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**THE CHOICE OF ADJECTIVES SHOWING ATTITUDES IN SHORT STORIES WRITTEN BY CREATIVE WRITING STUDENTS**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents the linguistic selection by students in creative writing class. It aims at describing the linguistic choice done by the students, particularly in selecting the adjectives for characterizing the characters in the short stories. The students have learned how to write the stories in creative writing class. Linguistic selection in writing short stories as literary work is motivated, not random (Verdonk, 2002). Therefore, the students are more aware in choosing their linguistic expressions. Traditionally, adjectives are words functioning as noun modifier. Practically, however, this paper employs the attitude analysis proposed by Martin and White (2005). By employing the attitude analysis, the adjectives will be perused as affect, judgement, or appreciation. Affects show the feelings, Judgements evaluate the behaviors, and Appreciations evaluate things or natural phenomenon. This paper examines two short stories written by creative writing students. The selected short stories employ female children as the main characters. The paper focuses only to the female child characters and the characterization of the characters. The analysis consists of several steps. First, the characters in each story are collected. Second, the adjectives which are used to describe and characterize the characters are collected. Third, the adjectives are classified into affect, judgement, or appreciation. Fourth, the categories are described to draw conclusion. Hypothetically, the protagonists will be characterized dominantly by positive attitudes, while the antagonists are characterized by negative attitudes. This paper does not intend to draw any generalisation towards students' performance in writing short stories.

**Keywords:** *adjectives, attitudes, characterization*

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*by* Simon Arsa Manggala

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**A. BACKGROUND**

In this part, the researchers elaborate the reasons of choosing the topic of this paper. The reasons are theoretical and practical reasons. Those reasons are based on the notions from Stylistics, language of evaluation, and creative writing. They cover the discussion on motivation and selection in language use, the creativity in using language, and the feasibility of conducting the analysis. The researchers also present previous research and analyses to be able to provide comments on the feasibility of this present paper.

The researchers select the topic for this paper theoretically by holding two notions from Stylistics. The first notion is that language users select their language to achieve particular effects. The use of language is motivated (Simpson, 2004, p. 22; Verdonk, 2002, p.5). Because Stylistics observes the motivation of the linguistic choices, it concerns with how the choices bring effect to literature (Toolan, 2013, p. ix). In other words, writers might have their own preferences in using language. The observation on language, therefore, might address this motivation and the effect of using language. However, since Stylistics deals with linguistic analyses, the motivation and the effects should be related to linguistic choices, such as the choice of words, structures, or patterns. Non-linguistic factors, such as age, gender, or occupations, might be put into consideration, but they still need to be relevant to the linguistic evidences found.

The second notion is that stylistic analysis needs to be rigorous, retrievable, and replicable (Simpson, 2004, p. 4). This second notion is a more practical background. Stylistics observes particular aspect of language, organizes the observation in a traceable manner, and provides a way to verify the result of the analysis. Similar observations have been done in a research investigating the portrayal of a female character who is an Afghan wife in Asne Seierstad's novel entitled *The Bookselller of Kabul* in the light of transitivity analysis by Halliday. The research scrutinizes the verb choice and its significance in characterizing the particular character. In Afghanistan, women are expected to fulfil their roles as tolerant mothers and wives. In accordance with the cultural context, the analysis shows that the verbs employed in the novel portray the

character as a submissive and devoted wife (Isti'anah, 2018). This character is described as being capable of solving her internal conflicts to fulfil her role as a wife.

The conception that the choice of linguistic features is significant in constructing a character in a literary work is also proven in a study examining the language choice in describing the main character in Hoa Pham's short story entitled *Heroic Mother*. By applying Halliday's transitivity analysis method, the study reveals that the language choice portrays the main character, known as the heroic mother, as a lonely person who is suffering from boredom and neglected by her family (Nguyen, 2012). This heroic mother used to have a victorious life and contribute to the country's independence and freedom. This lonely representation of the heroic mother is said to depict how the old people are often ignored by the younger generation. This study also suggests that this representation is also purported to make the younger generation more aware and compassionate to the older generation.

In working with the data, especially in classifying and categorizing the data, the researchers adopting the classification of attitudes by Martin and White (2005, pp. 42-91). The attitudes or feelings can be classified into three big groups, namely Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. Affect is the attitudes or feelings to evaluate emotions. Judgement is employed to evaluate persons or behaviours. Appreciation is selected to evaluate things. Those three big groups are broken down into more detailed categories, and polarities. For instance, Affect can be in the form of un/happiness, in/security, or dissatisfaction. Judgement might occur in the form of normality, capacity, tenacity, veracity, or propriety. Appreciation takes the form of reaction, composition, or valuation. All those attitudes can be positive and negative.

