AN INTERPRETATION OF SYMBOLS IN ADE FIRZA PALOH'S *BUNGA DI TELINGA*

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ABSTRACT

Figurative language always has a special place in the heart of literature enthusiasts. This is because; it plays a vital role in beautifying the literary works as well as conveying its figurative meaning which could lead to ambiguity thus resulting in various interpretations (Fadaee, 2010). One of the frequent used figurative languages in literature is symbolism. Flower behind the ear is the prominent symbol offered by Ade Firza Paloh in the lyrics of *Bunga di Telinga*. Thus, this study investigates the differences in the interpretation of the symbols presented and the difficulty level rated by the respondents of different literature background. In reference to literature background, purposive sampling is applied in this study. The study involved LG120 (Diploma in English for Professional Communication) students from UiTM (Universiti Teknologi MARA) Cawangan Johor; two groups (Semester 1 and Semester 2). A mixed-method sequential explanatory study involved an experimental design and a semi-structured interview procedure. Data analysis will make use of the t-test procedure for the statistical results of the quantitative data, and the thematic analysis for qualitative data obtained. In contrast to previous literatures, there is no significant difference shown by the interpretation and difficulty level rating obtained from the two groups studied.

Keywords: literary interpretation, symbols, figurative language, literature background, flower behind the ear

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Applying figures of speech in literary works is highly looked upon by literature enthusiasts. They are setting their pens to appraise those works based on the figurative language presented. Appraising literary works means analysing the figurative languages used by the authors, including poems, short stories, drama, song lyrics, and other forms of literary works. As mentioned by Fadaee (2011), figures of speech are important in literature and ordinary communication as they are used to deliver the meaning beyond their typical practice.

Bunga di Telinga is a Malay phrase that can be defined as flower behind the ear in English. It can specifically refer to the flower behind the ear that is put by a person either to invite beauty or other specific reasons according to his or her respective cultures.

The song *Bunga di Telinga* is written in Indonesian by an Indonesian musician, singer and writer, Ade Firza Paloh. Ade Firza Paloh was formerly known with an Indonesian band called *Sore*. He is also known as a musician and a writer who has a huge talent in producing poetic and interesting lyrics with strong character because of ambiguity and eclecticism elements surrounded in. (Jenie, 2014).

Since this song lyrics were written by a very talented writer, it was granted to a very talented musician and singer too which is Noh Salleh. Starting his career with an independent band called *Hujan* as the frontman (Tan, 2013); he is one of the fans who admired the music genre presented by Ade Firza Paloh's former band, *Sore*. Thus, the admiration turns into a collaboration between these two talented musicians in songs writing. The song *Bunga di Telinga* was granted to him for his solo album project known as '*Angin Kencang*' which was released in 2014 (The Display, 2017).

Even though the singer of *Bunga di Telinga*, has clearly mentioned that the title and the storyline are inspired by his wife's portrait, this study is going to portray the interpretation of the symbols through the perspective of these language students.

> "*Bunga Di Telinga* – This song is inspired by Mizz Nina's portrait which portrays a beautiful lady with a gentle and graceful personality shown through her charming smile with the lovely flower behind her ear." (2014).

Problem Statement
It is indeed expected that every mind follows its own map in interpreting a literary work. Therefore, these two groups of language students of different literature backgrounds are also expected to provide different interpretation of symbols. Even though it is a celebration to witness different kinds of interpretation produced by the language students, we are keen to find out whether their literature background/knowledge is the main contributor for the diversity to exist.

Significance of the Study

Teaching aesthetic works to students is indeed a challenge as teachers ought to instil the understanding of a literary piece to class. Nevertheless, the students' literature knowledge/background should not be cared less along the effort. Therefore, this study will alleviate the teachers' concern in viewing similar or different opinions and interpretations produced by their students of different literature background.

Research Objectives & Research Questions

This study is meant to investigate the differences in the interpretation of the symbols presented in the song and the difficulty level rated by the respondents of different literature background. Enrolling to the same course in university does not promise a similar knowledge and background of the students especially in the field of literature. Thus, the objectives of the study are listed below;

1) To identify whether there is a difference in Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students' rating for level of difficulty in interpreting the symbol presented in the lyrics.
2) To identify different interpretations by Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students on symbol presented in the lyrics.

Briefly, this study is meant to answer two research questions which are;

1) Is there any difference in Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students' rating for level of difficulty in interpreting the symbol presented in the lyrics?
2) Do Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students provide different interpretations on symbol presented in the lyrics?

Based on the previous literatures, this study has formulated two hypotheses;

H_0 : There is no significant difference between Part 1 LG120 students and Part 2 LG120 students in rating for the level of difficulty in interpreting the symbol presented in the lyrics.

