

Beyond Buildings: A Panofskian Framework for Using Architectural Imagery to Foster Oral Communication Across EFL Textbook Proficiency Levels

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Abstract

This study proposes a novel framework for integrating architectural imagery in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education to foster oral communication, using Panofsky's iconological model of visual interpretation. Visual input plays a critical role in enhancing comprehension, vocabulary development, and communicative competence in EFL contexts, yet current textbooks often lack a structured approach to leveraging visual progression for language output. Analyzing the Headway EFL textbook series (Beginner to Advanced), this qualitative visual content analysis classified architectural visuals into Panofsky's three levels—Pre-iconographic, Iconographic, and Iconological—based on complexity, interpretive demand, and symbolic depth. The findings reveal a general alignment between visual complexity and language proficiency levels, supporting the concept of visual scaffolding in oral development. However, inconsistencies were noted, with some visuals misaligned with corresponding CEFR oral tasks. Drawing on these insights, a visual progression model was developed, offering textbook writers and educators practical strategies for aligning imagery with oral competencies. The framework advances EFL pedagogy by emphasizing the narrative and symbolic potential of architectural visuals as tools for critical thinking and communicative interaction. Future research should test the framework across digital platforms and diverse textbook contexts to explore its broader applicability in visual-literate language teaching.

Keywords: *Visual Literacy, Panofsky's Framework, EFL Textbooks, Architectural Imagery, Oral Communication*

Introduction

Visual input plays a pivotal role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning by enhancing learners' comprehension, vocabulary retention, engagement, and overall communicative competence. Numerous studies have shown that integrating visual elements—such as images, diagrams, and multimodal media—significantly improves language outcomes by stimulating motivation and supporting deeper cognitive processing. For example, visual aids like flashcards and infographics enhance vocabulary acquisition (Wattimena, 2022), while visualization techniques have been linked to improved reading comprehension and recall (Ghazanfari, 2009). Moreover, visual literacy contributes to cognitive development by enabling learners to interpret and understand representational forms (Hoang, 2019), and the use of audiovisual materials in EFL classrooms—such as TV series, films, and image-rich textbooks—fosters multimodal engagement and cultural awareness (Wen-hua, 2018). Even in language testing, carefully selected visuals help evaluate communication abilities, though cultural appropriateness must be considered (Canning-Wilson, 2001). Against this backdrop, this paper explores how architectural imagery—extending beyond mere buildings—can serve as powerful visual input to foster oral communication in EFL textbooks, using Panofsky's iconological framework to guide pedagogical alignment across proficiency levels.

The lack of pedagogical frameworks that harness architectural imagery to foster oral communication represents a critical gap not only in architectural education but also in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. While architectural education has traditionally emphasized visual

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and written expression, verbal articulation—essential for conveying spatial and conceptual design thinking—remains underdeveloped (Avidan & Goldschmidt, 2013). Similarly, EFL textbooks frequently include rich visual content without leveraging it systematically to promote oral proficiency. Research in architectural pedagogy suggests that integrating verbal communication through tools such as the Communication Skills Attitude Scale (CSAS), augmented reality learning environments, and cinematic strategies (Abdel-Ghani, 2021; Hsu & Liu, 2023) can enhance expressive capabilities. Moreover, visual literacy and experiential methods like model-making or museum visits have proven effective in linking visual comprehension with verbal output (Barbero-Barrera et al., 2022; Catay & Geylani, 2020). Despite these advances, a significant challenge persists: the absence of a structured framework that uses architectural imagery—beyond buildings—as a scaffold for oral language development in EFL contexts. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a Panofskian framework that classifies visuals according to iconological levels aligned with learners' proficiency stages, offering a new direction for integrating visual and verbal literacy in EFL textbook development.

Architecture in textbooks transcends the mere representation of buildings, embodying layered meanings that can effectively scaffold oral development in educational contexts. When integrated multimodally into textbooks—combining visual and verbal elements—architectural imagery enhances comprehension, engagement, and cognitive development, particularly in EFL learning environments (Salbego et al., 2015). Moreover, architectural education emphasizes the need for clear and persuasive verbal articulation of design concepts, highlighting a critical gap in the development of reasoning and communication skills among students (Yanik & Hewett, 2000). The ethical dimension of architecture, as a facilitator of intellectual growth and cultural enrichment (Hendrix, 2014), reinforces its pedagogical value in promoting oral expression. By adopting such pedagogical approaches, educators can encourage learners to explore architectural imagery as a means to express increasingly complex ideas, ultimately enriching oral proficiency across different levels of EFL instruction.

