca akan dapat mengucapkan beberapa kosa kata bahasa Inggris dengan benar karena di belakang buku ada pedoman fonetiknya. Di belakang buku juga ada menu makanan sayur yang menjadi karakter utama buku. Dengan strategi ini, buku ini dapat diproyeksikan untuk menjadi populer bagi para pembaca yang juga mau membuat masakan yang menarik bagi anak-anak. Buku cerita bergambar ini yang dipenuhi oleh hal yang mudah dan simple tapi menarik untuk dibaca adalah cara untuk menunjukkan bahwa seseorang dapat menjadi kreatif dalam menciptakan karakter-karakter sayur yang menggemaskan. Artikel ini memberikan penjelasan tentang terciptanya buku cerita bergambar itu.*

***Kata kunci:** budaya populer, sayuran, anak-anak, dwi bahasa, cerita bergambar, bahasa visual*

LOW VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION AND ITS EFFECTS IN CHILDREN

It is often the case that when asking children what they prefer to consume for their meal, a more likeable answer is to have fried chicken or have some kind of noodle dish. Rarely would the answer of the children be a preference to have stir-fried vegetables or green salad. When consuming a hamburger from a McDonald's restaurant or fried noodles at a nearby Chinese restaurant, children tend to take out the vegetables from these meals. When asked why, some would answer that the vegetable smells or too difficult to swallow or just simply not tasty enough.

An interview given to 30 children studying at Don Bosco Pangudi Luhur Kindergarten and first and second grade of elementary school that are between the ages of 5-8 and also a questionnaire given out to their parents show that 80% of children dislike vegetables. There are 13.33% of the elementary school and 46.66% of the kindergarten children who do not like vegetables. Their reasons are similar to the above phenomenon. It is interesting that 30% of the children's parents are themselves not a vegetable lover. These parents also often have no idea how to make creative vegetable menu for their children. The easy access to junk food or fast food which is made popular through the advertisements seen on television or billboards may have influenced these children and parents even further away from eating healthy vegetables in their meals. It is, nevertheless, quite shocking to find that according to Bararah (2010), 50% of young children do not enjoy eating vegetables. In addition, according to Dennison, Rockwell & Baker (1998) preschool-aged children only consume 25% of recommended vegetable servings a day.

Children of two years old and over should eat "more fruits, vegetables, and grain products" (Dennison, Rockwell, & Baker, 1998, p. 372). Because of this, it is recommended that the fruits and vegetables are made into fruit or/and vegetable juice, so it will be easier for children to swallow. If not consumed numerous times a day, however, only little dietary fiber gets into the body. Low consumption in vegetables will directly give an advantage to children who during their adult stage will have a low body endurance and vulnerability towards deceases (Hidayati, p. 7). Girls are especially affected by it because they are potential to mother and baby deaths (Hidayati, p. 3). The promotion of consuming high fiber like found in vegetables should, therefore, be made. One way is to promote it through a popular culture media.

A popular culture, according to Danesi (2008, p. 2) not only include the beliefs and rituals of a society but also the lifestyle pattern of that society, which in this case includes the eating habit of the people living in that culture. As informed above, the lifestyle of eating fast food or junk food is also a popular culture shaped by the many advertisements shown on television as a way to answer the people's minimum time for cooking a healthy meal at home. In the interview with some of the children at Don Bosco elementary school, it was also found that some of their parents are busy workers. These kinds of parents do not even have time to take them and pick them up from school. With regards to the daily meal, these children say they do not often see either of their parents cook and what is usually consumed at home are fast food meals.

In Indonesia especially, there are relatively good television shows that can remedy the low consumption of vegetables. For the mothers, Farah Quinn's *Ala Chef*, which is aired at Asian Food Channel TV station and also RCTI's *Master Chef* cooking competition can be an input to how creative one can be in cooking healthy vegetable meals. The recent *Master Chef Junior* program whose judges are from the *Master Chef* cooking competition should have also encouraged the children themselves that they can be the creative one in the kitchen. If parents and children prefer to go out for their meals in the weekends, they can also have input from Bondan Winarno's *Wisata Kuliner* aired at Trans TV as a popular culture program that may give suggestions for places where a healthy vegetable menu is available. Although positioned at a *primetime* schedule (Irawadi, 2012), it seems it is still not enough to attract children and parents to love consuming vegetables. Based on this background, therefore, the writers decide to popularize vegetable consumption through an 'I Love Vegetable' picturebook series.

