

**The Characterization of Topeng Panji Cirebon Through Judgment Evaluation
At Topeng Gegesik Book in Indonesian Version (Appraisal Theory)****Fedro Iswandi¹, Arief Firdaus², Widyasari³**Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon¹, Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon², Universitas Terbuka³
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Abstract

This study investigates about the characterization of *topeng Panji Cirebon* at *Topeng Gegesik* book. The focus of research is to analyze the types of judgment evaluation that represents in the source language text (Indonesian version). The data are words and clauses which it indicates judgment and the data source is *Topeng Gegesik* book. Next, the research design is descriptive qualitative and the data were obtained through documentation (document analysis). Then, data is analyzed by using data collection, display, conclusion drawing-verifying. The last, research findings showed that there are two types of judgment namely social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem includes *normality* and social sanction is *propriety* and *tenacity*. Furthermore, *positive normality* is used more dominant by the author with 7 data frequency. Next, it is followed by *positive propriety* with 5 data frequency. Based on the research findings, the author predominantly employs *positive normality* and *positive propriety* that the author portrays *topeng Panji Cirebon* in a positive and respectful manner with social norms and moral values. The use of *positive judgment* suggests an attention to both appreciate and legitimize the cultural and ethical significance of *topeng Panji Cirebon*.

Keywords: Characterization, Topeng Panji Cirebon, Topeng Gegesik book, Judgment Evaluation, Appraisal Theory**Citation:**Iswandi, F., Firdaus, A., Widyasari. 2025. The Characterization of Topeng Panji Cirebon Through Judgment Evaluation At Topeng Gegesik Book in Indonesian Version (Appraisal Theory). *J-LELC: Journal of Language Education, Linguistics, and Culture*, 5(2), 199-208. 10.25299/j-lelc.2025.22862

INTRODUCTION

Appraisal theory is developed within the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) tradition by James R. Martin and David Rose. Judgment is a sub-system of attitude which it is one of the three core domains of appraisal the others being engagement (dealing with sourcing and perspective) and graduation (dealing with intensity or force). The attitude system broadly captures how speakers or writer's express feelings. Judgment specifically deals with the evaluation of human behaviour. The judgment system is used to assess and interpret people's behaviours, actions, and character traits in relation to shared social norms and values. It plays a crucial role in expressing approval or disapproval, praise or criticism, and acceptance or condemnation. In other words, judgment helps language users position themselves morally and socially in relation to the people they are describing. This system is especially powerful in narrative, media, education, and cultural discourse. It reveals underlying ideologies and the moral compass of a speaker, writer, or society. In judgment, texts can implicitly or explicitly construct characters as admirable or blameworthy, trustworthy or deceitful, brave or cowardly, and more. It allows audiences not only to understand what someone did but it also how society or the narrator evaluates behaviour. Judgment in a text such as in a folktale, novel, or performance script researchers can uncover how language reflects and reinforces social values, builds character identity, and positions readers or viewers to align with certain moral or cultural perspectives.

Topeng Panji Cirebon (Panji Mask Cirebon) is a classical dance drama originating from the Cirebon region of West Java, Indonesia. This represents a rich cultural tapestry rooted in the *Panji* cycle—legendary tales that trace back to the ancient Javanese and Balinese courts. Among the many variations of the *topeng* tradition across the archipelago, the Cirebonese rendition stands out for its distinctive masks, stylized gestures, and symbolic narratives. The performance does not merely recount mythological episodes but encapsulates moral and philosophical messages deeply ingrained in local wisdom. In particular, the development of *topeng Panji* tradition located in the village of Gegesik. A prominent cultural center which generations of *dalang topeng* (mask dance performers) have preserved and passed down it. This is documented in the "*Topeng Gegesik* book" a local compilation that serves as both a cultural archive and interpretive guide to understanding the characters, symbolism, and performative techniques unique to the Cirebonese version. The book provides insight into the values, ethics, and identity reflected in the performance especially through the portrayal of the *Panji* character.

