

EXPLORING THE IDEOLOGY OF NARRATIVE TEXT *LUTUNG KESARUNG*: PEIRCE'S SOCIAL SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Lutung Kesarung is a popular Indonesian folktale. Nevertheless, many communities cannot find the appropriate ideology of the text. This research aims to explore the ideology of this text from Peirce's social semiotic perspective. It is a qualitative, phenomenological research to reveal the social phenomenon related to the *Lutung Kesarung* text. *Lutung* means monkey, which is associated with greed, while *Kesarung* is interpreted as destruction. Therefore, the interpretation of *Lutung Kesarung* is that a greedy person will be destroyed by his/her own character. The theory used in this research is social semiotics, proposed by Peirce. The research results show that the text teaches readers to practice positive social behaviours in every social situation. In addition, the text teaches readers to improve their quality of life for a better future instead of dwelling on past bad events. The research results are expected to provide positive impacts on the development of Discourse Analysis, Semiology, and Language Philosophy fields. Furthermore, it may help future studies explore the ideologies of other local narrative texts.

Keywords: harmony, *Lutung Kesarung*, self-control, selfish, social semiotic

Introduction

Language is not only a tool of social interaction involving the participants, but it is also a representation of the language user (Danesi, 2007). It is not limited to a narrow sense of verbal communication but involves non-verbal language used in communities. Since the language used by the users represents culture, social, personal character, profession, and others, language is considered social semiotic (Haq Aslama et al., 2025).

Language embeds very complex aspects that cannot be seen only from the surface, but also from the social aspects related to why the language is used, to whom it is used, when it is used, and how it is used. From those aspects, language users comprehend the references of language use. Different social contexts produce different references; thus, language can be interpreted as unlimited semiosis (Merrel, 2001). In this case, language is categorised as semiotic, the study of social signs used in communities. Signs in non-verbal language have certain functions that can be realised, such as voices, colours, codes, entities, and many others. Whereas, signs in verbal language can take the form of spoken and written texts. However,

not everyone can understand the social signs applied in communities since the social signs cannot be separated from the social context. The signs are only comprehended by communities that engage in social activities (Wilang, 2024). It means that language can convey certain functions indirectly through certain genres (Batubara, 2020).

Narrative text is one of the text genres emphasizing social semiotics, in which many communities view narrative texts as story texts (Sari & Putra, 2020). Narrative text is realised with a sequence of clauses that describe social events (Toan, 2025). It cannot be apart from community life since the text has certain functions, namely education, social criticism, information, life guidance, and humour. These functions are called semiotic since the essence of the text lies beyond the clauses (Ganzin et al., 2014). Understanding narrative text at the lexicogrammar level can guide the readers to understand the social events at the level of surface, which includes the relationship among clauses within the text (Todd, 2023).

Lutung Kesarung is a local narrative text from West Java, a story that is not only popular in West Java but also in Indonesia. The text is often found in children's storybooks with different styles, so the readers have different points of view regarding the text. In Sundanese, the name *Lutung Kesarung* is used as an idiom representing a beautiful and wise woman (Isnendes, 2023).

The essence of a narrative text is that a narrator guides readers in following the story's plot. This phenomenon enables the readers to engage in the social event (Herman & Vervack, 2003). Furthermore, the narrator has their own language styles in narrating the story, thus the clauses used in the narrative text can be interpreted from different points of view. The interpretation differences show that readers may not be successful in understanding the ideology of the text. That phenomenon has drawn serious attention, since *Lutung Kesarung* is viewed to have an unrevealed message. However, the text is often understood as a mere story.

A previous study by Rahmawati (2022) observed the moral values of *Lutung Kesarung*. The result found that the story can be used to teach students how to be honest, harmonious, peaceful, and polite. However, the research did not show a clear theory to get the result. The research focused more on the interpretation of the story. Another study was done on the philology of *Lutung Kesarung* by (Subandiyah et al., 2023). The result showed that the text teaches honesty and harmony in social life, which is regarded as in accordance with Sundanese culture.

