

# **REVEALING FEMINISM IN ROALD DAHL'S *MATILDA* THROUGH BARTHES' NARRATIVE CODES**

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## ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini membahas tentang nilai feminisme yang terdapat dalam novel berjudul *Matilda* karya Roald Dahl. Dalam menganalisis data, saya menerapkan pendekatan semiotika berdasarkan kode-kode narasi dari Roland Barthes, khususnya kode tertulis. Saya membahas 24 leksia yang diambil dari novel *Matilda* menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Setelah menganalisis, saya menemukan bahwa sebagian besar makna feminisme terkandung dalam kode semik. Ini terjadi karena kode semik merujuk kepada hal-hal yang memiliki nilai konotasi. Oleh sebab itu, dapat diambil kesimpulan bahwa karakteristik dari tokoh-tokoh utama dalam cerita tidak mencerminkan stereotip gender. Sebaliknya, tokoh-tokoh tersebut mematahkan stereotip dan merepresentasikan ide feminisme. Melalui penelitian ini, pembaca diharapkan dapat menambah wawasan baik tentang nilai feminisme maupun pengaplikasian kode narasi Barthes dalam sebuah cerita. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga diharapkan dapat berguna sebagai referensi untuk penelitian di masa yang akan datang.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Many people enjoy literary works, namely prose, poetry and drama. To this day, prose is one of the most popular literary works that people enjoy reading regardless of their ages. In terms of the types, prose comes in several forms; one of which is novel. Novels, or “an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.), consist of several genres, for example romance, science-fiction, fantasy, thriller and adventure.

Novels are further divided into two categories: children’s novels and young adults’ novels (Akers, 2011). Besides the readers’ age, both categories are differentiated in several aspects. One of the examples is the subject or theme of the novel. Children’s novels mostly cover the idea of “the good and the evil and how can we change the world” (Lynley, 2014). The main reason, as mentioned by Lynley (2014), is because children are highly interested in understanding the world

and the way it works, more than adults. In addition, the character of children's novels often encounters hardships; yet, the story always ends with "some sense of hope" (Lynley, 2014). On the other hand, the theme in young adults' novels commonly reflect the reality of the teenagers' life, such as about relationships (Owen, n.d.).

Furthermore, there is always a message or moral value contained in both children's and young adults' novels. The messages are sometimes implied or mentioned explicitly. *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* (n.d.) defines implicit as "capable of being understood from something else though unexpressed", while explicit is "fully revealed without implication" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). The moral value in children stories is often presented explicitly, while young adults' stories usually contain an implied message. This is in accordance with the statement of Nuba, Sheiman and Searson (2016) that children take the message from the story literally, as they are said to have less experience of situations in their lives to be related to.

However, although a book is specifically targeted for children, it is likely that the story also appeals to adults' readers (O'Sullivan, 2015). As a result, the messages in a children book can appear both explicitly and implicitly. One of the authors whose children's stories often contain hidden messages for adults is Roald Dahl. He is a controversial British writer of several famous children classics, namely *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964). As stated in Biography (n.d.), Dahl is considered controversial as his children's books portray "children's harsh revenge on adult wrongdoers"

(Biography, n.d.). Aside from the two novels mentioned above, this kind of children's revenge is also portrayed in his book *Matilda* (1988). This book will be used as the data source of my thesis.

*Matilda*, published in 1988, is one of Dahl's controversial children's novels. This is because some people consider the writing misogynistic and contain violence, making it deemed to be inappropriate for young readers (Alston & Butler, 2013). It is about a smart little girl named Matilda Wormwood. Although being only eight years old, she is able to teach herself to master Mathematics and read books for adults without facing any difficulty. However, her life is surrounded by unsupportive parents and a wicked headmaster in her school, all of whom love to underestimate and bully her. Fortunately, she has Miss Honey, the only person who always supports her. With her intelligence and superpower, she always manages to take a revenge and fight bullying from both her parents and headmaster.

*Matilda* is an interesting novel to be analyzed because regardless of people's thinking the story contains violence and it is considered inappropriate for children, I believe that the characters in the novel portray the idea of feminism, including Matilda; despite being only five years old, she is described as someone who is wiser than her age (Dahl, 1988, p. 189). Thus, in order to reveal such an aspect from the novel, I will apply the theory of Semiotics, or finding the signs of feminism and interpret their meaning, respectively through Barthes' narrative codes.

Barthes provides some perspectives in seeing a text, which is also known as the narrative codes (Understanding Text, n.d.). As stated by Zaib and Mashori (2014), these codes are: (1) proairetic, or a code that shows sequence of action

within a story; (2) hermeneutic, or a code of enigma; (3) semantic, or a code with connotative meanings; (4) symbolic, or a code of binary polarities; and (5) cultural, or a code that is related to common knowledge of the world. However, the codes taken for the purpose of the study are the three writerly codes: semantic, symbolic and cultural.

Moreover, I am interested in conducting the study because I want to add a contribution to the study in the Semiotics field. I also hope this study will be useful in adding a reference for future research, especially in Barthes' narrative codes. Lastly, by conducting the study, I hope that this can help the readers understand how feminism is portrayed in Roald Dahl's children novel *Matilda*.

(Words: 844)

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

In this thesis, there are two research questions as follows:

1. What are the narrative codes found in *Matilda*?
2. How does each code represent feminism?

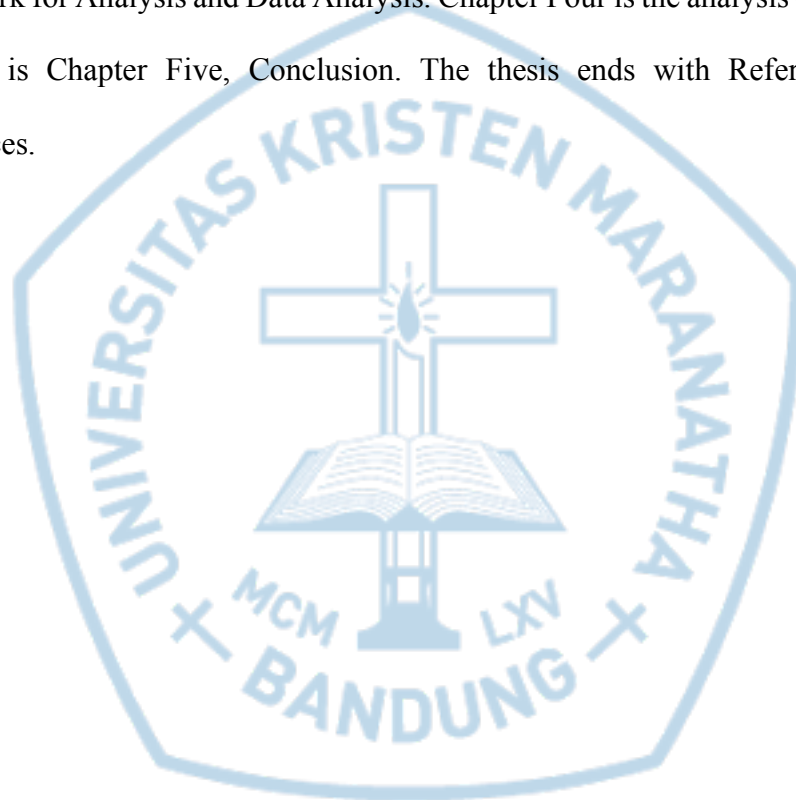
## **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this thesis are:

1. to find the narrative codes in *Matilda*.
2. to find how each code represents feminism.

## **1.4 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is Introduction, consisting of Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study and Organization of the Thesis. The second chapter is Literature Review, which explains the theories of gender stereotype, feminism, semiotics, the five narrative codes and critical review on the previous study. Chapter Three is Methods of Research, which consists of Research Design, Data Collection Technique, Framework for Analysis and Data Analysis. Chapter Four is the analysis of the data. The last is Chapter Five, Conclusion. The thesis ends with References and Appendices.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I would like to elaborate the theory used in this thesis, which is the Semiotic theory proposed by Roland Barthes on the Codes of Narrative. The theory is applied to find gender stereotype and the aspect of feminism in Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda*. This chapter will be divided into five sections, respectively: gender stereotype, feminism, semiotics, Roland Barthes' five narrative codes, and a critical review on similar research using Barthes' narrative codes.