Despite the recognized value of visual input in enhancing language learning, no existing studies have systematically applied Erwin Panofsky's three iconological levels—Pre-iconographic, Iconographic, and Iconological—as a visual progression model in the design and evaluation of EFL textbooks. While research in both architectural education and EFL pedagogy acknowledges the importance of visual literacy and its role in supporting oral communication, there remains a notable absence of pedagogical frameworks that align visual complexity with language proficiency. Current EFL textbooks may incorporate architectural imagery, yet they do so without a theoretical foundation that links the interpretive depth of visual content to learners' communicative development. Consequently, this paper addresses this underexplored area by proposing a Panofskian framework that categorizes architectural visuals in relation to learners' proficiency levels, offering a structured and theory-informed approach to enhancing oral communication through progressive visual literacy in EFL contexts.

Thus, this study aims to classify the architectural visuals embedded in each unit of the Headway English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbook series—spanning from beginner to advanced levels—using Erwin Panofsky's iconological framework, which includes Pre-iconographic, Iconographic, and Iconological levels of visual interpretation. By mapping these levels to corresponding stages of English proficiency, the research seeks to identify how progressively complex visuals can be strategically aligned with learners' communicative development. Building on this classification, the study further aims to develop a pedagogical framework that leverages architectural imagery as a tool for fostering oral competence, demonstrating how visual progression can support structured oral communication practice across EFL proficiency levels.

Literature Review

A growing body of literature underscores the vital role of images in language acquisition and communicative competence, positioning visual input as a crucial bridge between abstract linguistic concepts and tangible real-world experiences. Images enhance comprehension and retention by providing concrete foundations for vocabulary and grammar, as evidenced by Paivio's (1970) dual coding theory and subsequent studies highlighting the mnemonic power of imagery (Abbood, 2017). Their utility spans all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—by promoting language output and critical thinking (Abbood, 2017), and they are particularly effective in early childhood education, where they foster creativity and independent interpretation (AlAli et al., 2024; Maleki et al., 2024; Fatah et al., 2025). Methodologically, effective visual pedagogy depends on the careful selection

of contextually relevant imagery and on developing students' visual competence, enabling them to decode and derive meaning from visual inputs (Hecke, 2012). These insights provide a foundational rationale for exploring how architectural imagery, rich in symbolic and narrative potential, can be used to foster oral communication in EFL settings.

Visual literacy and symbolic interpretation are increasingly recognized as essential components in English Language Teaching (ELT), enhancing students' comprehension, cultural awareness, and communicative competence. Visual literacy encompasses more than the recognition of images—it involves the interpretation of cultural and contextual meanings embedded in visual symbols, which, when integrated into ELT, can foster more dynamic, engaging, and effective learning environments (Suryanto, 2014; Darmawan et al., 2024; Rijani, 2023). By enabling students to express ideas visually and critically engage with images, visual literacy contributes to intercultural communicative competence and supports learners in navigating complex socio-cultural contexts (Brown & Savić, 2023; Wang & Hemchua, 2022). Symbolic interpretation through semiotic and multimodal discourse analysis further deepens the pedagogical value of textbook visuals by illustrating how images function alongside verbal texts to convey layered meanings (Ghoushchi et al., 2021; Shahril et al., 2023). These approaches equip learners to interpret visual texts critically, revealing the ideological and representational choices in ELT materials. However, scholars caution that visual literacy must be implemented thoughtfully, acknowledging cognitive demands and cultural variability in visual interpretation (Arbuckle, 2004; Dworkin, 1970). These insights lay the groundwork for exploring how architectural imagery—rich in visual and symbolic meaning—can be systematically integrated into EFL textbooks to foster oral communication, particularly through Panofsky's iconological lens.

