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**Analysing the Front Cover Pages of the Books of the Collection *Go for English*: A Cognitive Constructivist Approach**

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**Abstract**

This paper deals with an analysis of the front cover pages of the books of the collection *Go For English* (henceforth *GFE*). The theories used to achieve the goal are semiotics, the cognitive constructivist theory theories that make the learner an independent and active participant in the teaching/learning process. In addition, since the analysis includes the description and interpretation of signs (pictures, images, painting and colour...), defined as the science that studies signs, is associated to the study. The methodology used consists in presenting the cover pages of the documents selected for this study from which a qualitative analysis is made. The interpretation concludes that the books of this collection prove a rich experience for the experimentation of the Competencies-Based Approach (CBA) which aims at making learners autonomous and decision takers.

**Key words:** *Go For English*, constructivism, semiotics, signs, signified, signifier, Competencies-Based Approach.

**Introduction**

The books of the collection *Go For English* (henceforth *GFE*) has appeared in schools in West Africa at the beginning of 90s. One of the objectives assigned to this collection is to "combine the best features of traditional methodology with imaginative new techniques of language learning to develop students' communicative skills" (*GFE T<sup>le</sup>*, the introductory words). It then appears clear that these books

of the collection have been conceived to end up with the traditional methods of teaching which some centuries back were bookish and rigid. This also implies that the authors have understood that a language is learned for communication purposes.

The books of the collection *GFE* happily stand as a way out for a motivating practice of the English language. The topics developed therein have something to do with the learners' social environment and future lives. Since the introduction of these teaching materials in West African schools, little attention has been paid to the front cover pages by researchers. The fact is that textbook covers are overlooked in educational research though they constitute gateways to the learning experience. This paper then aims at exploring the front cover pages of the books of this collection. The incentive to write this article came from a question asked to us by one of our upper sixth students who wanted to know the meaning of the picture on the front cover page of *GFE T<sup>le</sup>*. The relevance of this question enlightened our curiosity and ended up extending the research to the three books of the collection *GFE* from *GFE 2<sup>nd</sup>* to *GFE T<sup>le</sup>*. We then based our hypothesis on the fact that, like this student, many EFL teachers are unaware of the message behind the pictures and the colour choice of the cover pages. Owing to the preceding, our objective in undertaking this study is threefold. On the first hand, this study aims at offering EFL teachers a broad view of the messages hidden behind these pictures and colours at the front cover pages of these colourful printed documents. On the other hand, it intends to equip each teacher with interpretative elements they require to achieve the objectives of the authors who have designed these materials to ease the teaching/learning/evaluation processes in EFL classes. Actually, the objective of these documents is to make learners proficient and communicatively autonomous and independent in their practice of the English language after studying these books for three years out of the seven they have in the secondary school. This fact may be weakened by the fact that the learner evolves in a multilingual and multidisciplinary environment. Finally, the study intends to identify if these documents align with the philosophy propounded by the Competencies-Based Approach (CBA).

To achieve our purpose, the question raised to know which theory is most appropriate for this study. A documentary perusal through the net and personal libraries allows us to sort out (cognitive) constructivism backed by semiotics/semiology as the theoretical backgrounds for this study. This has brought to ally language learning theories with linguistic interpretation of images. But a point is worth making. The study of the colours is not done ex nihilo. It is contextualised and seeks to understand why different cover colours page are used depending on the class/form. It will then be noticed that the interpretation of the colours pages is context-dependent.

## **I- Theoretical Framework**

As said in my introductory words, this paper draws its theoretical foundations from cognitive and social constructivism associated with semiotics/semiology.

### **1.1- Cognitive and Social Constructivisms**

Teaching and learning English in Africa and especially in Benin is a complex process since the English teaching/learning environment does not escape learners' linguistic realities. It is then a fact that education policy designers must seek for theories and approaches that best suit a second language learning.