'I LOVE VEGETABLE' BILINGUAL PICTUREBOOKS AS A MEDIA FOR VEGETABLE AND VISUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

According to Hsiu-Chih (2008, p. 51) a good picturebook should not only give an overall comprehension of the story, but also stimulate the readers' imagination. If these functions are reached, children usually have some satisfaction in reading a story. Citing Owen and Nowel, Faizah (2009, p. 252) gives further understanding that picturebooks are good media for children because they are usually brief and straightforward. They also contain a limited number of concepts, so that it is easy to be comprehended by

children. The writing style is also direct and simple with attractive illustrations that complement the text. Because a picturebook usually contains lots of pictures with simple words, it is important to make the visual illustrations meaningful. Faizah (2009, p. 253) informs that that visual illustrations help increase children's memory by 14 to 38%. It is consequently understood that a memorable character should be created, so children will want to refer to their picturebooks not once but for a number of times. Pictures as visual language help speeds a story line because there is usually about 40% decrease in time when using visual language.

Faizah continues to explain that children usually love picturebooks because of a number of other reasons (2009, p. 254). A picturebook can make children learn more about their society based on a character from the book. The character may also help children have a let out of their own problems because they can see how the characters deal with a problem similar to their own. The pictures can help children who are not proficient enough in reading feel the enjoyment of reading books. As a consequence, a picturebook can encourage the habit of reading. Thus, it is clear that picturebooks are the right media for children to learn positively about something.

With lots of pictures and minimal words in a picturebook, it becomes a way to easily memorize the wordings used in the story. For this reason, picturebooks is a satisfactory media also for vocabulary learning, too. With the recent trend of not all Indonesian elementary schools providing English language lessons, a bilingual, Indonesian-English picturebook may be the answer to those who are eager to learn English in a fun and simple way.

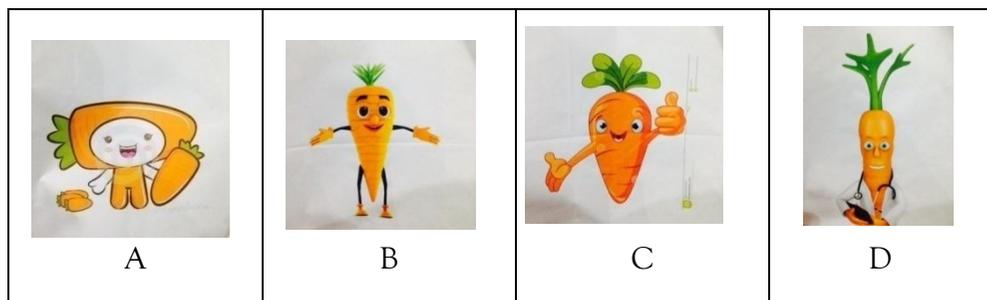
THE CREATION OF VEGETABLE PICTUREBOOKS

Children love to read books that have more visuals rather than verbal texts in capturing information (McNeal & Ji, 2003). Henceforth, as suggested by its name, picturebook, it must contain more pictures than words. In the 'I Love Vegetable' picturebook series, the writers followed the suggestions above that the main character of the book must be made appealing and memorable. In addition to the visualization that must be there in a picturebook, the size and number of pages is also important to provide interest to children as readers of the book. Because of this, before creating the book a small research was done to decide about the book type,

illustration, drawing style and typography preference, in addition to the books' practically.

Using a purposive sampling of a 3-6 year-old children who are from middle to high class families in Semarang area, four different books were given for the children to comment and give insights to the researchers as writers of this article. The books are a 12 page picturebook with sponge media entitled *Sayang Binatang, Anjingku* (Loving Animals, My Dog), then a fancy paper and thick 308 page book, entitled *Dongeng Mini: Cerita Binatang* (Mini Tales: Animal Stories). The other book is a fancy paper and 24 page book, entitled *Seri Mengenal Profesi: "Guru"* (Knowing Professions Series: "Teacher"), as well as a 32 page bilingual picturebook with a popular cartoon character entitled *Step Into Reading 2: Barbie, I can be A Baby Doctor*. Using a video camera recorder, we observed how the children try to read and interact with the books. We also asked their comments about the practicality of the books, the weight, types of paper used and the size of the typeface that makes them easy to read. We also asked the children's preference in the kind of characters they would like to see in picturebooks. The following four different types of illustration of a carrot character were used as media (see figure 1).