H_1 : There is a significant difference between Part 1 LG120 students and Part 2 LG120 students in rating for the level of difficulty in interpreting the symbol presented in the lyrics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In understanding the word symbol, we can refer to the explanation in Webster (2003), where the original words were from Greek, 'symbolon' and Latin 'symbolum' which meant 'token' or 'sign'. Then, these two words were combined to a word called 'symballein' which means 'to throw together'.

As retrieved from the online Encyclopedia Britanica (2009), the definition of a symbol is "a communication element intended to simply represent or stand for a complex of person, object,

group, or idea."

Meanwhile, Shaw (1881), in the Dictionary of Literary Terms, defines a symbol as "something used for, regarded as, representing something else, it is also a word or phrase used to express complex association of meanings and values.

Perrine (1974) also defines a literary symbol as an object, a person, a situation, an action, or other items that own its literal meaning while suggesting other meanings as well.

Classification of symbols

Among the five classifications of symbols related to literature;
    i) arbitrary symbols – common symbols that can be easily interpreted by the reader (e.g: red colour = bravery)
    ii) personal symbols – freshly created by the poet/writer which means more effort needed from the readers to interpret them (e.g: lion – symbol of God in Molana's poem) (Shamisa, 2004)
    iii) significative symbols – arbitrary symbols that are commonly used in a certain field or a study (e.g: @ is used to signify email address)
    iv) metaphoric symbols – symbols used for natural phenomena (e.g: flying birds symbolise freedom)
    v) commemorative symbols – symbols that add a real event to a memory (e.g: rosemary symbolises Anzac Day)
    vi) sacramental symbols – symbols used in myths and customs (e.g: white candle symbolises newly baptised)

General and specific symbols

As highlighted by Fadaee (2011), symbols that own a stable and fixed meaning can be categorised as general symbols. In other words, it is universally understood that a certain symbol should be understood in a certain way other than its fixed literal meaning. As an illustration, upon seeing a majority of people are wearing black attires from head to toe coming in your way, it could be understood as they are mourning, or they are attending a funeral.

Meanwhile, specific symbols tend to suggest meanings that are specially created by the writer to honour them besides their literal meaning. In identifying those, readers should be able to observe some clues provided in a particular literary work. Therefore, there are a few aspects that could be paid attention to, namely;
    i) Clues provided in the literary work; repetition, emphasis or position.
    ii) The entire context of the work; inside the text, not outside.
    iii) Different kinds of meaning than its literal meaning.
    iv) Representation of something more than it possesses,

Flower behind the ear around the globe
As our earth is brilliantly divided by the geographical settings, it contributes to the various meaning of wearing flower behind the ear. Putting a flower behind one's ear can suggest various meanings than just a fashion statement according to certain regions. As we are referring to the Hawaiian culture, wearing a flower behind the left ear, means that a person is married or in a relationship. Meanwhile, wearing a flower behind the right ear, suggests that a person is single, and probably looking for a partner (Hawaii's Most Popular Flowers and How to Wear Them., 2016)

Following is the meaning of wearing flowers behind the ear in the Asian continent, such as Japan and Korea. In Japan, specifically in Okinawa, other than wearing flower behind the ear for a fashion statement, they hold the same meaning as Hawaiian culture where their relationship status is revealed by that act. Similarly in Okinawa, wearing flower behind the left ear, suggests that a person is married or in a relationship, while putting the flower behind the right ear means that a person is ready to be approached and looking for a companion. However, in Korea, wearing flowers behind the ear generally means that a person is having a mental issue.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Theoretical Framework
There are two main variables that have been used in this study as adapted from Perrine (1974);
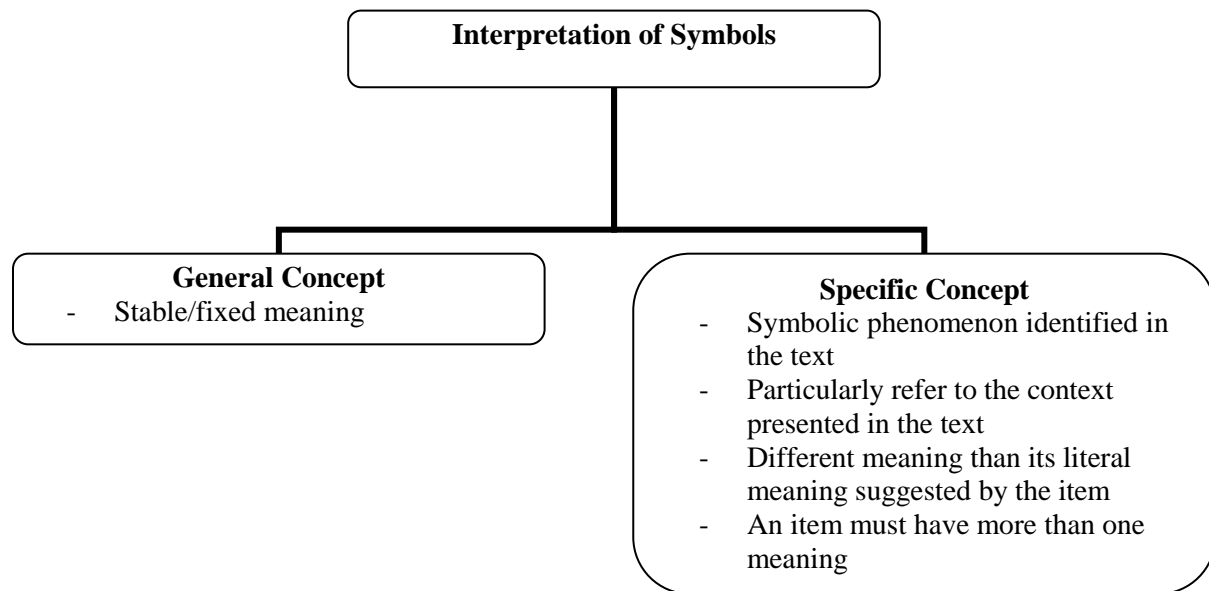

