CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introductory part of this study. It includes the background of the study, the purposes of the research, statements of problems, the scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1 Background of the Study

According to World Health Organization (2019), autism or scientifically known as an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to people with social behavior and communication impairment, and the sufferers usually have a wide variety of unique interests and activities which are done repetitively. Autistic people are part of the social groups within the society. They have many characteristics. However, the media tend only to categorize autistic characters into "four specific and mostly unrealistic categories" (Prochnow, 2014, p. 136). Four categories which are mentioned in Prochnow's (2014) article are magical/ savant, different/ quirky, undiagnosed/ unlabeled and realistic portrayals.

The participant of this study, Kodi Lee, described himself as a blind and autistic musical prodigious savant as is written on his website. According to his website (kodileerocks.com), Kodi is one of only approximately 25 individuals in the world who possesses excellent abilities in music, such as musical expression and audio photographic memory. Kodi's extraordinary abilities manifest that he is in line with Prochnow's definition of savant autistic which is as written below:

> The magical/ savant category has supernatural abilities, due to their diagnosis, that elevate the autistic person from having a disorder that affects them negatively to having a disorder that makes them special and more interesting than the average person. (Prochnow, 2014, p. 137)

Kodi who performs in America's Got Talent Season Fourteen as one of the contestants, attracts many viewers. However unfortunately, his representation in

America's Got Talent (AGT) Season Fourteen gains some critiques. As written by Erin (n.d.), how Kodi portrayed in AGT clips is considered wrong because according to Erin the clips tend to describe him as a talented young man despite his disabilities. Additionally, Ascher (2019) wrote an article on Yahoo! Lifestyle entitled "The Problem with How AGT Portrayed Kodi Lee". In his article, Ascher (2019) believes that AGT tends to emphasize Kodi's disability which is terrible until a mere act for normal people, such as playing the piano and singing, becomes inspirational to be watched.

Many previous studies have investigated autistic children in news discourse (e.g., Colson, 2010; Clarke, 2011; Kang, 2012; McKeever, 2012; Bie & Tang, 2014; Holton, Farrell, & Fudge, 2014; Muhamad & Yang, 2017). Those studies focused on what autistic children had in common, such as their family background and the cause of autism. However, none of those mentioned studies focused on a certain specific child with autism. Meanwhile, these studies focused on autistic fictional characters which were mostly taken from television series (Dowdy, 2013; Belcher & Maich, 2014; Ficarrota, 2018). This study involved online media to enable comparison of how online media represent a real-life savant autistic young man. Additionally, involving online discourses allows this study to uncover the meanings behind the representations and some potential threats to the autistic persons viewed from the linguistic meanings and their representations.

More specifically, this study attempts to uncover how Kodi Lee is linguistically represented in Good Housekeeping, HuffPost and The Wrap. Good Housekeeping is one of the most famous women magazines in the USA. A study in 2011 investigated the portrayal of autism in women and men magazine and Good Housekeeping was one of the objects of study. The study showed that women magazine tended to portray autism as a kind of tragedy. Meanwhile, HuffPost, an American news website has more concerns for those on society who have a disadvantaged position. As for The Wrap, it is a US news organization which covers entertainment and show business. They aim for high-profile news. The findings of this study is expected to provide better insight into how to wisely represent autistic people in online media.

1.2 Purposes of Research

This research aims to uncover how online media represent a real-life savant autistic young man through Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) analysis framework which focuses on transitivity analysis. On the other hand, this study also aims to make sense and discover potential linguistic threats and harm caused by such representations.

1.3 Statement of Problems

Below are the questions to guide this research:

1   What processes are used in describing Kodi in Good Housekeeping US, The Wrap and HuffPost?
2   What does the choice of processes in Good Housekeeping, HuffPost and The Wrap signify?

1.4 Scope of the Study

To achieve the aims of this study, this research's tool analysis is limited only to transitivity analysis to analyze clauses related to Kodi Lee. Transitivity analysis was chosen to realize the representational meanings in the clause which "includes aspects of the physical world, such as processes, objects, relations, spatial and temporal parameters" (Fairclough, 2004, p. 96).

As for the data of this study, three articles per each about Kodi Lee were taken from Good Housekeeping US, HuffPost and The Wrap.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is expected not only to uncover how Kodi is represented in three different online media but also give a better explanation about a real-life savant autism portrayal for readers. The results of this research are also expected to offer a better understanding of how to apply Halliday's TA to interpret a social actor's representation.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method. This method was chosen because it relies on text and image data, and also employs different analyses and interpretations (Creswell, 2009). Data for this study were in the form of text articles, so it is suitable to use the qualitative method.

This research also uses a descriptive method to describe the interpretation results of Kodi's portrayal in each news website. The descriptive method was selected because it has a set of particular characteristics which are simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what is (Ethridge, 2004).

1.7 Clarification of Terms

1. Autism

   A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction (autismawarenesscentre.com, 2020).

2. Savant autistic

   One of the unrealistic portrayal categories made by media to portray autism spectrum disorder phenomenon. Character lays within this category is portrayed to have supernatural or certain abilities beyond a typical, average-intelligent person (Prochnow, 2014).

3. Representation

   The act of presenting someone or something in a particular way; something that shows or describes something (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2020).

4. Media Representation

   Media representations are a way to represent in which their main function is to produce meaning, to capture in some way 'reality' in signs (Orgad, 2012).

5. Transitivity analysis

A system which expresses experiential meaning in the clause with the choice of process implicating associated participant roles and configurations. It involves determining the process type, participants and circumstances realized in any clause (Eggins, 2004).

1.8 Organization of Paper

The organization of this paper are as follows:

1. Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter presents the introductory part of this study. It includes the background of the study, the purposes of the research, statements of problems, the scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

2. Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter presents some theories which were used for this research. It covers representation, media representation, autism representation and transitivity.

3. Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter covers a brief explanation of the research methodology, namely research design, data collection, data analysis, and data presentation.

4. Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of this study by providing the answers to the research question and discussions regarding the findings.

5. Chapter V: Conclusions and Suggestions

This chapter provides the conclusions derived from the results of this research and suggestions which can be used for further research in the future.