The classification and application of visual input in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education play a vital role in fostering comprehension, vocabulary development, and cultural awareness. Visual aids such as images, videos, and pictorial devices support language acquisition by making abstract concepts more accessible and enhancing learner engagement. Images are commonly used to clarify vocabulary, motivate learners, and support intercultural understanding, while their appropriateness is crucial in assessment contexts to ensure fair evaluation (Canning-Wilson, 2001; Hecke, 2012). Videos serve as rich multimodal inputs that provide authentic exposure to language use, with tools like InVideo AI enabling the creation of tailored content to support learning (Bahrani, 2013; Lin & Liu, 2024). Pictorial devices have also been shown to aid in the comprehension of figurative language, such as idioms (Calderón & Cedeño, 2023). Instructional strategies leveraging multimodal sequencing—such as presenting images before text—have proven effective in vocabulary retention (Liu, 2023), while textual enhancements like highlighting key vocabulary improve learners' focus and lexical understanding (Fahim & Vaezi, 2011; Vaezi, 2013). In assessments, visuals must be culturally sensitive to avoid misinterpretation, and learners' positive responses to visual aids further underscore their pedagogical value (Liu, n.d.). This literature foundation supports the exploration of architectural imagery, classified through Panofsky's iconological levels, as a structured visual progression tool for scaffolding oral communication across EFL proficiency levels.

Architecture as a cultural narrative transforms spatial design into symbolic literacy, allowing spaces to communicate cultural values, historical memories, and social ideologies through visual and experiential storytelling. This narrative function is achieved by integrating spatial configuration, materiality, symbolic representation, and sensory interaction, as seen in iconic sites like Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which convey powerful cultural messages (Abdulwahab et al., 2025).. Spatial sequencing—framed through the concept of "space, event, movement"—further emphasizes the temporal and interactive nature of architectural storytelling (Whitley, 2018). Symbolic elements such as form, material, and spatial hierarchy contribute to cultural production and ideological messaging (Aliefendioğlu & Keskin, n.d.). Semiotic approaches highlight how architectural spaces encode meaning through their articulation of space and time (Terzoglou, 2018), while spatial storytelling connects human experience to built environments using culturally meaningful configurations (Lyu, 2019). Memorial architecture exemplifies this narrative power by evoking collective memory through spatial language and emotional resonance, as demonstrated in the Berlin Jewish Museum (Tseng, 2015). These insights underscore the potential of architectural imagery to serve as a rich visual and cultural resource in EFL education, supporting the development of oral communication through layered interpretation aligned with Panofsky's iconological framework.

While existing literature highlights the effectiveness of visual input—such as images, videos, and multimodal materials—in enhancing language acquisition, vocabulary retention, and communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, there remains a critical gap in the systematic use of architectural imagery as a structured pedagogical tool. Studies in visual literacy, semiotic analysis, and multimodal discourse demonstrate the value of visuals in supporting oral communication; however, no research to date has applied Erwin Panofsky's iconological framework to classify architectural visuals in EFL textbooks according to learners' proficiency levels. Furthermore, architectural education emphasizes the verbal articulation of design ideas, yet this communicative potential has not been harnessed in EFL pedagogy to scaffold oral proficiency through progressive visual complexity. This absence of a theoretical and pedagogical model that aligns visual interpretive depth with language development stages constitutes a significant oversight in both ELT and architectural pedagogy.

Despite extensive research affirming the value of visual input in enhancing vocabulary retention, engagement, and communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, a notable gap remains in the pedagogical use of architectural imagery—particularly through a structured, theory-informed lens. While architectural visuals are often present in textbooks, they are rarely leveraged systematically to foster oral communication. Moreover, Erwin Panofsky's iconological framework, though widely recognized in art history and semiotics, has not been applied to classify visual complexity in EFL materials aligned with learners' proficiency levels. This study addresses this gap by exploring how architectural imagery can be used not only as a cultural and symbolic resource but also as a scaffold for structured oral development.

Accordingly, this study is guided by two research questions:

How can architectural visuals in the *Headway* EFL textbook series be classified using Panofsky's iconological framework across proficiency levels?

How can this classification inform the development of a pedagogical model that fosters oral communication based on visual complexity and learners' language proficiency?

