

A Stylistic Analysis: Personal and Community Identity as Represented in the Language of Stories for Children

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One of the repositories of cultural identity is literature. This is especially true of literature written by adults for children belonging to the same ethnic group as theirs. In such a case, children's literature is not just a simple repository – it becomes a means of orienting children to their supposed cultural identity. Thus, by focusing on the language used in children's literature, we explore not only the kind of identity and culture represented by writers (who themselves are constructed by the culture of their community) but also how we ourselves are constructed by the language that we use, i.e. the language that we speak, hear, read, and write. In other words, we realize that “the forms and meanings of reality are constructed in language:

by analyzing how language works, we come nearer to know how our culture constructs itself, and where we fit into that construction" (Stephens 57).

It is in the light of children's literature as both a repository of culture and a means of constructing a "cultured individual" that this paper explores the concept of identity as it is represented in the language of seven selected stories for Filipino children. The seven stories were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) they were all written by Filipino writers for Filipino children; (2) they have a main character belonging to a particular community; (3) this main character is explicitly or implicitly compared to other members of the community; and (4) the main character experiences a conflict related to her/his identity.

Using stylistics, this paper aims to (1) explore how identity is represented in and constructed through the language of stories for children, (2) determine how the representation of personal identity in these stories is related to the representation of communal identity, (3) describe how conflicts concerning identity are resolved in children's literature, and (4) examine the ideology represented in children's stories dealing with identity-conflicts.

Defining Identity

The term "identity" is not universally accepted in the current research literature on the subject (Joseph 9). The term is sometimes distinguished from subjectivity and is thought of as "a particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being" (Hall 3). It has been pointed out that though people use the word to refer to the sense of who they are, the

term still does not automatically carry with it the connotations of social construction and constraint (Ivanic cited in Joseph). Studies have also distinguished between two views of identity—that of identity being a timeless essence (the essentialist view) and that of identity being plastic, changeable, and specific to particular social and cultural conjunctures (the anti-essentialist view) (Barker and Galasinski 28).

This paper takes the anti-essentialist view of identity and considers identity as a process of becoming. In the context of a story for children, this process of becoming is three-fold:

1. For the writers, the act of writing is an act of becoming. As the writers consider the choices available to them in completing the story—choices, for instance, pertaining to the different elements of the narrative such as characterization, setting, theme, point of view, style—they gradually develop an identity as writers in general and as writers for children in particular. As these writers find their voice in the narrative and make decisions as to which ideas, values, and emotions to emphasize in a story written for children who share their ethnicity, they likewise develop an aspect of their identity as members of an ethnic group. For instance, as a Filipino writer writes for Filipino children, she/he may find herself/himself emphasizing the ideas, values, and emotions that she/he consciously or unconsciously would like to share with or develop in Filipino children.
2. For the readers, the act of reading is also an act of becoming. The child-readers (or listeners, in the case of children who cannot read yet but who listen to the story read to them) may tell what they are like or what they would like to be by discovering things that they share with the characters in the

story (their resemblances) or things that make them different from the characters (their distinctions).

3. For the characters in the story, the story itself is an act of becoming. As the characters experience internal or external conflict and later find resolution to this conflict, they acquire a certain identity—partly constructed by the story writer (who has given them certain physical, emotional, and psychological attributes) and partly bestowed by the reader (who continues to recognize the characters despite the changes that may or may not happen to them in the course of the story).

Aside from considering identity as a process of becoming, this paper also considers the multiplicity of identity and adapts Baldwin and Hecht's four layers of identity in analyzing the stories for children: personal identity (an individual's conception of self), enacted identity (how an identity is expressed in language and communication), relational identity (identities in reference to each other), and communal identity (identities as defined by collectives).

The Stories for Children

As mentioned earlier, all seven stories included in this study are written by Filipino writers. Three of these are originally written in English (*The Spectacular Tree*, *Polliwog's Wiggle*, and "Pan de Sal Saves the Day"); three are originally written in Filipino but are published as bilingual (Filipino and English) texts (*The Thirsty Sparrow*, *The Legend of the Bitter Gourd*, *The Shy Rooster*); and one is written and published in Filipino (*Si Putot*). With the exception of "Pan de San Saves the Day" which is part of an anthology of award-winning stories for children,

these are published as picture storybooks; that is, each story is published as one book and the texts come with illustrations.

