

Enhancing disability awareness and empathy through children’s literature about characters with disabilities: a cognitive stylistic analysis of Rodman Philbrick’s *Freak The Mighty*

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Abstract The present study depicts how cognitive stylistic analyses help readers to interpret the children’s literature and infer the underlying meaning of metaphorical points in the text. Cognitive stylistic approach enables readers to create different meanings and various interpretations of a literary text. This paper applies Werth’s Text World Theory, as a sub-discipline of cognitive stylistics, to analyse Rodman Philbrick’s *Freak the Mighty* to connect the text world to the reader’s worlds. This enables them to interpret the text, develop awareness and empathy towards the character’s thoughts and attitudes. The researchers have the following aims: (1) to examine the building blocks of the novel in accordance with the Text World Theory, and (2) to evaluate the readers’ responses and examine how reading children’s literature with disabled characters can enhance their disability awareness and empathy. The second part of study is allocated to the evaluation of readers’ responses to the novel. It is believed that these connections will enhance disability awareness and empathy of readers. The study uses content analysis method to analyse both the text and readers’ responses.

Keywords Cognitive stylistics · Text World Theory · Disability awareness · Empathy

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1 Introduction

Books enrich and enlarge students' horizon and perspective to the world. In fact, "books provide windows by which children can look outside of their own experience and live vicariously through others. Books may also be mirrors, allowing readers to look thoughtfully at themselves" (Prater and Dyches 2008, p. xiii). Children's literature in early years of school has a great impact on students' cognitive and personality development. In particular, children's literature with disabled characters "provides an effective vehicle for interweaving disability awareness and character education into existing curriculum and instruction to address problems in everyday life" (Beech 2012: 29). Reading Children's literature about characters with disabilities "can help young people learn about disabilities as well as how to respect and accept individual differences. The literature (Beech 2015: 21) provides an effective vehicle for interweaving disability awareness and character education into existing curriculum to address problems in everyday life". Stories with disabled characters and how they continue their daily challenging life and their attempt to overcome their problems has a great positive impact on students. Students reading these sort stories can experience the following elements:

1. *Identification* The reader should be able to identify with the main characters and the events in the story,
2. *Involvement* The reader should be able to relate to the situation and feel emotional ties with the main characters,
3. *Insight* The reader should analyze the main characters and situation and explore possible new ways to replace inappropriate behaviours (Parker and Ackerman 2007: 1).

The above mentioned three elements are essential in terms of the rationality of incorporating the children's literature about characters with disabilities in the curriculum of schools. In fact, these "stories help us to understand our own experiences and those of others, providing access to inner thoughts and feelings" (Leicester 2006: 7). According to Follos, "stories share and dispel the mysteries of life. In a perfect world, a book might change a person's perspective, develop awareness, and initiate conversation to knock down walls and bridge the gap between misfortune and misconception" (Follos 2013, p. xiii). Therefore, exposing children to those kinds of stories "provide a springboard into greater disability awareness, both at a cognitive level, and through deeper empathy at an emotional level" (Leicester 2006: 7).

The deeper empathy and emotional ties with the disabled characters can enhance disability awareness in students and, as a result, the new generations can be equipped with more social values which lead to be attentive and responsive towards their surrounding and milieu. Therefore, this study tends to apply Text World Theory to examine and recognize narrative elements in Rodman Philbrick's *Freak The Mighty* in order to find out how readers by creating their world can increase their disability awareness and empathy through children's literature about characters with disabilities. The purpose of this study to apply Text World Theory the analysis of Rodman Philbrick's *Freak The Mighty* to explore how the characters' conceptual world and readers' world contribute to revealing the foregrounded features for an ideal interpretation.

2 Theoretical frameworks

Cognitive stylistics, adapting many different cognitive related theories from different fields of studies such as psychology, aims to help scholars and readers to interpret the literary texts from different aspect, especially in terms of “the role of emotions in discourse processing including issues such as how and why readers respond emotionally to literary texts” (Burke 2010; Miall 2006; Oatley 2002, cited in Whitely 2010: 23). Cognitive stylisticians and linguists are developing many applicable cognitive models to interpret the language of literary texts. Text World Theory developed by Werth (1999) has a potential power to analyse the literary texts from cognitive point of view. This model combines the textual knowledge and the active role of readers in the interpretation of the literary texts. This interpretation mainly encompasses the characters, objects and their relationship with each other? The readers apply this model to makes a good relationship between the texts and their previous world knowledge directing them to a dynamic interpretation.