The popularity of the text does not guarantee that all communities know the message contained in the text. The text may be interpreted differently based on how the clauses are formulated in the text and how deeply they are understood. This expectation to comprehend the text is not met. Therefore, this research aims to completely explore the message of the text by exploring the ideology. The theory used to reveal the ideology is the theory of social semiotics, proposed by Peirce (2001), which involves representamen, object, and interpretant. The theory is considered to be able to solve the social phenomena since it describes the form, social aspect, and reference in detail. Therefore, this research's goal is to reveal the ideology of text *Lutung Kesarung*.

This research is an applied linguistics study, belonging specifically to Semiotics and Discourse Analysis. This research tries to explore the social signs of

narrative texts that have not been explored. Moreover, it tries to give a description of how to find the text's moral values.

Theoretical framework

As a narrative text, the narrator in *Lutung Kesarung* uses language to guide readers in understanding how social phenomena are constructed. To support the narrator's language, the text provides dialogues involving the participants, time, place, and action. Narrative text differs from other genres as it presents the first and second layers within language. The first layer is presented in how language is constructed within the text. The clauses used in the text must have a semantic relation marked with linguistic features (Kiose et al., 2025). The second layer is how the context is destructed from the origin, then the text is reconstructed into the appropriate social context.

Since narrative text is used to transfer certain messages to communities, this research uses the social semiotics proposed by Peirce (Merrel, 2001). The theory gives an interpretation based on a reconstructed social context, which involves Representamen, Object, and Interpretant. In this theory, those three aspects cannot be separated from each other (Suardana, 2023). Representamen is the entity used as a sign applied in societies. The representative of a sign can be realised with a social code or other entities. Representamen realised with entities are understood by the language users based on three approaches: (i) Sinsign, referring to the sign which can be seen, tasted, or felt; (ii) Qualisign, referring to the sign that is related to quality, such as hard, loud, low, and other qualities; and (iii) Legisign, referring to the sign that is understood and applied in communities due to legality. Interpretant is associated with the way of creating social reference based on a reconstructed social context. The approaches used to interpret are (i) Rheme, the interpretation based on subjective grounding with feeling or sense; (ii) Decisign, the interpretation grounded with high frequency; and (iii) Argument, the relation between the object and the concept. Object is associated with the reference or the meaning based on social context. It is made based on how the social interpretation is established. The approach to meet the relation can be through (i) icon, the relation between the object and the representamen that can be seen clearly, such as colours, shapes, characters, pictures, and other similarities; (ii) Index, the relation between the object and the representamen that has cause and effect; and (iii) Symbol, that there is no relationship between the object and the representamen but conventional in communities (Widyastuti, 2022).

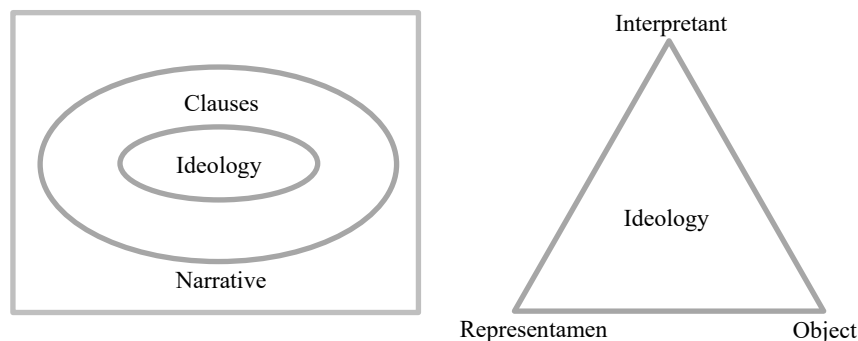


Figure 1. The relationship between narrative text and Peirce's theory

Method

This research is phenomenological qualitative research to reveal the ideology found in *Lutung Kesarung*. The researcher found that the text is often interpreted subjectively. Since the story is regarded as a popular text, the researcher asked ten third-semester English students of Bali Dwipa University about the moral values of *Lutung Kesarung*. The students' answers were varied. Five students answered that it was about honesty, two answered that it was about unity, and the remaining three answered: "I do not know". Therefore, this study tries to clear the vagueness of the story by exploring the ideology of the text. For this purpose, this study used Cahyani's (2021) version of *Lutung Kesarung* as the research object.