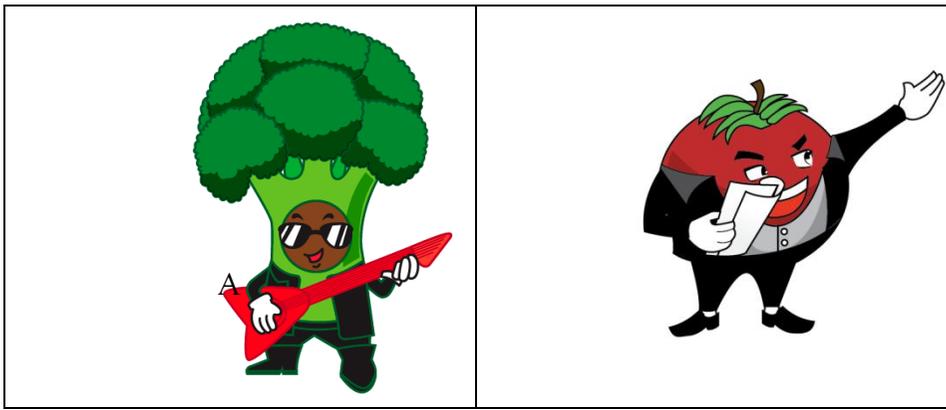
Figure 1:
Four different types of carrot character used in the research



The research found that two out of six children prefer to have a feminine character such as A and a masculine character such as in B, so we decided to do two types of visual approach for the character being used in the picturebook. The first one is to draw a character of a person-like figure wearing a vegetable costume. Second, we use a personification and provide an anthropomorphic feature to a vegetable. Using a predetermined storyline, the character is incorporated into the picturebook to help convey the

message as discussed earlier. Figure 2 is a sample of the vegetable characters for A: Rocco the Broccoli Rocker and B: Tommy the Tomato Actor. Since children love to attractive pictures, the writers decide to cover the book with bright

Figure 2:
A is a person-like figure wearing a broccoli costume;
B is a tomato character with an anthropomorphic feature.



colors that are filled with images. Children also do not like lengthy pages, so we limit our pages into only about 18 pages which excluded the menu and phonetic transcription page. The typeface of Sans Serif is chosen since it is easier to read by beginning readers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3:
Sample page from Rocco the Broccoli Rocker



Given that we also want to increase the popularity of the books by showing some Indonesian feature to the vegetable character, in comparison to the broccoli and tomato character above, the other picturebooks give some visualization on Indonesian images. See a sample of the preview in one of Rocco the Broccoli Rocker's picturebook (figure 3) and covers of the book series (figure 4).

Figure 4:
Covers of the 'I Love Vegetable' picturebook series



THE ADVANTAGE OF INDONESIAN - ENGLISH VEGETABLE PICTUREBOOKS

Devising picturebooks as a creative media to increase children's consumption in vegetables as well as learn a foreign language such as English is not as simple as it seems. In order that it reaches its targeted market segment, a small research had to be done so the creation of the characters, typeface and size of the book is appropriate. A picturebook is not only a media to entertain the children but more importantly it gives advantages not only to the children as well as parents as readers of the book, but also to professionals like us who specialize in the English, Visual Communication Design, and Food Technology field of teaching.

The picturebooks that we created is believed to actualize the intention of making children to love consuming vegetables. This is due to the finding that most children do not like vegetables because most TV channels would show more on junk food advertisements, which are packaged attractively for children to enjoy; rather than on TV cooking shows that would show how to cook healthy vegetables for children's nourishment. This is a shame since

vegetables are a high source of fiber and nutrients that can increase the quality of the human resource. Therefore, with a picturebook on vegetable characters, it is hoped that children would be attracted to consume more vegetables.

