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The Roles of Human, Nature, and Supernatural Power in Phuoc's *The Celestial King Phu Dong and the Iron Horse*

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Abstract

Anthropocentrism centralizes the role of humans and human impact on the environment. In folktales, the anthropocentric nuance is amplified by the moral messages delivered after telling the tales. The moral messages are usually for the betterment of humans. This paper intends to offer an alternative reading of a folktale by shifting the focal perspective slightly from human to nature and supernatural beings and their power. The object of this paper is a folktale from Vietnamese culture titled The Celestial King Phu Dong and the Iron Horse. In the tale, the human character could defeat the monster since they had supernatural power. This paper employs three tools to foreground the roles of nature and supernatural power. The folktale's plot is analyzed by its tale elements proposed by Booker (2004). The power relation of the actants is analyzed using Greimas' actantial analysis, and the clause structure is examined by Systemic Functional Linguistic's thematic structure analysis. The result shows that the plot is built upon the opposition between human and nonhuman characters. The actantial analysis indicates that in opposing the nonhuman character, the human character needs help from nature and supernatural power. The thematic patterns structure the delivery of the power relation and the human character dependency. This paper concludes that human character is depicted as dependent on nature and supernatural power in solving problems and obstacles. It foregrounds the agency of objects surrounding humans.

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Introduction

This paper examines how humans, nature, and the environments, including supernatural existence, play entangled roles in a folktale. It is triggered by the intertextuality among folktales, where natural objects in any form are often mentioned in folktales. Similar ideas and concepts about them in tales, regardless of the cultures where they are told or delivered, are

prevalent. This notion is supported by the fact that folktales have traveled globally and undergone cultural and linguistic adaptations. The famous Cinderella story, for instance, has been retold in many languages and adapted by many cultures Tatar (1999). Thus, the concepts about humans, nature, and the environment are also spread globally. For instance, in Balinese culture, the Cinderella plot is adapted into a story entitled "A Tale of Two Sisters" by Mason (2001). The Malayan version of Cinderella is entitledBawang Merah and Bawang Putih" Hashim (2009). With some adaptation to Vietnam culture, Phuoc retold the story in "The Story of Tam and Cam" (2015). In all of those versions, natural objects appear prominently. Even the name of the characters in the Malayan version, *Bawang*, literally means garlic/onion.

Humans and nature also have been addressed by scholars. Previous research examines the existence of nature and the relationship between humans and nature in literary works. Alonso & Traseira trace the literary turn in observing literature from ecological perspectives (2019). They mention that the concerns about literature and the environment have drawn the attention of scholars. O'Connell (2017) examines the clues for nature and the relationship between humans and nature in Charles Bowden's Desert Trilogy. They find that Bowden does not separate humans from nature. Instead, humans and nature are interconnected. She also argues that nature is communicating as well. Another research by Goodboy discusses the Anthropocene point of view about natural gardens in which humans and nature are inseparable, and humans are part of nature (Goodboy, 2023). This present research may add to the discussion on the relationship between humans and nonhuman matters in literary works, especially folktales. Specifically, this current research employs linguistic analysis to examine the folktales. It echoes the notion mentioned by O'Connell (2017) and Goodboy (2023) that human beings are part of nature and the environment.

Besides mentioning natural objects in literary works and literary studies, the concerns about the ideological positioning and relationship among nonhuman characters such as animals, plants, and objects in stories have also triggered linguistic analyses and research. Hampton (2022) presents the relationship between preserving the Emilian language and introducing places and environments. Hampton's objects are poems analyzed by examining the choice of language. Similar to Hampton (2022), who attempts to preserve the environment, Merskin (2022) advocates for animals by promoting the appropriate use of pronouns. They argue that animals have their voice and identity, and specific uses of pronouns should present their voice and identity. Another research by Ma & He (2022) employs the Systemic Functional Linguistics' (SFL) thematic structure analysis to analyze the ecological discourse in the General Debate statements by the US and China at the United Nations General Assembly. They examine the eco-orientation in the delivery of statements in the political domain.

Similarly, Isti'anah (2019) employs thematic structure analysis to expose the textual representation of Rohingya in the headlines of five newspapers written in English. The analysis reveals the reflected ideologies on responsibility and blame. This present research shares a similar spirit with Hampton (2022) and Merskin (2022) in preserving the environment and foregrounding nonhuman characters' roles in stories, although it has a different research object. With Ma & He (2022) and Isti'anah (2019), this present research shares a similar tool in scrutinizing the language of the object text, which is the SFL's thematic structure analysis.

In revealing the relationship among humans, nature, and supernatural beings/powers in folktales, this research also employs Greimas' actantial analysis. The analysis is based and centered on the actants in a narrative. The actants are classified and placed in the narratives based on their roles. The actantial analysis highlights the relations among the actants.

