

## LANGUAGE AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL SEMIOTIC: A CASE STUDY ON THE FICTION TEXT

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**Received:** 4<sup>th</sup> August 2016/ **Revised:** 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2016/ **Accepted:** 8<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**How to Cite:** Latjuba, A. Y. (2016). Language As A Socio-Cultural Semiotic: A Case Study on the Fiction Text. *Lingua Cultura*, 10(2). 77-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21512/lc.v10i2.940>

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### ABSTRACT

*This article was intended to prove that a language could reflect a socio-cultural situation at a certain period of a nation. The first step taken to achieve this end was choosing a text that had the appropriate register, in accordance with the purpose. The fictional text "Nocturne" was a register which was chosen as the object of research to prove that the language might reflect the socio-cultural situation of a particular period of a nation. This register had the potential of meaning, both visible and hidden. Meaning that appeared to come from the system of meaning that was owned by choice of words, phrases, and sentences. While the meaning that was not visible is the potential meaning that indirectly was stated in the text. The method of research was interpretation by using a semiotic approach. These words were then associated with sentences in the text, which explained series of event or actions of the story's figure. From here, it obtained the actual meaning of the text in question. This article finds out that the form of signs that potentially could have a meaning that is integrated into the text. Thus, by isolating the socio-cultural system that has the meaning potential in the text, the marker can easily be interpreted through the semiotic approach. The overall theme of the story can be interpreted two-fold: an overview of the concept of culture Bugis-Makassar Siri' or impression of the situation calm.*

**Keywords:** semiotic, socio-cultural situation, meaning potential, fiction text

### INTRODUCTION

This article is intended to prove that a language can reflect a socio-cultural situation at a certain period of a nation. The first step taken to achieve this end is choosing a text that has the appropriate register, in accordance with the purpose. To that end, the choice fell on "Nocturne", a fiction text, a work of Dutch author H. J. Merlijn from the beginning of the twentieth century. This fictional text stated in the literary-cultural magazine in Indonesia 1947-1953 named *Oriëntatie* (Zonneveld, 1988). This is assumed to contain socio-cultural signifiers that will be conveyed to the readers if they can be interpreted appropriately. Thus, this text is not just a series of words that form a coherent sentence, but this text has a purpose that is not directly to be conveyed to the reader. What is a text having the proper register is that the text in principle has a way different to say something. This method looks at the meanings and forms of choice which based on the situation of language use. Thus it can be said that this text has the meanings potential. Meanings potential explained further by Msuya (2014) has three kinds of levels, namely the level of ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Every utterance encodes meanings based on this level, and the speakers use it to (a) represent experience, (b) achieve

interpersonal purposes, and (c) arrange information as efficient and effective as possible. "Meaning" for Halliday, according to Msuya, means "function", more specifically, "function in context".

Meaning in the ideational level, represented in the form of clauses, is expressing the "content" of the language, which is our experience of the real world, including the experience of our inner world. When using language, we use it to say something or say what other people do; therefore the ideational meaning refers to our experience of the real world and our inner world. While the meaning on the interpersonal level, it helps to establish and maintain social relationships. Our relationships with other people and our attitudes toward them, are often expressed through the interpersonal meaning. We usually use language to facilitate an action or to demand an object and the expected result is gained most generally verbally or in writing. And the meaning in textual level creates links between features of the text with elements in the context of situation. This means that refers to the way the text is organized. The meaning of the text is usually derived from the clauses that contain the message. Message from the clauses is obtained from its thematic structure. According to Nguyen (2012), Halliday claims that three types levels of meaning as explained above, are not

accidental but necessarily in place, because we need them to perform functions in social life.

Potential meanings owned text, as referred Halliday (2007) has two characteristics, namely a meaning refers to the context of the situation and the context of socio-culture. Malinowski, as explained by Halliday (2007), has stated that the context of the situation as a concept can be interpreted as the environment of the text and context of culture as an environment of the linguistic system.

Nowadays, the concept of context has been extensively studied from different perspectives and produced various definitions such as the context in translation (Hu, 2010), in pragmatics (Seung, 2009), in discourse analysis (Song, 2010; Dijk, 2009). While various types of social processes can be described in terms of linguistics as the context of the use of language.

The context of the situation is simple to be interpreted because it is a picture of a special semantic system owned by words, phrases, and sentences. To understand the semantic system owned by a language, especially a language used in literary texts, linguists often use transitivity analysis. This analysis is conducted to examine the structure of the sentences presented through the process, the involvement of participants in the process, and the circumstances in which the process and participants are involved. By using transitivity analysis, researchers can show that the structure of language that can produce certain meanings and ideologies which are not always explicit to the reader (Nguyen, 2012). While other researchers use this analysis to explain the main character's personality (Msuya, 2014) and gender theme.