The "*Topeng Gegesik* book" plays a crucial role in this cultural preservation. The book acts as a bridge between oral tradition and contemporary documentation. It provides detailed descriptions of characters such as *Panji*, *Samba*, *Rumyang*, and *Kelana* as well as interpretive commentary on the spiritual and symbolic significance of their roles. Readers and researchers can explore how the stories and performances reflect societal ideals such as humility, loyalty, inner peace, and moral responsibility. The book not only supports the continuity of performance practice but it also contributes to academic and intercultural understanding of the Cirebonese heritage. So, it represents idealized human virtues with calm demeanor and humility. Thus, both the performance and the book play essential roles in safeguarding and revitalizing this intangible heritage in the face of modern challenges.

In literary and performance studies, the characterization of figures within these traditional performances has largely been explored through ethnographic, semiotic, and performance analysis lenses. However, relatively few studies have investigated how these characters are constructed linguistically, particularly through evaluative language. Appraisal theory, a framework within systemic functional linguistics developed by (Martin & White, 2005) and (Martin & Rose, 2007). It offers a powerful tool to dissect the ways language encodes attitudes, emotions, and social judgments. The three main systems within appraisal attitude, engagement, and graduation. Judgment system focuses on the evaluation of human behaviour in terms of ethics, social esteem, and sanction, making it a suitable lens to explore how moral and social values are attributed to characters in *topeng Panji* narratives.

This study aims to investigate the characterization of figures in *topeng Panji Cirebon* by analysing Indonesian textual versions or interpretations using the judgment system of appraisal theory. Through this linguistic evaluation, the study seeks to uncover how the moral qualities, motivations, and social standings of characters such as *Panji*, *Sekartaji*, and others are constructed and conveyed to audiences. By focusing on the Indonesian language version, this study also examines how modern retellings or documentation of the *topeng Panji* tradition continue to reflect and reshape traditional value systems.

Some previous studies have been conducted with appraisal theory by (Putra et al., 2024), (Marpaung, 2022), (Simanjuntak, 2022), (Risdianto et al., 2024), (Kurniawati et al., 2023), (Magfiroh et al., 2021), (Khoo et al., 2012) and (Mirzaaghabeyk, 2022). The existence of most dominant *positive appreciation* to evaluate objects, processes or forms. Shine novel talks about Rachel's journey as a trainee at agencies in Korea so that the author uses appreciation (Putra et al., 2024). Furthermore, (Haq & Rahyono, 2025), (Chalimah et al., 2023), (Dhyaningrum et al., 2023) that they focused on judgment evaluation. The results tell that how the language can be implemented *negative judgment* in social media, positive personal in advertisement, give information as essential position in news. Mostly, Sasana character was valued with capacity, normality and tenacity. This means that he was evaluated based on his ability, produce something than state of being normal.

There are some gaps and another insight of research based on the previous studies above. Some researchers focused on linguistics element of judgment system however they do not connect it with others study such as translation. This research will have contribution for translation studies which the object of research is *Topeng Gegesik* book in Indonesian version (source language text). Then, the special *topeng Panji* from Cirebon as the main object of research while others research focused on human or general things. So, appraisal theory can be used to analyse novel, news article, speech, book or various genre of text. *Topeng Panji* as the character in *Topeng Gegesik* book that we can see the characterization or evaluation language that it will be built by the author.

This study contributes both linguistic and cultural studies by showing how traditional characters are represented through evaluative language, and how language choices reflect broader cultural ideologies. This interdisciplinary approach bridges linguistic discourse analysis with performance studies, offering a fresh perspective on the enduring relevance of Indonesia's performing arts heritage.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach specifically using the appraisal theory framework. A descriptive qualitative study utilizes qualitative measurement scales to depict a condition or phenomenon. Subsequent to this depiction, an analysis of the data is conducted to generate various iterations of the condition without quantifying the phenomenon (Amilia & Andini, 2022). The focus is on the judgment system which assesses the behaviour of individuals in terms of social esteem (e.g., capacity, tenacity, normality) and social sanction (e.g., veracity, propriety). The qualitative design is appropriate because the study aims to explore and interpret the meanings, values, and character portrayals embedded in Indonesian texts describing or narrating *topeng Panji Cirebon* rather than to test hypotheses or measure variables.