Cognitive stylistics, also known as cognitive poetics, refers to cognitive processes that the readers undergo while reading and interpreting any literary text. Stockwell (2002: 1) maintains that “cognition is to do with the mental processes involved in reading, and poetics concerns the craft of literature”. Affected by other field of studies such as psychology, cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics, cognitive stylistics adapted many different theories developed by these disciplines. Text World Theory is an adapted theory developed by cognitive linguists.

Text World Theory, introduced and developed by Werth (1999) and extended by Gavins (2007), attempts to construct “a world” in which the writer and the reader come together to consciously create a meaning. Therefore, it “is the conscious and common effort on the part of the maker and the receiver to make “a world” wherein propositions are extended and embodied, and finally result in semantic structure” (Werth 1995: 95). However, Text World Theory is one of the several ‘Worlds Theories’ as cognitive approaches to analyze the literary texts. The followings are other worlds theories that are being used by scholars; ‘mental models’ (Johnson-Laird 1983); ‘situation models’ (Van Dijk and Kintsch 1983); ‘possible worlds theories’ (Ryan 1991); ‘Mental Spaces Theory and Conceptual Integration’ (Fauconnier 1997); ‘Contextual Frame Theory’ (Emmott 1997); and ‘story worlds’ (Herman 2002, cited in Whiteley 2011). All these theories help readers to experience emotional ties with literary texts and construct their own worlds while reading the text (Lahey 2014; Duchan et al. 1995; Gerrig 1993, cited in Whiteley 2011).

3 Methods

3.1 Research design

In this study, Document Analysis Method which is one of the Qualitative Research Methods, was used to be able to examine Rodman Philbrick’s novel deeply entitled *Freak The Mighty* in relation to the Text World Theory. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss 2008; see also Rapley 2007). Documents contain text (words) and images that can be

recorded without a researcher's intervention. Therefore, the researchers decided to use this method to be able to review and evaluate that novel. The researchers had the following aims, as mentioned previously:

1. to examine the building blocks of the novel in accordance with the Text World Theory, and
2. to evaluate the readers' responses and examine how reading children's literature with disabled characters can enhance their disability awareness and empathy.

As a qualitative study, this research, thus, used Document Analysis Method to analyse both the novel in terms of the Text World Theory and collected reader responses as the data from six participants who read the novel and constituted the discussion group. The researchers also used this method because qualitative study mainly "involves analysing, synthesizing, and reducing the information the researcher obtains from various sources (such as observations, interviews and documents) into a coherent description" (Fraenkel et al. 2011: 431).

3.2 Data collection

Freak The Mighty written by Rodman Philbrick was chosen as the main data for this study. The novel tell the story of two characters with disabilities who collaborate with each other to overcome their problems. The rationale behind choosing this novel is its disabled characters that the researchers came across when they were reading a book entitles "*Disability awareness through language arts and literacy: Resources for middle and high school*". The books also talks about the importance of these kinds of novel in increasing the awareness and empathy among high school students. Reading this book inspired us to do a research on the efficacy of the use of novels with disabled characters.

3.3 Data analysis

To be able to analyse the novel, on the basis of the Text World Theory as a sub-discipline of cognitive stylistics, the content of the novel was scrutinized by the researchers many times and, then, three levels of the theory including Discourse World, Text World, and Sub-worlds were applied to the novel and discussed in details. The researchers later found some examples for each layer and analysed them in accordance with the theory. The second part of the analysis was allocated to the analysis and evaluation of the participants' responses to the novel. The researchers endeavoured to analyse the readers' emotional reactions towards the novel to see how reading the novel can enhance the disability awareness and empathy through children's literature about characters with disabilities.

