

A Bodily Code Analysis Used in Revealing an Imaginary Character in Calvin and Hobbes

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ABSTRACT

The study entitled “A Bodily Codes Analysis Used in Revealing an Imaginary Friend Character in Bill Watterson’s Comic Strip: *Calvin and Hobbes*” seeks to discover the representation of imaginary character of Hobbes based on his bodily codes occurred in the 5 selected strips purposively. To obtain deeper understanding, this study applies four basic premises of experientialism proposed by Buckland (2004) towards 9 bodily codes proposed by Chandler (2002). This study uses a qualitative method in order to describe the premises in a narrative way. It discovered that Hobbes makes 76 bodily codes. There are 14 appearances as a real tiger (18.42%), 14 gestures (18.42%), 12 postures (15.79%), 9 proximities (11.84%), 9 physical orientations (11.84%), 8 facial expressions (10.53%), 7 gazes (9.21%), 3 bodily contacts (3.95%), and 0 head-nods (0%). Furthermore, this study also discovered 5 representations of Hobbes. The first is Hobbes as a cloning of Calvin. The second representation is Hobbes as a friend of Calvin. Third, Hobbes is represented as a pet. The fourth representation is Hobbes as an opponent of Calvin. Lastly, Hobbes is represented as a real tiger which has instincts as a wild animal. Therefore, in Bill Watterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes*, Hobbes is visualized as something very close to very distant for Calvin.

Keywords: *Bodily Codes, Basic Premises of Experientialism, Representation, Comic Strip.*

INTRODUCTION

According to Chandler (2002), in a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects. In fact, there are some works which combine two forms of sign, for example, a comic strip which combines words and images. Therefore, a comic strip contains many aspects that can be analyzed through a semiotic analysis. McCloud (1993) concludes that comic is a juxtaposed pictorial and other image in deliberate sequence, and intended to convey information.

Berger (2008:192) says that there are some conventions which readers have to learn if they are going to read a comic correctly: the way characters are drawn, facial expressions of the characters, the role of balloons, movement lines, panels of the frame, the setting, and the action. Thus, a comic strip contains many aspects that can be analyzed through a semiotic analysis. In addition, Moriarty (2002) asserts that everything in the world could be defined as a code, as

long as the receiver can interpret the code to get its meaning. Chandler (2002) divides types of codes into three which are most widely mentioned in the context of media, communication, and cultural studies: social codes, textual codes, and interpretative codes.

Bill Watterson's comic strip entitled *Calvin and Hobbes*, tells about a six-year-old-boy named Calvin who has a tiger-best friend-doll named Hobbes. From Calvin's point of view, Hobbes is a real tiger that always accompanied him every time, but to everybody else Hobbes is just a stuffed tiger. This phenomenon is explained by Allen and Felluga (2002) who say that in their first-five-year, children begin to know and to interact with their surroundings. In this case, Calvin who has already developed his social ability has a complex imagination.

In this study, a semiotic analysis was used as a tool to reveal the character of Hobbes as an

imaginary friend character in Bill Watterson's comic strip, *Calvin and Hobbes*. The data were analyzed by using Chandler's (2002) tripartite framework that focuses on social codes: bodily codes which can be seen from bodily contact, proximity, physical orientation, appearance, facial expression, gaze, head-nod, gesture, and posture.

First, bodily contact contains the messages when one communicator touches another one. In Bill Watterson's comic strip, *Calvin and Hobbes*, the contact between two main characters can be seen from the way they hug, fight, or touch each other. Second, proximity indicates how close Hobbes approaches Calvin. Fiske (1990) classifies proximity within how many feet they face each other: three feet is intimate, up to eight feet is personal, and over eight feet is public. Third, physical orientation indicates what kind of relationship they had by determines how they angle themselves to the other. Facing someone can represent either intimacy or

aggression, and being at 90° (right or left side) can represent co-operative position (Argyle, 1972 as cited in Fiske, 1990)

Forth, Argyle (1972) says that appearance is used to send the messages about personality, social status, or conformity (as cited in Fiske, 1990). In this case, this study focuses on the appearance of Hobbes whether he turns into a stuffed tiger doll when there is someone other than Calvin appears in the panel or conforms as a real tiger when there is only Calvin around. Fifth, facial expression delivers emotions in a variety of situation (Ekman, 2003). It can be sad, anger, surprise, disgust, or many kind of enjoyment. Generally, the receiver of the facial expression can understand the message that the sender tried to deliver. Sixth, gaze is a way of sending important messages (Fiske, 1990). The representative participants, Calvin and Hobbes, appear with 'oblique' or 'straight' gaze which indicates their attention.