All seven stories are modern fantasies and have for their main characters nonhumans with human qualities: a tiny plant (a vine), a polliwog, a kind of bread (Pan de Sal), a bird (Maya), a bitter gourd (Ampalaya), a rooster (Onyok), and a dog (Putot). Each character is explicitly or implicitly compared to other characters in the story and somehow experiences a conflict related to identity.

In *The Spectacular Tree* by Robert Magnuson, a tiny plant with yellow flowers grows under the shade of acacia trees. The little plant wants to be a tree and be able to touch the sky, but the mighty acacia tree tells him that he is no tree and that he cannot touch the sky. This saddens the little plant, but he still tries to reach for the sun. A storm comes and destroys the mighty acacia tree. The tree now is in danger of being cut down by the choppers. The little plant (which is actually a vine), winds itself around the broken acacia tree to keep it intact. In this way, with its entire body sewn and wrapped by long leafy cords covered with delicate yellow flowers, the acacia tree looks spectacular. As for the crawling plant, he feels much too happy to notice the ground, because from where he is sitting, the sky never looked so beautiful.

In *Polliwog's Wiggle* by Heidi Emily Eusebio-Abad, a polliwog, with its wiggly tail and “rolly-polly” shape finds itself a star among the minnows in the swamp—until an odd-colored creature with large, bulging eyes appears and steals all the attention away from it. Later the polliwog finds itself very much like the odd-colored creature, instinctively rolling out its long sticky tongue to catch insects. The minnows still recognize Polliwog who says it is no longer its old self and who, therefore, fears that the minnows will no longer like it for a friend now

that it has lost its wiggle. Happily, Polliwog learns that the minnows still like it in spite of its new, odd-looking self.

In “Pan de Sal Saves the Day” by Norma Olizon-Chikiamco, a girl named Pan de Sal compares herself to her classmates and thinks she is the unluckiest kid in school because of her dark skin, oblong shape, flat nose, and name. The class goes on a field trip and it is during this time, when the kids and their teacher get stranded after their bus breaks down, that Pan de Sal discovers that in spite of the things she does not like about herself, she has much to offer to others – especially to her classmates who seem to have the best of everything. While they wait for a mechanic to repair the bus, Pan de Sal teaches her classmates the game *sipa*, sings to them the songs that her mother has taught her, and shares with them her simple food. At the end of the day, Pan de Sal learns that she is unique and that she likes her name after all.

In *The Thirsty Sparrow* by Victoria Añonuevo, a little sparrow feels thirsty but cannot as yet drink water from a glass. There is just one glass of water and five thirsty birds that fall in line to wait for their turn to drink. Hawk drinks first, then Hornbill, then Egret, then Rail, and at last, it is Sparrow’s turn. But by this time, there is little water left in the glass and because Sparrow’s beak and legs are small, he cannot reach the water at the bottom of the glass. Sparrow thinks and tries out ways of reaching the water. Finally, he comes up with an idea: he gets five pebbles and drops each one carefully into the glass. As he drops the fifth pebble, the water almost reaches the brim of the glass and Sparrow is able to take his fill.

In *The Legend of the Bitter Gourd* by Augie D. Rivera, Jr., Ampalaya or the bitter gourd is originally pale and bland. This is the reason why he is so envious of the colorful and delicious vegetables in the town of Sariwa. Ampalaya decides to steal the

different tastes and colors of the vegetables while they are asleep and he becomes a vegetable of varied colors and tastes. However, he is found out, is tried by the court of fairies, and is punished by being given all the tastes, colors, and beauty that he has stolen from his fellow vegetables. All the tastes, colors, and beauty fight inside Ampalaya's body until his color turns dark green, his wrinkles come out, and his bitter taste emerges. Ampalaya is sorry for what he has done and becomes friends with the other vegetables.

In *The Shy Rooster* by Rebecca T. Añonuevo, a young rooster named Onyok is not able to crow well like the older roosters. This saddens him a lot. He thinks he is good for nothing and wishes that he had never been born. His mother gently reminds him that every rooster that starts to crow does so joyfully to give honor to both the self and the world around it. Onyok heeds his mother's reminder and learns to crow well. Not only that—Onyo promises that when he grows up, he will teach the younger roosters how to crow.

