CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the whole study and is divided into ten sections. Section 1.1 will present the focus of the area of research. Section 1.2 will describe the existing problems in this area of research. Based on the stated problems, Section 1.3 will explain the objectives of carrying out the study, followed by Section 1.4 which will lay down the research questions that guide the current study. Next, Section 1.5 will justify the rationale of executing the study. Section 1.6 then will detail out the delimitation of the study, followed by Section 1.7 which will briefly describe the methodology undertaken to carry out the study. Section 1.8 will provide the significance of carrying out the current study. Section 1.9 will describe the outline of the study, and Section 1.10 will end with a chapter summary.

1.1   Statement of the Research Area

The current study is concerned with an analysis of anthropomorphic animal characters in the genre of animal fantasy, classified under children's literature, from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics (SFL).

In broad terms, anthropomorphism is defined as any kinds of animals or objects that bear human behaviours, attitudes and feelings (see Britannica Encyclopaedia Online, 2010; Horowitz, 2007). In anthropomorphism, human characters can be depicted by animals (as in the novel *Wind in the Willows*) or toys (as in the film *Toy Story*) or any other objects like robots (as in the novel *Wizard of Oz*), cars (as in the film *Cars*) or fruits (as in the TV series *The Munch Bunch*). Among the

kinds of anthropomorphism, animals have been given the most attention and have been widely used in narratives since the era of Aesop fables (c 620 BC) and Panchatantra (c 200 AD).

Even though anthropomorphic animals and real humans share common qualities, less attention has been given to a literary analysis on animal anthropomorphism. Therefore, the current study attempts to undertake an analysis on the human characterization of anthropomorphic animals found in animal fantasy stories meant to be read aloud to young children of the age of two to six years. Frog and fox stories in the early 20th century are drawn as data. Frog and fox characters are chosen for analysis because these two types of animal are two of the most mentioned animals in various sayings and proverbs found in both the Western and Asian cultures, as compared to other animals like rabbits, tigers or monkeys. Two frog stories and two fox stories are then selected for the purpose of investigating the similarities and differences between them. Animal fantasy stories in the early 20th century are chosen because fictions in this era are linguistically richer, i.e., bearing the language similar to the language used in adult novels. Contemporary fictions for young children are not chosen as data because they are mostly in the form of beginning reader picture books with controlled language and vocabulary, for example *Dr. Seuss series* by Dr. Seuss and *Arthur series* by Marc Brown (see Section 2.1.1).

To bring out the characterization of human in the animals, the systemic functional linguistics' theory of transitivity proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) is deployed. The transitivity theory is concerned with "who does what to whom under what circumstances" (Butt, Fahey, Spinks and Yallop, 1995, p. 40); thus, it is aptly applicable to the analysis of roles, actions and events.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

The current study was enthused by three contentions in the field of literary analysis. First, characterization, which is "an important area within stylistics" (Culpeper, 2002, p. 12), has not been given sufficient systematic treatment (Toolan, 2001; Montgomery, 1993). Secondly, the language of children's literature is regarded as unimportant (Stephens, 1998; Hunt, 1994; Nodelman, 1985). Thirdly, children and animal stories are not given importance in criticism (Copeland, 2003).

Due to the less sufficient systematic treatment on characterization, Montgomery (1995) and Toolan (2001) assert that character has become a neglected element even though literary analysis is a profound field of study. As a consequence, within the systemic functional approach, very few literary studies are found focusing on character. Among the few studies are Hubbard's (1999) analysis of women characters in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Martinez's (2002) analysis of main characters in Thomas Pynchon's novels, and Junior's (2005) analysis of gay characters in English/Portuguese short stories. However, from these studies, it can be observed that focus of analysis is merely on real humans and weighty plots. Very little attention has been given to talking animal characters which are profusely found in children's literature. Parallel to this observation, Copeland (2003, p. 288) points out the following:

..... children and animals are seen neither as interesting nor as sophisticated and "evolved" as adult humans. Consequently, novels so designated have received little attention from the academy or from "mainstream" literary critics.

Thus far, not much linguistic studies have been carried out on talking animal stories. Examples of linguistics studies on talking animal stories are studies by Mondada (2000) on the narrative structure and talking animal characters in Curacao folktales, multimodality analysis by Guijarro and Sanz (2008) on a talking animal picture book, and critical discourse-narrative analysis by Mazid (2009) on *Kalila and Dimna* (Arabic version of Panchatantra). Hence, talking animal stories are yet to receive critical syntactic examination. This argument by Le Guin (2006) should illumine the above concern: "Tales of talking animals ...... aren't just for children, ... We can and should return to them throughout our lives" (p. 86).

1.3   Aim of Study

Based on the problems stated above, the current study aims to bring out the human characteristics in the anthropomorphic frog and fox characters found in animal fantasy stories. In other words, the current study aims to investigate what human characteristics the animals carry and how the human characteristics are characterized. In addition to that, the current study would like to find out whether frogs and foxes in different stories are portrayed similarly or otherwise.

1.4   Research Question

Based on the aims outlined above, two pairs of parallel questions are formulated:

1.a How are human characteristics in the frog protagonists characterized through the system of transitivity?

1.b   How are human characteristics in the fox protagonists characterized through the system of transitivity?

2.a   Do the frog protagonists in both stories carry similar human characteristics?