4 Cognitive stylistics analysis of *Freak the Mighty* on the bases of Text World Theory

4.1 Freak the mighty

Freak The Mighty written by Rodman Philbrick tells the story of Max and Kevin, the two disabled characters, who overcome their disabilities with the strength of friendship. Both characters are not welcomed by the peers because of their disabilities. However, Max's

physical strength and Kevin's brains come together and breaks all the negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. Their friendship revolves around cooperation, Kevin's teaching new vocabularies to Max expands his conceptual world and imagination and Max becomes Kevin's legs and hands. Kevin becomes Max's hero when he saves him when his dad kidnaps him.

To analyse *Freak the Mighty* according to the Text World Theory, three layers of the theory; discourse- world level, text-world level and sub-world level, will be examined. Then the view of six readers will be evaluated in order to figure out how they create their own world and to what extent have been influenced by the text. Moreover, the analysis of these three layers and also the views of the six readers will help the researchers to examine the novel according to the following aims: (1) to examine the building blocks of the novel in accordance with the Text World Theory. (2) to evaluate the readers' responses and examine how reading children's literature with disabled characters can enhance their disability awareness and empathy. We later make a link between the micro-text world that comes out in the minds of the main characters in the *Freak the Mighty* and forms the original text world of the novel.

4.2 Discourses-world level

Discourse-world level is the first level of Text World Theory which mainly focuses on human communication. It refers to the immediate interaction between the narrator/speaker/writer and reader/listener. These two interlocutors are also called participants which are part and parcel of a discourse. The first encounter "will produce a text containing the function-advancing propositions which he or she thinks will best realise his or her communicative goals. [The second encounter] will formulate a separate interpretation of those propositions" (Gavins 2007: 63). Moreover, in order to create an active communication both participants need to have some sort of personnel and cultural knowledge. This level "offers a means of exploring how a range of contextual factors have the potential to impact upon both the construction and comprehension of a given discourse" (Gavins 2007: 10).

As soon as a reader begins to read the *Freak the mighty*, he or she shares a separate spaces with the author, because this encounter lack the tangible qualities of a normal communications such as body language, pitch and etc. The text is the main resource which is available for the reader. The absence of these communicative aids is not obstacles for the reader to make his own discourse with the text. For instance, the *Freak the Mighty* the reader while starting to read the text encounters the following opening paragraph:

I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that's the truth, the whole truth. The unvanquished truth, is how Freak would say it, and for a long time it was him who did the talking. Except I had a way of saying things with my fists and my feet even before we became Freak the Mighty, slaying dragons and fools and walking high above the world. (Philbrick 2001: 1).

This is the opening of the novel in which Max, the main character, transmits his own emotional feelings to create a discourse-world wherein a communication takes place among participant, the narrator and the reader. In fact, this level "deals with the immediate situation which surrounds human beings as they communicate with one another. The conscious presence of at least one speaker or writer and one or more listeners or readers is essential for a discourse-world to exist" (Gavins 2007: 9). This paragraph is informative enough to create a discourse between the speaker and the reader. Max exposes his own inner world to the participants in this discourse. According to Peter Stockwell "factors in

the discourse world include the *perceptions* of the immediate situation, and the *beliefs, knowledge, memories, hopes, dreams, intentions* and *imaginings* of the discourse participants” (Stockwell 2003: 136). Therefore, Max talks about his beliefs, knowledge, memories, hopes and etc., to create a discourse with his readers.

4.3 Text world level

Text World is the second level in which all information is collected to form the narrative framework. In the level in order to understand the text the reader uses a cognitive approach, a mental process to create a mental construct. In our daily communication, we use plenty of deictic terms which convey our conceptual cognitive system and contributes to the understanding of our world experiences to others. These are known as world-building elements which enable us to fabricate depiction of discourse in our minds (Gavins 2007: 36). In fact, “our notion of the space in which a discourse is situated comes from our use of deictic terms such as locatives (for example, *in Sheffield, downstairs, abroad*), spatial adverbs (for example, *here, there, far away*), demonstratives (for example, *these, those, that*), and verbs of motion (for example, *come, go, run away*)” (Gavins 2007: 36). Therefore, the narrators or enactors using these deictic terms, which are building blocks of world-building elements, mainly share their inner self to state their position in the world and their connection with the objects surrounding them. These relationships, which help us to articulate our experiences of the world to the others, “form the basis of our understanding of the physical space in which we exist, the passing of time, and even the societal structures and constraints which govern our behaviour” (Gavins 2007: 36). The following are the opening paragraphs of Rodman Philbrick’s Novel *Freak The Mighty*.