There are six actants: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent. The actant's role assignments are not fixed. One

actant can occupy more than one role, and one role can be taken by more than one actants (Wang & Robert, 2005). In actantial analysis, those six actants play their roles in the narrative. The subject is an actant, which becomes the center of the narrative. It has the desire to obtain the object. The object is the one which the subject desires. The sender is an actant which initiates or triggers the subject to get the object. The actant receiving the results of the actions is the receiver. In obtaining the object, the subject gets help from the actant called the helper and gets obstructed by an actant called the opponent. Figure 1 shows the configuration of the actants and their relation to one another.

Similar research employing Greimas' Actantial analysis was conducted by Wang and Roberts (2005) and Aarva & Tampere (2006) to reveal identity construction in some newspapers. Actantial analysis was also conducted to analyze literary works such as drama by Moto (2001) and romance by Mitrengová (2021). This present research differs from the previously mentioned research employing Greimas' actantial analysis. It takes a folktale as the object of the research, and it intends to reveal the roles of the actants in the folktale. In analyzing folktales, this present research is similar to the one conducted by Tanusy & Tanto (2023). They examine the story of Sleeping Beauty from a feminist perspective. However, this present research does not take feminist viewpoints. It views the relationship among characters grouped as human, nature, and supernatural beings/powers.

Folktales are feasible objects to observe the relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural beings/powers. In many folktales, humans, nature, and supernatural powers/beings exist and play their roles in building the narrative and delivering moral teachings. Linog (2022) examines Maranao folktales in which animals with supernatural powers support human characters. Pierotti (2016) researches that Numic people pay particular respect to wolves since they consider them the creator figure. In Mexico, Costa Rica, and Peru, some birds in stories can give instructions, warnings, or advice to humans (Sault, 2020). This present research continues similar observations and examinations that were previously conducted by Linog (2022), Pierotti (2016), and Sault (2020). However, it does not intend to study the sociological relations among animals, plants, nature, and humans in real-life practices and conducts. It focuses on depicting humans, nature, and supernatural beings/powers in a folktale's narrative structure and thematic structure. Although the folktale may reflect the society, this present research does not examine how the society is reflected in the folktale. This present research takes a folktale from Vietnamese culture and does not only focus on a character but also examine the relationship of the characters using Greimas' actantial analysis.

After reviewing all the mentioned related studies and research, this present research wants to contribute to the academic discussion by perusing folktales' structure, linguistic, and textual meaning. Hopefully, this research may continue the list of studies concerning the ecology and literature mentioned by Alonso & Traseira (2019) and provide an example of how human is inseparable from nature, as mentioned by O'Connell (2017) and Goodboy (2023). Methodologically, by employing SFL's thematic structure analysis, it shares similarities with the ones conducted by Ma & He (2022) and Isti'anah (2019) but analyzes a folktale, not a newspaper. None of those mentioned studies employs SFL's thematic structure analysis and Greimas' actantial analysis in perusing the research object.

Considering all the above, this present research intends to map the relationship among humans, nature, and supernatural beings/powers in a folktale. The analysis aims to answer whether there is a power imbalance in the relationship. In other words, it wants to find out whether a character depends on others or is more powerful than others. In answering those questions, this research examines the plot, analyzes the relations among the actants, and scrutinizes the thematic structure.

Methodology

The object of this paper is a folktale from a book containing several folktales from

Vietnam. The folktale is titled *The Celestial King Phu Dong and the Iron Horse* (Phuoc, 2015). The book is selected because it is addressed to an international readership, and the tales are written in English. Being written in English provides access to examine its content and ideology. Besides, being internationally distributed makes the folktales readable to a global audience. The folktale is selected due to the explicit opposition of human and nonhuman characters in the story. Such explicit opposition provides clear clues to analyze the matters and their agency. In addition, nature and supernatural power contribute to the narrative building in the folktale. The object may also enrich the discussion on the relationship between humans and the environment from Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

This present research approaches the research objects under stylistic methods. The analysis of the language aims at revealing the linguistic styles, their purposes, and their effects. It aligns with the notions that stylistics is the analysis of language form and its purpose and effects (Verdonk, 2002). Stylistics is suitable for examining literary works and folktales. Simpson (1993) and Toolan (2013) note that stylistics studies the language in literature.

