

## UNDERSTANDING THE LITERARY ELEMENT 'CHARACTER' IN MALAYSIAN PICTURE BOOKS: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

Komathy Senathy Rajah

\*Cecilia Cheong Yin Mei

Department of English Language,  
Faculty of Language and Linguistics, Universiti Malaya

\*ceciliac@um.edu.my

### ABSTRACT

Character is a fundamental literary element and it is defined as the act of describing characters in literature, particularly their physical attributes as well as personal traits. In multimodal texts, the visual and textual sign systems are interlaced together to exemplify meaningful characters. In this study, two picture books were examined to determine how semiotic meaning-making systems work together to develop the literary element 'character' based on an adaptation of Painter et al.'s (2013) multimodal discourse analysis framework. The findings showed a lack of detailed characterisation elements in the textual meaning-making systems for character attribution and affiliation between characters, but the visual depiction of characters in both the picture books addressed this shortcoming effectively. The textual mode helped to confirm the identity of characters especially when the visual manifestation is metonymic or incomplete. In short, knowledge of visual meaning making systems is necessary as it will enable young readers to attain a deeper understanding of the literary element 'character' and fully comprehend multimodal texts.

**Keywords:** *Malaysian picture books, Literary Element, Character, Multimodal Analysis*

### INTRODUCTION

The definition of literacy has evolved with the arrival of the new millennium. The texts that one encounters daily are now multimodal in nature and have a combination of a least any two of the following semiotic modes: linguistic, visual, gestural, audio and spatial (Bull & Anstey, 2010). Young learners can use visual apps and emoticons in their smart phones to update their status in Facebook or Twitter and post messages on Instagram and Snapchat. However, knowledge of typing and tapping for information does not mean they are visually literate (Silverman & Piedmont, 2016). To interact with multimodal texts like webpages, graphic novels and picture books successfully, young learners need to simultaneously process the message conveyed in the forms of words, fonts, designs and visuals. They need to be taught and trained that each semiotic mode utilised in a multimodal text can convey meaning (Bland, 2015; Moya, 2014; Youngs & Serafini, 2013). They also need to have the ability to critically

analyse and interpret the information displayed in images (Romero & Bobkina, 2021; Silverman & Piedmont, 2016). As such, teachers should expose young learners to the visual meaning making systems and equip them with adequate vocabulary and new strategies that will enable them to study visuals, construct meaning and communicate the ideas presented in the multimodal texts accurately (Hassett & Curwood, 2009; O'Neil, 2011; Serafini, 2009).

Picture books are a suitable medium for embracing visual literacy and literature as they can be used in ESL classrooms during shared reading, literature and Language Arts classes. Visual meaning making systems in picture books as well as literary elements like character, setting, and mood found in them can support young learners to gain a deeper understanding of the fundamentals of a narrative. However, only a few studies like Painter et al. (2013), Moya (2011), Martinez and Harmon (2012) and O'Neil (2011) focused on aspects of literary elements and meaning-making in picture books.

Knowledge about the literary element 'character' is crucial as it helps readers to enter and navigate the world of story and interpret them for literary meaning-making (Wilson et al., 2014). Picture book characters are fictional representations of humans, non-human beings or animals and they are vital in creating meaning in stories. Most characters are only partially developed in the written text as the visuals furnish the remaining details. As such, knowledge of visual meaning making systems and literary elements will help young learners to critically examine stories in picture books. McNair (2021), O'Neil (2011) and Yokota and Teale (2005) believe that visual meaning making systems and peritextual features in picture books help to strengthen young learners' textual understanding of the literary element 'character'. In short, interpreting visuals in picture books will help readers to better comprehend the literary element 'character' that already exists in the written text and accelerate their understanding of a story.