I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that’s the truth, the whole truth. The unvanquished truth, is how Freak would say it, and for a long time it was him who did the talking. Except I had a way of saying things with my fists and my feet even before we became Freak the Mighty, slaying dragons and fools and walking high above the world.

Called me Kicker for a time - this was day care, the year Gram and Grim took me over and I had a thing about booting anyone who dared to touch me. Because they were *always* trying to throw a hug on me, like it was a medicine I needed.

Gram and Grim, bless their pointed little heads, they’re my mother’s people, *her* parents, and they figured whoa! better put this little critter with other little critters his own age, maybe it will improve his temper.’ (Philbrick 2001: 1).

These two short paragraphs as an introduction to the text-world of the story introduced us the main character of the story and his world view. Although the location of the text is not mentioned, readers can infer from the text that the setting of the novel is the protagonist’s grandmother’s house. The story is told in the first person and the passages are in the recent past tense. In these introductory paragraphs the narrator shares his world with the participants and creates a text-world. Based on these opening paragraphs, the readers can construct a mental picture of the narrator’s world. The following diagram can present the text-world based on the knowledge shared by the enactor (Fig. 1).

World-building elements are shown in the diagram describe the setting, time, entities, and the enactors. Many features of the novel are particularly foregrounded, helping the participant to make the text-world.

Fig. 1 World-building elements

Text-World
World-building elements time: recent past location: Gram and Grim's house objects: Brain, feet, dragons, fools, world, medicine, touch enactors: Max, a male protagonist

4.4 Sub-worlds

The third level of Text World Theory is the sub-world which encompasses deictic sub-worlds, attitudinal sub-worlds, and epistemic sub-worlds (Stockwell 2002: 140, 141). Deictic sub-worlds refer to the flashbacks and flashforwards with different time and location which mainly focuses on direct speeches rather than indirect speeches. Attitudinal sub-worlds refer to “alternations due to the desire, belief or purpose (constituting desire worlds, belief worlds and purpose worlds, respectively) of participants or characters” (Stockwell 2002: 140). Epistemic sub-worlds refer to some tools that the Text World Theory applies to control the dimensions of possibility and probability in the text. The last two items reformulated by Elena Semino and Joanna Gavins as “modal-worlds. These modal-worlds coerce the reader to visualize sub-worlds while reading the novel. Their modal-worlds have three parts:

Firstly, the use of boulomaic modality, including any description of wishes, desires or fantasies, will generate a boulomaic modal-world in the minds of the discourse participants. Secondly, the expression of any degree of obligation, from permission through to requirement, will generate a deontic modal-world. Finally, epistemic modal-worlds occur whenever some form of epistemic commitment is expressed in discourse. (Gavins 2007: 126).

Therefore, any change or switch in text-world creates sub-worlds. There are many examples of sub-worlds in the novel, for instance;

I like how it feels to have a really smart brain on my shoulders, helping me think (64)

is an example of boulomatic modality, because Max expresses his satisfaction of having a brain in his shoulders. Another example in the text is;

I'm standing there with Freak high above me and it feels right, it makes me feel strong and smart.

“How's this for an example?” Freak is saying. “Sometimes we're nine feet tall, and strong enough to walk through walls. Sometimes we fight gangs. Sometimes we find treasure. Sometimes we slay dragons and drink from the Holy Grail! (Philbrick 2001: 68).

This excerpt is another example of boulomaic modality, because Max feels strong and smart enough when he combines his power with Freak's. The following is an example of deontic modality.

Kevin knew from a very young age that he wasn't going to have a very long life,” she says. “He knew it was just a matter of time.” “So he was lying about getting a robot body?” Dr. Spivak is shaking her head. “I don't think it was a lie, Maxwell, do you? I think he needed something to hope for and so he invented this rather

remarkable fantasy you describe. Everybody needs something to hope for. Don't call it a lie. Kevin wasn't a liar. (Philbrick 2001: 78).

The example is apparently talks about some sort of obligation, we learn that Freak did not a have chance to live longer. The following example is for epistemic which mainly talks about the participant's ideas and beliefs.