Seventh, head-nod, a condition when a head is rhythmically raised and lowered, occurs in every face-to-face discussion as a sign of agreement, while head-shakes represent disagreement (Givens, 2002). Eighth, According to Toastmasters International (2011), gesture is a bodily movement that supports a verbal message. A gesture can suggest specific meaning to its audience. Lastly, the ninth bodily code is posture. It can be seen from the way the characters are sitting, standing, or lying. Posture can also indicate emotional states such as tension or relaxation, and concerned with interpersonal attitudes such as friendliness, hostility, superiority, or inferiority (Fiske, 1990).

This study uses Buckland's basic premises of experientialism (2004) which is influenced by Lakoff's and Johnson's Image-schematic structure (1987, as cited in Velasco, 2001). Lakoff and Johnson have suggested a series of image schemata that structures perceptual input into

experiences (Buckland, 2004). Buckland's basic premises of experientialism (2004) namely: *the body*, the physical form which the sign takes; *preconceptual experience*, the basic level categorization of the sign; *metaphor* or *metonymy*, the abstract thought which is used for creative strategies to interpret the sign; and *conceptual structure*, the sign's independent and abstract reasoning (Buckland, 2004).

Therefore, this study was conducted to discover the frequencies of bodily codes used by Hobbes as Calvin's imaginary friend character in Bill Watterson's comic strip entitled *Calvin and Hobbes* and to describe the representations of Hobbes' bodily codes in Bill Watterson's comic strip. It is expected that this study can help people to have a better understanding of pictures using a bodily code analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study is framed within a qualitative method because the data

were in the form of images as textual evidence. They were collected from the bodily contact, proximity, physical orientation, appearance, facial expression, gaze, head-nod, gesture, and posture. Moreover, they were analyzed by describing, elaborating, and interpreting the bodily codes found framed by Buckland's basic premises of experientialism (2004). In addition, Kothari (2004) states that qualitative research is concerned with phenomena which relate to or involve quality. Thus, it is suitably applied in this study because the study investigates the human behavior that is explained in the bodily codes.

The techniques used for analyzing the data are as follows: firstly, 15 illustrations were purposively selected from Bill Watterson's *The Complete Calvin and Hobbes* (2005). The selection of comic strips which are used in this study is based on the existence of Hobbes in each episode. In fact that *Calvin and Hobbes* is not always telling about both Calvin and Hobbes together but

also the other imagination of Calvin's while he is alone; the second technique is identifying Hobbes' bodily codes found in the panels through his bodily contact, proximity, physical orientation, appearance, facial expression, gaze, head-nod, gesture, and posture expressed in the front of other characters;

Third, interpreting and elaborating the Hobbes' bodily codes which are occurred in the panels framed by Buckland's basic premises of experientialism (2004) which consists of four elements: *the body*, *preconceptual experience*, *metaphor* or *metonymy*, and *conceptual structure*. Figure 1 presents an interpreting model which is used in this present study. The bodily codes which are categorized as non-verbal signs are interpreted through the receiver's experience and knowledge of their metaphor or metonymy, in order to get their concept or the logic even though the use of metaphor or metonymy is only an optional stage;

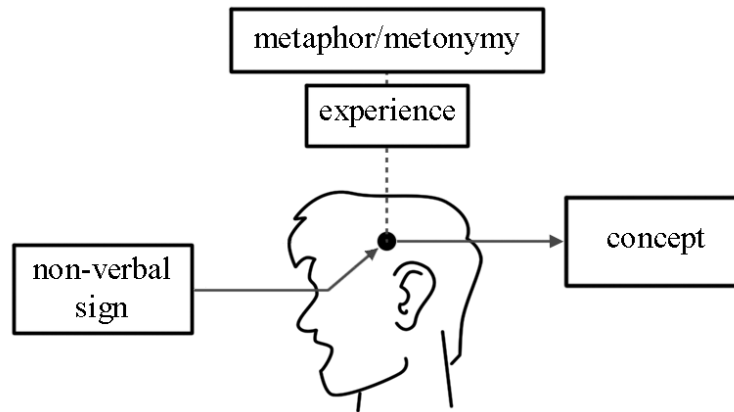


Figure 1: Non-verbal sign interpreting model adapted from Buckland (2004)