The objective of this study is to examine the cohesion of visual and textual elements in Malaysian picture books from the perspective of the literary elements 'character' by adapting the multimodal discourse framework of Painter et al. (2013). In line with its aim, this study is guided by the following research question:

1. How do the visual and textual meaning making systems cohere to develop the literary element 'character' in two Malaysian picture books?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed an analytical approach which is qualitative in nature as this would allow descriptive examples and discoveries of new perspectives in the discussion. Thus, this study adapted Painter et al.'s (2013) multimodal discourse analysis framework by adding two sets of meaning potentials under the 'character' meaning systems which are 'character qualities' and 'affiliation between characters'. This adapted framework is then utilised to examine the ways visual and textual meaning systems work together to develop the literary element 'character' from four different aspects: character attribution, character qualities, character manifestation and identification as well as affiliation between characters.

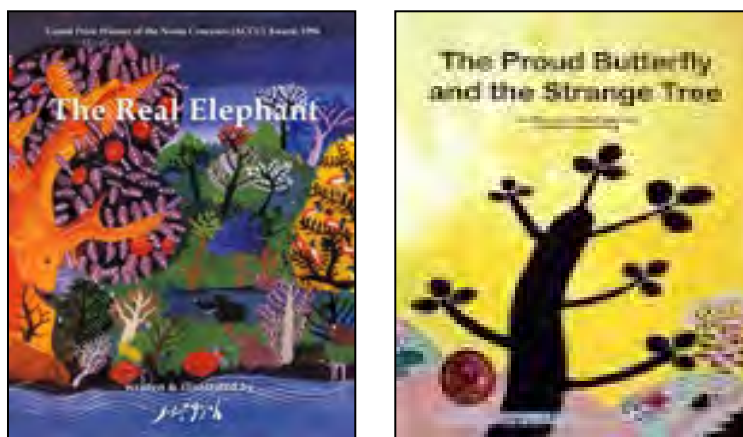
### *Data Collection*

The data used in this study comes from two sources. The primary data is from two Malaysian picture books which won the Noma Concours for Picture Book Illustrations (ACCU) award. The first picture book, *The Real Elephant* (hereafter *RE*), was written and illustrated by Yusof Gajah, a Grand prize winner. This picture book has 11 openings plus a single-page illustration. The word 'opening' refers to a double-page spread and opening 1 begins when the story starts (Sipe & Brightman, 2009). The story is about an elephant who eats some forbidden fruits and finds itself changing into different forms. The second picture book, *The Proud Butterfly and The Strange Tree* (hereafter *PB*) written and illustrated by Jainal Amambing has twelve openings. The story is about a butterfly who breaks the branches of a strange tree and faces the consequences of its action. The second set of data is information obtained from interviews with the two picture book writer-illustrators. These two sets of data provide a broader

description of the findings. In terms of triangulation, the interviews guarantee the credibility of the data analysis while the use of two inter-raters to analyse samples of the data ensures validity of the findings.

**Figure 1**

*A Composite of Two Award-Winning Malaysian Picture books*



### Data Analysis

The cohesion between visual and textual representation of the literary element 'character' in the two picturebooks were judged in terms of convergence or divergence. If the visual and textual meaning choices for 'character' complement each other, it was deemed as 'convergence' and if the meaning choices clash, it was considered as 'divergence'. The analysis also showed if there is disparity in commitment of visual and textual meaning. The four visual and textual meaning making systems that are used to analyse the literary element 'character' are clearly outlined in Table 1.

The visuals in this picture book are first labelled and presented systematically. For instance, the first visual opening in *The Real Elephant* is labelled as RE, followed by the word OP (refers to picture book opening) and a number which signals the order it appears in the picture book (i.e.: RE/OP/1). Similarly, for textual analysis, the text from RE is arranged according to sequence of the openings. Each opening has a different number of sentences, and they are labelled numerically according to the order. For example, the third sentence in the sixth opening of this picture book is denoted as RE/OP6/L3.

