A Conceptual Model of Folktale Classification as a Visual Guide to a Malaysian Folktale Classification System Development

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Abstract. In a study to systematically preserve the Malaysian folktales as one of Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage, a Malaysian Folktale Classification System (MFCS) is proposed to be developed as encouraged by UNESCO. Such a classification system is currently absent in Malaysia. In order to develop a comprehensive classification system, three folktale units are integrated and utilized: function, motif, and type. The use of the three folktale units ensures that the MFCS covers two important facets of folktale: structure and content. The integration of the classification system warrants a complicated classification process. Therefore, a conceptual model, which is central to this article, is constructed as a visual guide to assist the classification process. It illustrates a flow of analysis and all components required to classify namely the three folktale units and their guiding factors, and a primary classification method. A pictorial representation method is utilized to construct the conceptual model. With the conceptual model constructed, it is expected that the analysis of the Malaysian folktales toward the development of the MFCS becomes apparent and guided.

1 Introduction

Cultural heritage is important to society be it in the form of tangible or intangible. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which is the focus of this study, is a kind of heritage that is fleeting and ephemeral, unlike the tangible counterpart. According to UNESCO, ICH is the customs, portrayals, manifestations, wisdom, talents and also the tools, entities, relics and cultural areas that societies, crowds and at some points individuals acknowledged as a piece of their cultural heritage [1]. Folklore is a significant ICH, and one of its branches is prose narrative. Prose narrative or in a layman term, tale, is composed of three forms: folktale, legend, and myth [2-3]. The current study chose the folktale as its scope of ICH because there is an urgent need for its preservation considering a very minimal and scarce attempt by far [4-6]. In order to preserve the ICH of the world, UNESCO suggests that, among others, scientific studies to be conducted and a comprehensive register of folklore to be created [1-7].

This study aimed to preserve the Malaysian folktales through a systematic folktale classification coined as the Malaysian Folktale Classification System (MFCS) to meet the suggestion of UNESCO which is found absent in the context of Malaysia. Having a standardized folktale classification system guarantees consistency in classifying, archiving, and retrieval of folklore data and it is vital because the ancient knowledge preserved is not only the thing in the past but also helps to discover ideas and life's philosophy of the past and current generations [8]. At the same time, it is also conceded that the folktale classification process is a lengthy, complex, and meticulous examination [9]. To that end, it became a question in this study whether a conceptual model can be constructed as a visual guide to shed clarity on the development of the MFCS. Therefore, preceding the classification process, this study proposed to construct a conceptual model of folktale classification in order to answer the question imposed.

This article begins with an introduction to the study which eventually triggers the need for the conceptual model. Then, a method to construct the model is explained. Next, the result is presented which is the conceptual model constructed, and a discussion of the model follows. The article ends with a conclusion and references used. That said, the subsequent section elaborates on the method employed to construct the conceptual model.

2 Method

A model aids in channeling internal thought-process to the outer boundary to communicate ideas and solutions on a particular subject matter to other. Considering the mentioned purpose, the magnitude and gravity of

forming a standard model representation method are undeniable. A standard representation method would ensure all users comprehend the model equally and this alone makes it fundamental. Fortunately, there happen to be three categories of representation methods that are useful in forming a standardize model specifically textual, pictorial, and multi-faceted representation [10-11].

The first representation method is textual. A text-based representation method is a flexible and the simplest type of model representation. It uses narrative text to briefly explain the content and stimulate visualization of the structure of model components such as objective, output, scope, and flow of the model. This method is practical in a situation that beckons for a quick decision on the suitability of a model in a certain condition. Unquestionably there are benefits and shortcomings of this method. The textual presentation is flexible for it can be narrated in many ways and styles namely sentences, point form or table. Besides, it is also rapid in development compared to the other methods. Nevertheless, this very method also has its drawbacks. The flexibility of the method can also be a bane because it can cause unclear explanation of the model. Thus, it is vital that the structure and the content of the representation be organized well, and the use of standard keywords is practiced. In addition, the validation of the method's correctness is more suitably implemented via a subjective technique such as expert review instead of an objective technique. Not to neglect, since the use of narrative text involved languages, the understandability of a particular language's semantic among users of the model is of paramount.