One of these approaches is cognitive constructivism. According to Chand (2023:275) "The psychological theory of constructivism originates from the rapidly expanding field of cognitive science, primarily from the constructivist perspectives of Jean Piaget, the socio-historical work of Lev Vygotsky and the constructivist account of discovery learning by Jerome Bruner". The fundamental premise of Piaget's theory is that a child's cognitive development progresses through distinct stages until it resembles that of an adult. These stages include: the sensorimotor stage (from 0 to 2 years old), the

preoperational stage (from 2 to 7 years old), the concrete-operational stage (from 7 to 12 years old) and the stage of formal operation (from 12 to adult years). While Piaget's theory emphasises an individualistic learning, Vygotsky argues that "successful cognitive and intellectual development is dependent on social interaction". In other words, knowledge is generated in a social context before it is being used by individuals. As quoted by Katherine and Kalina (2009:243) "All of Vygotsky's research and theories are collectively involved in social constructivism and language development such as cognitive dialogue, the zone of proximal development, social interaction, culture and inner speech". It appears explicitly that social constructivism places emphasis on the social and cultural context in the development of individual learning. This is what differs Piaget's constructivism from Vygotsky's. Chand (2023:276) defines the zone of proximal development as "the realm of potential learning that each learner could reach within a given developmental span under optimal circumstances and with the best possible support from the teacher and environment". In other words, this lexical terminology unveils the guidance and support a learner benefits from a more reliable source or an expert or more knowledgeable person, in short from the teacher in situational learning process. It also implies that successful learning is dependent on social interactions between the learner and other members of the society. This is why Vygotsky (1978:57) asserts that ".....every function in the child's cultural environment appears twice: first on the social level, and, later, on the individual level".

Like Vygotsky, Bruner thinks that "learning is an active, social process in which the learner generates new ideas and concepts based on prior knowledge" (Chand, 2023, p. 276). From this assertion, it can be understood that learning is learner-centred and views learning as learners-based activities whereby they actively engaged in the process of learning by linking new ideas with their existing knowledge. Nino (2023:228) stated that constructivism theory of learning arose "an opportunity to replace an authoritarian classroom, controlled, content-based and individualistic learning with an active, autonomous, skills-based, collaborative, and knowledge-building paradigm of learning". It lays emphasis on learners' active role in constructing knowledge through interaction with their environment. Piaget rejected the idea that learning was the passive assimilation of given knowledge. Instead, he suggested that "learning is a dynamic process comprising successive stages of adaptation to reality during which learners actively construct knowledge and testing their own theories of the world" (1968, p.8). In other words, constructivism is a meaning-making theory whereby learners create new knowledge basing themselves on the existing. This is why Chand (2023:274) explains that "Constructivism is based on the concept that individuals actively construct or create their own knowledge and that their learning experiences determine the nature of reality". It becomes clear that within this theory, knowledge is not given. It is rather constructed. The foregoing is fundamental to the understanding of cognitive constructivism through which children's schemas are constructed through the process of assimilation and accommodation, when going through four different stages of development (Wadsworth, 2004). It is worth mentioning that the last stage is of our interest here since the three books of the collection *GFE* are used to teach students of this age group viz. 2<sup>nde</sup> (fifth form), 1<sup>ère</sup> (lower sixth) and T<sup>le</sup> (upper sixth). Here, Katherine and Kalina (2009:242) assumed that in "Piaget's (1953) formal operational stage, children up to adulthood, will start using higher levels of thinking or abstract ideas to solve problems".

## 1.2- Semiotics or Semiology

According to Griffin (2012:332), Semiotics (Semiology) is "the study of the social production of meaning from sign systems; the analysis of anything that can stand for something else". In other words, the interpretations of the different varied forms of human's communication such as the use of words, images, signs, pictures, objects, graphic and gestures are the major interest of *Semiotics/Semiology*. The later first appears in the field of medical science for the study of symptoms. As contended by Sebeok (2001:4): "Medical diagnosis is, in effect, *semiotic science* (my italics), since it is based on the principle that the physical symptom stands not for itself but for an inner state or condition". From this viewpoint,