#### 2.1 Gender Stereotype

World Health Organization [WHO] (n.d.) defines gender as a “socially constructed characteristics of women and men”. Since being born, female and male are expected to behave in accordance with gender norms which are applied within their communities (WHO, n.d.). These gender norms become culturally accepted that it later becomes stereotypes. Gender stereotypes, as stated in United Nations

[UN] (2014), is defined as a preconception or generalized view about the characteristics that should be possessed by men and women.

There are several common gender stereotypes in society, mainly concern about physical appearance, traits and occupations (Chandler & Munday, 2011). For instance, when talking about family life, people are more likely think about women, as women are expected to have warm and caring qualities; on the other hand, when it comes to discussing about careers, it is men that are more likely to appear on people's mind (Ellemers, 2018). In terms of physical appearance, it is said that "women are expected to be thin and graceful, while men are expected to be tall and muscular" (Sex and Gender Identity, n.d.) Another example of stereotype is women are commonly viewed as "sensitive and need to be protected by men" (Ellemers, 2018, p. 280) and men are "logical, sensible and rational" (Firestone, n.d.).

Gender stereotypes are believed to bring more harm than good. This is because stereotypes "can induce faulty assessments on people which can affect expectations about performance and bias consequent decisions that impact opportunities for both men and women" (Henstchel, Heilman, & Peus, 2019). Hence, it is best to break down expectations and roles based upon a person's assigned sex.

## **2.2 Feminism**

Cambridge online dictionary (n.d.) defines feminism as "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state". The movement spreads in Western world and is classified into three waves (Political

Studies Association, 2013), all of which focused on different issues. In my research, I would like to particularly focus on the second wave feminism, owing to the fact that *Matilda* is published in 1988 when the second wave feminism arises.

The second wave began from 1960s to 1980s and mainly concerned about inequality and patriarchy (Political Studies Association, 2013, para. 2). An American feminist, Betty Friedan (as cited in Political Studies Association, 2013) emphasizes that “feminism in its second wave was about breaking down gender stereotypes”.

Second wave feminism arises as a form of women’s reaction during the end of World War II and initially focused in the United States. During the World War II, women were employed in order to replace the position of men who had to join the defense forces; thus, once the men had returned, the women were fired and expected to spend their lives by doing domestic chores (Anand, 2018). The refusal of women doing these roles brought the second wave of feminism to the United States and later spread around the world. This movement is also marked by the emergence of National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, whose aim is “the true equality for all women”.

### **2.3 Semiotics**

A pioneer linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, defines semiotics as a study of signs (Yakin & Totu, 2014, p. 5). A sign itself is “anything that creates meaning. It is anything that can be used to represent something else” (Bradley, 2016). In other words, in semiotics, everything can be interpreted as a sign. Saussure (as cited in

Bradley, 2016) divides signs into two parts: signifier and signified. Signifier is the physical sign itself, which can be in the form of a word, a sound, a facial expression, or a sound. Meanwhile, signified is the representation of the object, for instance the colour red is a signifier that can either represent danger or a command to stop.

Saussure (as cited in Yakin & Totu, 2014) suggests that both signifiers and signified are inseparable as they “have a very close relationship and have mutual need and complement each other” (Yakin & Totu, 2014, p. 7).

#### **2.4 Five Narrative Codes by Roland Barthes**

In order to understand the five codes, I am going to divide this section into three subsections: (2.4.1) the work and the text, (2.4.2) readerly and writerly texts, and (2.4.3) the five codes.

##### **2.4.1 The Work and the Text**

Roland Barthes (1974) distinguishes between the text and the work in analyzing the text (Understanding Text, n.d.). According to Barthes, the differences between work and text are in terms of the position of the readers (para. 2). While reading a work, the readers are considered passive since they “cannot have different interpretation from what the author has intended” (Tanusy, 2018, p. 159). On the contrary, while reading a text, the readers “actively engage in [the narrative] production because it is not restricted by conventions of genre, linearity, or author control” (Understanding Text, n.d.). In other words, the readers are able to have any interpretation of the text although it may be different with the author’s intention

(Tanusy, 2018, p. 160). The text is divided into two kinds of texts: readerly and writerly.

#### **2.4.2 Readerly and Writerly Text**

A text is indicated as readerly when it has fixed meaning and causes the readers to be a mere receiver of information (Modules on Barthes, n.d.). In readerly texts, the readers are meant to experience and enjoy the text the way it has been designed for them (Readerly/Writerly, n.d.). The example of readerly text is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem *How Do I Love Thee*. The poem is considered as readerly text because the readers cannot have different interpretation of this poem; they may agree that this is a love poem.

Instead, when the readers are meant to take active role in order to uncover the meanings, the text is considered as writerly (Barthes & Text, n.d.). This results in the readers having a "full freedom to produce multiple textual meanings" (Zaib & Mashori, 2014, p. 174). The example of writerly text is T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922). The poem can be interpreted as death or "barrenness of a post-war world" (Taylor, 2016).

#### **2.4.3 The Five Codes**

In perceiving the meaning in both readerly and writerly text, Barthes invents five narrative codes (Understanding Text, n.d.). These codes are proairetic, hermeneutic, semantic, symbolic and cultural. Before determining the codes,

Barthes suggests the text to be broken into several lexias, or “the smaller sections of a larger, master text” (Understanding Text, n.d.).

Hermeneutic code (HER) is defined as “anything in the text that is mysterious or unexplained, usually leading to questions which the reader needs answered” (The Five Codes, n.d.). This code is also known as enigma code since it leads the readers’ curiosity in order to reveal why a certain thing is happening in the story (Zaib & Mashori, 2014, p. 173). The example of HER code mostly can be found in a detective story; for instance, a murder case is introduced in the beginning, but the readers must spend the entire reading to find out who the culprit is (Modules on Barthes, n.d.).

Proairetic code (ACT), also known as code of action, refers to elements which consist of sequence of actions and events that makes the story develop (Novak, 1997). This code also makes the readers question “what will be the reaction of a certain action?” (Zaib & Mashori, 2014). The example of ACT code is ‘She opened the cabinet and grabbed a knife. Then, she ran to the living room and stabbed the man’. This example contains ACT as it shows the action and reaction of the character *she*.

Semantic code (SEM) refers to the code which has connotative meanings (Zaib & Mashori, 2014, p. 173). Barthes (as cited in Zaib & Mashori, 2014) adds that “all narratives have some definite ‘characters, places and objects’ that connotatively help the reader to understand the theme of the text” (Zaib & Mashori, 2014, p. 173). The example is the word ‘rose’, which signifies passion, desire, and joy (Teleflora, n.d.).

Symbolic code (SYM) is a code which resembles semantic code. It is said that Barthes does not create clear difference between symbolic and semantic code; however, symbolic code emphasizes more on the binary polarities found in the text (Zaib & Mashori, p. 174). The example of this code is “references to life and death, hot and cold, youth and age, etc.” (Novak, 1997, p. 27).

Cultural code (REF) refers to the code which shows “sociocultural context of narrative and are connected to cultural authorities and communal thinking” (Tohar, Asaf, Kainan & Shahr, 2007). In other words, this code is related to a common knowledge of the world. (Zaib & Mashori, 2014, p. 174). An example of cultural code is when a writer mentions the word *Quran* in a story which has no relation to Islam or religion; the readers need to know what the Quran is in order to understand the story.