Then, data source is *Topeng Gegesik book* in Indonesian version and the research focuses on *topeng Panji* as one of the types of Cirebon mask. The primary data is scripted narratives used in performances or cultural documentation. The forms of data are sentences or clauses which accommodates judgment system. The researcher employed written documentation to gather the data and utilized note-taking then reading strategies. Documentation was used as the data collection which allows for the interpretation of data based on its context and meaning (Fitria, 2020). After that, data analysis used (Miles, 1992) (Miles, M, B, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) techniques namely: 1. The researcher reads book "*Topeng Gegesik*" in Indonesian version. 2. The book was classified into the types of judgment. 3. Drawing conclusions from data that been analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of study is to find out the types of judgment evaluation of *topeng Panji Cirebon* at *Topeng Gegesik* book in Indonesian version. After collecting and analyzing data, the result showed that *normality* is more than dominant than others type. Let's look at table and examples in the following:

Table 1. The Types of Judgment Evaluation at *Topeng Gegesik Book* in Indonesian Version

No	Types of Judgment	Frequency
1	Social esteem; Normality	7
2	Social sanction; Propriety	5
3	Social sanction; Tenacity	1
	Total	13

Social Esteem

Social esteem refers to the level of regard, respect, and recognition that an individual or group receives from others within a social context. It's a measure of how highly an individual or group is regarded, appreciated, or valued by the other people or society. Social esteem can be influenced by various factors, including a person's achievements, behavior, status, reputation (Dhyaningrum et al., 2023) and (Martin, J. R. & Rose, 2007)

Normality refers to the state of being normal or conforming to a standard or norm, or it is about "how special" something/someone is. In various fields, it may refer to behavior, values, or other phenomena that fall within an expected or typical range. For example:

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Raut mukanya memancarkan keagungan dan ketenangan</i>	<i>memancarkan keagungan dan ketenangan</i>	Behavioral process	Normality (+)

The clause can be interpreted as conveying judgment with *positive normality*. The character being described exhibits traits that are socially valued and commonly accepted. The use of the words "*keagungan dan ketenangan*" (majesty and calmness) reflects positive affect and carries connotations of dignity, peace, and spiritual depth. These lexical choices suggest that the character of *topeng Panji* is not only idealized but also positioned as embodying virtues that are held in high regard in the cultural and spiritual context. The behavioural process indicated in the phrase "*raut mukanya*" (facial expression) connects these abstract qualities directly to the physical representation of the *topeng Panji*. The author evaluates the mask not merely as an object but as a representation of a human or spiritual character that transmits or transmutes majesty and calm through its appearance. This symbolic association elevates the mask from a mere cultural artifact to a spiritual icon.

This portrayal is normal, usual, or expected within the cultural framework because *topeng Panji* is often interpreted through the lens of Islamic values—particularly those grounded in the Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah where majesty (*keagungan*) is associated with divine attributes and calmness (*ketenangan*) with inner peace and spiritual maturity. In this way, the *topeng Panji* becomes a didactic symbol, teaching and reminding viewers of the spiritual ideals to which they should aspire.

Furthermore, *topeng Panji* also symbolizes the early stage of human life—that of a child, newly born into the world, in a state of purity and innocence. This association draws on the cultural and spiritual belief that children are born in a holy and untainted state (*fitrah* in Islamic thought). Thus, when people see *topeng Panji*, they may experience a sense of peace, stillness, and clarity, similar to the emotional response evoked by observing a serene child.