5 Reader responses to *Freak the Mighty*

In order to measure and evaluate whether or not using children's literature about characters with disabilities enhances the disability awareness among readers, we collected reader response data about *Freak the Mighty*. For the validity of the data, we used low-control methods which is "suitable for exploratory investigation, so that natural validity was prioritized as much as possible over empirical control" (Whiteley 2011: 33). We supplied 3 MA students, one from English Language and Literature department and two from English Language and Teaching Department, all from Nigeria, with copies of the novel. We also supplied two Turkish MA students from Special Education department and one PhD student from Guidance and Psychological Counselling department with copies of the novel. After 2 weeks we had a discussion on the novel and the participants shared their feedback and opinion about the novel. The researcher later supplied the participant with following three open-ended questions related to their emotional experience about the novel and asked them to answer the questions.

The main purpose of this data collection was to examine the reader's emotional experiences after reading the novel. In recent years, many scholars focus on emotions in discourse processing and readers' emotional responses to the literary texts (Burke 2010; Miall 2006; Oatley 2002). The three questions were included as: (1) *Did you identify with the main characters in the Freak the Mighty? Were you able to relate to the situation and make emotional ties with the main characters?* (2) *Did the reading of the novel enhance your disability awareness and Sympathy?*, (3) *Give several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.* The following parts are the questions and the readers' responses and the interpretation of the researcher.

1. Did you identify with the main characters in the *Freak the Mighty*? Were you able to make emotional ties with the main characters?

Participant A: *Reading the novel intensified my interest in the disabled persons when I got myself into the depth of this mind-blowing text. While reading it, I was able to find myself in two fragmented situation. (A) I developed a great sense of empathy for the two main characters, Freak and Maxwell. (B) I developed a great sense of sympathy for both characters whose lives the text is centred. The degree of emotional identification I had with the two main characters was greatly intensified. When one finds oneself in the feelings of the handicapped person then you know how it feels. In this process, there was a cordial confabulation between my emotion and thought.*

Participant B: *In support of my identification with the main characters in the *Freak The Might*, it can be seen that at a very tender age of four, Max saw his mother been murdered by his father, an event he vividly remember and hurt him all through his life. The tragic event completely changed Max's life. He came lonely and psychologically imbalanced. The*

more he grows, the more he becomes a mirror through which people around him see his father 'killer Kane' (His father atrocity). On the other hand, Kevin is a genius who is well read. Although crippled physically, but mentally he is a giant who never for once look down on himself. He believes in the power of imagination. Kevin is a hero who would risk everything including his life to save his friend's life.

My emotional ties with the main characters gradually increases as the story progresses and at the end, my emotional affiliation with the main character was greatly and positively intensified. The combination of Max and Kevin seem perfect combination as Max needs a brain (to function properly) and someone to pull him out of the state of loneliness destiny has brought upon him. As for Kevin, He has a massive brain but with an imperfect structure for his brain size. The duo fit like flesh that covers the skull and function perfectly as a union. Kevin's demise seems so painful at the first glance but looking at it critically, we could see that Kevin achieved his imagination of been the first 'bionically' improved human on earth, as he gained a new body in Max. At the end though Kevin died physically but mentally he lived through Max.

Participant C: *They help each other go through life problem and yet maintain a trustful, honest, loyal companion. What I most enjoy in this story is the both Character that maintain truthful and show themselves love unlike friends who will mislead their friend to the Grave yard or Prison. The two characters are very good example of how two people can trade by barter in sharing what one has and working on each other deficiency. This book helped me to see the meaning of true friendship and realize the power that is strength and courage. In this book we can see how freak save mighty from been strangle by his father who murder his mom the same way.*

Participant D: *I identified with the characters in the Freak the Mighty. The novel portrays the difficulties of people in real life with very clear and nice expressions. The novel is a masterpiece because it attempts to increase awareness among normal people toward handicapped people and to help them how to behave with people with disabilities. One of the things that must be learned from this novel is that people with different difficulties does not mean that these people are weak and useless. The novel also teach us how impossible is possible and people can do every things that seems difficult and impossible.*