it stands clear that semiotics as science has as object the study of symptoms. But later, semiotics becomes the target of philosophers with Aristotle and Stoic philosophers the main proponents. Again, as exemplified by Sebeok (Ibn), Aristotle defined the sign as consisting of three dimensions: "(1) the physical part of the sign itself (e.g., the sounds that make up the word cat); (2) the referent to which it calls attention (a certain category of feline mammal); and (3) its evocation of a meaning (what the referent entails psychologically and socially)". These three dimensions come together in the definition, identification and analysis of a sign. The view taken during the first half of the twentieth century by Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist, considered as the Father of Modern Linguistics led to a new representation of semiotics. To clarify his notion of sign and to demonstrate that Semiotics is beyond linguistic signs, he uses the term *Semiology* (my italics) to describe the study of sign and argues that linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology.

Ferdinand de Saussure's definition of the sign is then taken from a linguistic perspective. From his standpoint, he defines a sign, as emphasized in Sebeok (2001:5-6): "as a form made up (1) of something physical - sounds, letters, gestures, etc. - which he termed the signifier; and (2) of the image or concept to which the signifier refers - which he called the signified. He then called the relation that holds between the two *signification*". In other words, 'a tree' represents the concept of what is thought of when the word is heard (the signified) while the sound of the word 'tree' brings up a mental representation of an actual tree (the signifier). The fact of associating the signifier (the physical/material) with the actual definition of the signified (concept) is known as *denotation*, which is the most basic literal meaning of a sign. But by associating the signifier (the physical/material) with emotions, feelings, or cultural 'stories' of the signified (concept) reveals the *connotative* representation viewed as the cultural meaning of a sign.

Roland Barthes, a French literary critic and semiologist is one of the key figures interested in the meaning of signs. As contended by Griffin (2012:333) "Barthes' description of a sign as the correlation between the signifier and the signified came directly from Saussure".

All in all, from the medical and philosophical fields to Saussure's definition of the sign, it is noted semiotics/semiology, the scientific study of a sign, has evolved and developed into more manageable and researchable units that offer some models of analysis. By selecting semiotics/semiology as one the theoretical backgrounds to this study, we intend to gain insightful knowledge into how meaning is created, communicated and interpreted in various contexts (language, culture, artistic representation ...).

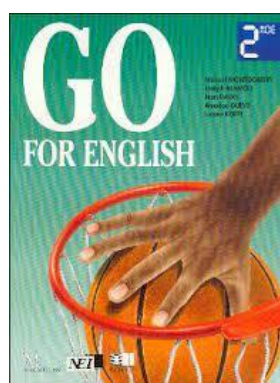
## II- Methodology of research

As said above, the material under analysis are the books of the collection *GFE* with a specific focus on their front cover pages. The description and interpretation of the later unveil the idea behind the holistic organisation of the Learning Situations/Units and the building of the different activities to achieve the pedagogical goal. It is worth noting that with the blowing wind of reforms that pervaded Benin educational system in the late twenties with the advent of competences-based approach, the books of the collection *GFE* for the first cycle (6<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup>, 4<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup>) are recommended not prescribed. They have been replaced by new pedagogical materials viz. Document d'Accompagnement (DA), The Brilliant English Student's Workbook (TBESW), etc. designed by English language teaching inspectors under the supervision of experts. Nonetheless, the ones of the second cycle (2<sup>nde</sup>, 1<sup>ère</sup>, T<sup>le</sup>), which constitutes the corpus of the study are still in use with some teaching Units selected as Learning Situations. My methodology consists in taking into account the front cover pages of the last three documents. A picture of each of them is offered in the data collection section. The pictures of the front cover pages have been retrieved during January 2025 from <https://www.amazon.fr/Go-English-K-R-Cripwell/dp/2850695947>. Each front cover page is labelled picture 1, 2, 3. The rationale behind this numbering is to keep track of each document during the analysis and interpretation sections.

