

Cross-Cultural Narratives in Literature for Children: A Cyber Semiotics Analysis

Encik Savira Isnah^{1*}, Suyatno², Heny Subandiyah³, Suhartono⁴,
Udjang Pairin⁵, Darni⁶

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6} Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. Email: encik.19025@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Literature for children in cyberspace like YouTube is easily accessible by anyone around the world. Unknowingly, it has led to cultural exchange. As a result, there is an exchange from different localities, so that it can enrich the culture of the watchers or listeners. This study aims to look at cross-cultural narratives in literature for children using cyber media with a cyberspace perspective. In this paper, the focus of the research is the children animation entitled “Upin Ipin”. The results show that cyber literature for children contains many cross-cultural narratives, including English, *Divaphali* celebrations, Chinese New Year celebrations, night markets, and Korean-style haircuts. Its influences, in reality, are shown through the reactions recorded in cyberspace. In the conclusion, cross-culture narration in literature for children does not only affect fictional works, but also in real life.

Keywords: *Cross-Culture, Literature for Children, Cyberspace.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural studies on literature for children are in accordance with the postmodern spirit. It eliminates homogenization and centralization, which aims to realize the existence of different localities for the benefit of cultural plurality. In the conditions of postmodern culture and society due to technological developments, there has been a paradigmatic change in literature for children and its publication process. Literature for children, according to Nodleman, is a fictional story containing the imagination of children created by the author in the form of writing, pictures, or movies [1].

Generation Z is identical to the use of gadgets and the internet in daily activities, one of which is YouTube. The data in Indonesia shows that 98% of Indonesians know about smartphones and the Internet; as many as 79.5% are children and adolescents [2]. Internet is synonymous with cyberspace, a virtual space where humans can share information without boundaries of time or place (borderless). Cyberspace can not only be described as software or hardware as defined by Benedikt [3]; it is more about awareness to understand the combination of factual and virtual reality [4]. The existence of cyberspace makes the literary industry have

to adapt by making literature for children combined with cyberspace, hereinafter referred to as cyber literature for children.

Animation for children as a form of cyber literature for children contains cross-cultural narratives resulting in the disappearance of a global and centralized hierarchical system where a process of cultural heterogeneity occurs. Despite being challenged by other cultures, the national identity of Indonesian children cannot be replaced. This can be seen from the research that conducted by Suyatno which shows that novels by Indonesian children still present national identity [5]. On the other hand, the culture industry sees children as a promising field for ideological cultivation [6]. Therefore, research on cyber literature for children is important.

Upin Ipin (UI) is an animation produced by Burhanuddin Radzi and Ainon Ariff from Malaysia which tells the life of twin boys named Upin (wearing a yellow shirt) and Ipin (wearing a blue shirt with a strand of hair on the head and a red scarf around his neck). They live with Opah and Kak Ros because their parents have passed away. This series uses the local Malaysian language, Malay. They have friends from different cultural backgrounds: Jarjit is a Hindu of Indian descent,

Mei-Mei is a Chinese descent, and Susanti is from Indonesia. Interestingly, Upin Ipin as an Asian series has succeeded in penetrating the country market in Europe (Turkey). That means the culture contained in the series has reached Europe.

Raina in her dissertation analysed the form of Muslim representation across cultures in America in the texts after the WTC bombing on September 9, 2011 [7]. She concluded that many cultural pluralities were brought up, so the readers could recognize them through the reading process. Meanwhile, in research that conducted by Putra, although Upin Ipin used the Malaysian language, it could be enjoyed by Indonesian. Then, those children began to use and imitate its vocabularies, for example, “*Nak main bola sepak, jom!*” (I want to play soccer, let's go!) [8]. The examples showed that if the blank slate mind of the children is filled with Upin Ipin language, they will appreciate the language more as Korea has hegemonized the world with Korean through K-pop [9]. Both studies show that works using cyber media are easily disseminated and become culturally hegemonic.