Participant E: *When I read the novel, I understood how two different people could be perfect by collaborating their power. Max shuts himself down from all over the world because of his problems. But Kevin is a great one, helps him feel happy. The fact that Max's mother was killed in front of his eyes at a young age has deeply impressed him and allowed him to leave a big mark on his life. Kevin tells Max the story of his exclusion by his friends because of his disability in his body. The unification of two different disabled, and the overcoming of all difficulties taught me lesson that every disability can be overcome. Max's physical strength and Kevin's brains challenge the world and all the negative thoughts against the obstacles are lifted from. I completely identified with both character during the reading of the novel.*

Participant F: *While I was reading the novel I had a great identification with the characters. The novel showed the difficulties of disabled people. I think everybody should read it, because it increases awareness among normal people toward handicapped people.*

When we evaluate our readers' responses we notice that all participants' answers equate the discourse-world reader with the main character of the novel. In fact, "the inclusion of enactors in a text-world always results, to varying degrees of intensity, in an empathetic identification on the part of the discourse-world participants" (Gavins 2007: 64). This agrees with the Text World Theory concept of self-implication, self-awareness or identification, which makes a connection the enactor and the reader (Gavins 2007: 86; Stockwell 2009: 138). Thus, the readers' response depict that they understand the suffering of others and this occurs when they read literary text with disabled characters. Therefore, the readers improve their disability awareness through children's literature about characters with disabilities. Bobby K. Cheon et al. maintain that:

How do we understand the suffering of others? How can others' suffering be reduced? These questions regarding one of the most fundamental aspects of human social experience have long been explored by philosophers, physicians, and poets. More recently, psychology has provided significant insights and theoretical foundations for understanding the emotional and cognitive processes underlying empathy - the ability to share experience, and react to the affective states of others. (Cheon et al. 2010: 32)

Thus, reading these kinds of stories with disabled characters "promote children's understanding of disability issues and their empathy with disabled children, sometimes through imaginative identification and sometimes through the provision of experiential learning" (Leicester 2006: 1, 2). Moreover, this understanding is crucial for everybody who lives in the society. According to Mal Leicester:

To understand disability issues is important for anyone who cares about children and who has some responsibility for their cognitive and emotional development. Thus parents and other carers, teachers in special and mainstream schools, learning specialists, psychologists, speech, occupational and physical therapists and leaders of children's voluntary clubs and organisations all need disability awareness and should nurture this kind of understanding in 'their' children – disabled and non-disabled alike. (Leicester 2006: 7)

As a consequence, the readers' responses show that their understanding of others enhances empathy and they can share the enactor's experiences and react to their emotional states. These connections "attributes primacy to the human experience of language and takes the face-to-face interaction between living, thinking human beings as the prototype for all other aspects of communication and cognition" (Gavins 2007: 18).

Participant A by making emotional ties with the characters becomes identified with them. Participant A in his responses confirms that he has developed a strong sympathy and empathy towards the characters. Participant B sees Kevin and Max as the characters that are full of courage and determination to become what they want to be. The determination and strong will to face the challenges of life are among the factors that coerce participant B to become identified with them. Participant C maintains that he learned from Kevin and Max that disability should not be seen as a hindrance to achieving one's goals. Kevin's death touches him very seriously, where he comments '*though Kevin died physically but mentally he lived through Max*'. Participant D, E, and F, who all are Turkish students, reports their identification and strong emotional ties with the characters, there is not a significant difference between Nigerian and Turkish students.

2. Did the reading of the novel enhance your disability awareness and empathy?

Participant A: *This novel arouses fear and pity in the sense that Freak's condition draws one's attention to reality of life. Anybody could be crippled and become disabled through any means. So this creates some kind of phobia; scared of not finding one's self in such pathetic situation. Life is full of fate and no one wants to be victim. So this creates fear and sympathy for the victim. Therefore, my emotional ties with the two main characters were high because I was able to sympathize and empathize with the characters. Therefore, though, this indispensable phenomenon, is mostly common in the part of the world I come from, Africa, and there has never been a time I see a handicapped person without empathizing and sympathizing with him or her. But the reading of this text has greatly improved my idea and given more awareness that every physically challenged person needs help from everybody as Maxwell does. It is also important to note that Maxwell has displayed a great sense of kindness to Freak by making his shoulders a horseback for Freak. This act provokes emotion. Though it is a difficult task but he pays a painful sacrifice of help. Therefore, Maxwell's action provokes thought and it encourages one to move into the action of helping the disable. They must not be stigmatized because they never wish to be in such position but life has made them to be so. The way he carries Freak on his shoulder every time is a rare sacrifice that is worthy of emulation. If a young boy can have such a sympathetic attitude and a great sense of empathy then the adults have a lot to learn from that action of a young boy. Another crucial thing that is the paramount element of Maxwell's action is love. Where love rules, ability to render help to such a person like Freak will be easy. Therefore this requires a compassionate heart.*