**Table 1**

*Complementary 'character' meaning systems across visual and textual (adapted from Painter et al. 2013)*

VISUAL		TEXTUAL	
Character Attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External Appearance – colour; facial features</li> <li>Position</li> <li>Size</li> </ul>	Character Attribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relational transitivity</li> <li>- intensive attributive</li> <li>- nominal group</li> <li>- adjectives</li> </ul>
Character Qualities	(Judgement) – Meaning may be invoked in readers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actions</li> <li>Depicted affect</li> </ul>	Character Qualities	Evaluative Language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>normality</li> <li>capacity</li> <li>tenacity</li> <li>veracity</li> <li>propriety</li> </ul>

Character Manifestation	Manifestation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete – character's head is included</li> <li>Metonymic – body part/shadow</li> </ul> Appearance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>appear</i></li> <li><i>re-appear</i></li> </ul>	Character Identification	Presenting Reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>indefinite articles or pronoun</li> <li>possessive determiner</li> </ul> Presuming Reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>personal pronoun</li> <li>definite articles</li> <li>names</li> </ul>
Affiliation between Characters	Power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high angle</li> <li>eye-level</li> <li>low angle</li> </ul>	Affiliation between Characters	Power - Reciprocities of linguistic choices between characters
	Social Distance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpersonal</li> <li>social</li> <li>personal</li> </ul>		Proximity – verbal intimacy markers
	Orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>face to face</li> <li>side by side</li> </ul>		Solidarity – linguistic choices, nature of conversation

## FINDINGS

### *Character Attribution in RE and PB*

Character attribution meaning system helps to describe and highlight characters' external appearance. The main character in *RE* is an elephant and it is introduced to the readers in opening 2. The visual shows three elephants, who are similar in size, colour and shape, standing together (refer to Figure 2). Textually, the elephant is not ascribed any attributes. In opening 3, the main character is introduced exclusively in the visual. It is positioned in the centre of the page and in terms of size, it looks huge. Its facial features, however, looks odd because the elephant has yellow eyes with red sclera and yellow tusks. Clearly, the visual in Opening 3 contributes pertinent details in terms of changes in the elephant's physical attributes. The weirdly coloured facial features may also indicate a twist in the storyline. In the next few openings, the elephant's appearance changes extensively as it goes through various physical alterations and transforms into different types of animals. The use of colours and features in the visuals clearly illustrate each transformation and the changes in the elephant's external appearance. However, the character attributes assigned to describe the elephant's appearance in the written text are minimal as only nominal groups like 'a bird, a fish' or a dragon' are used or intensive attributes like 'very strange' or 'unusual looking' are used to describe the elephant's transformations.

**Figure 2**

*Opening 2 of The Real Elephant (Yusof Gajah, 2011)*



The supporting character in *RE* is an anthropomorphic tree. It is first introduced, both visually and textually in opening 1 as the tree plays a pivotal part in the story. In the establishing shot, the visual depicts a tree which towers over the other trees and animals. The tree is reddish orange in colour and has eyes, teeth and mouth. The visual depiction of the red tree, especially its humanised features, helps to accentuate its evilness and bizarre appearance while the tree's size and amplified height signifies its importance and role in the story (Yusof Gajah, personal communication, April 12, 2017). In terms of position, it is placed on the left foreground and not in the centre as it is not the protagonist in this story. Textually, the only attribute assigned to the tree is the adjective 'strange'.

The analysis on character attribution in *PB* focuses on two characters in the story. The main character 'a butterfly', is introduced visually in opening 1. The visual mode highlights the butterfly's human like attributes, position on page, size and appearance which sets it apart from the other animals and insects. For instance, in opening 1 the butterfly is positioned in the centre of the recto page to show its importance to the story. The butterfly's size is also clearly exaggerated as it is not proportionate to the trees. In addition, the main character's colourful external appearance and humanised features sets it apart from the other monochromatic butterflies. Textually, all this additional information is not available in opening 1.

The supporting character, a tree, is introduced in opening 4. Its physical appearance is described and depicted briefly in both visual and textual modes as black and strange. There is convergence in the visual and textual descriptions of the tree as they complement each other. The visual however, highlights the strange tree's role and importance in the story via the meaning systems of size and position. In opening 4, the tree's central position and exaggerated size and height shows its importance in the story, especially when the main character appears small next to it. In opening 6, the strange black tree is transformed into a colourful and beautiful tree. The myriad of colours used to highlight the tree, which is the supporting character and the single colour used to depict the main character shows the change in stature.