When interpreting the context of socio-cultural, the meaning can interpret the semantic system across the language used. Functional Linguistics put an emphasis on the relationship between language and context. The thinking is that it is impossible to understand the meaning of what people say or write, without knowing anything about the context of the surrounding text. Vice versa, if people understand the utterances of the speaker or understand the writing, it means that it can also describe the context of the situation. The relationship between language and context appears as a reciprocal relation, where one is the realization of others, in this case, the text to realize the context of the situation and the linguistic systems to realize the culture (Figueiredo, 2010).

Meanings potential is an option of meanings that paradigmatic presented in the system, and through these choices, members of culture have access to their language. The term of the register can be defined as variations of meanings of a text as an institution whose produces language. Thus, you can say that the register is a variety of meaning according to the use. Originally, the register understands in terms of lexicogrammar. As a variant of the language, the register is determined not only by its users but also by its use. Briefly, it can be said that the register is determined by what people say as the reference.

In the view of Martin, as quoted in Figueiredo (2010), registers and genres are a semiotic system distinct from other semiotic, such as language. In the sense that a language is presented in the both semiotic system, just the way that the language creates meaning through the selected words and structure has made it different. Register corresponds to the context of the situation, and genre to the cultural context. Both use the language as a mediator to make it happen. Examining the cultural context means involves actions to observe how language is structured to

achieve the motivated cultural objectives.

## METHODS

To begin the discussion about the context of situations and the context of socio-cultural that may be owned by a text, it will be set a few words and sentences that represent the text. Since the preferred register is the configuration of a set of sources of meaning that is a member of the special culture which associated via a type of situation, which in this case is the situation of fiction, so it is necessary to show only the associated words and sentences specific that represent the social situation and culture as reflected in the text.

These words are then associated with sentences in the text, which explain series of event or actions of the story's figure. From here, it obtains the actual meaning of the text in question. This way, according to Danesi and Perron (1999), is called micro semiotic analysis. The purpose of this analysis is gaining the projected meaning in the construction of texts. While the potentials meaning possessed which derived from the text is the hidden meanings, which are not directly stated in the text. Meanings potential, in view Danesi and Perron (1999) have represented macro signified. These markers are analyzed by connecting them with various codes and text that make up the order of the marker. In other words, the study of specific markers is intertextual analysis. Danesi and Perron named this macro-semiotic analysis.

There are several components of meaning identified in the text, which is believed to potentially support the text's meaning to be conveyed. These are who the author of the text was, how the position of the text was associated with the authorship, and how the knowledge of the author had an impact on a theme or message to be conveyed. All of these are markers that will be interpreted using a semiotic approach.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The object being observed stems from the sound of voices drum heard faintly from a distance, the sound is heard initially dimmed (*doffe* – Dutch), then pressing (*dringende* – Dutch), finally banging loudly (*kloppende klanken* – Dutch). The context of the situation is reinforced by the depiction of a tranquil natural situation (*de stille, blinkende zee* – Dutch), in the middle of the night (*het was middernacht* – Dutch), even when the universe amid in the silence (*waneer de wereld zweeg* – Dutch).

In the second and third paragraphs the depiction of the object being observed, that may be a theme of this story, is done by applying rhythm binary opposition, not only on the depiction of nature, but also on the human, which is represented by the word 'they' (*zij* – Dutch), as well as their activities. The people illustrated have quiet voice, soft as whispered (*zacht flustered* – Dutch), but they can also shout loudly till sweated (*zij luid en bezwerend riepen* – Dutch). They were as excited as Makassar horses at the beginning of the race (*als vurige Makassarse paarden aan het begin van een reis* – Dutch), but when dancing (*dansten* – Dutch) they were like small dancers (*kleine danseressen* – Dutch), earnest, need to be protected, still timid and nervous. However, they can "act" like men maintain their heroic actions. They fight for life and death (*zij vochten een strijd op leven en dood* – Dutch). They stabbed, due to insult (*beledigingen* – Dutch). They died together (*zij stierven zelve* – Dutch).