### **2.5 Sabah Zaib and Ghulam Mashori’s “Five Codes of Barthes in Shahraz’s Story A Pair of Jeans: A Post-Structural Analysis” (2014)**

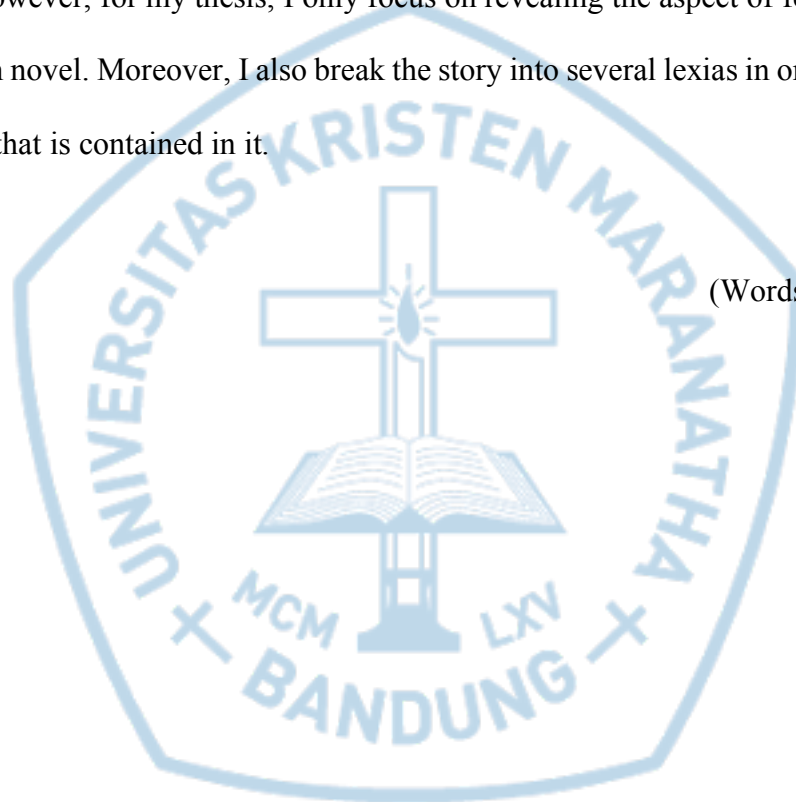
In 2014, Sabah Zaib and Ghulam Mashori conduct a study by implementing the theory of Roland Barthes’ five narrative codes in a short story. The title is “Five Codes of Barthes in Shahraz’s Story A Pair of Jeans: A Post-Structural Analysis”.

The study uses qualitative research methodology and aims at revealing “the hidden voices of the target story” through the five narrative codes (p. 1). Zaib and Mashori expect the finding of their study can help the readers in understanding the theme of the story.

Through analyzing the five narrative codes, the researchers find that there are some dialogues in the story which have various meanings. They finally come into the conclusion that the story contains the theme of cultural clash between East and West.

As I use similar theory to my study, I can learn from Zaib and Mustafa on how to reveal the underlying theme in a narrative by using the analysis of Barthes' five codes. However, for my thesis, I only focus on revealing the aspect of feminism in a children novel. Moreover, I also break the story into several lexias in order to find the code that is contained in it.

(Words: 1787)



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS OF RESEARCH

In this chapter, I will explain the method that I use for this thesis. I will divide the method into four subsections: the research design, data collection technique, framework analysis and data analysis; each is explained below.

#### 3.1 Research Design

This thesis aims at finding the aspect of feminism in Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* using descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive research is a method of research that is "aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation" (Research Methodology, n.d.). Meanwhile, qualitative method, as stated by Mohajan (2018), is a method which is used by the researchers to observe as well as giving interpretation on certain situation. It aims at helping us "to understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are" (Mohajan, 2018). In

my analysis, I collect the data from Dahl's *Matilda*, both from the dialogues and the story, then describe how several major characters of the story in *Matilda* breaks the gender stereotypes.

From the description, I will interpret on how each data reflects the idea of feminism. Hence, I consider the method of my research as both descriptive and qualitative.

### **3.2 Data Collection Technique**

The data which I am going to analyse in this thesis is a children novel by Roald Dahl, *Matilda*. I use library research, or a technique which is a process of collecting information by identifying, analyzing and developing the relevant information in order to back up what is discovered in the research (Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, n.d.). I collect the data for my analysis from a book and add information from Internet sources in order to support my findings, which is in line with Elmer E. Rasmuson Library (n.d.) that mentions in library research technique, the information is gathered from several sources, for instances from books, newspapers, and Internet sources.

### **3.3 Framework for Analysis**

This thesis uses the novel *Matilda* as the data. In analyzing the data, I use the theory of narrative codes proposed by Roland Barthes. The theory suggests that the data are divided into units that are called lexia. Afterwards, these lexias are put into different categories and assigned a code based on the functions, whether it dealt

with suspense (hermeneutic or proairetic), or deals with connotation (semantic), opposition (symbolic) or knowledge outside the text (cultural). Then these codes are interpreted using references that relate to their meaning, i.e. the theory of gender stereotypes and feminism.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

There are several steps done in conducting this research. First of all, the text is divided into different lexias, which contexts are explained in order that the readers may understand about the unit. After that, I determine the codes that are found in the lexias and elaborate why a certain lexia contains such codes. I also give explanation of how the meaning of each code in the lexia defies the common female stereotypes, which leads to the idea of feminism in the story. Lastly, I conclude that the lexia supports the ideology I am going to reveal from the story, which is feminism. The data below is a sample of my analysis in order to give better understanding:

*Matilda, who had been listening closely said. 'But Daddy, that's even more dishonest than the saw dust. It's disgusting. You're cheating people who trust you' ... 'Quite right, Harry,' the mother said. (p. 19)*

The conversation happens when Mr. Wormwood, Matilda's father, shares about the way he runs his business to his wife, Mrs. Wormwood, and Matilda. Matilda disagrees with the father's way of running business, while the mother simply agrees on his idea. In analyzing this lexia, the first step is to determine the narrative codes.

This lexia contains one code, that is symbolic (SYM), or a code which focuses on binary oppositions (The Codes, n.d.).

The second step is finding the opposing elements or ideas in the lexia. From the lexia, we can see that Matilda's and her mother's opinions toward her father are contrasting, which lead to the concept of "agreeing" and "disagreeing". Both words are a binary opposition as agree is defined as "to have or come to the same opinion or point of view" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.), while disagree is "to have a different opinion" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). Thus, this lexia is considered containing symbolic code.

The final step is connecting the code with gender stereotype and feminism aspects. In terms of gender stereotype, or "the beliefs that people have about the characteristics of males and females" (Martin & Dinella, 2001), women are expected to be obedient and will do anything to please her man (History of Women, n.d.). As agreeing to someone on something can be one of the ways to make a person feel accepted and liked (Morin, 2017), it is clear that the mother promotes the stereotypical trait of women. Contrary to her mother, Matilda is fighting against her father's idea. It shows that she breaks women stereotypical role at that time that "women must obey" (History of Women, n.d.). Hence, considering Matilda does not conform to women stereotype like her mother does, I conclude the lexia promotes the idea of feminism, which is breaking gender stereotype.

(Words: 874)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REVEALING FEMINISM IN ROALD DAHL'S *MATILDA* THROUGH BARTHES' NARRATIVE CODES

In this chapter, I would like to present the findings and analysis of Roald Dahl's *Matilda* to find the concept of feminism using Barthes' five narrative codes, focusing only on the three writerly codes. Each data, or lexia, is discussed in details throughout the chapter.

- **Lexia 1**

*From then on, every afternoon, as her mother left for bingo, Matilda would toddle down to the library. (p. 7)*

The lexia above talks about Matilda and her mother. It is mentioned in the lexia that Matilda's mother goes to play bingo while Matilda chooses to go to the library. From the context of the lexia, it is believed that this lexia consists of two different codes: semantic code (SEM), which talks about the connotation of the lexia, and

symbolic code (SYM), which focuses on the opposition.