Theoretical–Conceptual Framework

This study employs Erwin Panofsky's tripartite model of iconology as the core theoretical framework to analyze architectural imagery in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks. This framework, grounded in art history, facilitates the interpretation of visual content through three hierarchical levels of meaning: pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconological (Panofsky, 1955; Renders, 2016). Within the context of EFL pedagogy, this model is adapted to classify the symbolic complexity of visuals used in popular textbook series such as *Headway*, and to align each level with appropriate CEFR language proficiency levels and Bloom's cognitive taxonomy.

Pre-iconographic Level: Basic Visual Recognition

The pre-iconographic level focuses on the primary or natural meanings of an image, involving factual recognition and expressional elements. At this stage, learners observe basic shapes, colors, objects, or spaces without interpreting deeper cultural or symbolic significance (Bozkaya, 2016; Sitindjak, 2011). For example, students may describe a building as "tall" or a room as "bright," fostering fundamental descriptive skills and vocabulary building.

Bloom's taxonomy: Remember, Understand

CEFR alignment: A1–A2 (Beginner–Elementary)

Language activity: Naming, describing, responding to simple questions

Iconographic Level: Cultural and Narrative Interpretation

This level explores conventional or secondary meanings, identifying symbols, themes, or motifs within the visual content (Borges, 2022). Students interpret culturally familiar architectural elements such as Gothic arches, Islamic domes, or traditional houses as signifiers of national identity or historical periods (Abdullah et al., 2020; Sitindjak, 2011).

Bloom's taxonomy: Apply, Analyze

CEFR alignment: B1–B2 (Pre-Intermediate–Intermediate)

Language activity: Comparing cultural visuals, storytelling, opinion sharing

Iconological Level: Symbolic and Ideological Interpretation

The iconological level involves the most abstract and interpretative skills, uncovering the symbolic or philosophical meaning behind visual forms. This includes understanding how architectural space conveys ideology, cultural hybridity, or socio-political power (Bozkaya, 2016). For instance, the Pangururan Catholic Church symbolizes inculturation between Catholicism and Batak Toba traditions (Sitindjak, 2011).

Bloom's taxonomy: Evaluate, Create

CEFR alignment: B2+ to C1 (Upper-Intermediate–Advanced)

Language activity: Debates, critical analysis, abstract interpretation

Integration with Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy is a hierarchical model used to classify educational objectives across six cognitive levels: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create. The upper levels of *Evaluate* and *Create* are essential for fostering critical thinking and innovation in learners (Bejjanki et al., 2025; Chandio et al., 2021). Evaluating involves making judgments about ideas based on criteria (Bejjanki et al., 2025; Stevani & Tarigan, 2023). However, research shows that these higher-order skills are often underrepresented in EFL textbooks, with only 11% of tasks involving evaluation and 3% involving creation (Stevani & Tarigan, 2023).

To address this gap, our study argues that the development of visual literacy through architectural imagery should scaffold oral and symbolic competence progressively. Pre-iconographic imagery is most suitable for beginner and elementary learners, iconographic visuals are effective at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels, while iconological visuals should challenge upper-intermediate and advanced learners. The alignment of Panofsky's iconological levels with CEFR stages and Bloom's taxonomy is summarized in **Table 1**.

Core Assumption

Architecture in EFL materials should be treated as communicative and interpretive space, not merely physical structures. When analyzed through Panofsky's iconological levels and aligned with Bloom's taxonomy and CEFR, architectural imagery can serve as a powerful tool to scaffold oral proficiency and visual-symbolic literacy across all levels of language education.

Table 1

Panofsky Level	Meaning Focus	Bloom's Level	CEFR Level	Language Activity
Pre-iconographic	Basic visual identification	Remember, Understand	A1–A2 (Beginner–Elementary)	Naming, describing, basic Q&A
Iconographic	Cultural scenes and conventional meaning	Apply, Analyze	B1–B2 (Pre-Int.–Intermediate)	Storytelling, comparing, sharing perspectives
Iconological	Abstract, symbolic, and ideological meaning	Evaluate, Create	B2+ to C1 (Upper-Int.–Advanced)	Debating, interpreting, critical reflection

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative visual content analysis approach to explore how architectural imagery embedded in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks can be classified and pedagogically utilized to foster oral communication across different proficiency levels. Visual content analysis is particularly well-suited for examining patterns and symbolic depth in educational materials, especially those involving multimodal inputs. The method facilitates an in-depth exploration of the interpretive meanings within visuals and their alignment with pedagogical objectives. By employing a structured coding framework, the study ensures a systematic and replicable process for classifying architectural images based on their communicative and cognitive demands (Bell, 2012; Rose, 2022).