Forth, calculating the frequency of the bodily codes appeared by making a percentage of each bodily code, in order to answer the first research question, the bodily codes which were dominantly used by Hobbes; the fifth technique is analyzing the results of the data collected in order to answer the second research questions, the representation of Hobbes; and finally, discussing the findings and drawing the conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to 5 comic strips which were analyzed in this study, it reveals

14 times appearances as a real tiger (18.42%); 14 times gestures made (18.42%); 12 times postures made (15.79%); 9 times proximities which indicated either intimate or superficial relationship (11.84%); 9 times of physical orientations occurring in the interactions (11.84%); 8 times facial expressions expressed (10.53%); 7 times gazes stared (9.21%); and 3 times bodily contacts made (3.95%) which were performed by Hobbes towards Calvin. Moreover, this study found 0% of head-nod.

Table1: Percentages table of bodily codes in *Calvin and Hobbes* analyzed in this present study

Bodily Codes	1	2	3	4	5	N	P
Bodily contact	-	3	-	-	-	3	3.95%
Proximity	2	3	2	1	1	9	11.84%
Physical orientation	2	3	2	1	1	9	11.84%
Appearance	2	3	2	1	6	14	18.42%
Facial expression	2	3	1	1	1	8	10.53%
Gaze	2	2	1	1	1	7	9.21%
Head-nod	-	-	-	-	-	0	0%
Gesture	2	3	2	1	6	14	18.42%
Posture	2	3	2	1	4	12	15.79%

Table1 shows that Hobbes has two dominants of bodily codes namely appearance and gesture. In fact, Hobbes can interact with objects or the other characters in the comics if he appears in the form of a real tiger. Hobbes who gets himself turned into a real tiger also makes gestures. Moreover, he can express his bodily codes while he is in the form of a real tiger only. In addition, comic strips

which are stop motion pictures in sequence cannot reveal a motion of head-nod because they appear in limited panels. In other words, they depict one event to another in a short duration. The strips tend to evoke head gestures such as tilted side and faced away because they cannot animate the head up and down in the printed pictures.

Strip 1: Calvin and Hobbes: April 5, 1986



Based on the first strip above, Hobbes expresses his bodily code similar to Calvin. It is possible because he appears in the form of living creature. In the first panel, he and Calvin smile at each other while they

hold their sleeping bag. Therefore, he and Calvin get their eyes flashbulb, their lips stretched, and their teeth tighten in the forth panel.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Facial Expression</i>	(1)Hobbes smiles at Calvin.	Hobbes feels happy.	Smile can reflect gladness or joy.	Hobbes controls his expression based on his feelings.
	(4)Hobbes gets his eyes flashbulb, his lips stretched, and his teeth tighten.	Hobbes feels frightened.	Flashbulb eyes can represent anger, surprise, or fear; Stretched lips appeared with teeth tighten can represent a fear grin.	

In addition, Givens (2002) states that smiles can reflect gladness or joy. Meanwhile, if flashbulb eyes which can show anger, surprise, or fear are supported by stretched lips and

teeth tighten which can represent a fear grin, it can show a frighten expression (Givens, 2002). It shows that Hobbes is represented as something that has feelings and gets his mood changed.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Gaze</i>	(1)Hobbes stares straight at Calvin.	Hobbes pays an attention to Calvin.	Gazing at someone's eyes can stimulate	Hobbes controls his gaze based on his attention.

			strong emotion.
(4)Hobbes gets his stares oblique while his eyes flashbulb.	Hobbes stares at his surroundings because he feels frightened.	Flashbulb eyes can represent anger, surprise, or fear.	

Furthermore, Hobbes also controls his gaze. It can be seen from the first panel when Hobbes responds Calvin who greets him “good night” because he pays an attention to Calvin.

Meanwhile, in the forth panel, he stares obliquely at his surroundings in order to be aware of something he is frightened of.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Proximity</i>	Hobbes places himself beside Calvin.	Hobbes accompanies Calvin.	Closeness can represent an intimate relationship.	Hobbes has an intimate relationship with Calvin.

The proximity between Hobbes and Calvin is close. Both in the first and the forth panel, Hobbes appears on Calvin’s side. It can be said that Hobbes appears to accompany Calvin.