In analyzing the SEM, it is clear that Matilda's mother conforms to the gender stereotype of women in the 1980s, which is the time when the story is published, by leaving for bingo. In *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* (n.d.), bingo is defined as "a game of chance played with cards having numbered squares corresponding to numbered balls drawn at random and won by covering five such square in a row"; it is usually a game which is played by a lot of people and whose main function is for socializing with other players (Chapple & Nofziger, 2000). This fact is in line with a common gender stereotype that women tend to spend their leisure time by socializing (Fisher, Egerton, Gershuny & Robinson, 2006). In accordance with the stereotype, The Bingo Project (n.d.) also finds that bingo is commonly played by women, especially older, working class ones (p. 6).

Meanwhile, Matilda is said to "toddle down to the library" every day. Library, according to Dictionary.com (n.d.), is generally defined as a place with books and other material for reading or studying. As Matilda spends her leisure time going to a study place instead of socializing, it can be said that she does not promote the stereotype of how women spend their leisure time.

Aside from showing SEM, the words "bingo" and "library" in the story also contain an antithesis in meaning, which suggests that this lexia also contains a symbolic code (SYM) as this code refers to a contrasted element of the text which causes the reader to pay attention to the binary polarities (Zaib & Mashori, 2014). In a broad term, bingo, which is a kind of game, can be related to the concept of "playing", which means "doing an enjoyable and/or entertaining activity"

(Cambridge online dictionary, n.d.). On the other hand, “library” is a word that is commonly associated with studying. Studying and playing are opposites because studying is an activity that is related to searching for the truth or fact, while playing is related to pleasure or amusement for oneself (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). By looking at the opposition and relating it to the stereotype of women at that time, it can be drawn that Matilda is not a stereotypical woman.

Moreover, despite Matilda’s only being a five-years-old, she can be seen as a feminist. The proof is shown on Lexia 124 below:

“you are so much wiser than your years, my dear,” Miss Honey went on, “that it quite straggers me. Although you look like a child, you are not really a child because your mind and your powers of reasoning seem to be fully grown-up. So I suppose we might call you a grown-up child, if you see what I mean” (Lexia 124, p. 189).

The supporting lexia above clearly depicts that Matilda’s mental capacity is different from other children. As she is more mature than her actual age, her actions can represent a feminist as well. Moreover, since the whole analysis in Lexia 1 shows Matilda defying gender stereotypes, I believe it strongly supports the idea of feminism.

- **Lexia 8**

*Matilda, who had been listening closely said. ‘But Daddy, that’s even more dishonest than the saw dust. It’s disgusting. You’re cheating people who trust you’*

...

*'Quite right, Harry,' the mother said. (p. 19)*

The conversation happens when Mr Wormwood, Matilda's father talks about the way he runs his business to Matilda and her mother. It can be seen from the lexia that Matilda disagrees with the father's way of running business while the mother simply agrees on his idea. In this lexia, I find a symbolic code (SYM) which emphasizes on opposition.

In terms of SYM, we can determine the words that describe the mother and Matilda's way of reacting to the father, which are "agree" and "disagree". Both of the words are a binary opposition as *agree* is defined as "to have or come to the same opinion or point of view" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.), while *disagree* is "to have a different opinion" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). As cited from History of Women (n.d.), women are stereotypically portrayed as "submissive and above all eager to do anything to please her man". As agreeing with someone on something can be one of the ways to make a person feel accepted and liked (Morin, 2017), I assume Matilda's mother does so in order to be accepted by her husband. In addition, this also shows that the mother promotes the stereotypical trait of women.

On the opposite, Matilda's fighting her father's idea shows that she breaks women stereotypical trait and role at that time, which is that "men must command and women must obey" (History of Women, n.d.). Hence, considering Matilda does not conform to women stereotype like her mother does, I suggest the lexia promotes

the idea of feminism.

- **Lexia 10**

*“But we’re not at the table,” Matilda said. “We never are. We’re always eating off our knees and watching the telly.” (p. 22)*

The dialogue starts when Matilda asks her father if she could eat in her room while reading her book instead of watching the telly. However, her father suddenly scolds her and insists that all the family members gather at the dining table for dinner. The proof can be found on the book, “The father glanced up sharply. “I would mind!” he snapped. “Supper is a family gathering and no one leaves the table till it’s over!”” (Lexia 11, p. 22). Then, we can see from the lexia that Matilda argues with her father, telling that they are never at the table for dinner anyway. From the context, I consider that this lexia contains a semantic (SEM) code, which focuses on implied meaning.

By telling the father that they are “always eating off [their] knees and watching the telly”, Matilda implies that the father is wrong and at the same time shows her disapproval towards the father’s command. Yates (2001) suggests that since the 1940s, television has influenced every aspect of British life and dominated the nation’s recreation habits, which at the same time portrays the habit of Matilda’s family. Moreover, a study has shown that women tend to watch television compared to their male counterparts, as it is “a way to create some space during a busy day” (Nathanson, Perse & Ferguson, 1997). The fact that Matilda chooses to read instead of watching television implies Matilda does not follow common habit in Britain as

well as showing that she is not a typical woman.

In terms of gender stereotypes, women are often attributed to several traits, two of which are passive and submissive (Thompson, Glenn, & Vertein, 2011). Passive is defined as “accepting or allowing what happens or what others do without resistance” (Lexico online dictionary, n.d.). Moreover, submissive is conforming to other people’s will (Lexico online dictionary, n.d.). However, Matilda is portrayed as a girl who bravely states what she feels. Since her characteristic defies the stereotypical of women being both passive and submissive, it shows that Matilda is not a stereotypical woman. Hence, I think this lexia also supports the concept of feminism.

- **Lexia 20**

*She seemed to know that neither crying nor sulking ever got anyone anywhere. The only thing to do when you are attacked is, as Napoleon once said, to counter attack. (p. 35)*

The lexia talks about how Matilda reacts toward her parents who constantly bully her. This lexia contains a semantic (SEM) code which talks about the connotative or implied meaning of the lexia.

From the lexia, I believe Dahl implies that Matilda defies one of the common feminine stereotypes that women are more likely to react with crying in negative situations (Hess & Senecal, 2000). It can be seen from the lexia that instead of crying, Matilda is portrayed to be rational by thinking how to get her own back

every time the parents bully her. According to Warner and Shields (2007) reacting to negative situations by being more rational instead of showing vulnerability is considered as masculine stereotype. The fact that Matilda gives a payback whenever she is bullied by her parents shows that she does not conform to gender stereotype. Thus, because breaking gender stereotype is considered as the characteristic of feminism (Political Studies Association, 2013), I believe that this lexia also promotes feminism.

- **Lexia 35**

*“Shut up,” the father said. “Stop guessing and trying to be clever.”*

*“Look at your answer Dad,” Matilda said gently. “If you’ve done it right it ought to be four thousand three hundred and three pounds and fifty pence. Is this what you’ve got, Dad?”*

*The father glanced down at the paper in his hand. He seemed to stiffen.*

*He became very quiet. There was a silence. (p. 48)*

The conversation on the lexia above takes place when Matilda’s father shares about how to run a business to Matilda’s brother, Michael, and asks him to solve math problems. Although Matilda is the one who can solve the math problems, the father tries to exclude her from the conversation. The proof is shown in Lexia 29 below:

*“...he said, addressing the son and ignoring Matilda, “seeing as you’ll be going into this business with me one day, you’ve got to know how to add*

up the profits you make at the end of each day. Go and get yourself a pad and a pencil and let's see how clever you are.” (Lexia 29, p. 44).

In the main lexia, the passage “The father glanced down at the paper in his hand. He seemed to stiffen. He became very quiet. There was a silence” (Lexia 35, p. 48) connotes that Matilda has got the answer right, yet the father refuses to admit it. Hence, I believe this lexia contains a SEM code.

Relating to gender stereotypes, Matilda's father's attitude may be influenced with the belief that boys are smarter in math than girls. Some studies show that girls are considered weaker in mathematics performance because there is a belief of math as a “male domain” (Steele, 2003; Cvencek, Meltzoff, & Greenwald, 2011). This stereotypical belief explains why the father keeps ignoring Matilda; he even implicitly considers her as a smart aleck by saying “stop guessing and trying to be clever” (Lexia 35, p. 48) although she is more capable than her brother.