Corpus Selection

The corpus for this study comprises the 5th edition of the Headway EFL textbook series published by Oxford University Press, spanning proficiency levels from Beginner (A1) to Advanced (C1). This series was chosen due to its wide international adoption and consistent visual and pedagogical structure across levels. Additionally, the textbooks contain a rich variety of architectural and spatial visuals, making them ideal for the proposed analysis. Notably, each unit in the series is introduced with a prominent image that reflects and sets the thematic tone of the unit, serving as a key visual anchor for subsequent tasks. All units within each textbook were reviewed, and all visuals that depicted built environments, architectural structures, or spatial elements were extracted. These visuals include photographs, illustrations, and artistic renderings and were systematically cataloged for further analysis.

Analytical Framework: Panofsky's Iconological Levels

To analyze the visuals, the study applies Erwin Panofsky's three-tiered iconological framework. This method distinguishes three levels of visual interpretation. The pre-iconographic level involves the straightforward identification of objects and forms, supporting basic naming and descriptive activities aligned with CEFR A1–A2 proficiency levels and lower-order cognitive skills. The iconographic level goes a step further by recognizing culturally significant scenes or symbols, suitable for B1–B2 learners engaging in comparative and narrative exercises. The iconological level encompasses abstract and ideological meanings that demand critical interpretation, aligning with higher-order cognitive skills and CEFR B2+ to C1 proficiency levels. For instance, the image in *Unit 1: What Makes Us Human?* from the Advanced textbook—showing people in Times Square—invites interpretation beyond the literal urban setting, serving as a metaphor for digital culture and mass identity. Likewise, *Unit 3: Enough is Enough?* presents a stark aerial contrast between slums and luxury apartments, symbolizing socio-economic inequality—an example of iconological depth that stimulates reflective oral discussion. This framework allows for the alignment of visual complexity with learners' oral communicative abilities.

Coding Criteria and Procedure

Each visual was analyzed and coded based on three primary dimensions: visual complexity, interpretive demand, and symbolic depth. Visual complexity refers to the level of detail and composition within the image, such as comparing a basic sketch with a densely layered cityscape (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). Interpretive demand assesses the cognitive effort required to understand the image, from simple identification to complex socio-cultural analysis (Rose, 2022). Symbolic depth evaluates the extent of cultural, historical, or ideological meaning embedded in the image, drawing on semiotic theory (Barthes, 1977). These three dimensions form the criteria for classifying each image into one of Panofsky's interpretive levels. The use of such visuals—like the socio-spatial contrast in *Unit 3*—demonstrates how symbolic content can serve as scaffolding for advanced oral expression, including hypothesizing and debating.

Validation and Reliability

To enhance methodological rigor, the study incorporates triangulation through three validation strategies. First, the classification of each visual was compared to the associated textbook oral production tasks. This comparison helped identify any pedagogical misalignment between the visual's complexity and the communicative demand of the task. Second, classifications were validated against CEFR speaking descriptors to ensure that the visuals and their corresponding oral tasks were appropriately aligned with learners' proficiency levels. Third, a second coder independently classified a subset of visuals to test inter-coder reliability. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved, leading to refinements in the coding manual and ensuring consistency in the analytical process (Krippendorff, 2018).

Results and Analysis

The findings (Table 2) reveal distinct patterns in the distribution of visual complexity that largely correspond with the expected progression of language proficiency across the Headway series. Each unit in the textbooks opens with a prominent architectural image that introduces the thematic focus of the unit, setting the tone for language learning through visual context. These introductory images, combined with in-unit visuals, were systematically classified into Panofsky's three iconological levels: Pre-iconographic, Iconographic, and Iconological.