Clearly, position and size play important roles in the visuals as they help to convey detailed meaning about a character via character attribution. All this information is not evident in the written text. In short, in terms of cohesion for character attribution, it is the visuals in both picture books that provide vivid depictions of the characters' external appearances as they provide pertinent details of their unique transformations and changes. The use of colours to depict the changes in the characters' external appearance also play an important role in the stories as they indicate a twist in the storylines.

### ***Character Qualities in RE and PB***

Character qualities focuses on internal traits like tenacity, capability or diligence and can be described by analysing characters' thoughts, actions, feelings and dialogues. In *RE*, the main character's quality is implicitly described using the evaluative language. In opening 4, readers can infer from the text that the elephant is disobedient (tenacity) because it ignores the warnings given about the anthropomorphic tree and eats its forbidden fruits. As a result, the elephant undergoes various transformations. There is divergence in meaning as the defiant side of the elephant is not revealed visually. However, there is convergence in opening 10 where both the depicted affect and evaluative language reveals the elephant as pious because it repents and prays for forgiveness. Overall, the textual mode conveys more information regarding the main character's qualities.

The supporting character in *RE* is an anthropomorphic tree whose personal qualities are revealed visually and textually. In opening 1, the depicted affect visually portrays the tree as sinister as it is illustrated with an evil smile, sharp teeth and humanised features. This invoked judgement is also supported by the final visual in *RE* that shows the tree confined by a fence to protect the other animals in the forest. From this, readers can infer that the tree is a dangerous entity. This quality is not disclosed explicitly in the textual mode as the only evaluative language used to describe the tree is 'strange'. In short, for



character qualities, the textual mode provides more details of the elephant's qualities while the visual mode provides more information about the anthropomorphic tree's qualities.

Character qualities are clearly exemplified in *PB*. The visual and textual modes inform the readers in opening 2 that the butterfly is vain as it thinks highly of the way it looks to the point of looking down at other beings. Similarly, in opening 5, both semiotic modes show that the butterfly is vicious as it will go to any extent to show its hatred and this is proven through its action of breaking the branches of the strange tree in opening 5. Subsequently, similar convergence in the character qualities of the butterfly is evident in opening 10 (refer to Figure 3) where the visual shows the butterfly pleading for forgiveness from the tree while the evaluative language analysis of the butterfly's direct speech conveys its sincerity. In opening 12, more meaning is committed in the textual mode as the butterfly's change of heart is only evident in the use of positive evaluative language "... it became a kind-hearted butterfly". This validation is not available in visual mode. In conclusion, the written text clearly helps readers to evaluate the main character's qualities better than the visuals. For character quality, basic qualities are conveyed simultaneously in both modes, but complex quality is expressed textually. Clearly, readers need to process meaning conveyed visually and textually in picture books as this will help them to compose meaning.

**Figure 3**

*Opening 10 of The Proud Butterfly and The Strange Tree (Jainal Amambing, 2011)*



### ***Character Manifestation and Identification in RE and PB***

Characters in picture books are represented and tracked through the systems of manifestation and identification. The main character in *RE* is identified textually as 'a member of a herd' and visually as one of the three elephants standing near a tree in opening 2 (Figure 2). Visually, it is difficult to pinpoint the protagonist as all the three elephants are similar in size, shape and colour. According to the writer-illustrator of *RE*, the main character is the elephant positioned in the right centre and the one nearest to the tree (Yusof Gajah, personal communication, April 12, 2017). In opening 3, the elephant appears alone in the visual, and it is identified textually as *one of the elephants*. From opening 4 onwards the elephant appears alone and its visual manifestation changes in each opening. The elephant resembles a fish (refer to Figure 4), bird, dragon and a combination of all three animals in openings 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10. The visual manifestation of the elephant in all these openings is varied as its appearance differs when it transforms into different kinds of animals. The only body part that identifies it as the elephant is the trunk which is retained in each transformation except in opening 7. In this opening, the elephant transforms into a crocodile with a set of elephant's feet. Hence, the textual mode is needed to confirm the identity of the main character in *RE* as the readers are presented with a metonymic manifestation of the character from opening 4 until opening 10. As such, knowledge of both semiotic modes will

facilitate readers' ability to construct meaning in picture books, while knowledge about visual systems like position and size will enable readers to identify the main character especially when the characters have no outstanding features.