In the story *Si Putot* by Mike L. Bigornia, a little dog named Putot is sad because he has a very short tail. He is so envious as he compares himself with other animals with fabulous tails: the parrot, the cat, the pig, the horse, the cow, the water buffalo, and the monkey. Putot considers himself unlucky until he meets the worm who sadly tells him that a worm like him is far unluckier because he is all tail and has no ears, no nose, no feet. Putot realizes he is not unlucky after all and no matter how short his tail is, it is still a tail.

Identity: The Conflict and the Resolution

This paper uses stylistics to explore how identity is represented in and constructed through the language of stories

for children. To explore the concept of identity, the linguistic analysis is focused on two elements of the plot—the conflict and the resolution because it is in these two elements that the representation of identity becomes most evident. The table below shows the excerpts from the stories, identifying the passages where the conflict and the resolution are found. The stylistic analysis will focus on these passages.

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<i>The Spectacular Tree</i>	<p>As the tiny plant grew, he realized <i>something was wrong</i>. His stems were still <i>thin</i>. His leaves were still <i>small</i>. On top of this, he began to grow strange yellow leaves. "What's wrong with me?" he cried.</p> <p>"Everything is wrong with you!" sneered a cranky Acacia. "You are not a tree! You are one of those plants that <i>crawl</i> along the ground and <i>wither</i> away because you cannot reach the sky. Only trees are made to reach the sky."</p> <p>"But I am a tree!" the tiny plant cried. "I just haven't grown up yet!"</p>	<p>For in front of them stood the most spectacular plant they had ever seen.</p> <p>It was clearly a tree. But its entire body was sewn and wrapped by long leafy cords covered with delicate yellow flowers.</p> <p>"Do you think they're buying it?" the Acacia whispered nervously.</p> <p>"Keep quiet, and just try to look good!" the Lamp Post winked.</p> <p>As for the crawling plant, <i>he felt much too happy</i> to notice the ground. Because from where he was sitting, <i>the sky never looked so beautiful</i>.</p>

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<p><i>Polliwog's Wiggle</i></p>	<p>Gradually, without noticing it, the polliwog would <i>turn green with envy</i> each time the minnows would fuss over the stone-like creature.</p> <p>...</p> <p>"Polliwog," the stoutest minnow said, "is it you?"</p> <p>The polliwog let out a faint gargle this time.</p> <p>It blinked like it was about to cry.</p> <p>"It is me," it croaked. "<i>But it's not the old me.</i>"</p> <p>"Wow!" said the smallest minnow.</p> <p>"We thought you were the stone creature that was here before. You look like it now."</p>	<p>"Can I still be your friend?" the polliwog asked.</p> <p>"Of course! Come join us," said all the curious minnows.</p> <p>"Are you sure that you'd still like me for a friend?" the polliwog croaked.</p> <p>"I've lost my wiggle. You liked me for my wiggle."</p> <p>"Yup," said the stoutest minnow. "We liked you for your wiggle..."</p> <p>"And for your playfulness," the smallest minnow followed up.</p> <p>"And <i>even for your new, odd-looking self.</i> Hop in and join us!"</p> <p>With that welcome cheer, the polliwog – now a frog and not a fish – hopped for joy and leaped into the water to play with its minnow friends.</p>

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<p data-bbox="456 300 597 396">“Pan de Sal Saves the Day”</p>	<p data-bbox="618 300 881 726">Of all the kids in school, Pan de Sal <i>felt she was the unluckiest</i>. She <i>didn't like the way she looked</i>. Her skin was too dark, and she found her oblong shape weird. She also hated her rather flat nose. Besides, whoever heard of a girl named Pan de Sal anyway?</p>	<p data-bbox="914 300 1250 789">That afternoon Pan de Sal rushed to their nipa hut, her <i>heart pounding with happiness and joy</i>. She no longer felt like the odd one out at school. <i>She felt unique, a person like no other, with her own special talents and abilities</i>. And she would finally join the Glee Club! <i>“Hmmmmm. Maybe I like the name Pan de Sal after all,”</i> she told herself as she helped her mother prepare supper.</p>