This kind of representation aligns with social esteem in appraisal theory (Martin, J & White, 2005) (Martin, J. R. & Rose, 2007) where characters are evaluated based on attributes that reflect moral, social, or cultural approval. In daily life, such symbols reinforce collective attitudes and values, encouraging the audience to recognize and appreciate traits such as calmness, purity, and majesty as part of their cultural identity and spiritual reflection.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Bentuk mulutnya renyah dan tersungging senyum dikulum</i>	<i>renyah dan tersungging senyum</i>	Attributive relation process	Normality (+)

The clause contains judgment with *positive normality* which can be identified through the words "*renyah dan tersungging senyum*" (crunchy/soft and smiling). These lexical choices convey a sense of lightness, gentleness, and joy. Specifically, they refer to the visual expression of the *topeng Panji* character, particularly in the depiction of the mouth—delicate (*renyah*) and shaped in a subtle smile (*tersungging senyum*). These features signify a positive behavioral representation and are used by the author to express an evaluative stance toward the character.

The smiling expression is symbolic of childlike innocence and joy, connecting the *topeng Panji* mask to the early phase of human life namely childhood. Children are typically associated with emotions such as happiness, warmth, and tenderness, and are often perceived as pure and close to the spiritual ideal (*fitrah* in Islamic belief). By describing the *topeng Panji* mask as having a mouth that is

soft, expressive, and gently smiling, the author reinforces the idea that this mask embodies the traits of childhood purity and emotional openness.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Matanya yang sipit dan hidungnya yang mancung merunduk mempertegas kesan kehalusan dan kelembutan perangnya</i>	<i>sipit</i>	Relational process	Normality (+)

The word “*sipit*” (narrow or slanted) refers to the eyes of *topeng Panji* specifically highlighting a key element used by the author to convey evaluative meaning. The *topeng Panji* is described and judged by the speaker as having narrow eyes which is interpreted as a symbolic feature rather than a purely physical one. Narrow eyes in this context are not seen as a flaw, but rather as a marker of innocence, humility, and introspection, often associated with childhood. This interpretation contributes to a judgment with *positive normality* meaning that the trait is socially accepted and even valued within the cultural framework being discussed.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Bentuk mukanya memancarkan kewibawaan</i>	<i>kewibawaan</i>	Identifying relational process	Normality (+)

The clause contains *positive normality* judgment with the word ‘*kewibawaan*’. This word means “*pembawaan untuk dapat menguasai, memengaruhi, dan dihormati orang lain melalui sikap dan tingkah laku yang mengandung kepemimpinan dan penuh daya tarik*” (<https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/wibawa>). So, the author describes and evaluates *Panji* character with dignity face because it’s the real character of *Panji* than others mask.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Bahkan Topeng Panji dalam hubungannya dengan cerita panji seringkali sebagai manifestasi dari tokoh Panji Inu Kertapati</i>	<i>manifestasi</i>	Identifying relational process	Normality (+)

The word ‘*manifestasi*’ refers to *positive normality* judgment because *topeng Panji* as the implementation or manifestation character of Inu Kertapati based on some references. “*Topeng Cirebon berorientasi dari cerita Panji, kisah kepahlawan raja-raja Jawa yang banyak dijadikan tema dalam seni pertunjukan tradisi, bukan hanya di Jawa dan Bali tapi juga di beberapa negara Asia Tenggara seperti Thailand*” (<https://isibali.ac.id/topeng-meningkap-karakter-manusia-dan-sejarah-masyarakat/>). So, *topeng Panji Cirebon* is inspired by the Javanese king that makes the mask is special in this research.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Tetapi ada yang menyebutnya Panji Asmarabangun atau Panji Gagak Pernala.</i>	<i>menyebutnya</i>	Verbal process	Normality (+)