Moreover, the fact that Matilda is portrayed excelling in arithmetic implies that the belief “girls don't do math” is stereotypical. In other words, by showing that Matilda's brother is less-able than her in performing math, it implies that Matilda breaks the stereotype regarding math and gender. Thus, I believe that this lexia also supports the idea of feminism.

- **Lexia 43**

*Miss Trunchbull, the Headmistress, was something else altogether. She was a gigantic holy terror, a fierce tyrannical monster who frightened the life out of the pupils and teachers alike. (p. 61)*

The lexia above contains semantic (SEM) code, or also known as a code which deals with connotative meaning. From the phrases which are used to describe Miss Trunchbull, such as “gigantic holy terror” and “a fierce tyrannical monster”, it seems like there is an implication that she is a distant person.

In terms of stereotyping, women are commonly linked to feminine traits such as affectionate, tender, and love children (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). However, the fact that she has the characteristics which scare the pupils also connotes that she is the opposite from women’s expected traits. In other words, she successfully shows that such feminine traits are stereotypical and therefore supports the idea of feminism: breaking gender stereotypes.

- **Lexia 48**

*“You must have a great father then. He must be a brilliant teacher.”*

*“No, Miss Honey,” Matilda said quietly. “My father did not teach me.”*

*“You mean you taught yourself?”*

*“I don’t quite know,” Matilda said truthfully. “It’s just that I don’t find it very difficult to multiply one number by another.” (p. 67)*

The lexia above shows the dialogue between Miss Honey and Matilda. Miss Honey is impressed with Matilda’s ability in multiplication. Then, she assumes that it is Matilda’s father who teaches her until she becomes very smart in math. However, she denies the idea that her becoming good at math is because of the

father. From the context of lexia, I find semantic code (SEM) which refers to connotation.

In relation to SEM code, the dialogue between Miss Honey and Matilda above implicitly presents the characteristic of Matilda: independent, or “not relying on others” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). As we can see from the dialogue, when Miss Honey asks if she teaches herself, she does not argue with the statement. Besides, she implies that she learns math by herself as she mentions that she does not find multiplication difficult. Zotos and Eirini (2014) suggest that women are stereotypically portrayed as dependent; meanwhile being independent is one of the stereotypes that is attributed to masculinity (Thompson et al., 2011), that is “the quality or nature of the male” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). From the explanation, it can be concluded that Matilda breaks the stereotype of women, which supports the concept of feminism.

Furthermore, math is a subject that is commonly associated with male, as there are several cultural stereotypes such as “girls don’t do math” (Cvencek, Meltzoff, & Greenwald, 2011) and “math is for boys” (Cvencek et al., 2011). Considering Matilda, who is a girl, is brilliant at math shows that she defies such cultural stereotype. Therefore, Matilda supports the characteristic of the second wave feminism: breaking the stereotype (Political Studies Association, 2013).

- **Lexia 55**

*She had been once a famous athlete, and even now the muscles were still clearly in evidence. (p. 76)*

### Lexia 81

*“Only a few,” Hortensia said. “You’ve got to remember that the Trunchbull once threw the hammer for Britain in the Olympics so she’s very proud of her right arm.” (p. 104)*

The lexias above, which contain semantic (SEM) code, describe Miss Trunchbull’s occupation before being a headmaster. While discussing the SEM, we can infer from both lexias that Miss Trunchbull is depicted as a former hammer throw athlete, which at the same time implies that she is portrayed as a physically strong woman in the story.

In the 1980s, when *Matilda* was published, females were traditionally associated with jobs like nursing (Lifschitz, 1983). A study conducted by Senden, Klysing, Lindqvist and Renstrom (2019) suggests that women are socially expected to have kind and nurturing attitudes; hence, they tend to dominate the work that requires caretaking roles. However, Miss Trunchbull is presented as an athlete, “a person who is trained or skilled in exercises, sports, or games requiring physical strength, agility, or stamina” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). Furthermore, it is also shown from a statistic that female Olympic athletes only amounted 20% in 1980 (Terret, 2015). In other words, it was not really common for women to participate in sports at that time, considering that sports is generally perceived as “a male-dominant” area (Lin & Chen, 2013).

In addition, it is explained in the following lexia that Miss Trunchbull “threw the hammer in the Olympics”. *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* (n.d.) defines hammer throw as “a field event in which a usually 16-pound metal sphere attached to a flexible handle is thrown for distance”; it is considered as men’s historic event for centuries, considering that hammer throw is generally played by men (Sakr, 2012). Seeing that Miss Trunchbull plays hammer throw even though she is a woman, this part also strengthens the idea that she is not a stereotypical woman. Hence, I believe the two lexias support the idea of feminism in the story.

- **Lexia 67**

*“But does it not intrigue you,” Miss Honey said, “that a little five-year-old child is reading long adult novels by Dickens and Hemingway? Doesn’t that make you jump up and down with excitement?”*

*“Not particularly,” the mother said. “I’m not in favour of blue-stockings girls. A girl should think about making herself look attractive so she can get a good husband later on...” (p. 91)*

The conversation happens between Miss Honey and Matilda’s mother, when Miss Honey tries to convince the mother that even though Matilda is still a child, she already reads books by Charles Dickens and Ernest Hemingway. However, Matilda’s mother, being uninterested with her daughter’s intelligence, still persists that being attractive is more important. In this lexia, I find two codes: cultural (REF) code, which refers to anything in the story that is related to common knowledge of

the world (Zaib & Mashori, 2014) and symbolic (SYM) code, which focuses on polarities.

In terms of REF, we can see from the lexia that Miss Honey mentions “Dickens and Hemingway”. Charles Dickens, according to Biography (2019), is an important British writer who writes famous classic novels, namely *Oliver Twist* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Moreover, his works are also considered social criticism (Biography, 2019). Similar to Dickens, Ernest Hemingway is also a highly influential writer in the United States; his novels and short stories are mostly about criticism (Thriftbooks, n.d.). Considering both writers published books about criticism, these books are believed not to be intended for children, as the categories of children books are mostly about folklore, poetry, fantasy and fiction (Ashland University, n.d.). Moreover, seeing that adults’ vocabularies are richer than children (Snow, 2001), I can assume that the use of words in adult’s novels are more sophisticated than the novels for children. Therefore, this lexia is trying to show that Matilda is a brilliant girl from the books she reads. Since being intelligent is a trait that is stereotypically considered masculine, or “having qualities appropriate to or associated with a man” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.), it can be seen that Matilda is breaking such gender stereotype.

Moreover, I found the opposition between how Miss Honey and Matilda’s mother perceive intelligence differently in this lexia, which at the same time shows that this lexia contains symbolic (SYM) code. Miss Honey saying “doesn’t that make you jump up and down with excitement?” implies a rhetorical question, meaning a question is asked by a speaker without expecting any answer; instead,

the question is uttered in order to emphasize a point (Literary Devices, n.d.). From the question, Miss Honey implies that the mother should have been excited when hearing the daughter is smart; thus, I can conclude that Miss Honey appreciates intelligence. Meanwhile, the mother thinks it is physical appearance that matters more than intelligence. I believe that intelligence and physical appearance are opposition because intelligence is invisible, while physical appearance is something that people can clearly see; in other words, visible.

In the 1980s, the time when *Matilda* was published, women tended to place more importance on beauty, considering that men are more attracted to physical attributes (Mazur, 1986). The fact is in line with how Matilda's mother appreciates physical looks. Her saying that she is not interested in "blue-stockings girls" also shows that she does not appreciate intelligence, since blue-stockings girl is a word that stands for intellectual or educated women, yet mostly used to derogate them (Wills, 2019). Therefore, the mother conforms to such stereotype. Miss Honey and Matilda, on the other hand, break the gender stereotype as both of them are portrayed as someone who chooses intelligence over beauty. As both Miss Honey and Matilda are the protagonists of the story, which means the story revolves around them, I can conclude that this lexia reflects the idea of feminism, which is breaking gender stereotypes.