Figure 1. *(Theoretical Framework)*

The students' interpretations of flower behind the ear will be investigated and analysed based on the general and specific concept even though it is well-known that the general concept variable suggests a stable meaning which is the aesthetic pleasure or its relationship with the fashion statement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This study made use of a mixed-method design uniting quantitative and qualitative approaches. As cited in Morse (2012), a mixed-method design is used when a certain research question cannot be answered by a single method approach. Other than that, a mixed-method approach is also used where the possibility of an improved research outcome arises. The former research by Sandelowski (2000) also highlighted that there was an increasing number of researchers using this mixed-method approach as this method has said to aid in expanding the scope and deepen their understanding of their researches. For this study, the data for students' rating for difficulty level in interpreting the symbols presented in the lyrics were collected using an experimental design. This quantitative data was analysed using the independent t-test procedure for the significant statistical difference. Meanwhile, the data for different interpretations produced by the respondents were recorded using a semi-structured interview. In brief, this qualitative approach was analysed using the thematic analysis where the recurring themes were paid attention to.

Research Samples
The samples for this study were 20 Diploma students from UiTM Johor, Malaysia. They are the students of Diploma in English for Professional Communication (LG120). Enrolling to this programme means that they must complete one of the compulsory subjects according to their study plan, which is ALS103 Literature during the first semester of their diploma year. This is the subject that will provide them with the knowledge of literature within a semester.

Sample Selection
A purposive sampling method was applied in this study. The respondents were selected among the Diploma in English for Professional Communication (LG120) community. This is important as we are specifically focusing on the ratings and interpretations based on their literature background. For this study, different literature backgrounds of the students are defined based on their completion of ALS103 Literature course from their semester 1 study plan. The semester 1 students who have not completed the literature course were categorised as without the literature background, while the Semester 2 students who have completed the course were the students with literature background. Therefore, the 20 students were grouped into two groups. Group 1 consists of 10 students of Diploma in English for Professional Communication from Semester 1 and Group 2 consists of 10 students from Semester 2.

Research Procedures
The quantitative data of the study were collected using the experimental design. The students from both groups were asked to rate the difficulty level that they faced when interpreting the symbols presented in the song. Then, the data were analysed using the independent t-test provided by the SPSS application to seek for the significant statistical difference between the two groups.

The data from the first research instrument were then complemented with the qualitative approach using the experimental design, where the semi-structured interview sessions were carried out. The students were asked to interpret the symbols presented in the song. An important detail to note here is the students were not equipped with any assistance be it internet searching aids or the interviewer's interference. They were supposed to interpret the symbols based on their current and prior knowledge of literature. The students were also provided with the audio of the song together with the lyrics. The data obtained were recorded and manually transcribed and analysed using the thematic analysis by focusing on the recurring themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings are discussed based on two research questions;

RQ1: Is there any difference in Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students' rating for level of difficulty in interpreting the symbol presented in the lyrics?
An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the Semester 1 and Semester 2 students' rating of their difficulty level in interpreting symbols presented in the song lyrics. Based on the analysis, it was found that there was no significant difference in the students' rating of their difficulty level in interpreting the symbols by the scores (M=1.6, SD=0.51640), conditions; t (0.866), *p*=0.398. The results are displayed in the table below;

Table 1
Independent Sample Test

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Difficulty level	1	10	1.6000	.51640	.16330
	2	10	1.4000	.51640	.16330

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Difficulty level	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	.866	18	.398	.20000	.23094	-.28519	.68519
	Equal variances not assumed			.866	18.000	.398	.20000	.23094	-.28519	.68519

Since *p-value* recorded is 0.398, this study failed to reject the null hypothesis proposed earlier;

H₀ : There is no significant difference between Part 1 LG120 students and Part 2 LG120 students in rating for the level of difficulty in interpreting the symbols presented in the lyrics.