The next paragraph, after the first three paragraphs,

illustrates the narrative through the relationship between the drum sounds are heard earlier, and the men actions which became the principal concern of the figure 'I'. Words that appear later, which is a cataphoric reference of the phrase "trommen" is the word "trommenpaar" (in fourth paragraphs); "gandrangs", "gandrangspelers" (in fifth paragraphs); "trommelspelers", "medetamboer", "gandrangspelers" (twice), "trommen" (twice), "trommelslagers" (in seventh paragraphs); "gandrangspelers" (in eighth paragraphs); "Trommen" (in twelfth paragraphs); "trommen" (in thirteenth paragraphs), "trommen" (twice) (in fifteenth paragraphs); "trommen", "gandrangspeler", "de trom", "de gandrang" (in sixteenth paragraphs). While the men actions which become the concern of the figure 'I', are illustrated through stork dance (reigerdansen – Dutch). This dance or rather the human actions are newly introduced in fifth paragraphs, which then intensely present together with the presence of the word "trommen" and its variants in the following paragraphs. All this, to support the theme that wanted to be delivered. Semantic analysis of the semiotic signs of this will be done later.

Lexicogrammatical explanation of the above, will be about cohesiveness and coherence of the text in question. This narrative text is arranged in an integrated manner, either grammatical or semantic. By adopting the perspective of the text as a semantic unit, then as a realization to downward text will be connected with sentences and other grammatical units, and to upward will be projected on the meaning to a higher level.

To realize the social and cultural meanings of the narrative fiction text, a thorough interpretation of the signs will be done. Because the presence of the text is supported by the role of several components, then it is necessary to explain them, although there may be a shortage here and there. The technical components which contribute significantly to materialize an idea into written form are the competence of an author who is generally acquired through experience. The second component which plays a role in the emergence of the text is the text itself, here in question is the context of the situation reflected in the text. In addition, also it is necessary to consider the relationship between the intended text with other text. This is called intertextuality. One component of intertextuality is how the relationship between text and recipients, in this case, how the relationship between text and readers. How readers interpret the signs conveyed in the text. So that the text is easy to understand, then the signs in it must be able to be a part of him. Thus the reader will be more trust to the text that faced.

The fiction text "Nocturne" is a short story that took place in South Sulawesi, but the precise location is unknown. But from the indications that can be found in the text, some place names can be mentioned, namely Palatjari, Barombong, as well as others associated with the origin, like the royal Gowa (*het Gowase hof*), or horses Makassar (*Makassaarse Paarden*). It has given an indication that the situation of the story takes place in Makassar and its surroundings, or more precisely in South Sulawesi. Of course, logically, this is acceptable because when viewed from a background of authorship H.J. Merlijn, which actually has a name H.J. Fiedericy (1900-1962), he was a former overseer (*controleur*), who worked in Public Administration (*Binnenlands Bestuur*) at the time of the Dutch East Indies government, and placed in the South Sulawesi (*Zuid Celebes*). The long enough period of duties from 1922 – 1930, gave him a wealth of experience. In addition, he had also experienced displacement of working area for several

times, among others in Bantaeng, Sungguminasa, Makassar, Watampone, but all were still in the surrounding region of South Sulawesi. His first placement, in Watampone region with the central government in Bone, he was still relatively young. At that time, Watampone was still a self-governing region (*zelfbesturend landschap*) or the same as the current autonomous region, where the central government only accounts for advice and supervision to local governments (*inlands bestuur*). Although not yet served as the supervisor (*controleur*), but only as an *aspirant-controleur*, Fiedericy made a lot of travel with his superiors, especially to supervise the construction of roads, bridges, and irrigation (Heemskerck, 1990).

Construction of roads, bridges, and irrigation is a realization of ethical Politics of the colonial government that had been promised to the people of its colonies. Before that, the colonial government in the Netherlands Indies and the central government in the Netherlands repeatedly received sharp criticism from its own people. They criticized the way the government was managing the colony. Criticism also came from within the Netherlands itself; they assessed the central government too much took advantage of the wealth of the colonies and leaving only misery and poverty.

Thus, the central government policy changes have an impact on political attitude of Fiedericy against people of South Sulawesi. Not only that, before deployment to the area where he served, namely in South Sulawesi, Fiedericy had studied Indology at the University of Leiden. Here he was guided by teachers who were widely recognized as ethical political figures, such as Van Vollenhoven and Snouck Hurgronje. His experiences traveling to areas inland, in the mountains, in the coastal region have given significant contributions to the authorship, which always took a setting in South Sulawesi. His knowledge of the people and culture of Bugis-Makassar was undoubted, in that he had done serious research, with respect to the writing of his dissertation, entitled *De Standen Bij de Boeginezen en de Makassaren* written in 1933.

As has been said before, this fictional text describes Bugis-Makassar people's lives as reflected through one small part of their community activity. There is only a fraction of activity described in the text because this text is just a short story. That is already a convention in a short story, that characters and events do not overly complicated flourish. If both of them developed long-winded involving various conflicts, with varying complex characters, of course, that would be produced is no longer a short story but a novel. The short story is just developing a special event, which is considered by the author to be sufficient to represent the theme of the story to be conveyed.