- **Lexia 68**

*"Now look at me," Mrs. Wormwood said. "Then look at you. You choose books. I choose looks." (p. 91)*

### **Lexia 69**

*“I’m sitting pretty in a nice house with a successful businessman and you’re left slaving away teaching a lot of nasty little children the ABC” (p. 92)*

This lexia is a dialogue of Matilda’s mother, Mrs. Wormwood, while talking with Miss Honey, the teacher. Miss Honey is trying to convince the mother that Matilda’s intelligence should be appreciated more by the parents. Disagreeing with Miss Honey, the mother gives comparison between her life and Miss Honey’s, as can be seen from the dialogue on the following page “I’m sitting pretty in a nice house with a successful businessman and you’re left slaving away teaching a lot of nasty little children the ABC.” (Lexia 69, p. 92). In the context of lexia, I find this lexia contains symbolic (SYM) code.

Symbolic (SYM) code is a code which makes the readers focus on polarities (Zaib & Mashori, 2014). As already stated above, the saying “you choose books, I choose looks” shows the contrast of both Matilda’s mother and Miss Honey. A book is a thing that is usually associated with reading activity, which is an activity to enrich our knowledge and thus can be related to the concept of “intelligence”. On the contrary, the word “look” is defined as physical appearance (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). Intelligence and appearance are contrasting because intelligence is related to mental quality and cannot be perceived by eyes. On the opposite from intelligence, appearance is something visible. Wolf (2002) states that beauty becomes a very important aspect for women during the 1980s. This fact reflects on Matilda’s mother who is concerned with her looks more than

intelligence, which is also in line with Mazur's (1986) statement that women are "under more pressure than men to conform to an ideal of beauty because they quickly learn that their opportunities are affected by their beauty".

Different from Matilda's mother who reflects typical women in that era, we can conclude that Miss Honey is portrayed as someone who values intelligence more in this lexia. In other words, she does not reflect the stereotype that women consider beauty as a very important aspect (Wolf, 2002). Thus, I believe this lexia supports my idea that the story promotes feminism, seeing that Miss Honey is also one of the prominent characters as she sometimes becomes the center of the story.

- **Lexia 70**

*"A girl doesn't get a man by being brainy." Mrs. Wormwood said. "Look at that film-star for instance," she added, pointing at the silent TV screen, where a bosomy female was being embraced by a craggy actor in the moonlight. "You don't think she got him to do that by multiplying figures at him, do you? Not likely. And now he's going to marry her, you see if he doesn't, and she's going to live in a mansion with a butler and lots of maids." (p. 93)*

**Lexia 71**

*"Matilda's trouble," she said, trying once again, "is that she is so far ahead of everyone else around her that it might be worth thinking about*

*some extra kind of private tuition. I seriously believe that she could be brought up to university standard in two or three years with the proper coaching.” (p. 93)*

#### **Lexia 74**

*“That is not true,” Miss Honey said. “If you had a heart attack this minute and had to call a doctor, that doctor would be a university graduate. If you got sued for selling someone a rotten second-hand car, you’d have to get a lawyer and he’d be a university graduate, too.” (p. 94)*

The three lexias above are a part of a conversation which occurs when Miss Honey meets Matilda’s parents to convince them that Matilda is a mathematical genius and deserves to be sent to university in the future. However, the parents think that it is not necessary for Matilda to attend university, especially the mother who believes that it is not beneficial for women to be intelligent. As each of them carries its own connotative meaning, I decide to separate them into three different lexias. However, the three lexias altogether create another code, which is symbolic (SYM), since they show the contradictory opinions between Miss Honey and Matilda’s mother. For this reason, and so as not to make the analysis repetitive, they are analyzed together.

First of all, in Lexia 70, the mother mentions “a bosomy female” while referring to the actress. Wood (1994) suggests that the media often portrayed

women as an object that satisfies men's sexual fantasy, which leads to the stereotype that women's primary functions are to look attractive so that they can satisfy their men. As this stereotype is in line with how Matilda's mother glorifies physical appearance, I believe Dahl tries to imply that the mother considers physical attractiveness as a very important aspect that women should pay attention to rather than education. Hence, it can be said that the mother conforms to gender stereotype.

Meanwhile, in Lexia 71, by saying "I seriously believe that she could be brought up to university standard", Miss Honey shows how much she prioritizes education over beauty, which is uncommon for women at that time. Research suggests that instead of focusing on intelligence, women tend to focus on their physical appearance (Fredrickson et al., 1988) and achieving ideal body standards excessively (Maimaran, Ghosh, & Labroo, n.d.). Since Miss Honey clearly does not conform to the stereotype, I believe this lexia leads to the idea of feminism.

The idea of Miss Honey as a feminist is also strengthened with the next lexia, which is Lexia 74. In this lexia, Miss Honey resents Matilda's parents' idea that being clever and graduating from university is not important (p. 93). She later refutes the father by mentioning several situations that require a university-graduate help, which connotes how much she appreciates education.

In terms of SYM, we can see the opposition of Matilda's mother and Miss Honey's ways of thinking, in terms of perceiving intelligence. Workman (2004) states that females are stereotypically viewed to be "less intellectually able than men" (p. 23). Since the 1960s, Galloway (as cited in Workman, 2004) suggests that it is the women themselves who actually shape the stereotype that they are less

intelligent than men, as they think men will be threatened with women whose intelligence is equal to or superior to them. This idea is presented in the mother's dialogue, since she keeps emphasizing that "a girl doesn't get a man by being brainy" (Lexia 70, p. 93), which makes her similar to the stereotypical traits of women.

Contrasting to the mother, Miss Honey is portrayed as someone who really appreciates Matilda's brain-power more than her physical looks. Thus, I can infer that Miss Honey breaks the idea that women shape the stereotype that they are less intelligent than men; in other words, it is clear that Miss Honey promotes the idea of feminism.

- **Lexia 86**

*"Read Nicholas Nickleby, Miss Honey, by Mr Dickens. Read about Mr Wackford Squeers, the admirable headmaster of Dotheboys Hall. He knew how to handle the little bruthes, didn't he! He knew how to use the birch, didn't he! He kept their backsides so warm you could have fried eggs and bacon on them! A fine book, that."* (p. 108)

This lexia shows a dialogue of Miss Trunchbull, the headmaster in Matilda's school. The conversation on lexia above happens when she scolds Miss Honey for defending the students when they are bullied by Miss Trunchbull. She later suggests Miss Honey that she should read a book whose title is *Nicholas Nickleby* and learn something from it. This lexia encloses a code, which is cultural code or REF.

*Nicholas Nickleby*, as stated in The British Library (n.d.), is a Victorian literature written by a famous British writer, Charles Dickens. The story is about a man named Nicholas Nickleby who is characterized by “his outrage at cruelty and social injustice” (Ford, n.d.). In addition, Ford (n.d.) also states that this book is apparently his social criticism about the Yorkshire schools at that time, considering Dicken’s use of language.

As shown from the dialogue in this lexia, Miss Trunchbull states “a fine book, that” while talking about *Nicholas Nickleby*. This implies that Miss Trunchbull has finished reading one. A study conducted by Wuhr, Lange, and Schwarz (2017) shows that women preferred literary works whose genres are romance and comedy, while men tend to enjoy thriller and adventure genres. Aside from romance and comedy novels, it is also shown that women tend to be interested in reading cookbooks for their enjoyment (Culver, 2013). This stereotypical idea is apparently reflected by Matilda’s mother instead, quoting the lines from the book: “By the time she was three, Matilda had taught herself to read by studying magazines that lay around the house” (Lexia 2, p. 7) and “The only book in the whole of this enlightened household was something called *Easy Cooking* belonging to her mother...” (Lexia 3, p. 7).

From the analysis above, it can be drawn that based on the book she reads, Miss Trunchbull is not presented as stereotypical women. In other words, she breaks the stereotype that women are more likely to read cookbooks or romance novels, considering that *Nicholas Nickleby* itself is an adventure novel. Hence, this lexia also supports the idea of feminism.