Attitude analysis has been employed in several research. An article applying the appraisal theory, particularly attitude analysis, in a comparative study of two English translation versions of an ancient Chinese poem entitled Changgan Xing. The quantity, types and distribution of the three kinds of attitudes are analysed. This study points out that all three kinds of attitudes are found in both translations, however since the translators have different cultural

background, several differences are found between the two versions (Dong & Lin, 2018). The distribution of the kinds of attitudes differ which is mainly due to the adjustments done by each translator to overcome the cultural disparity they have. It is also revealed that both translations deviate from the original ancient version of the poem which is assumed to happen because of the cultural gaps between the translators and the original poet. The research shows that it is applicable to use appraisal theory in the comparative studies of literary translations (Dong & Lin, 2018). Another study on attitude analysis is conducted to analyse the attitudes in Barack Obama's inaugural speech by employing the appraisal theory. This study shows that Obama's speech is dominated by Judgment since the speech aims at provoking and persuading people. It is also revealed that Obama shows more positive attitude and by having positive attitude, he shows his optimism for a brighter country (Rohmawati, 2016).

Society influences how people perceive their surroundings and identify themselves, including gender. Gender roles are constructed by the society where an individual lives, hence gender roles in a particular society might differ from one another. In a patriarchal society, roles assigned to males and females are unequal and the females' roles usually serve the males' interests (Madsen, 2000). Females are assigned the traits of conformity and obedience while males are assigned roles of rationality and power (Eisenstein, 1983). This implies the expectation that females, both children and adults, should behave nicely and friendly. The representations of gender roles can be seen through various social products, including pieces of writing.

Creative writing is closely connected to the authors' unique personal idea and their freedom in expressing their ideas. The ideas are resulted from the authors' personal reactions or feelings to the experience they make contact with. Therefore, creative writings are perceived as something original in the sense that no other authors can produce exactly the same artistic self-expression (Allen, 1948). In order to be able to express their ideas in the form of creative writing, authors must be given complete freedom and opportunities, not to mention the complete understanding and appreciative

reception of the product. In the classroom setting, students are given ample time and chance to plan and create their writing. Furthermore, the students are equipped with theories of literary traditions and opportunities to discuss their plans and their writing progress with the instructor. After the students get feedback from the instructor, they have sufficient time to revise their writings.

Considering all the above, the objectives of this paper is to find out how the linguistic choices in evaluating the world in the short stories, to present the tendency of the choices, and to explain the use of adjectives in characterizing female child characters. The linguistic choices being evaluated is the adjectives since adjectives are one of the content words used to describe nouns. By aiming to those objectives, the paper would follow several steps in the analysis.

## B. RESEARCH METHOD

In this part, the object of the analysis and the working steps in conducting the analysis are elaborated. The objects of this paper are short stories written by students in Creative Writing class. The length of the short stories is similar. They are more or less four-page long. Not all students' works are observed. This paper only observes the short stories in which the characters are female children. Child characters are chosen since children need particular ways in characterizing them. The settings are also limited by their being children. This selection might also specify the focus of the observation to be specific. Therefore, there are only two stories are observed as the data. There were there steps in conducting the analysis for this paper.

The first step is to identify the adjectives in the short stories and make a list of them. The same adjective might appear more than once. They are accounted as different items whenever they characterize different matters. Each short story had two lists. The first list is the list of adjectives describing the main characters. The second list describes the things other than the main characters. Therefore, there were four lists.

The second step was classifying the adjectives based on the types of attitudes by Martin and White (2005, pp. 42-91). To describe the *feeling,* the adjectives were categorized into three groups based

on what they characterize, namely affect, judgement, and appreciation. The result of this step was a more detailed list of adjectives. The categorization also went specific by classifying the attitudes into positive and negative attitudes. Further, each type of attitude might be also elaborated.

The third step was done to observe the characters, particularly child characters. Since the data were taken from short stories which had child characters, those characters might be significant to examine. In this step, the elaboration might include the discussion on the plot to dig out the motivation in characterizing particular characters.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the methodology, there are 38 adjectives from the first story, and 45 adjectives from the second story. Out of 38 adjectives from the first story, 12 adjectives describe the main character, and 26 adjectives describe other nouns. In the second story, 8 adjectives describe the main characters, and 37 others describe other nouns. The finding shows that in the first story, more or less 30% of the adjectives are employed to describe the main character. On the other hand, in the second story, the adjectives are employed mostly for describing nouns but not the main character. In other word, the main character in the second story might not be significantly described by adjectives. The following table summarizes the findings in numbers:

| | **Adjectives describing the main character** | **Adjectives describing other nouns** | **Totals** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Story 1** | 12 (31,57%) | 26 (68,43%) | 38 (100%) |
| **Story 2** | 8 (17,77%) | 37 (82,23%) | 45 (100%) |