The author describes *topeng Panji* character as same as with Panji Asmarabangun or Panji Gagak Pernala. “*Topeng Panji Inukertapati, Panji Inukertapati memiliki nama lain Panji Asmarabangun ia diceritakan memiliki istri Dewi Sekartaji atau Galun Candrakirana. Kisah itu berlatar di Kerajaan Kadiri.*” (<https://krungu.id/audioguide/821>). Next, the word ‘*menyebutnya*’ represents *positive normality* of judgment because some references mentioned that *topeng Panji* has another title or name. Panji Asmarabangun which it is inspired by the name Prabu Lembu Hamimulur’s son of Jenggala. The existence of the Jenggala king and the king of Kediri in the Panji story. It can be analogized the two lords of the Jenggala and Panjalu regions who were the sons of Airlangga king. So,

it makes *positive normality* for *topeng Panji Cirebon* character that it has many backstories especially the king story.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
Raja Jengala yang bernama Prabu Lembu Amiluhur mempunyai dua orang putera, Panji Asmarabangun yang dijuluki Panji Inu Kertapati dan Panji Gagak Pernala	<i>mempunyai</i>	Identifying relational process	Normality (+)

The word ‘*mempunyai*’ means “to have”. Thus, Jengala king (Prabu Lembu Amiluhur) had two sons, Panji Asmarabangun (Inu Kertapati) and Panji Gagak Pernala who was the younger brother of Asmarabangun. This indicates that the character of *topeng Panji* is special, majesty and high. It is inspired by the son of Jengala king. So, the author gives the evaluation with *positive normality* because *topeng Panji* deserves to be called it and it is very normal or common in the story.

Tenacity (how resolute they are) values are inscribed in terms of the target's accomplishments, and any claim to have successfully done something or shown determination or willingness to sustain work towards some goal may invoke positive values. For example:

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
Topeng ini jika dipakai menari tatapannya menyudut 45 derajat. Bentuk topeng dengan ciri-ciri seperti itu menunjukkan bahwa itu berkarakter halus.	<i>menyudut</i>	Material process	Tenacity (+)

The word ‘*menyudut*’ refers to the gaze of *topeng Panji* which the author describes as a significant aspect of the character. According to the definition, ‘*menyudut*’ can mean "towards an angle" or "taking a particular view or perspective". In this context, the term is not merely describing a physical eye direction but is rich with symbolic meaning. The angled gaze—positioned at approximately 45 degrees—is a deliberate artistic choice that reflects how *topeng Panji* is portrayed as a thoughtful, observant, and reflective figure.

Social Sanction

Social sanction refers to the approval, disapproval, or acceptance given by a society or a social group for specific behaviors or actions. These sanctions can be formal or informal and are a way for society to regulate behavior, reinforce norms, and maintain social order. Social sanctions can take the form of rewards for conforming to social norms or punishments for violating them.

Propriety refers to the quality of being appropriate, fitting, or conforming to accepted social, moral, or ethical standards. It involves behaviors, actions, or decisions that are in line with established norms and principles. In other words, it is about “how far beyond reproach”

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
Matanya yang sipit dan hidungnya yang mancung merunduk mempertegas kesan kehalusan dan kelembutan perangnya	<i>mancung merunduk</i>	Attributive relation process	Propriety (+)

The clause contains judgment with *positive propriety*, as seen in the phrase “*mancung merunduk*” which refers to the nose of *topeng Panji*. The word “*mancung*” means "pointed" or "sharp," while “*merunduk*” means "to bow" or "to look downward." This combination of physical attributes is rich in symbolic meaning. While a sharp or prominent nose (*mancung*) may typically be associated with strength, clarity, or high status, its downward tilt (*merunduk*) conveys humility, modesty, and respect.

Thus, even though the character possesses a strong and defined feature, it is tempered by virtue—indicating that *topeng Panji* is not proud, boastful, or arrogant.

This specific physical description reflects a deeper cultural judgment: the mask is evaluated positively not only in terms of aesthetic appeal but also in terms of moral character. The downward-tilted nose can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for propriety—an ethical stance that aligns with Javanese cultural values where humility and self-control are highly respected traits. In this way, the physical form of the mask expresses a moral message: even those with admirable qualities (sharpness, intelligence, beauty) should remain grounded, humble, and respectful.

In appraisal theory, this constitutes positive judgment under the category of propriety, which asks: *Is the character ethically good? Is their behavior socially acceptable or beyond reproach?* Here, the *topeng Panji* character is clearly represented as such—a figure of high ethical standards, someone who possesses inner strength (*mancung*) yet carries themselves with grace and humility (*merunduk*).