Brief of The Text

Once upon a time, there was a king in West Java who had five daughters. Three of the five daughters were married to other kings around West Java. Two of the five daughters were still young, namely Prabu Rarang and Prabu Sari. The king was confused about nominating the most appropriate daughter to be the future queen. Based on the tradition, the older daughter had the right to be a queen. However, Prabu Rarang had a bad character, which made the king feel confused. Prabu Sari was the second daughter, but she had brilliant thoughts, so the king preferred to choose Prabu Sari as the queen. It made Prabu Rarang disappointed because of the king's choice.

Therefore, Prabu Rarang had an idea to cause a mysterious skin disease for Prabu Sari. The disease could not be cured, which made all commoners afraid of the disease. The king felt worried if the disease spread in the society, so Prabu Rarang insisted that the king exile Prabu Sari into the forest. Prabu Rarang was very happy since Prabu Sari got a very serious disease.

Meanwhile, Prabu Sari was very sad to have such a disease. Due to her condition, she cried while touching her skin. At midnight, a beautiful monkey called Lutung Kesarung approached her and asked her not to cry. Lutung Kesarung said, "Let me pray to the god to cure your disease". Lutung Kesarung took holy water from a small pond in the forest. The disease was smeared with the holy water. The diseases disappeared on the following day. Prabu Sari was very happy to see something extraordinary happen.

Lutung Kesarung begged Prabu Sari to go to the palace, but she did not want to. Lutung Kesarung explained that the king was sad to think of Prabu Sari's condition. The king would be happy if Prabu Sari escaped from the disease. Finally, Prabu Sari decided to go back to the palace because of her love for the king. Prabu Sari did have the ambition to become a queen, but that position would be given to her older sister, Prabu Rarang.

Prabu Sari's coming to the palace made Prabu Sari feel disappointed since the queen position that was expected by Prabu Rarang could be taken by Prabu Sari. Prabu Rarang had an idea how to punish Prabu Sari so that Prabu Sari would leave the palace. A lot of

competitions were held to defeat Prabu Sari in the computations. The defeat could be used as a reason to cast out Prabu Sari from the palace.

However, Prabu Rarang failed in every competition. She was conscious of the consequence. She had to agree to the agreement that she had to leave the palace. However, Prabu Sari did not permit Prabu Rarang to leave the palace. Prabu Sari invited Prabu Rarang to live together in the palace. Finally, Prabu Sari became a queen. Prabu Sari made the society live prosperously, and she was loved by all of the society.

There were several steps done in the research, namely (i) reading the whole text, (ii) emphasizing the clauses being the core of social semiotic, (iii) analysing the clauses used as the data, and (iv) presenting the results of the research. The clauses were examined or tested whether or not the cause deserved to find the data. It required a deep understanding of the social and cultural context of the text. Then, to understand the semantic discourse, the original text was deconstructed and reconstructed based on the current social context.

The second step was to align with the theory of social semiotic proposed by Peirce, called the Triadic concept, which involves Representamen, Interpretant, and Object (Fatiya et al., 2025). The third was collecting the data, which was found as follows.

- I. The king was confused about nominating the future queen. Based on the tradition, Prabu Rarang has the right to be the queen since she was the oldest one. However, Prabu Rarang's character was bad.
- II. Prabu Rarang was unhappy because of the king's choice. Prabu Rarang had thought to cause a mysterious skin disease for Prabu Sari. The disease could not be cured. Because of the mysterious disease, Prabu Sari was exiled to the forest.
- III. Lutung Kesarung prayed to the god to cure Prabu Sari's disease. Prabu Sari was cured with holy water taken from a small pond.
- IV. The disease occurring in Prabu Sari disappeared, and then Prabu Sari went back to the palace. Prabu Sari's coming to the palace made Prabu Rarang disappointed. Prabu Rarang was stimulated to make a bad trick so that Prabu Sari failed to be a queen.
- V. Prabu Sari did not permit Prabu Rarang to leave the palace. Prabu Rarang invited Prabu Sari to live together in the palace. Prabu Sari became a queen. They lived together in the palace harmoniously.