Therefore, ***H₁ : There is a significant difference between Part 1 LG120 students and Part 2 LG120 students in rating for the level of difficulty in interpreting the symbols presented in the lyrics*** is rejected.

These results show that even though Semester 1 and Semester 2 students are basically from different literature background, they did not provide different ratings for difficulty level in interpreting symbols presented in the song. This is inconsistent with the previous research by Levine and Horton (2015), as their findings revealed that different exposures on literary appreciation practices experienced by students resulted in different meaningful interpretation of a literary text.

RQ2: Do Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students provide different interpretations on symbols presented in the lyrics?

To answer the second research question, semi-structured interview sessions were carried out to get the students' interpretations of the symbols presented in the song. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis using a thematic analysis approach. Based on the analysis, three main themes of their interpretations were identified as displayed in the following table:

Table 2
Thematic Analysis

Category	Term in Category	Interview excerpt
Personality	Lovely and magnificent	The woman that he loves looked very lovely and magnificent when she wears a flower between her ear.
	Gentle	I picture the "bunga" in this song as a symbol of beauty and a sense of gentleness is every woman's heart. So the writer was trying to say that the girl would be more beautiful if she has a sense of gentleness in her.
Emotion	Happiness	The flower behind the ear could symbolise happiness that spreads a good vibes
	Calm and peace	The flower reminds him of his loss as well as taught him to wait and be patient to stay calm in peace no matter what.
	Love	The flowers itself symbolize their genuine love, honesty and luck, and their avidity to be together forever.
Physical appearance	Beautiful	He also thought that she looked even more beautiful with a flower on her ear.
		He also said that the girl was very beautiful.
		It's a habit of the girl or the one he adores (she) of doing, where she placed the flower at her ear, as a symbol of beauty
	Elegant	The lady looks elegant with the flower behind her ear

The thematic analysis conducted revealed three important keywords interpreted by the respondents, reflecting both general and specific concepts of the interpretation of symbols as premiered in the theoretical framework. Basically, their interpretations were concentrating on personality, emotion, and physical appearance.

The first keyword obtained from the interview and the analysis is personality. The respondents interpreted the person, especially a woman as she is looking lovely and magnificent when putting the flower behind her ear. Other than that, the flower behind the ear also portrays that the person is having a gentle personality as they linked the physical look of the lovely flower to the person's personality. This is because; a flower is naturally a divine plant that symbolises beauty. These interpretations also suggest that the person who wears a flower behind the ear is easily approachable and friendly.

Next, emotion was selected as the second keyword to categorise the responses collected from the interview. The respondents interpreted a person who puts the flower behind the ear as a person who possesses happiness, calm, peaceful and live in a life filled with love. The emotions of the singer were also interpreted by the respondents based on the flower behind the ear of his life-partner. The singer was said to be calm and peace regardless of the hurdles he faced when waiting for his lover to be with him. Meanwhile, the flower behind the ear also symbolises their love vow which is genuine and eternal.

The third keyword derived from the responses to explain the meaning of the symbol is physical appearance. As the nature of a flower where the beauty lies in it, the respondents interpreted the meaning of putting the flower behind the ear as the representation of a person's beauty. In fact, the person is not just beautiful when having the flower behind the ear; she is looking more elegant as she appears to others' visuals.

In brief, even though the respondents from two different literature backgrounds were interviewed on the interpretation of symbol in the song *Bunga di Telinga* produced different interpretations, their views can be categorised under the same three keywords which are personality, emotion and physical appearance. Thus, there is no significant difference between the interpretations produced by Semester 1 LG120 students and Semester 2 LG120 students.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

To encapsulate, most of the respondents from both semesters rated their interpretation process as challenging since the Indonesian vocabularies presented were complicated. As Malaysian students, they are not familiar with Indonesian vocabularies, and the challenged elevated as some of the vocabularies are from classic Indonesian accompanied with amazing poetic values. As for the interpretation of the prominent symbol presented which is *bunga di telinga* – (flower behind the ear), majority of them chose the terms beauty and elegance representation of women as the conspicuous sense.

For future research, it is a celebration to witness this procedure to be applied to different interpretations provided by the respondents based on other literary elements.

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