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Sorot matanya tak pernah mendongak dan lebih terkesan selalu merunduk tajam</i>	<i>tak pernah mendongak</i>	Material process	Propriety (+)

The phrase “*tak pernah mendongak*” (never looks up) comes from the verb “*mendongak*,” which, according to the [KBBI](#), means “*to lift slightly upward and toward the face; to look up.*” In the context of *topeng Panji*, this expression is used to describe the gaze direction of the mask, emphasizing that its eyes never turn upward. This seemingly small detail carries significant symbolic and evaluative meaning.

In cultural and performative terms, looking up (*mendongak*) can often be associated with pride, arrogance, or a desire to dominate one’s surroundings. By contrast, the fact that *topeng Panji* “never looks up” (*tak pernah mendongak*) reflects a sense of humility, respect, and social awareness. This creates a clear example of judgment with positive propriety—a form of appraisal in which a character is evaluated in terms of ethical behavior and moral virtue. The mask is constructed and interpreted as beyond reproach—a figure that rejects arrogance and exudes dignity through restraint and modesty.

In the context of Javanese philosophy, such demeanor aligns with ideals of *alus* (refinement) and *tata krama* (social etiquette), emphasizing harmony, inner control, and the subordination of ego to communal balance. By embodying these virtues, Panji becomes more than a character—he is an exemplar of moral conduct and social refinement, with every gesture reinforcing his symbolic role as a cultural paragon.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Sorot matanya tak pernah mendongak dan lebih terkesan selalu merunduk tajam</i>	<i>selalu merunduk tajam</i>	Material process	Propriety (+)

The word ‘*merunduk*’ means “*menengok/melihat dengan pandangan ke bawah*” (looked down/with downcast eyes). The eyes of *topeng Panji* are depicted as always looking down and it indicates that he is not haughty and or arrogant despite his sharp eyesight. Furthermore, by never appearing to look up, *topeng Panji* exhibits a behavior that aligns with *positive propriety*. It suggests humility, modesty, and respectfulness—values that are highly esteemed in many traditional Javanese and Cirebonese cultural frameworks. The act of ‘*merunduk*’ stands in contrast to behaviors that may be judged as ‘*congkak*’ (arrogant), ‘*sombong*’ (proud) or ‘*menantang*’ (defiant). Thus, the downward gaze becomes a semiotic signifier of virtuous character, reinforcing the moral image of Panji as a noble, wise, and ethically grounded figure.

The last, even though Panji is described as having ‘*penglihatan tajam*’ (sharp eyesight), the fact that he does not show it off or use it to dominate others visually adds depth to his characterization. It emphasizes inner strength and self-control—he has the ability but chooses restraint. This combination of sharp vision and downward gaze can be read as a metaphor for clarity of insight paired with moral discipline.

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Topeng ini jika dipakai menari tatapannya menyudut 45 derajat. Bentuk topeng dengan ciri-ciri seperti itu menunjukkan bahwa itu berkarakter halus.</i>	<i>berkarakter halus</i>	Identifying relational process	Propriety (+)

The clause contains *positive propriety* judgment which it shows in the word ‘*berkarakter halus*’ (not abusive, gentle, good). The combination of a gentle character (*berkarakter halus*) and the non-confrontational gaze further affirms Panji’s moral identity as someone who avoids boasting or dominating others. This supports the evaluation under positive propriety because it shows that his external behavior (e.g., posture and gaze) aligns with internal values (e.g., humility, kindness, ethical self-restraint). So, the author tries to illustrate that *topeng Panji* has a gentle or kind character. Then, it can be proof by his gaze angled at 45 degrees which it still doesn’t seem to rise (arrogant).