- **Lexia 87**

*“Your mummy’s a twit!” the Trunchbull bellowed. She pointed a finger the size of a salami at the child’s head and shouted, “You look like a rat with a tail coming out its head!” (p. 108)*

**Lexia 110**

*“I said I’ve read it, Miss Trunchbull.”*

*“Read what?”*

*“Nicholas Nickleby, Miss Trunchbull.”*

*“You are lying to me, madam!” the Trunchbull shouted, glaring at Matilda. “I doubt there is a single child in the entire school who has read that book, and here you are, an unhatched shrimp sitting in the lowest form there is, trying to tell me a whopping great lie like that!” (p. 150).*

In Lexia 110, it can be seen that Matilda and Miss Trunchbull are having arguments. The situation happens when Miss Trunchbull visits Matilda’s class and conducts a weekly test for the students. She bullies Matilda’s classmates for not being able to answer her questions and underestimates people in the class by saying to Miss Honey that the students never seem to read anything (p. 150). Then, Matilda argues by saying she has read some books, one of which is *Nicholas Nickleby*. This lexia contains semantic (SEM) code.

In analyzing the SEM, we can see from the dialogue above that Miss

Trunchbull refers to Matilda as “an unhatched shrimp sitting in the lowest form” when she refuses to believe that Matilda has read *Nicholas Nickleby*. The phrase implies that Matilda is still very young, or even too young, to be able to read such a book. Thus, it can be concluded that Matilda is a brilliant girl, as she can read a book whose target readers are adults. As women are stereotypically perceived to be less intelligent (Workman, 2004), Matilda is considered to break the gender stereotype, which also suggests that the lexia portrays feminism.

However, Matilda is not the only one who portrays the idea of feminism. From the lexia above, it is clear that Miss Trunchbull defies one of the expected traits of women, or gender stereotype, that women are gentler while speaking (Giles, Scholes & Young, 1983). However, considering the way Miss Trunchbull speaks, which is shouting, she seems to assert independence by behaving the way she likes, which is by showing a less-feminine way of speaking. The proof that shows Miss Trunchbull defies the feminine stereotype is also strengthened from Lexia 87, as the word “bellowed” is used to describe Miss Trunchbull’s way of talking. In *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* (n.d.), the word “bellowed” is defined as “to shout in a deep voice”.

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that both characters in the story, Matilda and Miss Trunchbull, defy gender stereotypes. As breaking gender stereotypes is one of the major characteristics of feminism, I think these lexias also strengthen the idea that the story reflects the feminism movement.

- **Lexia 88**

*“Your mummy’s a twit!” the Trunchbull bellowed. She pointed a finger the size of a salami at the child’s head and shouted, “You look like a rat with a tail coming out its head!”*

*“My mummy thinks I look lovely, Miss T-T-Trunchbull,” Amanda stuttered, shaking like a blancmange.*

*“I don’t give a tinker’s toot what your mummy thinks!” (p. 108)*

The conversation in the above lexia happens between Miss Trunchbull and Amanda, one of Matilda’s schoolmates. It is described from the story that Miss Trunchbull loathes seeing someone’s hair being plaited into pigtails. Thus, as she sees Amanda’s hair plaited into pigtails, Miss Trunchbull scolds her. I find a semantic (SEM) code in this lexia, as some words used in the conversation implies Miss Trunchbull’s traits.

From the above lexia, it can be seen that Miss Trunchbull uses several words and phrases to show her disapproval, such as “twit”, an informal term to describe a stupid or silly people (Cambridge online dictionary, n.d.) and insults Amanda’s appearance by saying that she is like “a rat with a tail coming out its head”; hence, this implies Miss Trunchbull’s characteristics, which are harsh and impolite.

As cited from Wright (2002), there are certain stereotypes related to gender and their use of language, one of which is women use more standard forms while talking. Moreover, Koenig (2018) adds women are also stereotypically expected to be soft-spoken. However, seeing Miss Trunchbull uses several informal terms to show her annoyance, such as “twit” and “I don’t give a tinker’s toot”, it can be

inferred that she neither conforms to the stereotype that women use standard form while talking nor the stereotype that women are soft-spoken. Hence, from the analysis, I believe that Miss Trunchbull's breaking the stereotypes supports my idea that this story is about feminism.

- **Lexia 89**

*The Trunchbull yelled, and with that she lunged forward and grabbed hold of Amanda's pigtails in her right fist and lifted the girl clear off the ground. Then she started swinging her round and round her head, faster and faster, and Amanda was screaming blue murder and the Trunchbull was yelling, "I'll give you pigtails, you little rat!" (p. 108)*

In Lexia 89, it is described the way Miss Trunchbull treats Amanda. By using one hand, Miss Trunchbull lifts and swings Amanda. This happens just because she dislikes seeing Amanda's hair plaited into pigtails. From the lexia above, I find a semantic (SEM) code.

In this part, I believe Dahl states some phrases like "grabbed hold Amanda's pigtails in her right fist", "lifted the girl clear off the ground", and "started swinging her round and round head" in order to emphasize how strong Miss Trunchbull is. In other words, this lexia shows us that Miss Trunchbull is the opposite from the stereotypical idea that women are weak (Ellemers, 2018; Koenig, 2018; United Nations, n.d.), specifically in terms of physical strength (Nuwer, 2017). Hence, this lexia also supports the idea of feminism, as it also tells us about breaking down

gender stereotypes.

- **Lexia 93**

*“And the reason is obvious. Your story would sound too ridiculous to be believed. And that’s the Trunchbull’s great secret.”*

*“What is?” Lavender asked.*

*Matilda said, “Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it’s unbelievable. No parent is going to believe this pigtail story, not in a million years...” (p. 111)*

**Lexia 127**

*“Well,” Miss Honey said, “when I got my teacher’s job, the aunt told me I owed her a lot of money. I asked her why. She said ‘Because I’ve been feeding you all these years and buying your shoes and your clothes!’... She made me sign the paper.”*

*“You shouldn’t have done that,” Matilda said. “Your salary was your chance of freedom.” (p. 195).*

The above lexias show how Matilda responds toward two different situations. In Lexia 93, the conversation occurs when Lavender, Matilda’s classmate, wonders how to stop Miss Trunchbull’s bullies. She plans to tell her parents everything that Miss Trunchbull does to the children at school; however, Matilda thinks that the

story sounds really unbelievable. Meanwhile, the conversation in Lexia 127 occurs when Miss Honey shares her story to Matilda: she was forced to give all of her salary to her aunt. This is done to repay her aunt's money which is spent for taking care of her all these years. Matilda then responds that Miss Honey should have kept the salary for her own instead. I find the two lexias are similar, for both of them contain semantic (SEM) code.

Based on the conversation on both lexias above, it can be inferred from Matilda's response that she is rational. According to *Dictionary.com* (n.d.), rational is defined as "(of a person) able to think clearly, sensibly and logically" (*Dictionary.com*, n.d.). In Lexia 93 when Lavender thinks to tell the parents about what Miss Trunchbull has done, Matilda seems to be able to calculate whether the parents would believe the story or not. Similarly, in Lexia 127, Matilda is also seen to use her reasoning in responding to Miss Honey's problem.

By saying that Matilda is rational, it can be concluded that she is breaking the gender stereotype that "the concept *reason* is semantically associated with the concept *male*, *feeling* is preferentially associated with *female*" (Pavco-Giaccia, Little, Stanley & Dunham, 2019). Hence, this lexia also proves that the story contains feminism.

- **Lexia 120**

*"Do you live all by yourself, Miss Honey?" she asked*

*"Yes," Miss Honey said. "Very much so." (p. 177)*

The conversation above occurs when Matilda pays a visit to Miss Honey's house. As they arrive at the house, Matilda seems confused since she cannot find anyone but Miss Honey inside the house. I find semantic code (SEM) from this lexia, which deals with connotative meaning.