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<p><i>The Legend of the Bitter Gourd</i></p>	<p>Because he was <i>pale</i> and <i>bland</i>, Ampalaya was soon overcome with <i>envy</i>. He became irritable and hot-headed. He shouted at all the vegetables who went near his trellis.</p>	<p>All the tastes, colors, and beauty Ampalaya stole fought inside his body!</p> <p>Because of the boxing match among the white, green, purple, yellow, and other colors, his skin was stained a dark green.</p> <p>Because smoothness and roughness grabbed each other by the hair, all his wrinkles came out.</p> <p>Because sweetness, sourness, and spice shouted at each other, his bitter taste emerged.</p> <p>From then on, Ampalaya's color became dark green. His skin became wrinkled. His taste became bitter. Today, even if the Ampalaya is nutritious, many people dislike him. But you know, <i>the Ampalaya is sorry for what he has done</i>. The next time you see him on your plate, try to taste him and forgive his mistakes.</p>

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<p><i>Si Putot</i></p>	<p>Mahabang buntot ang pangarap ni Putot dahil maikli ang kaniyang buntot.</p> <p><i>Inggit na inggit</i> siya sa mahabang buntot ng iba at ikinahihiya naman ang buntot niya.</p> <p>(Putot dreams of having a long tail because his tail is short.</p> <p>He is envious of others' long tails and is ashamed of his tail.)</p>	<p>"Bakit ka umiiyak, kaibigan?" tanong kay Putot ng nagdaraang bulate.</p> <p>"Kasi, malas ako. Maikli ang buntot ko; mabuti ka pa, mahaba ang buntot mo."</p> <p>"Waaa!" biglang iyak ng bulate.</p> <p>"Bakit?" gulat na tanong ni Putot, "Ano ba ang nangyari?"</p> <p>"Kasi, ang kabuuan ko'y puro buntot!" paliwanag ng bulate. "Walang tenga, walang ilong, walang paa. Kaya mas malas ako kaysa iyo."</p> <p>"Hindi pala dapat ikahiya ang kapansanan," sabi ni Putot, "pagkat di ito ganap na kasawian. Maikli man ang buntot ko, buntot pa rin ang tawag dito."</p> <p>("Why are you crying, friend?" the worm who was passing by asked Putot.</p> <p>"Because I am unlucky. My tail is short; you are better off because your tail is long."</p> <p>"Waaa!" the worm cried.</p> <p>"Why?" the startled Putot asked. "What happened?"</p> <p>"Because I am all tail!" explained the worm. "I have no ears, no nose, no feet. That's why I am unluckier than you are."</p> <p>"One should not be ashamed of one's disability," said Putot, "because it is not really a misfortune. Though my tail is short, it is still called a tail.")</p>

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<p><i>The Shy Rooster</i> (Originally in Filipino, translated into English)</p>	<p>Onyok, the <i>youngest</i> of the roosters, is the one who sulks. His beak turns red again, <i>but he still can't crow like the others.</i></p>	<p>"Look at all the roosters, Onyok. No one bends his head when he starts to crow. Whether they are white or red, they joyfully wake up, and wake up others in a joy; they raise their heads to the sky, clap their wings, give honor to the self and to the world around." "Ta-ta-tak-talaoooooooook!" Onyok! Yes, it's Onyok! The shy little rooster stretches his back, stomps his legs, raises his neck, spreads his wings, and crows the high crows without end: <i>now Onyok the youngest rooster cannot be stopped from crowing.</i> One day he tells his mother and his friend Kokok, "When I grow up, <i>I will teach the other shy little roosters how to crow the finest crow.</i>"</p>

Story	Locus of Identity Conflict	Locus of Resolution
<p><i>The Thirsty Sparrow</i></p>	<p>Sparrow was the fifth to drink, but there was very little water left in the glass. Sparrow is <i>small</i>. His bill is <i>short</i>. The glass is tall with very little water left inside it. How can Sparrow drink water from the glass?</p>	<p>He gathered five pebbles. He dropped the first pebble and the water in the glass rose. He dropped the second pebble and the water in the glass rose again. He dropped the third pebble and the water in the glass rose again. He dropped the fourth pebble and the water in the glass rose again. He dropped the fifth pebble. The water almost reached the brim of the glass. At last, <i>Sparrow was able to drink</i>.</p>

In *The Spectacular Tree*, conflict is signaled by the phrase “*something was wrong*,” and this is followed by the modifiers “*thin*” and “*small*” which are used to describe the tiny plant growing under the shades of the acacia trees. There is identity conflict in the story because the tiny plant thinks that he is a tree, when he is actually a vine. Thus, the phrase “*something is wrong*” is simply the perception of the tiny plant, because if he knew that he is not really a tree but a vine, then he would know that there is nothing wrong with him. It would follow that the modifiers “*thin*” and “*small*” are not descriptions of *wrongness* as the tiny plant seems to think but of *naturalness* because it is natural for a vine like him to have thin stems and small leaves.