Differs from the textual representation method, a pictorial representation is a notch upgrade. It is because this method is more effective in a sense that it permits a representation of information via pictures (shape/symbol) associated with links (arrows/lines). The use of pictures in representing the model enables the information structure to flow non-sequentially, which is fitting for a more intricate model. This method is appropriate to be used during the model development as opposed to the early development phase as the previous method. Typically, the diagram is utilized in the pictorial representation method as it signifies information with shapes or symbols linking them with arrows and lines.

The third representation method is a multi-faceted presentation. Even though this method is claimed to be the best in documenting a complete model, it is apt to be used when there is more than a single diagram required in forming the model. The method also becomes the platform for verification for the consistency of model components [12]. Apart from that, the textual representation is also presented as part of the method for a more comprehensive model and to denote its different components. One of the types of the representation method is Unified Modeling Language (UML).

In the context of the conceptual model of the study, the pictorial representations method was borrowed and adapted in modeling the complex classification process. Though the original domain of application is a simulation, it is found that the pictorial representation method is fitting with what the study aims to achieve with the model. Additionally, its concept is known to be applicable in a broader gamut of implementation [13]. The main reason the method is adapted being its aptness to be used during the stage of model development and it clearly maintains the information regarding the configuration and association amid the factors of the issue represented [10 , 14].

Moreover, since the method communicates complex non-sequential information effectively via pictures, its adaptation in this study is astute because the folktale classification is by no means simple and sequential. The classification by function, motif, and type exhibits a complex and entangled configuration of narrative information. Via the use of shapes, symbols, and linkage, the components and the flow required to analyze the folktales for classification were lucidly envisaged. With that said, the next section presents the conceptual model of folktale classification of the study.

3 Results

Based on the pictorial representation method, the conceptual model that the study utilized as the visual guide in the classification process was constructed (depicted in Figure 1 overleaf). The components visualized by the conceptual model are the three folktale units (the function, the motif, and the type), the guiding factors used to identify the units in the Malaysian folktales analyzed (the seven-sphere of actions for the first-level classification, the actor, the item, and the incident for the second-level classification, and the theme for the third-level classification), and the main method employed to classify (a structural-semantic analysis). The shapes and the connecting lines and arrows were drawn manually to depict the components and the flows of the classification process toward the development of the MFCS. The following section discusses the conceptual model in details.

4 Discussion

The conceptual model exemplified in Figure 1 was visualized such a way to represent the unique nature of the classification process needed to be performed on the Malaysian folktales. The conceptual model evidently displays that in order to develop the MFCS (signified by the solid rectangle), each of the Malaysian folktales collected (signified by the dashed rectangle) was analyzed using the primary method elected in the study: the structural-semantic analysis for narrative folklore (situated on the right side of the dashed rectangle) [15-17]. This particular method was created to analyze folktales, among other folklores, to objectively obtain the type of a folktale, particularly by analyzing its structure and semantic (content). Thus, it can be seen from the model that the analysis of the

Malaysian folktales toward the classification was divided into two: the structure and the content (both encased in dashed rounded rectangle). Such analysis ensures that in the end, the comprehensive folktale classification system was obtained because its development was based on the both important aspects of the folktale.