A qualitative visual analysis is made of the three front cover pages. We have examined each cover page for visual elements such as colour, images, typography, etc. and how these visual elements generate the linguistic contents like titles of the units, the different activities designed, language function, grammatical points, language components, etc. In addition, the analysis utilises both semiotic interpretation and cognitive/social constructivist insights to explain how the teacher engages learners into the teaching/learning process.

### III- Description and Analysis of the Materials under Study

The pictures presented on the front cover pages of books of the collection *GFE* are not so varied. They represent an athlete in full flight on the cover pages of the documents from 6<sup>e</sup> to 3<sup>e</sup>. Unlike the first four pages, a player of basketball is seen on the cover of the documents from 2<sup>nde</sup> to 1<sup>re</sup> shooting the ball in basket. Below are the pictures of each of the front cover pages.



Picture1 (fifth form)



Picture2 (lower sixth)



Picutre3 (upper sixth)

The picture on the front cover page of *GFE 2<sup>nde</sup>* shows the right hand of a basketball player shooting the ball into the basket. The colour of the cover page is light green. Other colours such as blue, white and orange are slightly represented within the title of the document, the form it is designed for and the basketball. The colour scheme here is significant, bears valuable meanings and can positively affect teaching/learning process. The dominant green colour is symbolic of peace, comfortable nurturing, confidence, security and reliability. As for white, it denotes neutrality, creativity, simplicity and efficiency. Colour of mind and soothing in general, blue is associated with some positive characteristics such as intelligence, communication, logic, and reflexion.

Like on the front cover page of *GFE 2<sup>nde</sup>*, the same basketball player appears on the front cover page of *GFE 1<sup>re</sup>* (lower sixth) but this time with well tense muscles displaying efforts to definitely shoot the ball in the basket. Pink is the dominant colour of this page. White and red, slightly represented, give more intensity and significance to the picture. In the scheme and layout of colours, pink is seen as a calming colour that drains energy and calms aggression. It has a physical and physiological effects on people.

Finally, *GFE T<sup>le</sup>* is the last in the catalogue of the collection *GFE* recommended to teach English in T<sup>le</sup> (upper sixth). In Benin secondary schools, this class means the last step to enter university for higher and upper studies. Here again, the basketball player is found shooting with much confidence and precision the ball through the hoop into the net. Shooting is the last but important step in basketball playing whereby the player shows his/her mastery of the game. The dominant colour of the front cover page is light blue. White, green, and black are slightly represented. As said so far, blue is characteristics of peace, stability, harmony, trust, confidence, security, etc. From the foregoing, the colour code adds more meaning to the physical effort displayed by the player.

The description of the pictures, the analysis made of them and the meaning they generated are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: The pictures description, the analysis and meanings generated

Books	Pictures	Dominant colours	Meanings generated
<i>GFE 2<sup>nde</sup></i>	These three pictures show a basketball player displaying great efforts to shoot the ball through the hoop into the net.	Light green	Confidence, security, reliability.
<i>GFE 1<sup>ère</sup></i>		Pink	Drains energy, calms aggression.
<i>GFE 1<sup>le</sup></i>		Light blue	Peace, stability, harmony, trust, confidence, security.

The table above summarises the different data collected from the front cover of the books of the collection *GFE* and the analysis made of them. We now turn to the discussion and interpretation of the data.

#### IV- Discussion and Interpretation of the Collected Data

The front cover pages of the books of the collection *GFE* offer to the enquiry on descriptive semiotics a large field of investigation and interpretation of images which to some extent de-emphasizes the principles of opacity of the starter situation and contributes to a better construction of knowledge in a learner-centered approach class.

As said in our introductory words, this paper deals with a semiotic analysis of the front cover pages of the books of the collection *GFE*. The study is oriented towards the analysis of the pictures together with the colour code, the interpretation of which will give more orientation to EFL teachers as to the way to teach English in Benin EFL classes.