The first feasible systematic analysis is by explicating the intrinsic elements of the folktale. Practically, this paper examines the plot structures of the tales. The plot is identifiable by the characters' actions due to motivations and causes Chatman (1978). Therefore, the plot is not merely a set of events and acts with no reason. The events and acts in a plot should have a causal relationship in building the whole story. Plots can be used to break down a literary work, particularly a folktale, into categories according to the causal elements or parts. Some theorists mention categories of literary works based on folktales. This research follows Booker's plot classification (2004). The analysis was conducted by determining the stages in the plot. The stages cover a particular group of events in the tale. After the stages are determined, the plot types can be identified. There are seven possible types of plots, namely overcoming the monsters, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy, and rebirth. The identified plot led to interpreting the causal relationship between the characters.

Actantial analysis was conducted to reveal the roles of the characters and the power relation among them in the folktales. The actants in a narrative are not limited to human beings or animate objects (Rimmon-Kennan, 2002). The actants can be any objects in the tale. The objects are categorized into actants: subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent. The actants are connected by three axes, namely the axis of desire (for connecting the subject and the object), the axis of power (for connecting helper and opponent), and the axis of knowledge (for connecting the sender and receiver). The scheme of the actantial analysis is as follows (Greimas, 1966):

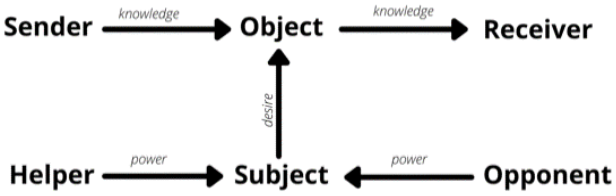


Figure 1. Greimas' actantial scheme

After classifying the actants into their types, their relations are identified. The analysis focuses on where humans, nature, and supernatural powers are located and related. The interpretation of this part of the analysis is

to test the centrality of human character in the story.

The actantial analysis was conducted to determine the general actantial configuration and the more detailed actantial scheme in each plot stage. This research assumes that each plot stage has specific events developed by certain actantial scheme structures. The actantial analysis of each plot stage also refines the findings to reveal the relationship among humans, nature, and supernatural actants.

Lastly, this paper also peruses the thematic structure of the folktale based on the English system of Systemic Functional Linguistic's thematic structure analysis proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). This analysis presents the cohesiveness of the folktale as a text. In the text, cohesiveness, human, supernatural characters and powers, and nature might take positions in the Theme or Rheme. This analysis can determine whether the characters are prioritized in the delivery of the textual meaning or not. First, it is broken into paragraphs to see the general topic in each paragraph. The general topics supposedly stick the sentences together in a paragraph. Second, the paragraphs are broken down into clauses. The clauses are examined by the Thematic structure. This paper examines the types of topical words in the themes of the clauses. The irrelevant clauses, which might not depict the role of humans, nature, and supernatural beings/power, will be excluded from the analysis. In addition, the analysis will also expose the types of participants in the theme and rheme position. The types of participants reveal the ideational functions being thematized in the story.

Results and Discussion

Plot Analysis

By the plot analysis proposed by Booker (2004), the roles of humans, nature, and supernatural power can be seen mainly in the depiction of society in each stage. Society is depicted as superstitious and agricultural. In the tales, society nurtures the interactions between humans and supernatural beings by being superstitious. Specifically, human characters are depicted as dependent on supernatural help. Being agricultural, humans also depend on agricultural products that they gather or plant. In the plot, the resolution was achieved by utilizing 'more natural' help when the main character used a bamboo sword to replace the metal sword. Therefore, by the plot analysis, the relation among humans, nature, and supernatural beings/powers is observable in the depiction of society throughout the plot progression.

The folktale employs a type of plot, namely "Overcoming the Monster". There are five stages in this plot, and those stages correspond to how the folktale proceeds. The stages are the "Anticipation" stage, "Dream" stage, "Frustration" stage, "Nightmare" stage, and "Thrilling escape from the death and the death of the monster" stage. Table 1 shows the summary of the stages resembling "Overcoming the Monster" depicted in the folktale and the summary of the events told in each stage.

Table 1. Plot Stages in the Folktale and the Roles of Human, Nature, and Supernatural Power

Stages	***Events***	***Human, nature, and Supernatural Power significance***
Anticipation	The introduction of the society, the supernatural birth of Giong, and Giong's intention to take part in the battle	The main character is said to be a supernatural human.
Dream	The hero's preparation and changes for the battle	• The main character's body grew big supernaturally. • Agricultural food becomes the source of the main character's power.
Frustration	The breakage of *Giong's* sword	The failure of human-made weapons is mentioned

Stages	*Events*	*Human, nature, and Supernatural Power significance*
Nightmare	The replacement of the sword with bamboo	The 'natural' bamboo sword is more powerful than the human-made sword
Thrilling escape & the death of the monster	The victory of the hero and his leaving for Soc Mountain/the heaven	The main character was said to go back to heaven.