**Figure 4**

*Opening 4 of The Real Elephant (Yusof Gajah, 2011)*



In *PB*, the main character appears visually and textually in all the twelve openings except in opening 7, which is a purely visual spread. From opening 1 until opening 6, the butterfly's manifestation is complete and it is identified textually using presenting and presuming references. Visually, the butterfly looks resplendent in the first seven openings but its appearance changes to black and ugly in opening 8. Readers might find it difficult to associate this butterfly as the main character because its salient features and colours are now different. However, the use of indefinite pronoun 'it' in opening 8 aids textual identification of the butterfly and enables readers to make the connection.

Visually, the supporting character 'strange tree' is completely manifested in five openings but represented textually in six openings. In terms of appearance, the strange tree looks black and ugly in openings 4 and 5 but its appearance changes for the better in opening 6. Readers will be able to identify the strange tree and make the connection if they process the meaning available in both modes concurrently. In brief, although there is convergence in meaning in terms of character manifestation and identification, the textual mode helps readers to confirm the identity of characters and make the necessary connections especially when the characters' external appearance changes or when only metonymic manifestation of the characters are available.

### ***Affiliation between Characters in RE and PB***

Affiliation between characters in the two picturebooks was analysed by looking at power, proximity and orientation of the different characters. The visual and text in opening 2 of *RE* provides the only example of affiliation between characters. Proximity wise, the three elephants are standing slightly apart from each other near a strange red tree and in terms of orientation, the bodies of the elephants are not parallel with each other. However, they are equal in power as they can maintain eye contact with each other (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The visual clearly shows that they are not strangers, and this resonates with the written text which informs readers that the three elephants are part of a herd. There is convergence in meaning as both semiotic modes indicate that the three elephants do not have an intimate relationship with each other. The distant affiliation between the anthropomorphized tree and the elephant is also evident in opening 2. Visually, the tree is looking down with a smile at the elephant that is attempting to pick the red fruit. This puts the anthropomorphised tree in power. There is also no eye contact between them. The lack of eye contact and unequal power shows that there is no relationship between the elephant and the tree. The absence of verbal intimacy markers in the written text affirms the distant affiliation between the two characters.

The elephant also does not share a cordial affiliation with the other animals that live in the jungle. The textual data in Openings 6 and 7 as seen in Table 2 clearly shows this. The restricted nature of conversation shows the lack of solidarity and points out the gap in the relationships between the animals. The elephant is mocked by other animals and not included in their conversations. The visuals support this because in both the openings the elephant appears alone. There is no sign of the fish or the crocodiles. This indicates that the main character does not have any sort of relationship with the other animals after undergoing the makeover.

**Table 2**

*Verbal conversation in The Real Elephant*

"Oh, what fish is this?" asked the other fish among themselves.	RE/ OP 6/L3
"It looks like a crocodile but it's not really a crocodile".	RE/ OP 7/L2
The crocodiles teased the elephant and laughed loudly.	RE/ OP 7/L3

In *PB*, the relationship between the main character and a strange tree as well as other animals are evident in a few openings. In opening 1, the butterfly is introduced visually by setting it apart from the others. It is positioned above the other animals and in terms of size, it is the largest. This shows that it is in power. There is no attachment between the main character and the other animals because the social distance between them is wide. However, all this information is not available textually as the butterfly is only introduced in opening 2. In opening 4, there is convergence of meaning in terms of affiliation between characters. The visual shows the butterfly hovering above the strange tree (high angle) and this puts it in a position of power while the textual analysis shows that the butterfly finds the strange tree repulsive and as such maintains a distance from it. Both modes prove that the butterfly and the tree are not friends. In opening 9, there is convergence between the visual and written text in terms of power (refer to Figure 5). Visually, the butterfly is looking up towards the ant and the caterpillar and this shows its lack of power. This resonates textually with the non-compliant response from the ant and caterpillar when they reject the butterfly's request of friendship. The lack of written or verbal intimacy markers in their exchanges also indicates detachment.