The focus of this story is the event where the figure 'I', King, along with the community of the countryside, in the mountains where no one exactly knows, but obviously in South Sulawesi, attended a stork dance performance (*reigerdansen*–Dutch) that accompanied with the drum's game of a famous tambour player. This event occurs because the figure 'I' was so impressed with the drum sound that heard faintly when he newly arrived at the seaside. When there was an opportunity to visit some rural areas, he expressed his craving toward the king whose accompanied him. Incidentally in a rural area was visiting a dance clubs Pakondo-Boeleng of Barombong, which was the family of a groom, which according to the story will do the wedding in three days' time. The groom's father is a famous tambour player with the drum's game so riveting. The rhythm of his playing increased progressively, which can be seen from



the meaning of the sign through use of the 'trommen' word repeatedly, to combine the word 'trommen' with 'paar', 'spelers', 'slagers', interspersed with the use of the word 'gandrang' (which is a vocabulary that has similarities with the local language or Makassar language) and again combined with 'speler', the Dutch word, then interspersed with 'trommel' which represented the same meaning such as 'tamboer', and finally re-used 'trommen', until finally only the basic word 'trom'. All of them indicated the intensity of the sound of drum's game such as narrator described in the text. At the time of the intensity of the sound of the drum was drawn to move up, that's when the stork dancers entered the performance arena. After the dance performances took place for some time, along with the intensity of the sound of a drum rhythm until at its peak, entered a hunter who tries to chase his prey, the storks. But suddenly unwitting the spectators, the bird (*vogel*- Dutch) was wounded by the hunter (*jager* - Dutch).

Actually, this is not a traditional dance of Bugis-Makassar, although the text does not state so explicitly. But from experience and reading the signs in the text, in which the figure 'I' stated that he often sees this kind of show (*ik had het spel vele malen gezien...*- Dutch, in fourteenth paragraphs). It can be concluded that this dance is just author's imagination, gained through experience to watch ballet performances which often feature dancing geese, and this is the European dance tradition. Anyway, when considered with the face of it, then the herons and geese same but different, or similar but not identical. Just because of his ability to use the words, the author at the end of the story related to the theme to be conveyed, that is to fight for life and death as a result of the humiliation. At the end of the story, it turned out that the hunter is the father of the groom, while the stork is the groom himself. The son died at the hands of his own father.

This theme actually wants to express the concept of the cultural value of Bugis-Makassar *siri*'. Friskawini (2015) has explained that *Siri*' is a term of the concept of Bugis-Makassar culture that reflects their philosophy of life. *Siri*' relates to personal dignity and self-esteem or dignity of the family. This type is also called *Siri' Ripakasiri*, is a taboo and never to be broken because the stakes are life-threatening. As an example carried off a girl to marry, means their marriage do not get the blessing of both parents. As a result of these actions, the perpetrators eloped, both the bride and the groom to be killed by the woman's family because they have shamed the family.

And because the author has a different culture with culture, that is to say; it cannot be avoided appearing personal distance. However, when the truth is restored to the text, the author's legitimate to do so. Because the fact is, this work is recognized only a fictional text. And the concept of *siri*' is understood that the reader may have another face for the reader who does not have knowledge of the cultural values of Bugis-Makassar.

The text of fiction usually means polysemy. So there is a possibility that this text message is understood only the beauty of the drum's game which was associated with the classical music of Chopin, Bach or Beethoven, which is familiar to the people of Europe. This music sounds beautiful, evoking the feeling of listeners when heard it at night, such as to hear the sound of a drum's game by figure 'I' in the show that night. This interpretation is, of course, supported also by the title given to the fictional text, "Nocturne", which means singing softly at night. Not only that, but classical music is usually also used to accompany

ballet performances held in the luxurious building. However, it is different from the performances witnessed by figure 'I' on a moonlit night, on the front page of the Village Head's house. But to the author, this metaphor becomes the inspiration for his work. So those readers of Europe who are not acquainted with the culture of Bugis-Makassar can also enjoy this text by associating it with their own culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

After capturing the meaning of fiction text "Nocturne", it is obvious that the meaning of it is actually created through the linguistic system and the socio-cultural surrounding. The linguistic system consists of words, phrases, and sentences that have choices of special meaning. This system is supported by the social and cultural system of the components of text, such as the background of the author and authorship, which in this case a person's competence and experience. Another text component that supports significantly the system socio-cultural context of the text is a situation that is reflected in the text itself.

This all, in fact, is in the form of signs that potentially could have a meaning that is integrated into the text. Thus, by isolating the socio-cultural system that has the meaning potential in the text, the marker can easily be interpreted through the semiotic approach.

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