The anticipation stage is characterized by introducing the setting and main characters. This stage also presents the call for the main characters to face the "monster" or the opponents. In the folktale, this stage is dramatically introduced by the disruption in a peaceful society, the birth of Giong, the main character, and Giong's intention to take part in the battle between the people of the village and the invaders. The hero, Giong, is depicted as a strangely small boy his parents got him supernaturally. Society is depicted as a peaceful society in this stage. The village is small. The characters are described as farmers. The invaders are not explicitly described. They are introduced as the invaders from the north. However, to fit the characteristics of the monster as a predator. The invaders are pictured as strong invaders who seek villages to destroy.

The second stage is the dream stage. In this stage, the main character, or the hero, Giong, makes some preparations for the battle. In the story, Giong asked for some equipment to be prepared by the king, i.e., an iron suit of armor, a metal conical hat, a long sword, and an iron horse that would fit a giant. In this stage, the society is depicted as monarchical by having a king and ambassadors. Giong's request was addressed to the king by the ambassador as the messenger. This stage would fail when this social structure is not introduced. The folktale requires introducing this social structure to develop to the next stage. Another description of the society in this stage highlights the agricultural characteristics of the society. Society prepared the food for Giong before he went to the battle. The foods are mentioned explicitly as rice, veggies, and fresh fish. Food serves as the source of Giong's physical power. As Giong ate the food, his body grew bigger and bigger. It indicates the significant role of nature.

The third stage is the frustration stage. The battle between the hero and the monster characterizes the frustration stage. In this stage, the hero seems to be powerless before the monster. In the folktale, this stage happens very shortly. The break of Giong's sword marks this stage. The breakage of the human-made sword may indicate the failure of human contribution to conflict resolution. It brings more problems to the plot—no other mention of the frustration aspect in this folktale and no description of the society as well. The frustration is solved in the next stage by the 'help' of natural resources.

The fourth stage in this folktale is also very short. It is a nightmare stage. Having the broken sword, Giong replaced his weapon with the uprooted bamboo. He fought the invaders with bamboo. The use of a bamboo sword leads to Giong's victory. This stage depicts society indirectly through the hero's weapon replacement choice. Instead of other objects, Giong chose natural resources to replace his sword. Using natural resources might foreground that bamboo is a common find in society. It supports the picture of agricultural society and the significant role of natural resources in society.

The last stage is the thrilling escape from the death and the death of the monster. In the folktale, the invaders are told to surrender. Society is saved from the attack. In the folktale, Giong left the village after winning the battle, riding to Soc Mountain. However, before he left, he bowed to Mother Earth. It depicts the human's deference and respect for the earth, and, again, it supports the agricultural characteristics of the society. Another remark about society in this stage is the alternative in the mention of Soc Mountain. It is said later that Giong left for heaven instead of to the mountain. It signifies that society believes the heavens are located in the mountains.

In addition to the last stage, the story becomes a legend among the present Vietnam people. In the last paragraph of the folktale, people are mentioned to celebrate the festival commemorating Giong every April the ninth. The people also believe that the horse's footprints form lakes, and a particular kind of bamboo gets its yellow color because it was burnt by the flame coming from the Giaong's horse's breath.

From the analysis, the plot depicts the society as superstitious and agricultural. Those characteristics are evident in the development of the plot. The society in the folktale is superstitious since it depends on supernatural beings and their powers in life. The birth of Giong is supernatural. His mother is pregnant due to her stepping on a mysterious footprint in the field. Giong's biological growth is supernatural as well. He is described as a small boy, but in the middle of the folktale, he grew into the size of a great tree. Giong's horse is also depicted to be able to shoot flames from its nostril.

The society is depicted as agricultural. From the very beginning of the folktale, the female character who becomes Giong's mother works on a rice field. The other villagers prepared certain foods for Giong before he went to the battle. The foods are agricultural products: rice, veggies, and fresh fish. Another supporting aspect is the replacement of Giong's sword with bamboo. It signifies that bamboo is common to find in society. After winning the battle, Giong also showed respect to Mother Earth. It signifies the relationship between humans and nature in the folktale.

The findings spotlight the interconnectedness of human, nature, and supernatural beings/powers in folktales. The present research, therefore, shares similar voice with Hampton (2022) and Merskin (2022). It contributes to the academic discussion by foregrounding the natural/environmental in a different text type, i.e., folktale, and employing a different perspective from plot analysis. The mentioning of the proper names and the mentioning of the natural resources in the plot's folktale can also promote Vietnamese local culture. They can draw images in the readers' minds while reading and comprehending the tale. The main character's name, Giong, is presumably familiar to Vietnamese culture. Similarly, the name of the mountain, which is mentioned in the last stage of the plot, might refer to a mountain in Vietnam.