In the fourth step, the clauses used as the data were analysed with the theory of social triadic. The process of interpreting the sign needs special metacognition since it requires good social and cultural comprehension (Hellystia & Hermawati, 2024). The analysis was reevaluated to meet the social and cultural context. It aimed to find the appropriateness of the ideology of the text (Sayogie et al., 2023).

The fifth step of this research presented the data collected in the form of clauses. Each datum is marked with Data I, II, III, IV, and V. This section elaborates on the three elements, namely Object, Interpretant, and Representamen. Object is taken from the clauses used as data. Interpretant is taken from the interpretation based on the social context presented in the text. Representamen is the reference or meaning obtained from the reconstruction

Findings

This section describes the analysis of the signs found in the text *Lutung Kesarung*. As previously mentioned, the data were taken from clauses that were considered to have signs of social semiotics. The analysis of the data is presented below.

Data I

Data I states that the king felt confused in taking decision. The king used to enforce regulations based on traditional custom which had been applied since long ago. The habit has been kept in the king's mind. However, the king found a crucial situation that had to be managed very well. The sign can be analysed as below

The representamen

The representamen is realised with the condition that states the king's confusion regarding the appropriateness of a queen's selection. The representamen represents qualisign, which the king did have strong courage to take decision. It brings negative impacts on his life.

The interpretant

The king must not follow the regulation very strictly, even though there is a tradition that must be performed and preserved very well. The performance of rigid tradition without applying the current social context causes trouble for the decision maker. The situation is suitable for a certain context since every moment has its own social context. Halliday (2014) states that the context of a situation involves field, tenor, and mode. Field is associated with what happens, what is done, where/when/how something is done. Tenor is associated with the relationship among the participants. Mode is associated with media, ideology, purpose, and norm. Those aspects must be applied based on the situation. Different contexts result in different decisions.

The object

The context of a situation plays an important role in creating the appropriate decision. In communities, we are not supposed to perfume anything stiffly. Everything can work well if the social context is applied well. The sign shows that we cannot equalize similar cases happening in the past to the present case, since every case has its moment, place, situation, and other aspects. Therefore, the management of the case must be done differently (Shofiya & Basuni, 2023).

Data II

Data II states that unhappiness and disappointment occurred in Prabu Rarang since Prabu Sari was planned to become a queen. That phenomenon stimulated Prabu Rarang to think of how to thwart the king's willingness to nominate Prabu Sari as the next queen. The sign is elaborated as follows.

The representamen

It is realised with a clause explaining Prabu Rarang's willingness to exile Prabu Sari into the forest. It was done consciously so that Prabu Sari would be killed

by wild animals. Thus, Prabu Rarang would not be hindered by anyone else. The effort to hinder Prabu Sari was by asking a bad-minded person to send a mysterious contagious skin disease that could spread to others. The representamen is related to qualisign since the king felt worried about the contagious disease.

The interpretant

The sign shows that Prabu Rarang had bad thoughts regarding the king's decision. The way she exiled Prabu Sari can be used as proof that Prabu Rarang had the ambition to become a queen. The reason used to convince the king to exile Prabu Sari was her contagious disease. Therefore, the interpretant is associated with the argument why the king asked Prabu Sari to leave the palace.

The object

It shows that when someone is controlled by their ambition to achieve a target, they can do everything without considering the consequences. Someone who is controlled by ambition often sacrifices others' feelings. They only focus on the target that must be obtained without obstacles. It is against the development of mental character, which educates communities on how to control emotion in doing social behaviour (Raharjo et al., 2025). The object is associated as an index since the reference has a cause and effect between the object and the reference (Fatiya et al., 2025).