Stereotypically, women are attributed to being dependent on men economically and thus are "often socialized to assume domestic and care responsibilities" (United Nations, n.d.). From the story, such common stereotype is also portrayed by Matilda's mother, as she always glorifies beauty and marriage so that a woman could be financially dependent on men, quoting her dialogue from the book "...now he's going to marry her, you see if he doesn't, and she's going to live in a mansion with a butler and lots of maids" (Lexia 72, p. 93).

In analyzing the SEM, it can be seen that Miss Honey lives on her own, which implies that she defies the stereotype that women are dependent on men. In the story, Miss Honey explains that she has rented a house by using her own salary as she no longer wants to live with her aunt. This is a deliberate decision and she is happy about it, considering her saying "I was free at last" (Lexia 135, p. 197) and "I can't tell you how wonderful it was" (Lexia 136, p. 197). Furthermore, as she lives alone by choice, the lexia encloses Miss Honey's characteristic: independent.

According to Wood (1994), women who are independent are often stigmatized by the media as "embittered spinsters", or "a woman who is no longer young and seems unlikely ever to marry" (Cambridge online dictionary, n.d.). The term spinster itself is derived from unmarried women in late Middle Ages with a lower-income job like spinning wool and whose job is done alone at home, hence it was

called as “spinster” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, n.d.). In the story, Dahl portrays Miss Honey as a young woman, as seen in the book that “she could not have been more than twenty-three or twenty-four” (Lexia 42, p. 60). In addition, she is also depicted as someone who is working outside her house, which is contrary to the definition of embittered spinster. Thus, Miss Honey’s being portrayed positively strengthens my idea that this story supports feminism.

- **Lexia 130**

*“I was a bright pupil,” Miss Honey said. “I could easily have got into university. But there was no question of that.”*

*“Why not, Miss Honey?”*

*“Because I was needed at home to do the work.”*

*“Then how did you become a teacher?” Matilda asked.*

*“There is a Teacher’s Training College in Reading,” Miss Honey said.*

*“That’s only forty minutes’ bus-ride away from here. I was allowed to go there on condition I came straight home again every afternoon to do the washing and ironing and to clean the house and cook the supper.”*

*(pp. 193-194)*

The conversation above takes place when Matilda visits Miss Honey’s house. In this conversation, Miss Honey explains about her life and how she finally becomes a teacher, even though she is forbidden from going to school. However, she finally agrees that even though she is going to college, she will still be

responsible for the house chores. Seeing the conversation in the lexia, I find a semantic (SEM) code; a code which deals with connotation.

As can be seen from the dialogue, it is clear that despite Miss Honey's being intelligent, no one pays attention to her education because she is expected to be at home and do the house chores instead of going to university. British Social Attitudes (2013) states that "in the mid 1980s, close to half the public agreed "a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family" (British Social Attitudes, 2013). Thus, it can be derived that Miss Honey's family agrees to the traditional gender stereotype in that era.

Contrary to the belief that women are fully responsible for doing household work, it seems that Dahl tries to show that Miss Honey defies the stereotype. By saying the university is forty-minute ride away from her house and she is willing to do house chores in order to be able to go to university, it implies that she is really determined to pursue education and perceives intelligence as something really important. As women at that time are expected to prioritize doing the household chores and do the caring roles (British Social Attitude, 2013), such stereotype does not apply to Miss Honey since she puts education as her priority. Hence, this lexia supports the idea of feminism, which is defying gender stereotypes.

(Words: 6002)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I would like to present the conclusion about feminism in Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda*, which was released in 1988. The conclusion will be based on discussion and findings in Chapter Four. I will also include the summary of the findings, my personal comments, limitations of the study, and end this chapter with suggestions for future research.

This thesis aims to find the narrative codes in *Matilda* and how each of the codes represents the idea of feminism. In the analysis, I use Semiotics theory, specifically Roland Barthes theory of narrative codes, in order to reveal the characteristics of the prominent female characters in the story. The codes taken for the purpose of the study are the three Writerly codes: Semantic, Symbolic, and Cultural. Moreover, I also use the theory of gender stereotypes and feminism to make a deeper analysis.

The novel is divided into a lot of different lexias; however, the only ones that are used as data in this thesis are the ones whose meanings are related to the concept

of feminism and/or breaking gender stereotypes. There are a total of 24 lexias that are analyzed in this lexia. From the analysis, I find that despite being categorized as a children's novel, *Matilda* embodies a strong message about feminism which is targeted for its adult readers. Over all, the findings show that 65% of the lexias belong to semantic (SEM) code, while the total of the symbolic (SYM) code is 25%. Out of the three writerly codes analyzed, the cultural (REF) code presents in only 10% of the data. This means that among the three codes, SEM is the most dominant one to help revealing feminism from the female prominent characters: Matilda, Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull.

I believe semantic (SEM) code dominates the most due to the fact that *Matilda* is a novel which is targeted for children, although it can also be enjoyed by adults. In comparison to another two codes, cultural (REF) code for instance, it is nearly impossible if a children story contains many REF. I think this is because by mentioning references, it requires the readers' general knowledge in order to understand what the passage supposed to mean; meanwhile, children usually did not have as much knowledge as adults. In addition, when it comes to symbolic (SYM) code, sometimes the two contrasting elements in the story (e.g. the contrasting traits or behaviours of the female characters) are shown in a lexia located far from the compared lexia. As a consequence, such contrasts are unable to be analyzed as a SYM and ended up being classified as another SEM code. I believe this reason also affects the occurrence of SYM code in the analysis.

Moreover, since semantic (SEM) code deals with connotation or underlying meaning, I believe that it is the effective way in pointing out the ideology of

feminism to the adult readers. In relation to feminism, this code helps the readers understand the characteristics or traits of the major female characters which defy gender stereotypes at that time. While discussing the activities done by the characters, we can see for instance Matilda's loving to go to a library and study Math represents that she is an intelligent woman; a trait that is considered masculine at the time when the story takes place. Furthermore, Miss Trunchbull who did hammer-throwing sports also represents that she is not a typical woman, considering at that time such sports was not common to be done by women. Then, in relation to the characters' behaviour, we can see how Miss Honey prioritizes intelligence over beauty by showing her determination to go to school and study, instead of changing herself to be physically attractive in order to get a husband. Another example is also shown by Miss Trunchbull. She declares her independence by behaving the way she likes, even though she is a woman and her behaviour does not show common stereotypes of women, such as weak and nurturing.

For some people, the novel *Matilda* is seen misogynistic due to the fact that the villain of the story, Miss Trunchbull, is a woman and portrayed as someone who is both oppressive and terrifying. I am not in the place to decide if this is not the right perspective, as Barthes' writerly codes promote that every text may be interpreted into multiple meanings. This being said, I personally disagree with the take that this novel is misogynistic. Instead, I am of the opinion that *Matilda* conveys a deep message about feminism. This is because both of the heroines, who are Miss Honey and Matilda, and the villain, who is Miss Trunchbull, overcome both gender

stereotypes and expectations. In other words, all of them show the main characteristics of feminism: woman empowerment.

Moreover, after analyzing the story and relating it to the year when the story is published, I have an opinion that *Matilda* is Roald Dahl's form of contribution in feminism, specifically in literary works. As second wave feminism arose in the 1980s, which is in line with the published year of *Matilda*, it strengthens my assumption that the story reflects woman empowerment.

This thesis uses Roland Barthes' theory of narrative codes which enables every reader to generate their own interpretation. Due to time and space constraints, my analysis solely focuses on the feminism aspect. This results in my only choosing particular passages of the story to be analyzed. There are several aspects of the story which are purposefully left out and possibly change the result of the analysis if being included. For this reason, I cannot make generalization that the whole story is merely about feminism nor can I claim that my analysis represents Roald Dahl's intention of writing *Matilda*.

Therefore, I suggest future researchers analyze the whole story in order to get a more general idea of the story. I would also recommend future researchers to find out Roald Dahl's historical background and political view for a more accurate analysis. On top of that, it would be best to analyze the story using other theories from other Linguistics branches, such as Stylistics.

(Words: 1020)

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