**Table 1. The number of adjectives in each story**

The adjectives are classified based on the attitude that they represent. The following discussion elaborates the classification in each story. In the first story, there are four affects, 19 judgements, and 15 Appreciations. This occurrence signifies that the most frequent attitude is in the form of judgement. The writer chooses the adjectives mostly to evaluate human characters and their behaviours. The second most prominent attitude evaluates things and matters. Affect is the least prominent evaluation. It seems that the writer does not choose the adjectives to describe feelings. In addition, the main character is not characterized by appreciation at all in the first story. The following table shows the number of attitudes by adjectives in the stories.

| | Affect | | Judgement | | Appreciation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Descibing main characters | Decribing other nouns | Describing main characters | Describing other nouns | Describing main characters | Describing other nouns |
| **Story 1** | 2 | 2 | 10 | 9 | 0 | 15 |
| **Story 2** | 2 | 10 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 21 |

**Table 2. The evaluation in the stories**

From the second story, there are 12 affects, 11 judgements, and 22 appreciations. This finding signifies that the writer of the second story tends to evaluate things rather than feeling and behaviour. However, in characterizing the main character, the writer mostly employs judgement in both stories. This finding might raise assumption that behaviours are significant in the characterization. Further, for the writers, evaluation towards things does not really matter in characterizing the main characters.

The adjectives, in sum, are employed more to describe the other entities in the stories. They are the things around the characters, the other characters, or the settings. To describe them, in the first story, the most frequent evaluation is done by appreciation. The writer chooses to evaluate things more than feelings and human behaviour. The second most frequent evaluation is by judgement.

The least evaluation is the affect. In the second story, the most frequent evaluation towards the entities other than the main character is done by appreciation as well. The second frequent evaluation is by judgement, and the least frequent is by affect. Judgement and affect in the second story are almost equal in their number. Judgement appears six times, while affect occurs five times. The next discussion elaborates the findings on the use of adjectives in characterizing the main characters.

In the first story, the main character is mostly evaluated by judgement. From the data, the most frequent judgment is in the form of positive propriety. It means that the main character is described to follow social convention and to have positive evaluation according to the convention. The main character is a *best friend* of the other characters. She has a close relation to them, and she is innocent. However, the main character is also judged negatively by her normality, veracity, and tenacity. She is not dependable or has negative capacity by being *little.* It means that she could not handle *big* matters. Further, by being *silent,* the main character is characterized having negative veracity since she is not open to others.

| | Affect | | | Judgement | | | | | Appreciation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | happiness | Security | Satisfaction | Normality | Capacity | Tenacity | Veracity | Propriety | Reaction; impact | Reaction; quality | Composition; | Composition: | Valuation |
| **Story 1** | 2 (-) | 0 | 0 | 1(-) | 3 (-) | 0 | 1 (-) | 5 (+) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Story 2** | 1 (+) | 1 (-) | 0 | 0 | 4 (-) | 0 | 0 | 1 (+) | 0 | 1 (+) | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 3. Attitude characterizing the main characters in both stories**

In the second story, by the use of adjectives, the main character is mainly characterized as a person who possesses negative tenacity. In other words, she is not dependable. The writer of the short story presents the character as somebody who is not dependable. Similar to the occurrences in the first story, negative capacity is presented by the adjective *little.* Being *little* means that the character cannot handle things yet. The main character is also insecure by being *surprised*. She is not ready to face something. Different from the character in the first story, the character in the second story is evaluated positively by describing her positive quality of being *cute,* and her happiness by being *cheerful.*

By the findings, the female main characters are characterized by particular choice of adjective in both stories. The findings are elaborated with the plots. The main characters are children. The main character in the first story, who is a female child character, is characterized as powerless after her father. Her father is described as superior and powerful. The main character *had* to be obedient and dependent to her father since her mother left her. This plot is in line with the textual findings, since the character has negative capacity. The main character is described by positive propriety by being a best friend to other characters, who turned out to be ghosts. This characteristic of being best friend is due to the condition that she has no other friends to play with.

In the second story, the main character is characterized as the one who is happy and kind. However, she is also depicted as incapable of thinking or doing things. She is described by the adjective *little.* The adjective appears four times. It highlights the significance of the characteristics. By the plot, the main characters kept doing *mistakes* by giving expensive flower and cookies to a grandmother. This action is unacceptable according to her mother.

## D. CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

As the conclusion, the writers of the stories employ different strategies in writing their short stories. They utilize adjectives in different manner. However, this paper does not intend to draw generalization about the use of adjectives by all of the students since

this paper only examines two short stories. Further finding shows that female children are characterized as powerless and incapable. The characteristics are represented by the plot and occurrences of adjectives such as *little* and *innocent*. The characters are also characterized positively by utilizing adjectives, but the negative evaluation still outnumbers the positive evaluation.

As the final remarks, this paper is a part of a more complex and detailed research by the researchers. This paper might serve as a preliminary observation to complete the research. However, there are also still some gaps to fill in this paper. Future observation is very possible to conduct to find out more findings, such as those related to the characterization of characters by particular social groups, the use of other word classes, or similarities and differences between literary works.

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