This present research adds to the examination previously conducted by Linog (2022) and Pierotti (2016). The animals in Maranao folktales serve as deux ex machina (Linog, 2022). They are depicted as wise in helping human beings. Nature in this present research's object also plays significantly in helping human characters. For instance, in the fourth stage, the human main character replaces the broken sword with bamboo trees. However, the appearance of the natural objects does not seem dominant, while in Linog's research, animals in Maranao folktales are more dominant because of their intelligence. They prominently help human beings in overcoming difficult situations. In the research by Pierotti (2016), wolves are depicted as creator figures in Numic culture. Nature is combined with supernatural characteristics. This is similar to the existence of Giong in terms of supernatural representation. In the plot's first stage, Giong is depicted as human having supernatural characteristics.

Actantial Analysis

By applying the actantial analysis, the main subject is Giong, and the object is the people's freedom. Giong's effort to achieve freedom is challenged by the invaders from the north. The invaders, therefore, become the opponents. The invaders' power is so strong that Giong needs help from the people, nature, and supernatural powers. Those helps are the helpers in the actantial configuration. Giong voluntarily took action to confront the invaders. His will became the sender and the king's approval since the king thought Giong was sent from heaven. Figure 2 depicts the general actantial scheme of the story.

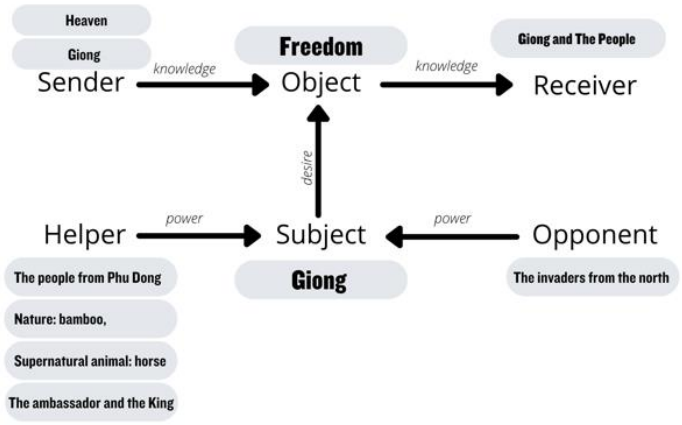


Figure 2. The actantial scheme in *The Celestial King Phu Dong and the Iron Horse*

From the analysis, a human is assigned as the subject in the story. Nature and supernatural beings/powers are assigned as the helpers. This finding may indicate that the story is centralized on human characters. The story focuses on the human efforts in pursuing the desire. Nonhuman characters like nature and supernatural characters are not depicted as having desire, though they are essential for human characters.

Previous research employing actantial analysis also shows similar tendency in anthropocentric views. The research by Mitrengová (2021) centers the narrative analysis on the human female protagonist characters in Byzantine romances. The actants in the romances are primarily humans. Nonhuman actants are found as objects. The research by Tanusy & Tanto (2023) finds human, nature, and supernatural characters in the narrative. However, most of the actants are humans. Nature appears as the helper, and the supernatural character serves as the opponent.

The human characters are depicted as submissive to the celestial beings. In the story, the king sent Giong to the war because the king and the ambassador thought Giong was from heaven. The story proceeds by acknowledging "heaven" as the sender of Giong, and humans should believe and trust in what/who heaven chooses. In the clause: *"The ambassador knew that the **Heavens** must have sent this young child to be a protector of the kingdom."* (Phuoc, 2015, p.35), the clue assigning the "heaven" is indicated by the process "must have sent". In the narrative, the subject would perform the actions due to the heaven's order.

Human's submissiveness to celestial beings creates a complex relationship between humans and supernatural beings. On the one hand, the story is based on humans' desires. On the other hand, humans' decisions and actions should agree with the heavens' approval. This relationship underlines that humans and supernatural beings/powers are interconnected and inseparable.

The actantial analysis can be applied in each plot stage, assuming each stage might have its actantial scheme. In the anticipation stage of the plot, there is a shift of the subject from the parents to the invaders. At first, there are no sender and opponent. The subject, as well as the receiver, are the parents. They wanted to have a child. The child is the object in the scheme. Supernatural powers become the helper. As the story introduces the invaders, the invaders are assigned as the subject. They intended to occupy Phu Dong village territory. The object is the expanded territory. The people challenged the invaders as their opponents. In this case, no nature and supernatural beings/powers are involved. Human characters become the center of the scheme. Thus, in the anticipation stage, there are two schemes. The first scheme introduces humans, nature, and supernatural powers. The second scheme is more focused on human characters.