The reader then perceives that the tiny plant is envious of the trees that can reach the sky and thinks there is something wrong with him because he sees himself from the point of view of “the other”—the mighty acacia tree who tells him, “Everything is wrong with you! You are not a tree! You are one of those plants that crawl along the ground and wither away because you cannot reach the sky. Only trees are made to reach the sky.”

The tiny plant takes the words of the mighty acacia tree for “truth”—that only trees are made to reach the sky, and because he wants to reach the sky, the tiny plant thinks that it **has** to be a tree to do so. This conflict is resolved when both the tiny plant and the mighty acacia tree realize that (1) a vine does not **just** crawl along the ground and wither away—a vine can do much more for it can help save a broken acacia tree from being chopped down, and (2) not only trees are made to reach the sky—vines can do the same. In the final analysis, the conflict (the feeling of unhappiness because of the thought that there is something wrong with oneself) is resolved when the tiny plant finds happiness in discovering his worth and seeing himself from his own perspective.

Like in *The Spectacular Tree*, the main character in *Polliwog’s Wiggle* thinks that something is wrong with it. This kind of thinking, however, is not made explicit in the story. What is made explicit is the envy that the polliwog felt: “Gradually, without noticing it, the polliwog would *turn green with envy* each time the minnows would fuss over the stone-like creature.” This part of the story is but the beginning of conflict. The main conflict is found in the part in which the polliwog has already grown into a frog but finds itself unhappy in being one: “It is me. But it’s not the old me.”

The polliwog's unhappiness lies in thinking that its new self is not acceptable to the minnows: "'Are you sure that you'd still like me for a friend?' the polliwog croaked. 'I've lost my wiggle. You liked me for my wiggle.'" Turning into a frog—what it is really meant to be—has made the polliwog unhappy because it lost its wiggle, which it thinks is the reason why its minnow friends like it. Thus, it is reluctant to accept its new self because it views this new self from the point of view of "the other"—the minnows. The identity conflict is resolved when the minnows assure the polliwog that they still like it for its new odd-looking self:

"Yup," said the stoutest minnow. "We liked you for your wiggle..."

"And for your playfulness," the smallest minnow followed up.

"And even for your new, odd-looking self. Hop in and join us!"

With that welcome cheer, the polliwog—now a frog and not a fish—hopped for joy and leaped into the water to play with its minnow friends.

Like *The Spectacular Tree*, the story *Polliwog's Wiggle* ends on a happy note and this is because the main character has found happiness in its acceptance of its new self and in its acceptance by the other members of its community. This is also the case with the main character in "Pan de Sal Saves the Day." The conflict is signaled by the phrase she "*felt she was the unluckiest*" which describes the main character and which is followed by the sentence, "She didn't like the way she looked." Thus, in the story, Pan de Sal is explicitly described as one who does not like what she has (dark skin, oblong shape, flat nose, name) and what she is. Like the tiny plant who is envious of the trees that can reach the sky and the polliwog that is envious of the attention given to the stone-like creature, Pan de Sal is also

envious—she is envious of almost everything her classmates have: golden brown skin, tall nose, curves in all the right places, popularity, delicious food, beautiful houses, cars, etc. This is so because Pan de Sal sees herself from the point of view of “the other” —her classmates’ whose supposed standards Pan de Sal uses to measure herself. But at the end of the story, after her teacher and her classmates have praised her for the things she has shared with them—her games, her food, her songs—and she feels being accepted for what she is, Pan de Sal’s identity conflict is resolved. She feels happiness and joy upon realizing that she is not the odd one in school; she realizes she is unique.