Semiotics/Semiology according to the Swiss linguist semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure is simply understood as the science of signs and symbols: how they work and how they are used. Actually, we live in a world of signs. For example, when the traffic lights turn red, the driver knows he/she should stop whereas when they turn green, he/she knows that he/she should drive on. In the matter of teaching language in EFL classes, the behaviours of the teachers are also determinant. Gestures, mimics, dressing codes, realia, face expression, the use of colours on the board, pictures, etc. contribute a lot to the understanding where the learner's outputs smash the teacher's efforts. We do not assume most learners are dummies but the teacher, as an artist, is the one who gives colours to the atmosphere prevailing in his/her class.

The documents under study offer a source to investigate on how colours and pictures impact learning. They are among the ones recommended and/or prescribed for use in Benin secondary schools. The average age of the students using these documents varies between 10 to 15 years old for students in cycle1 (forms 1-2-3-4) and 15 to 18 or even 19 and/ or 20 for those in cycle2 (fifth form, lower sixth and upper sixth). A researcher cannot then grab the real meanings of the images/pictures and colours used in the front cover pages of the books of the collection *GFE* without a background on the psychology and interests of the children of these group ages.

In fact, Boko (2009:64) has this to say: "Jusque vers 12 ans, l'enfant est tourné vers les choses externes d'abord et ouvre sa personnalité à leur contact. [.....]. Le sport et la danse apparaissent aujourd'hui comme les meilleurs moyens d'absorber le trop d'énergie en même temps qu'ils participent harmonieusement à la construction parfaite de l'édifice physique et mental de l'enfant". From this assertion, it can be understood that from the age of twelve (12) years old, sports and games represent the major occupations of many students. Recommending then some books with people practising sports or other games is to show the psycho-pedagogic instruments they represent.

Physical education has become a discipline in Benin secondary schools. As well as they offer moments of entertainment to students, they are also evaluated like other subjects and allow learners to

get their graduation. We can understand why the government invest money through the ministry of sports to support clubs and teams in schools for national and international competitions. If it comes as a reality that children from twelve (12) years old resort to games and sports as entertainment, colours also attract their attention and have a great impact on their minds. A critical mind must ask why different colours are used for documents depending on the class. Our perusal through the net discloses a large repertoire of the meanings of colours and the impacts they may have if the EFL teacher takes time to consider them. The semiotic signs on the *GFE* covers do more than decorate; they convey pedagogical messages that align with learners' cognitive process.

The first language element that discloses linguistic representation is the action verb "Go" used in the phrase "*Go For English*". The imperative form of this action verb encourages learners to take initiative. It suggests movement, concentration on the target, achievement, displacement of efforts with expectation to win the race and take home the trophy. We stated earlier that constructivism emphasises learners' active role in constructing knowledge. The use of this action verb then makes the learner an active agent aligning him/her with self-reliance, confidence, seeking security and reliability. This is characteristic of the light green which is dominant with *GFE 2<sup>nde</sup>*. The dominance of this colour prescribes the teacher as a socio-cognitive agent whose role as prompter, leader and coach are determinant to crush evil and foster inspiration, motivation and leadership. The language he/she is supposed to speak here is the one that helps learners understand life with great sense of maturity and responsibility. Like the students of form1 (6<sup>e</sup>) who tackle a new school environment with more confidence under the teacher's perspiration, the fifth form students need more assistance, sustainable and constant resources. Some of the students at this stage know their commitment to protect the environment. Others perform unbeatable feats in literature or science. Lesson titles/units like "Natural Resources", "The Environment", "Minerals", "Literature", "science"... catch attention and offer analysis for the learning environment.