At the **Beginner level**, contrary to expectations, visuals were distributed almost evenly across all three levels: 28.57% Pre-iconographic, 42.86% Iconographic, and 28.57% Iconological. While one might expect predominantly Pre-iconographic imagery at this level—simple visuals conducive to basic labeling and identification—nearly 71% of visuals required at least some interpretive or symbolic engagement. This suggests an early introduction to higher-order thinking through images, potentially encouraging learners to stretch their descriptive capabilities.

The **Elementary level** aligns more closely with theoretical expectations: 66.67% of visuals were Pre-iconographic, supporting the idea that lower-level learners benefit from straightforward, easily interpretable images. Iconographic (25%) and Iconological (8.33%) images were present but more limited, indicating a visual strategy focused on scaffolding foundational oral language tasks.

The shift becomes more pronounced in the **Pre-Intermediate** textbook, where Iconographic visuals dominate at 50%, and Iconological images account for 41.7%. Only 8.3% of visuals are classified as Pre-iconographic. This distribution reflects a transitional stage in which learners are expected to move beyond basic description into interpretive tasks such as comparison, cultural association, and extended monologue—tasks well-supported by visuals at the Iconographic and Iconological levels.

At the **Intermediate level**, visuals were relatively balanced: 25% Pre-iconographic, 41.67% Iconographic, and 33.33% Iconological. This suggests a pedagogical balance between reinforcing foundational oral skills and introducing tasks that require analytical and reflective speaking. The near parity between Iconographic and Iconological visuals indicates that learners at this stage are being challenged to use more complex language to discuss broader cultural and symbolic themes.

In the **Upper-Intermediate level**, the percentage of Iconographic and Iconological visuals is equal (41.67%), while Pre-iconographic visuals drop to 16.67%. This shows a clear emphasis on interpretive and symbolic engagement, as learners are expected to articulate more abstract and culturally

embedded ideas. The prevalence of higher-level visuals aligns with CEFR descriptors at the B2 level, which emphasize structured discourse and expression of viewpoints.

The **Advanced level** exemplifies the strongest alignment between visual complexity and language proficiency. Here, 58.3% of visuals are Iconological, requiring learners to engage in hypothesis-building, interpretation of abstract concepts, and discussion of ideological implications. Iconographic visuals appear in 25% of the units, while only 16.7% are Pre-iconographic. This distribution supports the use of symbolic and context-rich architectural imagery to promote critical discussion, argumentation, and the synthesis of ideas—skills essential at the C1 proficiency level.

The progression of visual complexity across the Headway EFL series generally mirrors the increasing demands of oral communication at each CEFR-aligned proficiency level. While some lower-level books incorporate unexpectedly complex visuals, the overall pattern confirms that architectural imagery becomes progressively more symbolic and interpretive as learners advance. This validates the core assumption of the study: visual inputs in EFL materials—when classified through Panofsky's framework—can be strategically aligned with learners' oral production development.

Headway EFL Textbook Level Series	Panofsky Level	Number of Units	Corresponding Unit	Percentage
Beginner	Pre-iconographic	2	Units 5, 7	28.57%
	Iconographic	3	Units 1, 3, 4	42.86%
	Iconological	2	Units 2, 6	28.57%
Elementary	Pre-iconographic	8	Units 1,2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11,12	66.67%
	Iconographic	3	UNIT 4, 5, 9	25.00%
	Iconological	1	UNIT 10	8.33%
Pre-intermediate	Pre-iconographic	1	Unit 4	8.3%
	Iconographic	6	Units 1, 3, 7, 9, 10	50.00%
	Iconological	5	Units 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12	41.7%
Intermediate	Pre-iconographic	3	Units 3, 11, 5	25.00%
	Iconographic	5	Units 4, 5, 7, 9, 12	41.67%
	Iconological	4	Units 1, 2, 6, 8, 10	33.33%
Upper-intermediate	Pre-iconographic	2	Units 1, 8	16.67%

Advanced	Iconographic	5	Units 2, 3, 6, 7, 9	41.67%
	Iconological	5	Units 4, 5, 10, 11, 12	41.67%
	Pre-iconographic	2	Units 2, 10	16.7%
	Iconographic	3	Units 4, 8, 9	25.00%
	Iconological	7	Units 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12	58.3%