**Figure 5**

*Opening 9 of The Proud Butterfly and the Strange Tree (Jainal Amambing, 2011)*



The affiliation between the characters changes towards the end of the story. For instance, in opening 10, the visual shows the butterfly and the tree are on equal footing in terms of power as the angle is at eye-level. In terms of proximity, the butterfly is close to the tree as it is sitting on the branch. The butterfly's linguistic choices of plea in the written text resonates with the visual information and proves that it wants to be friends with the tree. In the final opening, the visual mode shows that in terms of proximity, the butterfly and the tree are affiliated as they are depicted closely together. However, in terms of cohesion, there is divergence in meaning as this information is not evident textually. In brief, the visual mode commits more information about the relationship between characters compared to the



written text. As such, visual literacy knowledge is necessary to understand the affiliation between characters.

## DISCUSSION

RE and PB are categorised as fables because the stories in these two picture books feature anthropomorphised animals and natural elements as characters. The anthropomorphised animals or trees often has eyes as they help to establish connection with the readers (Yusof Gajah, personal communication, April 12, 2017). Likewise, the main character in PB is humanised to attract the attention of young readers (Jainal Amambing, personal communication, May 29, 2017).

Size and position are two semiotic resources that play an important part in conveying information about characters. In RE, the main character is portrayed solely from opening 3 onwards and its size is exaggerated in most openings. The elephant's large size could be related to ego or greed as it is never pleased with its various transformations (Moebius, 1986). The supporting character, an anthropomorphic tree is introduced first in opening 1, but it is positioned on the left foreground and not in the centre as it is not the protagonist in this story. In opening 2, the relative size and height of the tree, its humanised features and its position clearly reveal its important role in the story compared to the written text. Similarly, in the introductory opening of PB, the butterfly's central positioning on the right page highlights its important role in the story. All these information is not available textually in opening 1. In summary, visual meaning systems like size, colour and position commit a lot of meaning in picture books (Prior & Willson, 2013).

For character attribution, only minimal attributes are utilised textually because of word limitation (Paul, 2018). Intensive attributes like strange, black and beautiful are used in both picture books to describe the characters' external features as they help to make the characters vivid while the inclusion of at least one conceptual visual of the main characters' provides the readers information about their physical attributes (Painter et al., 2013). Colour, a visual meaning system, provides additional information about character attribution. In RE, different colours are used to depict the transformed elephant while in PB, the main character's colourful external appearance sets it apart from the other unicolour butterflies. In addition, the change in the strange tree's colour and size in PB help to signal a change in the storyline and simultaneously, highlight the tree's role in the story. Overall, in terms of commitment, the visual mode in both picture books conveys more information about the main characters' external descriptions.

Character qualities focus on a character's internal qualities like honesty and kindness. A character's qualities can be judged visually by looking at the way the character acts and evaluated textually by analysing the way the character thinks, feels or says using evaluative language (judgement), an Attitude subsystem in the Appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005). In RE, the textual mode provides more details of the elephant's internal traits while the visual mode provides more information about the anthropomorphic tree's internal characteristics. Conversely, in PB, the textual mode conveys more meaning for character qualities. The use of 'direct speech' in opening 10 verbalises the protagonist's sincerity (Lukens & Cline, 1995) while the narrator's opinion in opening 12 discloses the protagonist's change of heart. Alternatively, the visual mode exaggerates the butterfly's size in a number of openings. Size is used to highlight its role as the main character in the story and to symbolise its overblown ego (Moebius, 1986) while position is used to signal its superiority. The butterfly is positioned above the other animals and indirectly, this height on the page shows that the main character is in great spirits and elated with itself or situation (Moebius, 1986). In short, the textual mode includes information like what the character says, thinks, and does, what other characters say about the character, and what the narrator says about a character (Kirsznier & Mandell, 2007), while the visual mode highlights the butterfly's transition from being egoistic to humble. Knowledge about visual and textual meaning making systems are necessary for readers to deepen their understanding of narrative multimodal texts and communicate accurately the ideas presented in them.