Moreover, closeness can represent an intimate relationship (Givens, 2002). Thus, the concept is that Hobbes has an intimate relationship with Calvin.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Physical orientation</i>	(1)Hobbes faces Calvin.	Hobbes interacts himself with Calvin.	Facing someone can represent either intimacy	Hobbes co-operates his interaction with Calvin.

		or aggression.
(4) Hobbes sits on the left side of Calvin.	Hobbes relates himself towards Calvin.	Being at someone's side can represent co-operative position.

The first strip shows that Hobbes changes his physical orientation. In the first panel, Hobbes faces Calvin while he has a conversation with Calvin. In this case, facing someone in a conversation can represent intimacy (Givens, 2002). Meanwhile, the fourth panel shows that Hobbes sits on the left side of Calvin

but without facing him. Although, Argyle (1972) argues that being at someone's side can represent co-operative position (as cited in Fiske, 1990). Since he tries to interact himself with Calvin, Hobbes is a co-operative character. According to the analysis above, it can be said that Hobbes is a cloning of Calvin.

Strip 2: Calvin and Hobbes: December 25, 1985



In the second strip, Hobbes makes a bodily contact with Calvin. He rubs Calvin's head while he raises his eyebrows and stares at Calvin. Moreover, Givens (2002) says that touch cues can show comforting

emotion while raised eyebrows can represent friendly greeting. It shows that Hobbes welcomes Calvin and pays an attention to Calvin. Afterward, he hugs Calvin tight and tighter because he feels comfortable.

According to Givens (2002), hugging someone can represent a love signal. Thus, it can be said that Hobbes hugs

Calvin sincerely as a Christmas present for Calvin.

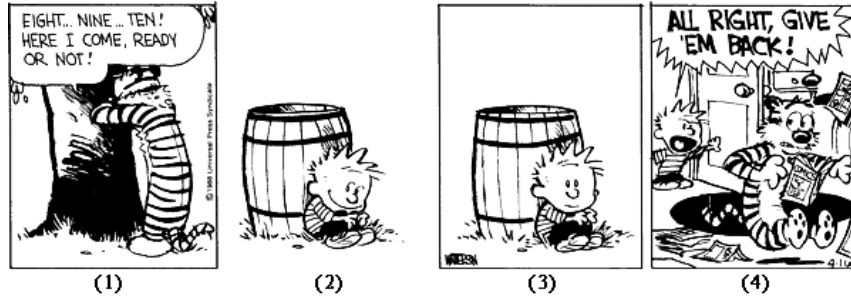
Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Bodily contact</i>	(2)Hobbes touches Calvin’s head.	Hobbes loves Calvin.	Touch cues can show comforting emotion or an aggression.	Hobbes feels comfortable when he is with Calvin.
	(4)Hobbes hugs Calvin.	Hobbes loves Calvin.	Hugging someone can represent a love signal.	

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Facial expression</i>	(2)Hobbes raises his eyebrows while he stares at Calvin.	Hobbes greets Calvin calmly.	Raised eyebrows can represent friendly greeting.	Hobbes controls his expression based on his feelings.
	(4)Hobbes smiles and looks rest and digest.	Hobbes feels comfortable.	Psychologically, rest and digest can represent the sensation of happiness.	

Moreover, Hobbes smiles and looks rest and digest while he hugs Calvin in the forth panel. Psychologically, rest and digest expression can represent the sensation

of happiness (Givens, 2002). It shows that Hobbes feels comfortable when he has an interaction with Calvin. Thus, Hobbes acts like a friend who is available for Calvin anytime.

Strip 3: Calvin and Hobbes: April 16, 1988



The third strip tells about Hobbes who feels bored when he plays as a “cat” in the hide-and-seek game outdoor with Calvin. The first panel shows Hobbes stands leaning his body towards a tree and covers his face by his own hand. Meanwhile, Calvin enthusiastically waits for Hobbes to

uncover him. Therefore, Calvin has not got himself uncovered by Hobbes. Finally, the forth panel shows Calvin appears from the back door and yells at Hobbes who sits inside the house to return the comic books he is about to read.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Proximity</i>	(1)Hobbes stands in a distance to Calvin.	Hobbes seems not related to Calvin.	Distance can represent a superficial relationship.	Hobbes has a superficial relationship with Calvin.
	(4)Hobbes sits in a distance to Calvin.	Hobbes seems not related to Calvin.	Distance can represent a superficial relationship.	