Participant B: *Yes, this book make me to realize that no matter our weakness we should try and bring out some strength in our weakness, despite KEVIN's deficiency he took a lot of his time reading and he succeeded in rehabilitating Max's deficiency who is healthy and bold but weak psychologically. This novel helped me know I can do it with full determination and concentration no matter how hard it is. The end part of the story really made me feel sad and I wish I could elongate Freak life time I would have because looking at the little time he spent on earth and his contribution to humanity how he save life and how he worked in sincerity really amazed way. This book built my passion positively and really helped me to think on how true friend can be maintain without sentiment of disability.*

Participant C: *The story has greatly increased my awareness and sympathy for the physically challenged. I prefer to refer to them as the physically challenged heroes. We can clearly see that disability is not about physical appearance. Appearances could sometime be so deceptive, as in the case of comparing Max stature with that of Kevin, Kevin been cog that control the wheel of Max's structure.*

Participant D: *When I was reading this novel I realized that I knew a lot about the handicaps but I did not care much about the superior features of these people in everyday life. While I was reading the novel I thought that we do not understand these people as a society and did not really do anything for them. We discriminate against these people and judge poorly their physical characteristics and all their lives and often look at them as poor and needy people. I once again thought about the obstacles in our minds. I released that there are so many things these people can do. The infinite helping power of the heroes in the novel, in spite of physical disabilities, forced me think very much about the positive approach to the events surrounding our lives. The characters approaches to their problems forced me to think how wrong our judgments about these people are.*

Participant E: *The reading of this novel helped me change my attitudes towards the disabled people and empathize with them. I learned that there is no such thing as powerlessness, and that there is nothing that can not be accomplished.*

Participant F: *During the reading of the novel I realized that I thought knew a lot about the handicapped people but I saw that I made a mistake. After reading the novel I understood that it increased my knowledge about the disabled people. The novel helped me to enhance my empathy towards people with disabilities.*

The readers' responses' illustrates that they have deep sympathy for the text-world enactor who has suffered a lot because of his disabilities. In fact, "in cognitive-psychological terms, readers are able to implicate themselves in the text-world" (Gavins 2007: 86). As seen from the responses given by readers, it is clear that they all implicate and make association with the enactors. In fact, all participants undergo a sympathetic connection and identification with the main characters. The text-worlds Max builds as he narrates his memories have great impact on reader's emotional experience of the text. In fact, "within stylistics and narratology, a connection is made between internal focalization and the creation of sympathetic, emotional connections between the reader and a literary character" (Booth 1961; Leech and Short 2007; Stanzel 1984, cited in Whiteley 2011: 28).

All participants responded that reading the novel enhanced their awareness and empathy towards disabled people. Participant A states that disabled people '*must not be stigmatized because they never wish to be in such position but life has made them to be so*'. This show how reading the novel has improved his disability awareness and empathy. Participant B highlights that disabilities are not obstacles if there is enough determinations and strong will. Participant C points out that reading the novel greatly increased his awareness and empathy for the physically handicapped people. Participant D, E, and F, who all are Turkish students, reports that reading the novel increase their awareness and empathy towards the characters, there is not a significant difference between Nigerian and Turkish students.