For character manifestation and identification, both the visual and textual modes are required to provide clarity to the readers. Size and position are two resources used to identify and isolate the main character

from other characters who share a similar external appearance. For instance, the protagonist in RE appears together with two other elephants who are similar in size and shape while the protagonist in PB is depicted with other similar looking butterflies. Readers who are equipped with visual literacy knowledge will be able to identify the main characters easily as they are always shown apart from the others, have a larger size, positioned in the centre or placed near the antagonist. The textual mode aids to confirm the identity of the elephant in RE who transforms into weird looking animals in each opening as well as in PB, when the butterfly's appearance changes completely. In summary, although the metonymic representation of the characters are sufficient to ensure the continuity of the visual appearance, it is the textual mode that justifies their identities (Hladíková, 2014, p. 25). It is through the interactive nature of the visual and textual systems that meaning is constructed in picture books.

Affiliation between characters can be understood textually by analysing their dialogues and actions (Yokata & Teale, 2005, p. 163) and visually by analysing the meaning systems of power, proximity and orientation. In RE, there is divergence in opening 2 as the visual shows the power possessed by the anthropomorphic tree over the elephant and simultaneously, reveals the gap in their relationship. This lack of affiliation is not stated textually. Conversely, both modes highlight the distant relationship between the elephant and the other animals in Openings 6 and 7 of RE. The other animals are not featured alongside the elephant in the visuals and similarly, the textual analysis shows that the elephant is excluded in the conversations among other animals. Hence, knowledge about visual and textual meaning systems are necessary to understand the relationship between the characters. This knowledge will indirectly enable them to process meaning conveyed in other complex forms of multimodal texts and prepare them for the digital world.

## CONCLUSION

The focus of this study is on the literary element 'character' as it helps young readers to comprehend the story clearly (Roser et al., 2007) and obtain "deeper levels of meaning" (Prior et al., 2012, p. 196). Being a multimodal text, characters in picture books are developed through the written text and visuals. It is vital to have a good understanding of the literary element 'character' in picture books particularly their inner traits, personality and relationship with others because all these aspects play a major part in the plot and conflicts that occur within the story.

In terms of cohesion for the literary element 'character', the visual semiotic mode provides more meaning and plays a more dominant role. For character attribution, the visuals provide additional descriptions of the protagonist like its colour, size, position and pertinent details of its unique transformations in RE and PB. For character qualities, both modes play an important role. The textual mode provides more details of the elephant's qualities in RE and the butterfly's thoughts and deeds in PB, while the visual mode provides more information about the anthropomorphic tree's qualities in RE. As such, readers need knowledge on both modes to understand the stories fully. For character manifestation and identification, both the visual and textual semiotic modes are necessary to make the meanings clearer and to confirm the characters' identities especially when there is a change or transformation in the characters' external appearances. For affiliation between characters, both modes are needed to obtain full meaning although the visual mode commits more information in RE like the anthropomorphic tree's supremacy in Opening 2 and the close relationship between the butterfly and the other animals in the final opening of PB.

This study suggests that the adapted Painter et al.'s (2013) multimodal discourse framework is useful in analysing 'character' in picture books as it provides a comprehensive description of the literary element. According to the writer-illustrator of PB, more details about the characters are available visually (Jainal Amambing, personal communication, May 29, 2017). Visual meaning systems like power, proximity, orientation, size and position will help readers to better interpret and understand the literary element 'character', especially if they are taught explicitly (Papen, 2020). In addition, this framework will help teachers in fostering young learners' visual literacy and providing them the necessary metalanguage to understand the qualities and subtle devices that delineate character in picture books.