The connection between humans and supernatural beings/powers is highlighted in

the dream stage. In this stage, the human character's body undergoes 'supernatural' changes after consuming agricultural products. The subject is Giong. He has the goal of getting ready for the battle against the invaders. Giong also acts as the receiver of the preparation. His body became bigger, ready for the battle. There is no opponent at this stage. Every actant supports Giong. They play the roles of the helpers. The parents prepared the food, and the king commanded the blacksmiths to work on the armor. Giong's love and respect for his parents and people send him to prepare for the battle. In this scheme, nature belongs to the helpers' groups through foods that amplify Giong's powers. The supernatural power lies in Giong's power. Therefore, Giong was identified as not just human but superhuman or human with supernatural power. In the actantial configuration, the supernatural power becomes one with the human character as the subject.

The frustration stage and the nightmare stage together provide another actantial scheme configuration. As the stage's name suggests, the stage contains the frustration of Giong as the subject. He desires to defeat the invaders. They are already in the middle of the battle. There are two helpers, namely the horse and the bamboo swords. The opponent is the fragile sword. In this stage, Giong received the effect of the actions, which is the broken sword and the replacement of the sword. The natural and supernatural actants appear more dominantly in this scheme than in another previous scheme. Giong, as the subject in the actantial scheme, was helped by the sword and armor crafted by the blacksmiths and by his horse, which was also depicted as having supernatural power. In this case, nature and supernatural beings have become blurred and inseparable.

The last stage, the thrilling escape and the death of the monsters, concludes the narrative structure. In this stage, Giong, the subject, gains the desired object, the people's freedom. The invaders, as the opponents, were defeated. In this stage, the helpers remain the bamboo sword, the supernatural horse, and Giong's supernatural strength. The people received the result. They were free from the invaders.

The actantial analysis can also be utilized to observe the relationship between the actants from alternative perspectives or viewpoints. For instance, the invaders can be assigned as the subject. The object becomes wealth and territory by assigning the invaders as the subject. The invaders faced opposition from Giong and the villagers. In other words, the invaders were challenged by humans, nature, and supernatural powers at one moment. The invaders got help from their powerful and immense strength. However, since the power of the opponents was too strong, the invaders received significant losses.

Thematic Structure Analysis

The third analysis is the textual analysis by employing the Theme and Rheme analysis. The analysis assumes that the theme in the texts is not random and is intended to guide the readers in comprehending the message. This assumption is in line with the notion in Systemic Functional Linguistics that *"The speaker chooses the Theme as his or her point of departure to guide the addressee in developing an interpretation of the message; by making part of the message prominent as Theme, the speaker enables the addressee to process the message"* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p.89). Therefore, the characters put in the theme's position are supposed to be considered significant.

The findings show that human beings are still assigned as the point of departure in all the stages. Nature and supernatural beings/powers mostly appear as the rheme. These findings indicate no equal textual representation among human, nature, and supernatural beings. In other words, the readers are presented with stories from the perspective of the human characters.

The analysis is to observe the textual arrangement of the folktale. By this analysis, the folktale is broken down into paragraphs and clauses. In the folktale's written delivery, there are 16 paragraphs and 91 clauses to analyze in the folktales. Those paragraphs and clauses can be grouped based on the plot's stages. The plot stages can frame the paragraphs to see the text's macrostructure.

The distribution of the clauses in each stage presents the foregrounded stage. Table 2 shows the plot stages and the number of the constituting clauses.

Table 2. Stages and the Constituting Paragraphs and Clauses

Stages	***(n) Clause***
Anticipation	38
Dream	33
Frustration	4
Nightmare	2
Thrilling escape & the death of the monster	14
Total	***91***

By the number of paragraphs constituting particular stages in the folktales, the most extended portion of the folktale belongs to the dream stage. It might be interpreted that the dream stage is the most significant part of the folktale and the anticipation stage. In other words, the folktale writer might want to prioritize or highlight the meanings in those paragraphs or parts of the folktale by giving more portions compared to the other parts.

The topics contained in the most prominent portions should be scrutinized. By the number of clauses, the most significant portion is taken for the anticipation and dream stages. In the anticipation stage, the prominent topics are the initial condition of the society and the coming of the "monster" that changed the condition. In the Dream stage, the hero and the society prepare for the battle. The topic of the paragraphs is about the preparation for the battle. To observe the topics of those two stages, the keywords related to the depiction of human, nature, and supernatural beings/powers are collected and framed into the characteristics resulting in the plot analysis. Table 3 presents the topical words that might be thematized in each plot stage of the folktale. The topical words depicting humans dominate the textual appearances of the folktales.