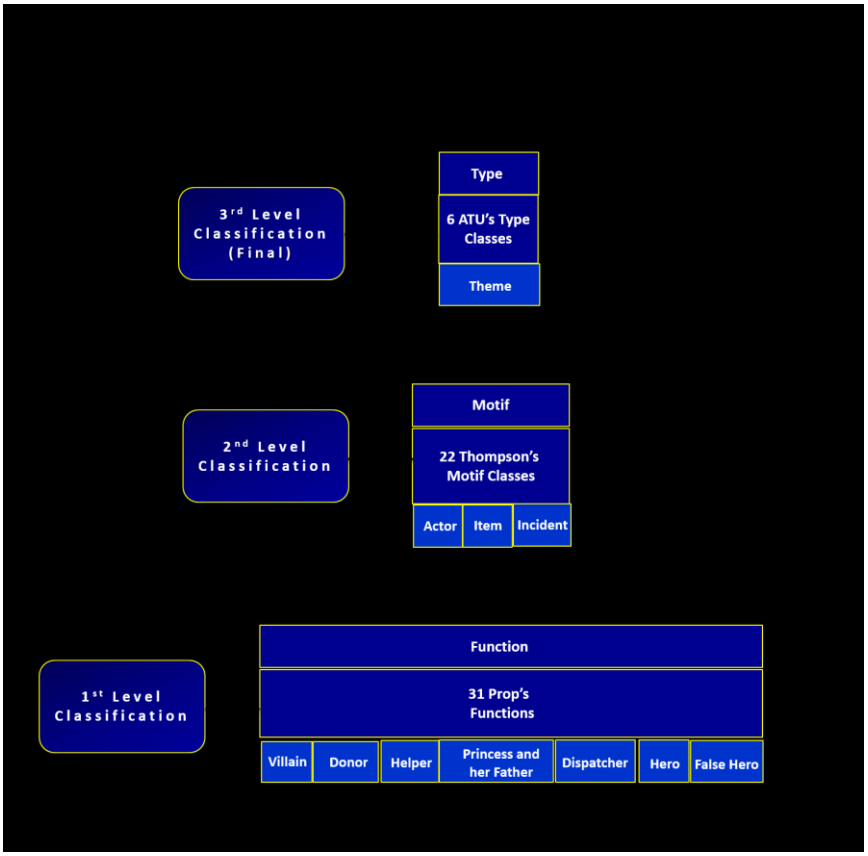

Fig. 1. Conceptual model of folktale classification for the MCFS development

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Based on the model, the two aspects of analysis was supported by the three folktale units which gave birth to the three levels of classification (signified by the dark blue rounded rectangles). The horizontal arrows from each dark blue rounded rectangle point to the specific unit of folktale representing the analysis for each level. The first-level classification was to obtain the structure of the folktale through the function unit and the second and the third-level classification the content via the motif and the type units.

The classification begins with the structure because the content is built with the support of its structure and the structure is the frame that forms the content [18]. Once the structure is affirmed, the content is sought because the structure alone does not suffice for a classification system to be comprehensive. A tale is a unique and not a solid entity owing to its specific and in-depth contents instead of being general and abstract like the structure [19]. Therefore, to achieve the comprehensive folktale classification system this study aimed, all the three levels of classification were necessary. The flow of the analysis was represented by the vertical arrows directing the analysis from the bottom to the top of the model. For each level, the guiding factors were available as the guides to identify the function, the motif, and the type in the folktales (signified by the light blue rectangle).

It is evident that from the ground, the first level classification begins with the analysis on the Malaysian folktales based on the 31 functions of folktale's morphology [20] (signified by the dark blue rectangle). The function is the action of the significant actors in the folktales. The sequence of the action of the actor forms the structure of the folktale. At this level, the Malaysian folktales were analyzed thoroughly for the functions in the folktales, and the folktales with a similar sequence of the structure were classed together. In order to identify the functions in the Malaysian folktales, the guiding factors were utilized. For this level, the seven spheres of action (Villain, Donor, Helper, Princess and her Father, Dispatcher, Hero, False Hero) were the guiding factors that aided the researcher in identifying the functions in the folktales analyzed. The spheres of action are general characters that perform the functions in the folktale. The result of this level was the structures of the Malaysian folktales based on the sequences of function.