Data III

Data III describes that Prabu Sari lived in a forest due to being exiled by the king. A very kind monkey called Lutung Kesarung then came and prayed to the god to ask for the treatment for the disease.

The representamen

It is realised with action that Prabu Rarang's disease was cured with water taken from a small pond by Lutung Kesarung. The sign is associated with good behaviour. It represents a sign of kindness (Merrel, 2001).

The interpretant

It represents that Prabu Sari was helped by Lutung Kesarung since Prabu Sari did not make any mistakes and did not have an ambition to become a queen. Due to having honesty in her mind, the god gave protection and courage, so Prabu Sari had a strong mentality. The interpretant is taken from the argument approach since communities believe that the god blessing comes to the right person at the right moment.

The object

The sign suggests that there are several references given to us. The first reference is that problems must be seen as motivation to get a better quality of life. Second, problems force us to think more critically so we can be more creative in managing social situations. Third, problems cannot be avoided since there is something significant that can be found beyond the problem. The object shows that the reference is associated with a symbol of strength in overcoming problems in life.

Data IV

Data IV describes Prabu Rarang's tactic to hinder Prabu Sari as a queen. Prabu Sari's disease disappeared, and she looked beautiful. At first, Prabu Sari did not want to go to the palace. She let Prabu Rarang be the queen. Lutung Kesarung asked her to go back to the palace. The situation can be analysed as follows.

The representamen

It is realized through the social phenomenon that Prabu Rarang made several kinds of competition. The competitions were held to block Prabu Sari from being the queen. The representamen is related to qualisign because the action done by Prabu Rarang has a bad intention.

The interpretant

Prabu Rarang could not accept Prabu Sari's coming into the palace. The coming was seen as an obstacle to becoming a queen. It showed that Prabu Rarang had bad thoughts by performing a legal event in order to cast out her bad character, so that Prabu Sari could not be seen by anyone else. The interpretation is related to the argument since the interpretation is associated with the reason why the competitions were held.

The object

The sign shows that one who hurts someone else destructs him/herself. Someone can be controlled by his or her own ego. The ego is one of the bad characters that stimulates one to do whatever he or she wants to do to achieve something. In addition, the sign is interpreted to mean that people must do positive social behaviour in society. Specifically, every social phenomenon happening in communities must be managed very well by thinking, speaking, and acting positively (Suardana & Semadi, 2026). The object is associated with an icon since all communities that the sign has a correlation with social and cultural elements held by the communities.

Data V

Data V describes that Prabu Sari won the competitions. Prabu Rarang was very sad because she had to leave the palace. However, Prabu Sari begged Prabu Rarang to live together in the palace. Prabu Sari forgave Prabu Rarang due to her mistakes.

The representamen

Prabu Sari did not have revenge on Prabu Rarang. Every mistake made by Prabu Rarang to Prabu Sari was forgiven. Even Prabu Sari invited Prabu Rarang to live in the palace together. The representamen is associated with qualisign since Prabu Sari has a good attitude toward Prabu Rarang.

The interpretant

It shows that Prabu Sari had a very good character, whatever occurred in her life. Prabu Sari believed that negative behaviour addressed to her must not be responded to with bad behaviour. The interpretant is associated with argument since

such behaviour has been embedded in all communities by religious teachings (Pitana, 2025).

The object

The sign shows that the text suggests not to engage in negative social behaviours. The sign teaches doing positive actions, whatever happens. Everything must be responded to with positive thought. In addition, we are guided to think of better future actions instead of previous mistakes. Improving for the best actions is better than regretting something bad in the past. The object is associated with the symbol of a wise woman who does good things and never has feelings of revenge towards others.

Discussion

Lutung Kesarung is written in semantics discourse that contains a series of social events. The text not only talks about honesty, harmony, and peace, but it also has very deep moral values. As mentioned previously, the text is categorized as a myth text in which the moral values are presented indirectly. Therefore, the moral values of *Lutung Kesarung* are explored comprehensively. The ideology of a text is associated with the reason why the text is produced in society (Suardana, 2023). The text of *Lutung Kesarung* is created to educate people to be wiser. Therefore, the text is categorized as an educational narrative text because it teaches good behaviour in daily life. The ideologies of the text are realized through the moral values, which promote a good mindset.