Discussion

The progression of architectural imagery across the Headway textbook series generally aligns with the pedagogical logic of increasing cognitive and linguistic demands across CEFR proficiency levels. At the lower levels (Elementary), visuals predominantly fall into the Pre-iconographic category, facilitating basic descriptive language and vocabulary acquisition, which aligns with the Remember and Understand stages of Bloom's taxonomy. As learners progress to higher proficiency levels (Intermediate to Advanced), there is a notable increase in Iconographic and Iconological visuals, which are suitable for fostering analytical and interpretative speech tasks. This shift supports the gradual development of communicative competence from basic description to critical reflection. The design logic reflects textbook authors' attempts to visually scaffold learners' oral development by aligning image complexity with expected speaking outcomes, echoing the visual progression principles (Panofsky, 1955) and supported by multimodal pedagogical frameworks (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020).

The findings reveal that visuals in EFL textbooks can function as effective scaffolds for oral production when aligned with learners' cognitive and linguistic capabilities. The increased presence of Iconological visuals in the Advanced textbook promotes higher-order speaking tasks such as debating abstract concepts and discussing cultural ideologies, in line with the Evaluate and Create stages of Bloom's taxonomy. This confirms the potential of architectural imagery to foster symbolic and reflective language use when integrated with thoughtful visual pedagogy (Salbego et al., 2015). For instance, symbolic visuals such as memorials or religious architecture can prompt discussions on cultural identity, ethics, or social justice—topics that require advanced communicative strategies. Hence, visuals must not merely decorate the page but serve as cognitive springboards to elicit structured oral discourse. This approach enhances learners' visual literacy and intercultural competence, preparing them to engage in meaningful communication across contexts (Wang & Hemchua, 2022).

The transition from Pre-iconographic to Iconographic and finally to Iconological visuals mirrors the shift from literal language use—naming and describing—to more abstract uses—arguing, reflecting, and hypothesizing. This visual-symbolic gradient supports the notion that learners' ability to interpret and respond to visual stimuli develops in tandem with their linguistic competence. At the Beginner level, images serve mainly to build lexical knowledge (e.g., describing a house), while at the Advanced level, visuals stimulate the exploration of symbolism, ideology, and social values (e.g., interpreting a postmodern urban skyline). This trajectory echoes findings in both EFL and architectural education literature that emphasize the role of imagery in cultivating not just language skills but also critical and

cultural awareness (Hendrix, 2014). The pedagogical implication is clear: textbook visuals should not only increase in linguistic complexity but also in interpretive depth to mirror learners' communicative development.

Despite the overall alignment of visual complexity with proficiency level, certain inconsistencies were observed. For example, the Beginner textbook includes a significant portion (28.57%) of Iconological visuals—unexpected for a level intended to focus on basic naming and identification. Similarly, the Intermediate level includes a relatively high proportion (25%) of Pre-iconographic images, which may not sufficiently challenge learners to practice more interpretive and analytical language tasks. These inconsistencies suggest either a lack of visual progression in textbook design or a disconnect between the visual and verbal tasks that accompany them. Such misalignments risk under-challenging or overwhelming learners, undermining the scaffolded development of oral communication. As (Ghoushchi et al., 2021) note, the value of visual pedagogy lies in its ability to match learners' interpretive readiness. Therefore, a clearer alignment between Panofskian visual categories and CEFR descriptors should be considered in future textbook development to optimize the role of architectural imagery in EFL instruction.

Proposed Framework: A Visual Progression Model for Oral Competence through Architectural Imagery

This framework presents a structured approach to fostering oral communication in EFL contexts by aligning visual complexity with learners' proficiency levels using Panofsky's iconological model. The model proposes that visuals used in language instruction should not be selected arbitrarily but rather according to their interpretive depth and the communicative goals appropriate to each CEFR stage. Architectural imagery, due to its layered symbolic potential, serves as a rich visual resource to implement this progression.

At the Beginner to Elementary level (CEFR A1–A2), visuals should be classified at the Pre-iconographic level. These are simple, literal images requiring minimal interpretation, such as photographs or illustrations of houses, rooms, or streets. They support oral activities focused on naming objects, describing basic features, and practicing simple sentence structures. Suggested tasks include labeling pictures, using prepositions of place, and answering questions like “What can you see?” This matches lower-order thinking skills and early oral competencies.