Table 3. Topical Words Depicting Human, Nature, and Supernatural Beings/Power

Stages	***Human***	***Nature***	***Supernatural beings/power***
Anticipation	Blessed, Lord, strange baby, they (a very kind couple), the wife, she (the wife), she (the wife) and the husband, Giong, he (Giong), his parents, the invaders, the enemies, the ambassador, the boy, mother, and father	Rice field, mud	-
Dream	The ambassador, the, a toddler, I (Giong), the king, the ambassador, he (the ambassador), the king, The blacksmiths, Giong, he (Giong)	The fish, his horse	The heavens
Frustration	Giong, the other army, Giong's sword	-	Fiery flames, The flames from his iron horse
Nightmare	The brave warrior, the invaders	Tall bamboo trees	
Thrilling escape	The invaders, the brave and mighty warriors, Giong, his parents and the villagers, he (Giong), the king	Mother Earth, bamboo, lakes	the iron horse's fiery breath, the heavens' messenger

Stages	*Human*	*Nature*	*Supernatural beings/power*
	and people of Vietnam, the warrior Phu Dong Thien Vuong, people,		

A more rigorous textual analysis needs to be conducted to draw a detailed picture of the textual analysis. The topical words are utilized to sort out the clauses. After excluding the clauses that do not contain topical words depicting human, nature, or supernatural beings/power, the types of participants serving as the topical themes in the clauses are identified.

In the anticipation stage, there are 31 clauses in which human characters are parts of the theme. Human characters are assigned as the point of departure in the delivery. However, the first clause assigns humans in the Rheme position as existent by the clause "*there lived **a very kindly couple***" (Phuoc, 2015, p.34). Although the human characters are not thematized in the clause, this thematic structure is a common strategy to start a story. The circumstantial 'there' is commonly non-deixis, referring to a non-definite location.

Humans are mostly the actors of the verbs. There are 18 actors, six carriers, five sensers, one behaver, and one sayer. This finding indicates that in the introduction of the tales, the readers are introduced to the human characters who mainly act and do material processes, as in *"**The enemies** destroyed many villages"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.35). The topical theme "the enemies" refers to the opponent doing the material processes. The second most dominant participant types of the thematized human characters are carriers, as in the clause: *"and **they** were overjoyed."* (Phuoc, 2015, p.34). The topical theme is personal pronoun "they" referring to the human characters. They are depicted carrying the attributive adjective" overjoyed". It implies that human possesses feelings. By the clause, humans are introduced by possessing their traits and characteristics.

Words depicting nature are put as rhemes. They are circumstantial to the meaning of the verbs, as in"*the wife saw large footprints in **the wet mud"*** (Phuoc, 2015, p.34). The wet mud adds meaning to the phenomenon of "footprint". The supernatural entity is represented once by the word ''the Lord'' in"*The elderly couple thanked the Lord for granting their sole wis"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.34), and it is not as a theme.

In the dream stage, the story tells about the preparation of the people to fight the invaders. Consequently, human beings' actions dominate the stage. In the dream stage, human participants are thematized in 24 clauses. Nature appears in three clauses: two clauses put nature in rheme positions, and one thematizes nature. Supernatural beings/powers only appear in two clauses. Human as an actor still dominates the theme of the clauses. Humans as theme actors appear 17 times. As sayer, human beings are thematized three times. Three clauses thematize human carriers.

Interestingly, now nature is thematized as a token, as in "***The fish** was gon"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.37). It indicates the importance of nature's characteristics. However, still, nature is not foregrounded. Supernatural beings/powers are structured once as the theme and one as the rheme. The thematized supernatural being can be seen in"*that the **Heavens** must have sent this young child to be a protector of the kingdom"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.35). The theme is now the celestial actor represented as "the heaven''. It is a metonymy referring to gods. The supernatural rheme is indicated as an earthly imaginary character ''the giant'' in "*Make all of this fit for a giant"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.36). The giant did not exist in the story. It is just for comparing the size of the armor.

The frustration and the nightmare stages can be analyzed as one part. There are only six clauses in those stages. In two of those clauses, supernatural powers are assigned as the themes. The powers are represented by the ''flame'' coming from the horse's nostrils. Nature appears once in the rheme position as a goal. Human characters are depicted in three clauses as actors. The frustration and the nightmare stages are stages in which the subjects and the opponents fight one another.

The thematic structure thematizes Giong as the subject. The opponents did not appear in any clause.

The last stage is the thrilling escape and the death of the monster. This stage is the resolution of the conflict. This stage is delivered by 14 clauses. Although human characters'' appearance is still dominant in the resolution, nature and supernatural beings/powers are also highly depicted. However, nature is still mostly depicted as the rheme and circumstances. Nature appears once in the thematic position (7%) and three times (21%) put nature in the rheme. The thematized nature appears in "*Since that day, **the bamboo called Tree Dang Nga** grows yellow at the Phu Dong village"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.39). The topical theme, "the bamboo," is a plant, and the tree's name in local culture is mentioned. The thematized local name is important in introducing local values.