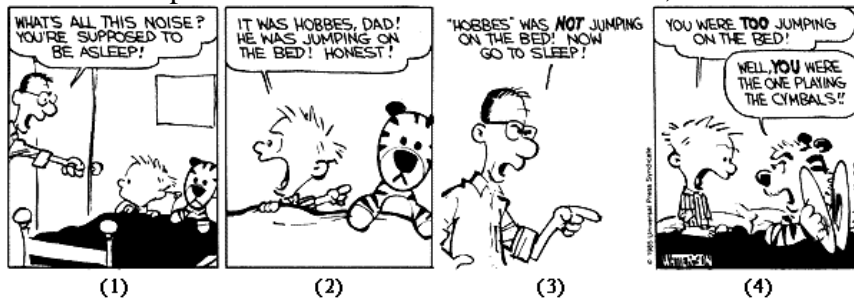
In the first panel, the proximity between Hobbes and Calvin is in a distance and seems not related to each other. It is because they play different

roles in the game, Hobbes plays as a “cat” while Calvin plays as a “mouse”. Moreover, Givens (2012) says that a distance can represent a superficial

relationship. Thus, different roles can mean superficial. The other distance also appears in the last panel. In this case, Hobbes who is known as Calvin's intimate friend has another

instinct to do what he wants to do. Since Hobbes has a tiger shape, he is portrayed as a living animal that lives in the house that has his own business and preferred things.

Strip 4: Calvin and Hobbes: November 20, 1985



The fourth strip tells about Hobbes getting blamed by Calvin because he makes a noisy sound. In the first panel, Calvin's father who comes into Calvin's room gives a warning to go to sleep instead of making noise. However, Calvin points at Hobbes and tells his father that Hobbes which appears in the form of a stuffed tiger

doll is the culprit. In the last panel, Calvin stands over the blanket while he warns Hobbes. It represents that Calvin makes Hobbes in inferior position. Moreover, when Hobbes lowers his eyebrows and drops his jaw, it indicates anger and disagreement (Givens, 2002).

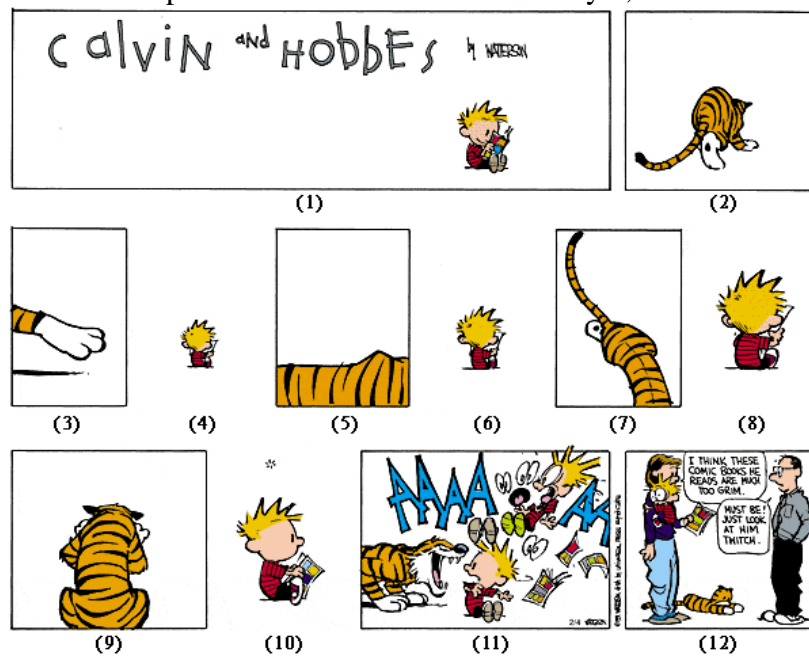
Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Posture</i>	(4)Hobbes keeps his body under a blanket while Calvin stands above it.	Hobbes is ready to sleep.	Lower body position can represent inferiority.	Hobbes controls his posture based on the circumstances he faces.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
Facial expression	(4)Hobbes lowers his eyebrows and drops his jaw.	Hobbes makes a disagreement.	Lowering eyebrows and dropping a jaw can indicate anger or disagreement.	Hobbes controls his expression based on his feelings..