For Pre-Intermediate to Intermediate learners (CEFR B1–B2), visuals should shift toward the Iconographic level. These images contain recognizable scenes or culturally meaningful architecture that invite learners to tell stories, compare places, or express opinions. Suggested oral tasks include comparing cityscapes, describing past experiences, or engaging in role plays. These activities foster mid-level cognitive and communicative skills, helping learners transition from description to narration and evaluation.

At the Upper-Intermediate to Advanced levels (CEFR B2+ to C1), learners are ready to engage with Iconological visuals that contain symbolic, ideological, or historical depth. Examples include war memorials, abstract architecture, or religious sites. These images can prompt discussions about cultural identity, historical memory, or social values. Tasks at this level include group debates, critical reflections, and presentations, aligned with higher-order thinking and CEFR's advanced speaking descriptors.

To support implementation, the framework also offers guidance for textbook developers and teachers. Visuals should be carefully chosen to correspond to the CEFR level and oral task design. Each unit could begin with a thematic architectural image to spark curiosity and discussion. Educators are encouraged to integrate this framework systematically, using visuals not just as decoration, but as strategic tools to scaffold oral expression, intercultural understanding, and critical thinking.

Visual Progression Framework for Oral Competence

CEFR Level	Panofsky Level	Visual Type	Main Focus	Oral	Typical Tasks
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A1–A2 (Beginner–Elementary)	Pre-iconographic	Simple photos/illustrations of familiar buildings	Object naming & basic description	Picture-labeling, “What can you see?” Q&A, pair-work on locations
B1–B2 (Pre-Int.–Intermediate)	Iconographic	Culturally recognizable architecture & city scenes	Narration, comparison, expressing opinions	Guided storytelling, cross-cultural comparisons, role-plays (directions, tickets)
B2+–C1 (Upper-Int.–Advanced)	Iconological	Historic, symbolic, or abstract architectural images	Critical analysis & debate	Group debates, thematic presentations, discussions on cultural symbolism

Conclusion

This study examined how architectural imagery embedded in the **Headway** EFL textbook series aligns with learners' oral communication needs across proficiency levels, using Erwin Panofsky's iconological framework. The classification of visuals into Pre-iconographic, Iconographic, and Iconological levels revealed a general pattern of increasing visual complexity corresponding to CEFR progression from A1 to C1. This alignment supports the pedagogical potential of architectural visuals as tools not merely for content decoration, but for scaffolding oral development in a theoretically informed and level-sensitive way. The results demonstrate that when visuals are carefully curated and pedagogically aligned, they can facilitate oral tasks such as naming, describing, narrating, and debating in ways that match students' linguistic maturity.

One of the main contributions of this study is the development of a novel visual-literacy-based framework for fostering oral competence in EFL classrooms. Unlike previous approaches that use images without clear theoretical grounding, this framework applies Panofsky's tripartite structure to propose a progression model that links visual interpretation with oral communicative tasks at each CEFR level. This model provides concrete guidance for both textbook authors and classroom practitioners on how to use architectural imagery to scaffold speaking skills—starting with basic description at beginner levels and moving toward critical reflection and debate at advanced stages.

The findings suggest several practical recommendations. Textbook developers should integrate visuals intentionally based on interpretive depth and language demands, ensuring that each image corresponds to appropriate oral production tasks. Curriculum designers are also encouraged to incorporate symbolic and culturally rich visuals in higher-level courses to stimulate learners' critical thinking and intercultural communication. Moreover, teachers should be trained to use visuals not only for comprehension but as dynamic prompts for speaking and interaction.

However, this study is not without limitations. The analysis focused solely on one textbook series—**Headway**—limiting generalizability across broader EFL publishing contexts. Additionally, the classification process, while guided by rigorous criteria, involved an interpretive element that may vary among coders, despite efforts to ensure inter-coder reliability.

Future research should apply this framework to other global EFL textbook series, particularly those used in digital formats or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) environments. Exploring how architectural visuals are presented and interpreted across diverse educational cultures could further validate the framework and offer cross-contextual insights. Moreover, longitudinal classroom-based studies could assess how learners respond to and develop oral competence through exposure to Panofskian-classified visuals.

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