According to Locke, children are like blank papers that are easy to draw [10]. What they see will easily become a cognition or understanding that turns into an ideology. Awareness of the existence of different localities requires understanding and acknowledging cultural plurality on a global scale. The facts show that only by comparing the implications of different cultures, values, and awareness can deepen the study of the concept of cultural ideology [11]. Therefore, there is a need for communication, exchange, and mutually enriching cultural relationships from different localities so that tolerance and synergy among them can be built [12]. It can be found in the cross-cultural narrative analysis is carried out on cyber children's literature.

2. METHOD

Cyber semiotics seeks to see signs in cyber works (cyber literature) as a form of simulation that presents

hyper-reality. In short, this theory sees the connection between virtual reality and factual reality. Cross-culture does not only occur between national or ethnic cultures, but can also occur between virtual cultures and factual cultures. In the other way, virtual culture or cyberculture allows cross-culture to occur massively. Cyber semiotics proposes an interdisciplinary framework that integrates the triadic semiotics by Pierce with cyberculture views. Semiotics, which comes from the Greek for the sign, is the science of signs: the use, production, and transmission of meaning. Thus, this system is more comprehensive than the language itself and can be used to understand languages in non-verbal forms of communication such as cognition and interpretation [13]. The word “cyber” is taken from “cyberculture” which is the era of information technology that controls human behavior to produce other realities besides factual reality [14].

How cyber semiotics works:

1. find signs in literary works,
2. interpret the signs,
3. interpret the virtual reality in factual reality.

Data were obtained from a *Les Copaque* account titled Upin Ipin in one season (2019-2020) randomly selected by purposive sampling aimed at finding stories that contain cross-cultural and their influence on reality.

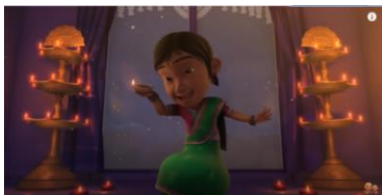
Below are the analysis steps:

1. data obtained from watching intensively repeatedly,
2. looking for signs that construct virtual reality about cross-cultural,
3. interpret the signs that construct virtual reality about cross-cultural with virtual reality,
4. provide an interpretation of the signs that construct virtual reality about cross-cultural in virtual reality,
5. make a conclusion.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Below are the finding and discussion from the analysis steps:

Table 1. Picture Analysis







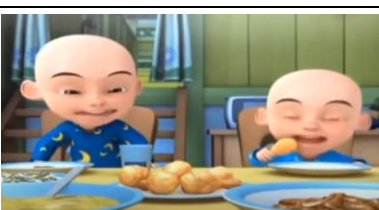
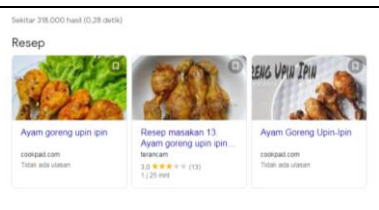
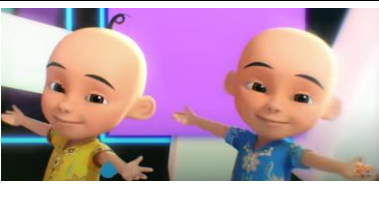

| No. | Pictures | Interpretations |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. |  | Devi who is Hindu has a culture of celebrating <i>Deepavali</i> . |

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| 2. |  | Upin-Ipin and Muslim friends who recite the Koran while waiting for <i>iftar</i> . |
| 3. |  | Mei-me and Ah Tong Chinese New Year Celebration. |
| 4. |  | Korean hairstyle becomes a hairstyle for the characters. |
| 5. |  | Grandma taste the <i>cekodok</i> made by Kak Ros. |
| 6. |  | Ipin, Mail, and Mei-me drink the ABCD ice made by uncle Muhtuh. |
| 7. |  | Upin and Ipin eat fried chicken, their favorite food. |
| 8. |  | Upin, Ipin, and friends dance " <i>Goyang Upin Ipin</i> " using batik. |