Like Pan de Sal, Ampalaya in the *The Legend of the Bitter Gourd* is also explicitly envious of things that others have. Unlike Pan de Sal, however, Ampalaya’s envy makes him irritable and hot headed. Such a negative attitude leads him to find an equally negative way to resolve what he perceives is his problem (i.e. lack of taste and color)—he steals the colors and tastes of the other vegetables. In the end, this produces a negative effect because Ampalaya’s color becomes dark green, his skin becomes wrinkled, and his taste becomes bitter. The story does not say if Ampalaya has learned to accept his new self; all it says is that “Ampalaya is sorry for what he has done” and the reader is enjoined to “forgive his mistakes.” Thus, the resolution is rather vague—is Ampalaya sorry only for stealing what belonged to the other vegetables? Or is he also sorry for not being content with being pale and bland? Has he accepted his new self—that of a vegetable with dark green wrinkled skin and bitter taste? Has Ampalaya stopped being envious? With the writer enjoining the reader to forgive the mistakes of Ampalaya, is the writer also inviting the reader to resolve Ampalaya’s conflict?

In *Si Putot*, a dog named Putot is envious of the fabulous tails of other animals. Because he sees himself from the point of

view of “the other” – the animals with long and useful tails – he perceives his short tail as something to be ashamed of. The resolution offered in the story is based on Putot’s realization that others (e.g., the worm) are more unfortunate than he is and that his tail, though very short, is still a tail. Thus, Putot’s non-acceptance of himself – a dog with a short tail – is resolved not really by his full acceptance of this identity but by having his feeling of inferiority “equalized” by a feeling of superiority as he compares himself to others who are more unfortunate than he is.

While the resolution in Ampalaya’s conflict is vague and that of Putot rather unconvincing, in *The Shy Rooster* it is clearer. The title of the story itself signals the conflict in the story – the main character, a young rooster named Onyok, is rather shy. This is why he cannot crow properly like the older roosters. As he views himself from the perspective of “the other” – the older and more experienced roosters – his shyness becomes worse. The conflict is resolved as Onyok heeds the advice of his mother to crow joyfully and “give honor to the self and to the world.” He even dreams of someday teaching other young roosters how to crow.

Among the stories, the case of the main character in *The Thirsty Sparrow* is a little different. The sparrow is not envious of anybody. But as in the other stories, the main character is compared to other characters. While the tiny plant is compared to the mighty acacia tree, the polliwog to the stone-like creature, Pan de Sal to her classmates, Ampalaya to other vegetables with colors and tastes, Putot to animals with long tails, and Onyok to the older roosters, the sparrow is compared to the other birds – to the hawk, the hornbill, the egret, and the rail. The comparison, however, is not presented as a perception of the sparrow; rather, the implicit comparison with the taller and bigger birds is made by the omniscient narrator who apparently

views Sparrow from the point of view of “the other” – the bigger and taller birds who are easily able to take their fill from the water in the glass. The point of comparison, therefore, is size; thus, the beginning of the conflict in the story is signaled by the two sentences: “Sparrow is **small**. His bill is **short**.” It is because Sparrow is not as big or as tall as the other birds and because his bill is not as long as those of the others that he is not able to drink water from the glass after the first four birds have drunk. But what Sparrow lacks in size he makes up with his big thinking. By being smart enough to look for a solution to his problem, Sparrow is able to drink water from the glass. Sparrow, therefore, does not dwell on what he does not have but focuses on what he has. In recognizing his own strength, he is able to find a solution to his problem.

Identity as Represented in Language

At the semantic level, two things are foregrounded in the stories for children: the use of nonhuman main characters and the use of one of gradable pairs of antonyms to describe these characters. If one were to analyze the semantic features of the nouns that name the main characters, one thing similar among them would be this:

<i>Vine</i> (tiny plant)	<i>Polliwog</i>	<i>Bread</i> (Pan de Sal)	<i>Vegetable</i> (Ampalaya)	<i>Rooster</i> (Onyok)	<i>Dog</i> (Putot)	<i>Sparrow</i> (Maya)
-human	-human	-human	-human	-human	-human	-human

As mentioned earlier, one of the criteria for choosing stories to be included in the analysis is that the main character experiences a conflict related to her/his identity. It was only after the stories were chosen and analysis made that the writer discovered this semantic feature that words pertaining to the main characters share. This common semantic feature (i.e., -human) is important in the context of identity as a process of becoming. For one, all seven writers of these stories **chose** to use a non-human main character; thus, there must be something useful and true about a non-human character that cannot be found in a human character, in as far as the idea of identity is concerned. If the act of writing is an act of becoming and an act of discovering one's identity, as writers for Filipino children, what have all seven writers discovered about themselves in opting to use a non-human main character? Is the choice borne out of how they perceive their intended readers; i.e., do they believe that children will be able to understand, appreciate, and relate more to a non-human main character experiencing an identity conflict? Or is it because the issue of identity is better tackled in the context of fantasy (the genre to which all seven stories belong) rather than in the context of reality (i.e. realistic children's stories)? Is using a non-human main character a "safe" way of representing the issues regarding identity?