*Go for English 1<sup>ère</sup>* comes to strengthen the mesh of the above-going interpretation. This pedagogic material stands like a bridge throwing one of its arms to the fifth form and the second to the upper sixth. Actually, the teacher should conceptualise it as a non-return door towards adolescence. The colour page is pink and is explained as draining energy and calming aggression. It is also significant in promoting and reinforcing independence. The idiomatic expression expanding from the use of this colour is "to be in the pink", which is an expression that describes a state of good health, well-being, or a positive financial position. It also signifies that there is a good reason to be optimistic. The ongoing explanation is also denotative of the curriculum designed that makes students of this age group physically apt and autonomous. This physical background appears as a challenge to their cognitive activities (thinking, understanding, demonstrating, reasoning, arguing, discussing, giving opinion, persuading, etc...). In front of this cognitive and constructivist reality, the teacher should surround himself/herself with attitudes showing confidence, security and reliability likely to encourage self-learning or self-reflexivity. Units/Lessons titles like "Loved or Exploited?", "Children's Rights" which summarise children's exploitation and life in family, "Computer Magic", "anyone can Succeed", "Getting a Job" that gun at research/artificial intelligence and gear shift to professional activity and "Customs and Traditions", "Media", "Politics and Elections" unveiling relationships between human sociological background and political activity through social networks (facebook, whatsapp, TV media, twitter, etc.) depict and portray a full transition towards maturity and consciousness raising.

*GFE T<sup>le</sup>* comes to close the series of the book of this collection. The dominant colour is light blue which denotes peace, stability, harmony, trust, confidence and security. Learners of this age group whose ages vary between 17 and 20 years old are actively prepared to leave secondary school for universities. Moreover, they have passed the stage of late adolescence and ready to start adulthood. As said above, the dominant colour (blue) generates a sense of stability, harmony and security. Considering Maslow's pyramid of needs, these terms rank second corresponding to safety needs



whereby the individual seeks financial security, mind stability, etc. to live a harmonious life. Lessons titles/units like "The World's a Family", "Helping Each Other", "Lifestyles and Health", "Success in Business", etc. are pedagogically selected to fit the purpose. The EFL teacher should consequently adopt a language that connects learners to real-life situations or interests following the projects, activities and language function that help to situate the English language within its teaching/learning context.

To round off, the learner's first interaction with a pedagogic material that later influences his/her motivation, expectation and engagement to learn positively is the cover page or the pictures posted on the cover page. Actually, the corpus under study shows the right hand of a basketball player throwing the ball into the net. It is possible to draw a direct relationship between the language (the English language) and the illustration (basketball player). Since its invention in 1891, basketball has become a pillar of many countries sharing the English language. It symbolises teamwork and perseverance bringing people together regardless their cultural background. In sports jargon/language, basketball is a collective game, nonetheless, each player relies individually on their physical/mental capacities and abilities displaying cognitive readiness/creativity. In a classroom setting, the similarity is not far-fetched. Learners start with the individual work to finally find themselves in plenary.

The construction of knowledge here will lay more emphasis on productive skills over receptive ones. A perusal through the documents under consideration demonstrates the learner's individual effort is required through skills such as "debate", "graph description", "analysis of texts", "discussion", "personal reactions to texts", "seeking information", "making notes", "writing and appreciation of speech", to mention but a few. The idea hidden behind this interpretation is the one of an autonomous child/learner who is no longer expected to be given order by parents for instance "go and buy", "take and eat", "open and close" (the door/window), "go and sleep", "go and take bath"... or by the teacher such as "listen and repeat", "stand up and sit down", "look and learn", "copy and complete", "come in and go out", "take out and open your books", etc. whereby socio-constructivism which is a group-based strategy turns to serve individual abilities and interests.

## Conclusion

The article has explored the front covers of the books of the collection *GFE* in order to uncover their impacts on the teaching/learning process through semiotic and socio-constructivist theories. The first language element that draws attention on the cover page is the action verb "Go" showing that knowledge is nothing without action. The title of these didactic tools is then calling to take action, to enter a new universe, a planetary village whereby the English language has become a global language bridging cultures, civilisations, philosophies, sciences and technologies, facilitating communication, collaboration, integration, travelling and studies. This is made more tangible with the semiotic elements, the picture of the basketball player showing that games and sports unit people. They teach an individual self-discipline, respect and skills. The different colours used to cover these pedagogic tools also have an influence on the teaching/learning process.

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