## REFERENCES

- Bland, J. (2015). Pictures, images and deep reading. *Children's Literature in English Language Education*, 3(2), 24-36.
- Bull, G., & Anstey, M. (2010). *Evolving Pedagogies (ebook): Reading and writing in a multimodal world*. Curriculum Press.
- Hassett, D. D., & Curwood, J. S. (2009). Theories and practices of multimodal education: The instructional dynamics of picture books and primary classrooms. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(4), 270-282.
- Hladíková, H. (2014). Children's book illustrations: Visual language of picture books. *CRIS-Bulletin of the Centre for Research and Interdisciplinary Study*, 2014(1), 19-31.
- Jainal Amambing. (2011). *The Proud Butterfly and the Strange Tree*. OYEZ
- Kirsznier, L. G., & Mandell, S. R. (2007). *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. (Sixth ed.). Thomson Wadsworth.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Lukens, R. J., & Cline, R. K. (1995). *A critical handbook of literature for young adults*. Harpercollins College Div.
- Martin, J., & White, P. P. P. (2005). *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martinez, M., & Harmon, J. M. (2012). Picture/Text Relationships: An Investigation of Literary Elements in Picturebooks. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 51(4), 323-343. doi:10.1080/19388071.2012.695856
- McNair, J. C. (2021). Surprise, surprise! Exploring dust jackets, case covers, and endpapers in picture books to support comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 74(4), 363-373.
- Moebius, W. (1986). Introduction to picturebook codes. *Word & Image*, 2(2), 141-158.
- Moya, A. J. (2011). Engaging readers through language and pictures. A case study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(12), 2982-2991.
- Moya, A. J. (2014). *A Multimodal Analysis of Picture Books for Children*. Equinox.
- O'Neil, K. E. (2011). Reading pictures: Developing visual literacy for greater comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 65(3), 214-223.
- Painter, C. (2007). Children's Picture Book Narratives: Reading Sequences of Images. In A. McCabe, M. O'Donnell, & R. Whittaker (Eds.), *Advances in Language and Education* (pp. 40-59). Continuum.
- Painter, C., Martin, J. R., & Unsworth, L. (2013). *Reading Visual Narratives: Image Analysis of Children's Picture Books*. Equinox Publishing.
- Papen, U. (2020). Using picture books to develop critical visual literacy in primary schools: challenges of a dialogic approach. *Literacy*, 54(1), 3-10.
- Paul, A. W. (2018). *Writing Picture Books Revised and Expanded Edition: A Hands-On Guide From Story Creation to Publication* (Revised ed.). Writer's Digest Books.
- Prior, L. A., Willson, A., & Martinez, M. (2012). Picture this: Visual literacy as a pathway to character understanding. *The Reading Teacher*, 66(3), 195-206.
- Prior, L. A., & Willson, A. M. (2013). Vivid Portraits: The Art of Characterization in Picturebook Illustrations. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 39(1), 53.
- Romero, E. D., & Bobkina, J. (2021). Exploring critical and visual literacy needs in digital learning environments: The use of memes in the EFL/ESL university classroom. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 40, 100783.
- Roser, N., Martinez, M., Fuhrken, C., & McDonnold, K. (2007). Characters as guides to meaning. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(6), 548-559.
- Serafini, F. (2009). Understanding visual images in picturebooks. In J. Evans (Ed.), *Talking beyond the page: Reading and responding to picturebooks* (pp. 10-25). Routledge.
- Silverman, K. N., & Piedmont, J. (2016). Reading the Big Picture: A Visual Literacy Curriculum for Today. *Knowledge Quest*, 44(5), 32-37.
- Sipe, L. R., & Brightman, A. E. (2009). Young children's interpretations of page breaks in contemporary picture storybooks. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 41(1), 68-103.

- Unsworth, L., & Wheeler, J. (2002). Re-valuing the role of images in reviewing picture books. *Reading, 36*(2), 68-74.
- Yokata, J., & Teale, W. H. (2005). Bringing the best of characters into the primary classrooms. In N. L. Roser, M. Martinez, J. Yokota, & S. F. O'Neal (Eds.), *What a character! Character study as a gateway to literary understanding*. (pp. 154-167). International Reading Association.
- Youngs, S., & Serafini, F. (2013). Discussing Picturebooks across Perceptual, Structural and Ideological Perspectives. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 9*(1), 185-200.
- Yusof Gajah. (2011). *The Real Elephant*. Gajah.