To achieve popularity, the strategy that we made was also to have cute memorable names for our characters, i.e. Rocco the Broccoli Rocker, Tommy the Tomato Actor, Kartini the Carrot Dancer, Poki the Pak-choy Chef and Spibam the Super Spinach. In addition to the names, the back part of the books is also provided with special menus of the vegetables in mind. We also tried to increase the vegetable consumption by giving a cooking demonstration of the menu contained in the book series, in addition to giving a talk in schools about the importance of it through a community service activity. With these strategies, we hope that children will quickly relate to actual vegetables with the picturebook series' characters, and thereby will love to consume the vegetables.

The second advantage of the picturebook is that it can become an effective visual language media for children to read the Indonesian language fluently and at the same time learn to read the English language translation in a fun, yet professional manner. In order that children, in addition to parents who will help read the picturebooks, know how to read the English words and phrases correctly the end part of each book is provided with a list of some of the words and phrases' phonetic transcriptions. In the story of Tommy the Tomato Actor some of the phonetic transcriptions provided in Table 1 can be seen as follows:

Table 1:
Phonetic transcriptions sample

Howdy =	[haʊdi:]	Yellow =	[jeləʊ]
I'm =	[aɪm]	You =	[ju:]
I'm Tommy =	[aɪm tɒmi:]	My friends =	[maɪ frendz]
I'm so popular =	[aɪm səʊ pɒpjʊlə]	Talented actor =	[tæləntɪd æktə]

Since the picturebook is bilingual, the third advantage is not only for Indonesian children to quickly learn English vocabularies but it can also benefit foreign children who want to learn the Indonesian vocabularies

creatively. This is why in the other three vegetable picturebooks, some Indonesian images and storylines are consciously created for foreigners to learn something about the Indonesian (Javanese) culture. Below are some sample pages of the vegetable picturebook series:

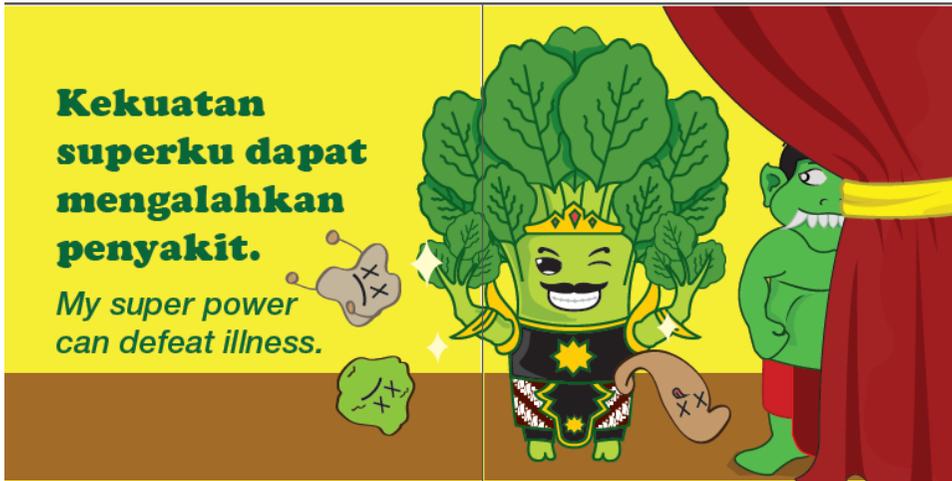
Figure 5:
Kartini the carrot dancer is shown wearing the
Javanese Golek dance costume



Figure 6:
Poki the pak-choy chef is shown with an Indonesian
Bakso (meat ball soup) seller



Figure 6:
Spibam the super spinach is wearing an Indonesian costume from the
superpower shadow puppet character, Gatutkaca with a big star in the
middle



Not only will foreigners relate the picturebook with Indonesian culture, but to Indonesian readers, the illustrations can help readers remember the vegetable characters with the vitamins or nutrients found in them.

Last but not least, English language, Visual Communication Design, and Food Technology teachers can also enjoy a fourth advantage, i.e. providing an additional income if teachers can create picturebooks like discussed in this article. Not only can teachers get credit for being good English language teachers since they can show their students how to read and pronounce English words, phrases, or sentences well through a picturebook as media, but they can also receive credit as creative visual language story book writers. Just like us perhaps other teachers can also have the opportunity to be published by a well known publisher like PT Gramedia. All in all, there is more to just teaching if teachers would care to make opportunities for the advantages of teaching children to love vegetables through a bilingual vegetable picturebook such as discussed in this article.

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