2.b   Do the fox protagonists in both stories carry similar human characteristics?

1.5   Rationale of the Study

In enlightening the aims stated above, the current study is interested to look not only into the human traits of the animals, but to go beyond that like the more delicate human actions they are capable of performing, the array of human inner consciousness sensed, their specific participant roles and the actual active participant involved, and the modes in which those human actions are performed.

What is expected to be achieved through the whole research is to be able to objectively rationalize on the purpose of the texts using a particular type of animal to reflect certain human characteristics. In simple terms, it is to find out whether the text's portrayal is based on the nature of the animal or conceptions (similes, proverbs and metaphors), or merely a random selection (see Cadden, 2005); and whether different texts have similar portrayals of human characteristics in animals. Moreover, the reason for choosing frog and fox characters is also to find out whether the texts used in the current study have any negative conception on these animals like their predecessors of frog and fox stories (depiction on frogs and foxes is explicated in Section 2.3.1.1). This is the premise on which the current study chooses two frog stories and two fox stories. A methodical syntactic examination attempts to find out how frogs and foxes are portrayed, and whether frogs and foxes in different stories reflect similar human characteristics.

1.6   Delimitation of the Study

The current study will limit itself to the analysis of anthropomorphic animal characters in the early 20th century animal fantasy stories classified under children's literature. The current study will look at only the human characterization of the anthropomorphic animals, and not the rhetoric and narrative structure of the stories that may affect the perceptions of readers. Two frog stories and two fox stories were chosen for the purpose of the study. The chosen data are highly anthropomorphic fictions where the animal characters are not only featured communicating in human language, but also wearing clothes, engaging in human body language, and sensing human emotions.

Examination on the characters will only be carried out on the protagonists, i.e., the main characters as shown in the title of the stories. For the purpose of analysing the anthropomorphic features of the animals, and to be in line with the aims of the study, only clauses related to the protagonists, and clauses containing the information of what the protagonists do, think, say and have, and what other characters say or think about them and how other characters treat them will be taken into account (see Glazer, 2000; Mohammad & Rosli, 2000 on characterization).

1.7   Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The current study deploys the transitivity framework of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) as its major tool in bringing out the human characteristic in the animals. The transitivity explications of Thompson (2004), Bloor and Bloor (2004) and Eggins (2004) are also integrated to elucidate the analysis. Two anthropomorphic frog stories and two anthropomorphic fox stories were selected as data. These stories were obtained from the Project Gutenberg website (www.gutenberg.org) which are

downloadable free for public use. The characters of concern for analysis are the protagonists mentioned in the title of the stories.

For the purpose of the current study, only clauses that contain experience related to the protagonists were selected for transitivity examination. Once clauses were selected, they were coded and subsequently were broken down into groups – nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverb and prepositional. Thereafter, the selected clauses were identified with their transitivity functions in accordance to the six process types, their assigned participants, and the accompanying circumstantial elements. All analyses were done manually as they need careful and in-depth examination, and some clauses need semantic reasoning. This transitivity scrutiny was used to answer the research questions of the current study. A detailed description of the methods used in the current study will be explicated in Chapter 3.

1.8   Significance of the Study

The current study explores the characterization of frog and fox characters in animal fantasy stories by drawing upon the transitivity framework of SFL. It is hoped that the findings of the current study are able to impart a number of contributions to the genre of animal fantasy, particularly within the area of characterization.

As argued by Stephens (1998), Hunt (1994) and Nodelman (1985), children's literature has been given less critical approach. The genre of animal fantasy is especially less valued (Copeland, 2003). Thus, the current study attempts to give significance to children's literature, mainly the animal fantasy genre, by demonstrating that it is worth valuing and that it is comparable to adult literature. Through the findings of the current study, literary analysts and teachers of literature

may find this genre to have its own unique value to be critically analysed; and there are more areas in this genre that can be excavated.

Character, even though an important element in narrative, has been given less systematic treatment in analysis (Montgomery, 1993, Toolan, 1998/2001). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, most linguistic studies in character draw on adult fictions which are of heavy plots with entirely real human characters. By bringing anthropomorphic animal characters to the fore, the current study thus adds 'flavour' to the area of character analysis. This gives value to animal anthropomorphism as a subject of study with the notion that, an in-depth and systematic analysis of character is possible to be carried out on personifications and not limited to real humans only. The current study hopes to make future writers of animal fantasy stories aware of their writing purposes and linguistic choices.

1.9   Outline of the Study

This study is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 has provided brief insights into the focus of the study which is about the analysis of human characters of anthropomorphic animals found in animal fantasy stories. Chapter 2, the Literature Review, will provide the background knowledge and studies related to the data and framework used, as well as the aims of the current study. Chapter 3, the Theoretical Framework and Methodology, will explicate on the analytical tool deployed and the procedures undertaken to attain the objectives of the study. Chapter 4, Findings and Discussions, will then present the findings of the analyses, together with discussions on the findings. Chapter 5, the Conclusion, will summarize the whole findings, impart the implications brought about by the study, and provide some insights into further research.

1.10   Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overall view on the area of research and the analytical framework used. Guided by three research questions, the current study seeks to achieve its aim, that is, to uncover the human characterization of anthropomorphic animals. Following this chapter is Chapter 2 on the review of related literature.