Aside from the use of non-human characters, it is also noticeable how the main characters are often described using a gradable modifier:

Main Character	Modifiers Used to Describe the Main Character
Plant	<i>tiny, thin, small, little, sad</i>
Polliwog	<i>small, tiny, green with envy</i>
Ampalaya (bitter gourd)	<i>pale, bland, overcome with envy, irritable, hot-headed</i>
Pan de Sal (bread)	<i>unluckiest, dark, oblong shape, flat nose, envied her classmates</i>
Rooster	<i>youngest, sleepy, shy, little</i>
Putot (dog)	<i>maikli ang buntot (short tail), inggit na inggit (quite envious), malas (unlucky)</i>
Maya (Sparrow)	<i>small, short</i>

In describing the main characters and contrasting them with the other characters, the writers have used **gradable pairs of antonyms** (in which the negative of one word is not synonymous with the other). In such a pair, one is often **marked** and the other **unmarked**. The unmarked member is the one used in questions of degree, e.g. “How tall is it?” “How old is she?” In describing the main characters, the writers noticeably used the marked pair of the antonyms—the one that denotes a lesser degree of a particular quality—*small, short, young, pale, bland*, and those that have negative connotations—*envious, irritable, unlucky*. Using the unmarked member of the pair may be the writers’ way of addressing their intended readers—the children—who themselves are often described by

members of their social group with such modifiers. On the other hand, the use of modifiers with negative connotations, in the context of the stories, almost always signals the internal and external conflicts, so that by the end of the story, when the resolution is given, the main character is no longer described as such; for instance, Pan de Sal is no longer envious, Putot does not feel unlucky anymore, and Ampalaya is no longer irritable. Such modifiers with negative connotations are likewise foregrounded to highlight the changeable identity, the shift from seeing oneself from the point of view of “the other” to one’s own point of view, and eventually, the process of becoming. And together with the marked member of the gradable antonyms, such modifiers with negative connotations also highlight the message of the story – that in spite of having less of a certain quality (e.g. less size – *small*, less height – *short*, less maturity – *young*), the main character is still an acceptable, productive, and legitimate member of the community

Identity: The Process of Becoming

These stories represent identity as a process of becoming, so that each main character seems unable to definitely say, “I am who I am” but more aptly says, “Sometimes I am what I am.” This is so because identity is represented as a paradox – for it to remain constant and recognizable, it has to change; for it to make an individual unique and distinct, it has to be based on resemblances and communal identities. Part of its being constant is the seemingly consistent overlap among the four layers of identity: the personal, enacted, relational, and communal identities. The main character’s personal identity (self-concept) is manifested and expressed in her/his enacted identity (identity expressed in language) and partly dependent on her/his relational identity (identity in reference to others) and rendered more recognizable because of communal identity (identity as defined by collectives).

In *The Spectacular Tree*, the tiny plant's self-concept of being a tree is enacted when he says, "But I am a tree!" He is sad because compared to the acacia tree (his relational identity) what he is (a tiny crawling plant) is not so spectacular. Yet, the tiny plant somehow knows that he belongs to that community in spite of his thin stems and small leaves because for one, he shares with the other plants the desire to "reach for the sun" (communal identity).

Similarly, Polliwog's self-concept of being a fish (and not a frog) is enacted when it says, "I'd have to grow creepy, bulging eyes first before I allow that thing in the water," referring to the frog. He grows sad and envious as the minnows shift their attention to the "moss-covered rock" (the frog) whom the polliwog thinks does not share anything in common with it. At the end of the story, the polliwog realizes its relational identity—what makes it related to its object of envy. It learns that it is indeed also a "moss-covered rock" that instinctively rolls out its sticky tongue to catch insects. Yet, even as such, it still belongs to the community of water creatures as the minnows gladly welcome it back.