Table 2. Texts Analysis

| No. | Texts | Sign Interpretations |
|-----|---|---|
| 1. | Jarjit: <i>Maboulus... Mabolous..</i> | Jarjit's India accent of saying "marvelous". |
| 2. | Uncle Muhtuh: <i>Ayoyoi..</i> | Uncle Muhtuh's India accent of saying "aduh". |
| 3. | Upin: <i>Betul... betul... betul...</i> | Words that Upin often says when agreeing to something. |
| 4. | Mei-me: <i>Saya suka... saya suka</i> | Mei mei's Chinese accent when saying the word "I like". |
| 5. | Fizi: <i>Itambayong</i> | The word used to rebuke Ehsan. |
| 6. | Mail: <i>dua singgit</i> | Words in Malay that are always spoken by Mail when selling goods. |

Table 3. Virtual Reality Interpretations in a Factual Reality

| No. | Virtual Reality | Factual reality | Interpretations |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 1. |  |  | In the story entitled “New Hair”, Fizi mocked Upin Ipin for not having hair. He received a response from the factual reality that Fizi was labelled as having no morals and asked for an apology and clarification. |
| 2. |  |  | In “ <i>Pisang Ngap-Ngap</i> ”, Kak Ros cooked Cekodok which was served to Opah. Then, the factual reality society imitated it. |
| 3. |  |  | In “ <i>Kedai Upin Ipin</i> ”, Uncle Muhtuh served ABCD ice to the children. In factual reality, people tried the recipe. |
| 4. |  |  | In "Fried Chicken", Upin Ipin ate his favorite fried chicken. In factual reality, people recreated it. |
| 5. |  |  | In " <i>Goyang Upin Ipin</i> ", Upin Ipin danced with their friends wearing batik. In factual reality, the society imitated the dance. |

The findings of the cyber semiotic analysis on the Upin Ipin animation show that there are various forms of cross-cultural narratives in literature for children. First, there are cross-cultural narratives in the form of religious activities such as the celebration of Deepavali, Chinese New Year, and Ramadan. Second, cross-cultural narratives are shown in a variety of daily activities, such as hairstyles, types of food, and accents. Both of these things show that the community (the

authors) have freed themselves from the Euro-centric perspective so that an alternative perspective has emerged that comes from local Asian culture. The locality perspective must be accompanied by an awareness of the existence of other localities. In Upin Ipin, Asian cross-culturalism is shown to be acceptable in the Malay population. This shows the recognition of cultural plurality as shown in research that conducted by

Raina [7]. However, this study focuses more on Asian cross-cultural in Malaysian children's literature.

Cross-cultural narratives in children's literature not only affect stories and discourse in its fictional reality but also on the factual ones. According to Gavrikov, representation through signs in cyber works transforms postmodernist active acceptance of literature into interactive nonlinear acceptance [15]. It means that cyberspace contributes to a change in the awareness of the readers. Some cultural narratives such as food, entertainment, and accent are transformed from a virtual culture to a factual culture, which is happening in several countries. In the context of this article, only Indonesia will be mentioned. ABCD ice, Cekodok, and fried chicken which are originally just fiction become a reality when people think that these foods can be realized as real food in Indonesia. It happens because cyberspace creates an illusion of reality or hyper-reality, a situation when humans think that what they see or hear from cyberspace is a fact. Likewise, the typical words from Upin-Ipin "*Betul, betul, betul...*" are imitated by many children as explained in the research that conducted by Putra [8]. Moreover, the fictitious dance by Upin Ipin becomes a competition in the real world and attracts many Indonesians to join. Cross-cultural narratives in cyber literature for children can connect cross-country cultural patterns.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Cross-cultural narratives in literature for children in cyberspace can be seen in religious activities such as the celebration of *Deevapali*, Chinese New Year, and Ramadan, as well as in daily activities such as hairstyles, types of food, and accent. It shows an awareness of the existence of some localities, in literature for children, which is well accepted in the Malay population as an acknowledgment of cultural plurality. Cross-cultural narratives do not only affect stories and discourse in children's literary fiction, but also on factual reality. ABCD ice, *Cekodok*, and fried chicken which are originally just fictions become realities when people think that these foods can be realized as real foods in Indonesia. Cross-cultural narratives in cyber literature for children can connect cross-country cultural patterns.

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