The text teaches readers how to manage social phenomena according to the social context. Social context and language work together to create certain meaning. In this case, different contexts within the same language will result in different language functions (Roothoof, 2025). Since the social context of *Lutung Kesarung* teaches us how to live in harmony, which emphasizes honesty and kinship, the text's ideology can be accepted in the community. The moral values embedded in the text are everlasting because the teachings are relevant to Indonesian culture.

Lutung Kesarung also teaches readers how to control their ambition to achieve their target by developing a mentality that does not ignore social life aspects, which can destroy someone else's feelings. It teaches readers how to avoid *Sad Ripu's* six self-enemies found in our life, namely uncontrollable desire, greed, anger, jealousy, intoxication, and confusion (Suardana & Semadi, 2026). One who cannot avoid *Sad Ripu* may have problems in life since the ego realized with *Sad Ripu* itself can destroy their lives.

The name *Lutung Kesarung* comes from the word *lutung*, monkey associated with greed, and *kesarung*, which is associated with "misguidance" that causes destruction. Therefore, based on the social context, *Lutung Kesarung* can be interpreted as "destruction of someone's life because of greed". The text guides readers on how a bad character brings a negative impact on the doers. In contrast, good character brings positive impacts for the doers. Therefore, the text motivates readers to perform good social behaviours to achieve something (Calingasan & Plata, 2022).

The story *Lutung Kesarung* featuring Prabu Rarang and Prabu Sari is a representation of the real world's balance of harmony in life. Prabu Rarang represents a negative character, and Prabu Sari is the good one. The two characters

are in our body. At certain times, bad and good character control people's minds. Prabu Rarang and Prabu Sari exist in our body. The text shows how to minimize the emergence of bad character in social life and emphasizes the good character (Adji, 2020). The word "palace" is interpreted as "body" since everybody can be filled with negative and positive characters.

The word "queen" is interpreted as "beauty" in moral, mind, and character. A queen is a person who speaks politely, has an honest character, behaves politely, can control her ego, and can forgive someone's mistake. When those abilities are embedded in people's minds, they can live in harmony and prosperity. Therefore, the word "queen" can be interpreted as "beauty in life supported with harmony and prosperity (Gumanay, 2023). This philosophy teaches us how to be a "queen," which needs a long process and deep patience to manage every phenomenon. Such a situation enables us to have higher mental quality (Hobart, 2022).

Lutung Kesarung is very suitable as an index of sign since the text teachings clearly guide people to have harmony in life. The teachings are associated with cause and effect embedded in the text. The teachings are very relevant to Indonesia's Pancasila teachings, which are used to develop Indonesian minds and characters.

Conclusion

Lutung Kesarung is a narrative text that contains psychosocial and cultural values that may influence people's social behaviour. The moral values conveyed through the text are not only intended for West Java communities but also valuable for all people in the world. The moral values contain deep life philosophy that is suitable for all time. The ideologies taught by the text are (i) understanding the social context to create a certain reference of sign, (ii) doing positive social behaviours in communities, (iii) being patient to manage whatever occurs in our lives, and (iv) improving the quality of life instead of regretting some mistakes that happened in the past. The word *Lutung Kesarung* means that one can destroy their own life due to their own negative behaviours in society. Prabu Sari has good character, while Prabu Rarang has bad character. Those characters exist in our body together. Semiotically, the text teaches readers how to control our negative behaviours in their minds so that they cannot destroy their lives. This study is expected to have impacts on Discourse Analysis, Semiology, and Language Philosophy, especially in answering the doubts regarding *Lutung Kesarung's* ideologies. From Discourse Analysis and Semiology points of view, this study emphasizes how social context plays an important role in creating meaning or reference in language use. While for Language Philosophy, the result of this research teaches readers how they should behave. Hopefully, the results of this research can stimulate other applied linguistics researchers to explore other local narrative texts.

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