Pan de Sal's self-concept of being the unluckiest kid in school is enacted as she explicitly expresses her envy of her other classmates. Her envy is borne of her relational identity—how she looks at herself in relation to her "more fortunate" classmates. Yet, in the end she realizes that though she thinks herself unlucky because of her physical attributes and lack of material things, she is still part of the community because she has something different to offer and to share.

Ampalaya's self-concept of being pale and bland is enacted in his being irritable and hotheaded. Such a self-concept is borne of his comparison of himself with the colorful

and delicious vegetables. At the end of the story, he is sorry for what he has done. Moreover, he assumes a new identity – that of a dark green, wrinkled, and bitter vegetable that is still part of the community of vegetables.

Putot's self-concept of being unlucky because of his very short tail is enacted through his expressions of envy. Such a self-concept is borne of his comparison of himself with animals that have fabulous tails. At the end of the story, he realizes that it is not the length of his tail that defines him and he is not that unlucky after all.

Onyok's self-concept of a rooster incapable of crowing is enacted in his shyness and apparent inability to crow as well as the older and more experienced roosters. Yet, Onyok discovers the strength and abilities he shares with other roosters and he is able to crow like any other member of his community.

The thirsty sparrow's concept of a little bird with a short beak, one that is unable to drink water from a tall glass, is enacted in the narrator's question: "How can Sparrow drink water from the glass?" As Sparrow is able to likewise enact the answer to this question, he discovers not only his unique abilities but also those that he shares with other members of his community.

As the different layers of identity overlap every so often, the main characters undergo the process of becoming. The identity turns out to be one that is **not** fixed but one that constantly changes, almost always plastic. This identity is more than the sum of all the instances of self-realization, self-discovery, and re-discovery, and it is more than the totality of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and psychological attributes of the main character. This identity is a continuing production of varied meanings as the main character conceives

of the self in comparison to and in contrast with other members of the community. Thus, one realizes that there could not be identity without the recognition of both resemblances and distinctions; that to be identifiable is to be both common and unique.

Such a process of becoming is likewise true for the writer of stories for children—because to write for children is to approximate what the writer shares in common with them. Otherwise, the writer risks being completely misunderstood and unappreciated. Among the various genres of literature, it is only children’s literature that is defined through its intended readers or audience. Thus, one who has chosen to write for children inevitably has to discover and rediscover what one shares with the intended audience. Yet, the act of writing is also an act of sharing something different, something that the intended audience may not know or may not have. Therefore, even as writers for children discover and rediscover what they have in common with their intended audience, they have also to share something new—something that makes them distinct from their readers. And this is how the writers for children are able to enact their own identities as writers in general, as writers for children in particular, and as members of their ethnic group. The story itself is their enacted identity, their expression of their personal identity.

On the part of the child reader (or listener), being acquainted with the main character of the story is also a process of becoming. Moreover, the act of reading (or listening) is a process of being interpellated (Althusser cited in Mills 244) by the writers. As the writers use words like the marked member in a pair of gradable antonyms (e.g. *small, little, short*), they call upon child readers to position themselves as the subject of the narrative. The response to such interpellation is experienced by the children-readers as *empathy*—a way of putting themselves

in the position of the main character to share that character's emotional and psychological experiences. Because part of these experiences are the conflicts and resolutions which are the locus of the changing identity and the process of becoming, the children-readers also get to experience such change and such process. It is in experiencing such change in identity and such process of becoming that the children-readers also get acquainted with the communal identity—this time, not of the main character, but that of the writer. Such acquaintanceship is part of what constitutes the gradual construction of one's cultural identity.

In summary, the seven stories for children included in this study represent the paradox that is identity. In presenting characters that experience identity conflict, the stories highlight the changeable and unstable nature of identity. Yet, in presenting resolutions that almost always rely on the individual's ability to change—be it in the physical or psychological sense—and the community's acceptance of such change, the stories also suggest the relative predictability of identity as a process of becoming. In this paradoxical representation of identity, one also gets a glimpse of the ideology found collectively in the stories—the ideology that allows and even encourages individuals to assert their uniqueness but at the same time also reminds them that such uniqueness is possible only if it retains aspects of the communal identity and only if the community recognizes and accepts the uniqueness as such.

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