Appraising Items	Appraised	Form	Judgment
<i>Nada bicaranya pelan, gerak geriknya halus serta pembawaannya yang pelan.</i>	<i>pelan, halus</i>	Identifying relational process	Propriety (+)

The word ‘*pelan*’ represents *positive propriety* judgment that means ‘*lambat*’ (<https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/pelan>) or “slowly or softly”. Then, the word ‘*halus*’ means “smooth”. The author does more than describe Panji’s demeanor; they evaluate his behavior as morally commendable. In the judgment system, it evaluates how appropriately or ethically a character acts according to social values. A slow and smooth movement then as well as a soft-spoken voice are signals of emotional discipline, humility, and respect for others key elements of propriety in traditional performance aesthetics.

Moreover, Panji as the central character in *topeng Cirebon*, represents the idealized nobleman or prince (*priyayi*) a figure who embodies politeness, wisdom, and self-control. His performance is not just theatrical but didactic and symbolic. He teaches through his calmness, communicates through grace, and leads through ethical behavior. The soft voice and gentle movement are part of his moral identity and cultural role. Thus, these descriptive words are loaded with cultural and evaluative meaning. They affirm that Panji’s actions are not abrupt, aggressive, or impulsive qualities that might be negatively judged as *kasar* (harsh) or *sombong* (arrogant). Instead, his gentleness reflects social harmony and moral virtue, qualities admired and taught through traditional performance art.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes significantly to the growing body of literature at the intersection of systemic functional linguistics (SFL); appraisal theory and traditional cultural performance. By examining the lens of judgment in *topeng Panji*, it reveals how attitudinal language encodes ethical and philosophical values embedded in cultural artifacts. The analysis uncovers how specific material and behavioral processes such as facial expressions and gestures which are linguistically constructed to reflect Javanese philosophical ideals and Islamic moral teachings. Furthermore, this study enriches the understanding of how traditional art forms serve as moral texts and it is not only performed or viewed. Then, read and interpreted through evaluative language. It bridges the gap between linguistic and cultural studies that language is not only descriptive but deeply constructive in shaping cultural identity and moral character.

A detailed clauses such as “*renyah, tersungging senyum, mata menyudut, mancung merunduk, dan tak pernah mendongak,*” becomes evident of the *topeng Panji*. The mask is not merely a physical artifact but it has a rich cultural shaped by evaluative language. Each clause reveals how the author or speaker constructs *topeng Panji* as a character embodying *positive* judgment especially in the dimensions of normality, propriety, and behavioral expression. The soft smile and narrow gaze represent childlike innocence and inner peace while the angled eyes and bowed nose reflect humility, modesty and introspective wisdom. Moreover, the deliberate portrayal of *Panji* as “never looking up” emphasizes a consistent moral stance: the rejection of arrogance and the embrace of ethical humility. These features described through material and behavioral processes. Position *topeng Panji* as a cultural

ideal—a figure who exemplifies moral virtue, spiritual balance, and social grace. In sum, the mask is not only an artistic expression but also a visual narrative of ethical excellence and cultural identity, conveyed subtly through language and form.

There are some suggestions for the further research. Firstly, comparative analysis across regions: Future research could compare the use of attitudinal language in representing other traditional masks or characters from different Indonesian regions, such as *topeng Bali*, *Reog Ponorogo*, or *Wayang Kulit* to identify regional variations in encoding ethical values. Next, multimodal appraisal analysis: This study focuses on linguistic features, integrating visual semiotics (e.g., color, movement, costume) with linguistic appraisal to provide a more holistic understanding of character construction in performance. Thirdly, audience reception studies: Another avenue is to investigate how modern audiences interpret and emotionally respond to evaluative features in traditional performances. This would provide insight into the continuity and transformation of cultural values across generations. Fourthly, pedagogical application: The richness of evaluative language in cultural texts, researchers could explore how *topeng Panji* and similar narratives can be used in educational context especially in teaching character education, ethics, and local wisdom through literature or language curricula. The last, digital documentation and corpus linguistics: Creating a corpus of descriptive texts or scripts related to *topeng Panji* could enable quantitative appraisal analysis to identify patterns in attitude, engagement, and graduation, contributing to corpus-based cultural linguistics.

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