In addition, facing someone in an interaction can represent either intimacy or aggression (Givens, 2002). The last statement of Hobbes says that Calvin is the one who plays the cymbals. It can be said that even though the cymbals are on Hobbes'

hands, Calvin is the one who makes the noise and he does not want to get himself blamed. Based on the description above, Hobbes can be represented as Calvin's opponent because he also has different arguments from Calvin.

Strip 5: Calvin and Hobbes: February 4, 1990



The fifth strip tells about Hobbes walks on four feet approaching Calvin. This strip shows Hobbes' body gestures in a detail. The third panel shows Hobbes' front foot takes a step forward and the fifth panel shows he lifts one of his shoulders.

The third and fifth panels which show body moving forward can represent aggression. Furthermore, the seventh panel focuses on Hobbes' wagged tail. Besides, tail movement of a *Felidae* can signal a sudden emotion (Givens, 2002).

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Gesture</i>	(2)Hobbes walks on four feet and his tail is lowered and wagged.	Hobbes walks as a tiger.	Tail movement of a <i>Felidae</i> can signal a sudden emotion.	Hobbes can act properly like a living creature.
	(9)Hobbes raises his hands forward.	Hobbes has something to do in his mind.	Hand gesture may reveal a presence of conceptual thought.	
	(11)Hobbes narrows his upper body towards Calvin.	Hobbes focuses on Calvin who sits below.	Bend a body forward can represent aggression.	

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Facial expression</i>	(11)Hobbes narrows his eyes while he shows his canines.	Hobbes scares Calvin with his tiger expression.	Narrowed eyes may represent displeasure or angry.	Hobbes controls his expression based on his feelings.

The ninth panel shows that Hobbes raises his hand. It signals that

he has something to do in his mind. Afterward, in eleventh panel Hobbes

appears from Calvin’s back with narrowing his eyes and showing his canines towards Calvin. While Hobbes walks on four feet as a tiger, he is also

constructed by the instincts of tigers. The eleventh panel shows how tigers’ way to attack their baits.

Bodily Code	The Body	Preconceptual Experience	Metaphor / Metonymy	Conceptual Structure
<i>Appearance</i>	Hobbes appears in the form of a real tiger.	Hobbes transforms into a real tiger because there is only Calvin around.	A real form can represent fact and not imaginary.	Hobbes gets himself interactive in the form of a real tiger.

In the last panel, Hobbes turns into a stuffed tiger doll because there are the appearances of mother and father. Meanwhile, Calvin is pickabacked with his frightened expression by his mother who thinks what makes Calvin becomes frightened is because of the book that Calvin read. It shows that Hobbes gets himself interactive in the form of a real tiger when there is only Calvin around. In other words, from Calvin’s point of view Hobbes is a fact and not imaginary (Givens, 2002). It is possible because Calvin is easily imagining objects he sees to be alive. He visualizes Hobbes as a frightening

creature after he gets his mind constructed by words he read.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed two dominants bodily codes which were made by Hobbes, there were appearance and gestures. However, every body language cue existed to support another cue in order to deliver the messages clearly. Through his bodily codes, this study determined five representations of Hobbes. The first was Hobbes as a cloning of Calvin because he was the closest partner who influenced many things to Hobbes. The second representation was Hobbes

as a friend of Calvin. Third, Hobbes was represented as a pet because in reality he was just a stuffed tiger doll which was intended to accompany the owner. The fourth representation was Hobbes as an opponent of Calvin. Lastly, Hobbes was represented as a real tiger which has instincts as a wild animal.

According to the representations of Hobbes as an imaginary character, it could be said that Calvin, the only person in the strips who visualized a stuffed thing became real, gets his imagination became wilder and wilder. In other words, he visualized Hobbes led from the closest thing that had the same personality until the most distant from Calvin.

After conducting the research, there are some suggestions related to the present study that can be advised. Several difficulties are found during the writing process of this present

study. First, select the suitable framework in analyzing and answering research questions, because semiotics are wide and analyzing picture is just one of them. Therefore, it is suggested to provide more knowledge of the frameworks for analyzing pictures.

Second, determine the relevant type of data to analyze. Many printed pictures are investigated using semiotics in order to discover the meaning of the presented signs. Moreover, it would be better for the next researchers to discuss other researchable issues in the printed pictures, such as revealing the representation according to the presented signs or the issue of ideological propaganda within. The next researchers may also conduct a research with the same issue of representation which is determined by bodily codes analysis in a comic strip, or another media which involve printed picture such as advertisement posters or captured movie screens.

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