Human characters are mostly put as themes and serve as the actors for the processes. Of 14 clauses, seven (50%) put humans as the theme. The theme is an actor in the clause "*Before long, **the northern invaders** surrendered to the brave and mighty warrior"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.38). The theme performs the material process of "surrendered". Another clause shows the thematized human character as possessor or carrier, as in "***The king** had a temple built at the Phu Dong village to honor Thanh Giong-or Saint Giong"* (Phuoc, 2015, p.39). The king is thematized as possessing the temple.

Supernatural characters are not depicted dominantly in the textual delivery. Two clauses (14%) put supernatural powers in the rheme. For example, in the clause "*because it was burnt **by the iron horse's fiery breath*** (Phuoc, 2015, p.39). Naturally, horses do not produce hot, fiery breath. In the clause, the horse produces burning breath. The horse is, therefore, supernatural.

The thematic structure shows the unequal portions in selecting human, nature, and supernatural beings/powers as the meaning's departure points. The folktale's delivery is mainly structured from the perspectives of human characters. Both nature and supernatural characters are most of the time put in rheme position. The themes are dominated by actors. It indicates that the story is built on material processes performed by the participants in the themes. On the other hand, nature and supernatural beings/powers are in the form of circumstances. It signifies that they are not centralized in the folktale.

The foregrounded interconnectedness of humans, nature, and supernatural beings/power in this present research's object adds to the discussion about the environment previously mentioned by Hampton (2022) and Merskin (2022). By revealing the thematic structure of the clause, it moves on from lexical level, such as the choice of pronoun in the research by Merskin (2022), to clause structure. In line with what Hampton (2022) examines, choosing themes in the clauses can also promote the culture and the environment. However, this present research still finds that human is still foregrounded. Nature is presented mostly as circumstances. The readers may realize nature, but nature might not become the center of attention.

This present research also contributes to the academic discussion that employs SFL's thematic structure. Similar to Isti'anah (2019) and Ma & He (2022), this present research finds textual clues for particular ideologies of texts. However, this present research has a different object that leads to different textual contexts that may impact the results in the clauses' thematic structure of the texts. Folktales have a conventionalized opening such as "once upon a time" or "there is a person" indicating an indefinite reference to time and place. This opening also influences the thematic assignments of the clause. For instance, in the clause "*there lived **a very kindly couple***" (Phuoc, 2015, p.34), the rheme should not be ignored. The rheme "a very kindly couple" will manifest in various thematized lexical items referring to human characters in other clauses. This finding may contribute to the analysis of other text genres, such as newspaper articles or headlines examined by Isti'anah (2019) and Ma & He (2022), by bringing forward possible interpretation of the theme-rheme structure.

Although newspaper articles are commonly straightforward, putting the theme at the beginning of the clauses, their writers can open them in narrative styles. The rheme can be significant if the writers incorporate narrative conventions in the textual delivery.

Conclusion

The analysis showcases the relationship map between humans, supernatural beings/powers, and nature. The relationship's complexity exists in the plot, actantial structure, and thematic structure of the clauses. The plot analysis shows that the folktales interconnected humans, nature, supernatural beings, and characters. In almost all the plot stages, they appear together, playing their roles. Although the folktale still centralizes human characters in the plot, it depicts human's dependency on nature and supernatural powers. The plot progresses on how the people overcome their problems with supernatural help.

By the actantial analysis, human characters play the central role in the story. They are assigned as the subjects, the opponents, and the receivers. Supernatural beings/power and nature serve as helpers. Therefore, by the assigned roles, human characters dominate the narrative. The relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural beings/powers is not simple. First, human and supernatural actants are inseparable. The characters' supernatural abilities and characteristics of human and animal actants indicate human, nature, and supernatural beings/power inseparability. Second, nature and supernatural beings are also challenging to identify distinctly. Humans are depicted as central but submissive to nature and supernatural beings/powers. Human characters are given the role of pursuing their desired dreams, but they need to act following what the celestial beings are told.

Textually, human characters dominate the folktale in its delivery. Topical words referring to human characters outnumber those depicting nature and supernatural characters. Human characters become the point of departure in telling the tale. Nature and supernatural beings/powers are configured as the rhemes serving as the circumstances surrounding the human characters.

This research is limited in the number of research objects. Future research can address more folktales from the same regions or others to view the human-nonhuman relationships in folktales. Conceptually, further research might discuss the definition of natural objects more profoundly since nature can be political and constructed. For instance, the agricultural products in the tale can be mentioned as natural since they are taken from the surroundings. However, they have been processed in a particular cultural manner.

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