3. Give several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Participant A: *There is another important thing in this text; the ability in disability becomes obvious. In their nebulous situation, though Freak is ever small in stature, but his brain of wisdom is ever big. He behaves very much matured and he shows the ability of his intellectualism. Therefore, according to the title of the text, Freak the Mighty, one could really discover the might of their minds and acts. The greatness of their minds and the commitment of their companionship are obvious. The text reflects this as "I was a hero or something, rescuing the poor crippled midget kid". This not an idea, but a reality of life which every individual is expected to adhere to and emulate. This act of rescue mission that Maxwell has displayed is what makes him the mighty.*

Participant B: *There is ability in disability; disability is not by appearance, never judge a book by its cover, a man must be strong and determined.*

Participant C: *Appearance vs. reality is the facts can be deduced from the events that occur in Freak the Mighty: "the next thing I notice is this crippled-up yellow-haired midget kid" (Kevin's appearance). "they never knew it was Freak who rescued me-or his genius brain and my big dumb body" (Reality of how power the brain of Kevin his compared to dumb stature of Max's body); "I never had a brain unit Freak came along and let me*

borrow his for a while' (reality of who Max was before Kevin came to redeem him"; "the boy is like him, we'd better watch out, you never know what he might do while we are sleeping' judging the look of Max' (he became a mirror through which the people see his father acts – a prisoner and murderer). Knowledge is powerful than strength. Kevin saved Max from killer Kane (Max's father), Kevin saved Max from Tony D./Bade (The gang leader of teenager group thugs). Freak the Mighty' Kevin change is name from freak to Freak the Might. He also imagine of been the first bionically improved human. 'I am going to be the first bionically improved human'.

Participant D: *The following quotations that attracted my attention while I was reading the novel. "I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that's the truth, the whole truth." and "Sure it will hurt. But so what? Pain is just a state of mind. You can think your way out of anything, even pain."*

Participant E: *The following quotation is the best part in the novel. "I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that's the truth, the whole truth."*

Participant F: *The best sentences in the novel for me are the followings: "I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that's the truth, the whole truth." and "Except later it was Freak himself who taught me that remembering is a great invention of the mind, and if-you try hard enough you can remember anything, whether it really happened or not."*

Responses to question 3 depict participants' reflections with respect and dignity towards the disabled characters. They cite textual evidence to show how they have been affected by the character's behaviours and attitudes. In fact, reading novels with disabled characters "encourage children to unlearn disablist prejudice and to develop positive attitudes to themselves and others" (Leicester 2006: 7). Moreover, these positive attitudes "genuinely promote the development of those worthwhile values, skills and attitudes which are part of a balanced, 'disability aware' education (Leicester 2006: 14). These textual evidences also reveal clear reasons for deep comprehensions of the text and support the analysis of what can be inferred from the text.

Participant A giving many textual evidences from the text supports his ideas regarding how he has been influenced by the text. Participant B proves that he has learned a lot by making the following comments: *'There is ability in disability; Disability is not by appearance, never judge a book by its cover, be strong and determined'*. Participant C provides many textual evidences to depict that he has really been influence by the novel.

6 Conclusion

Text World Theory, as a sub-discipline of the cognitive stylistics in discourse processing, is applicable to investigate the emotional experiences occurring between the readers and texts. Sara Whiteley highlights that "Text-world investigations into emotion and literary reading should, I suggest, pay greater attention to the scenes that readers create as a result of the multiple projections they perform during text-world construction" (Whiteley 2011: 38). This study used the theory to analyse Rodman Philbrick's *Freak The Mighty*, a novel with disabled characters written mainly for children. The study also collected data from the reader's responses to examine how children's literature about characters with disabilities

enhances the disability awareness. The first part of the study analysed the novel on the bases of Text World Theory which helped us to explore the three layers of the text, “text world”, “discourse world” and “sub-world”. We learned the building blocks of the story and found out how these building blocks influences the readers to make a connection with the text and interpret it. We focused on the relationship between the present time and the time of narrative, and categorized the world constructions. It revealed what helps readers in making mental representation. After the analysis, we recognized that readers can make their own worlds on the bases of the worlds presented in the text and connect these worlds to understand and comprehend of the narrative.

The second part of this study focused on the reader response data. The data revealed a strong emotional implications and relationships between the discourse world participants and text world enactors. The analysis of the connections between the text-world entities showed that there were strong interactions, in the case of *Freak The Might*, between these two worlds. The reader responses depicted that these interactions have enhanced their level of disability awareness. The participants who were from different cultural backgrounds, three from Nigeria and other three from Turkey, reported same feedbacks.

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