Next is the second-level classification based on the motif-index of folk literature. In the context of the study, there were 22 motifs utilized to analyze the

content of the folktale [21] (signified by the dark blue rectangle). The motifs are Mythological, Animal, Tabu, Magic, The Dead, and Marvels to name a few. The motif is the smallest narrative element in a tale with the ability to endure in tradition. Its endurance is due to the fact that it is an element of extraordinary and striking attributes in the tale. In order to identify the motifs in the Malaysian folktales, the three categories of motifs were used as the guiding factors: the significant actor, the item, and the incident. The actor is the principal characters in the tale that contribute to the meaning of the folktale such as the most handsome prince and the cruel stepmother. The same goes with the item. The item in the folktale is considered as a motif when it adds meaning to the tale, for instance, the magical ring and the talking fish-helper. As for the incident, it is the happening in the tale that provides meaning to the content of the folktale, for example, the princess cursed by the moon and the prince poisoned by the stepmother. Based on the three guiding factors, the motifs in the Malaysian folktales' content were identified, and the folktales that share the same motifs were classed together according to the 22 motifs. Thus, the outcome of this level was the motifs of the Malaysian folktales based on the content.

The last and third-level classification rests on the type. There were six types of ATU (Aarne–Thompson–Uther) type-index employed to analyze the content of the folktale in the context of this study]21-24] (signified by the dark blue rectangle). The types are Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Realistic Tales (Novelle), Tales of the Stupid Ogre (Giant, Devil), Anecdotes and Jokes, and Formula Tales. The type is the overall theme of a tale built from a single or a combination of motifs in a reasonably fixed order. There is only one guiding factor which is the theme of the folktale analyzed. Considering the theme is a non-concrete entity unlike the motif, each of the Malaysian folktales' content was analyzed as a whole to obtain the right theme which was linked to the best type representing. To make the identification of the theme conceivable, the motifs identified in the second-level classification in a particular folktale worked as an additional assistance to identify the theme of the folktale (hence, the arrow pointing from the motifs to the theme). It is because the spectrum of motifs in a folktale embodies the theme (s) of the folktale which in the end, shapes the tale type [25-26]. As soon as the types were identified, the Malaysian folktales that possess similar theme were classed together based on the six types. Consequently, the outcome of this level was the types of the Malaysian folktales based on the content.

With the completion of the three levels of classification, the classes of the Malaysian folktales based on the structure and the content were obtained. Hence the MFCS was theoretically developed. Using the conceptual model as the visual guide to the classification process, the flow of analysis that needs to be conducted at all the three levels of classification is apparent. Besides the flow of the analysis, the pictorial representations of the folktale units, the guiding factors, the division of structure and content, and the structural-semantic analysis method employed to classify are clearly visualized as an implication of constructing the conceptual model.

After discussing the individually visualized parts of the conceptual model, it is only fair to discuss a limitation of the model. Since the conceptual model was constructed as the visual guide for the classification process, the lack of visualized details regarding the 31 functions, the 22 motifs, and the six types is questionable to onlookers who aspire to undertake the classification of folktale proposed in the study. Nevertheless, in defense of the conceptual model constructed, it is tailored more toward researchers and classifiers who are well versed regarding the specifics of the three units but are unfamiliar with the integration of the three units for the purpose of classification of a folktale.

5 Conclusion

The objective of this study is to develop the MFCS for the systematic folktale preservation by integrating the three important folktale units: the function, the motif, and the type. The integration of the three units ensures the MFCS covers the two significant and connected aspects of a folktale study which are the structure and the content. Such integration leads to the comprehensive yet complex classification system. Therefore, the conceptual model that visualizes the complex classification process was considered necessary as the visual guide in this study and was constructed via the pictorial representation method. Being the emphasis of this article, the construction of the conceptual model of folktale classification marked the achievement of the proposed model. It also answered the question imposed in the study whether the conceptual model can be constructed as the visual guide to the MFCS development for the systematic Malaysian folktale preservation.

As future works, the researcher plans to engage two matters. The first is regarding the limitation stated. The limitation of the conceptual model is a matter that can be justly addressed by upgrading the details of the conceptual model's visualization regarding the particulars of the three folktale units. By doing so, it is hoped that the scope of users of the model and its applicability are more wide-ranging than the current model hence overcoming the limitation indicated. The second matter is a verification of the model. The verification of the model is vital before it is implemented as the visual guide for the classification process. It affirms the model was constructed correctly thus crucial since a flawed model affects the quality of the analysis of the Malaysian folktales toward the development of the MFCS.

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