

**REPRESENTATION OF BORDERLINE INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING IN THE *MIRACLE IN CELL*
NO.7 MOVIE: A SEMIOTIC STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the representation of borderline intellectual function in the film "Miracle in Cell No. 7" using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, focusing on denotation, connotation, and myth to reveal the symbolic meaning depicted. This theory is crucial for movie analysis as it provides a structured approach to uncovering deeper meanings in visual and narrative elements. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method, analyzing six key scenes from "Miracle in Cell No. 7" involving various situations. Data collection involved detailed observation of the main character's behavior. The analysis process includes identifying, classifying, and interpreting relevant scenes to reveal the underlying meanings of the borderline intellectual functions depicted in the movie. The result shows that the main character's denotation presents him as a responsible individual. The connotation of his actions defies common stereotypes by highlighting his emotional intelligence, empathy, and moral integrity. Myth analysis reveals that the movie refutes the societal myth that borderline intellectual function significantly hinders a meaningful life. In conclusion, this research emphasizes the role of movies in challenging societal prejudices and promoting a more inclusive and empathetic understanding of individuals with borderline intellectual functioning.

Keywords: Borderline Intellectual Functioning, Movie, Semiotic Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication, encompassing the exchange of knowledge, opinions, and feelings through agreed signs, sounds, or gestures, forms the basis of social interaction and is known as the communication system. When these elements are structured into sentences, it is called language, which includes both verbal and non-verbal signs (Tseng, 2018). Verbal communication involves words, phrases, and sentences, whereas non-verbal communication relies on facial expressions and body language. Linguistics, the scientific study of language, provides deeper insights into literary works, as language is fundamental to their existence (Gordon & Ladefoged, 2001). The evolution of language studies gave rise to modern linguistics, initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure, which explores the essence and role of language in human life (Ji, 1997). Saussure's semiotic theory, further developed by Roland Barthes into concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, offers a dynamic approach to understanding signs and meanings in various forms (Septiana, 2019).

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Semiotics examines culture, society, and natural phenomena as signs, aiming to uncover the meanings behind them (Koppa, 2010). According to Littlejohn (2009), semiotics helps interpret meanings within signs, revealing how messages are constructed by communicators (Kevinia et al., 2022). Analyzing semiotics can uncover unconscious meanings related to borderline intellectual functioning disseminated through culture, which influence social practices and behaviors (Kwiatkowska-Ciotucha et al., 2022). Movies, as a cultural medium, effectively convey messages through visual and auditory elements, influencing audience perceptions.

Borderline Intellectual Functioning (BIF) is often misrepresented or ignored in mainstream media. The film "Miracle in Cell No. 7" portrays the struggles of individuals with BIF, challenging societal perceptions and advocating for a more inclusive understanding. The film's significant impact, as evidenced by its box office success and numerous awards, underscores its cultural relevance and the need to analyze its representation of BIF (Harris, 2023).

Previous studies on media representation of individuals with unique intellectual functions have predominantly focused on negative stereotypes and misrepresentations. These studies highlight how media perpetuates stigmatizing views and reinforces societal biases. However, there is a noticeable gap in examining how positive portrayals can reshape societal attitudes and promote inclusive perceptions of BIF. This research aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the semiotic elements in "Miracle in Cell No. 7," exploring how the film's depiction of BIF counters stereotypes and fosters empathy and understanding among viewers.

Several studies have utilized semiotic analysis methods to understand movie content through different lenses. For example, Putri et al. (2022) analyzed the semiotic meaning in the "Aladdin" movie, while Nauli & Halomoan (2021) examined the signs in "Forget Me Not" using Barthes' theory. Wulandari (2020) focused on the denotation, connotation, and myth in "The Gentlemen," and Kevinia et al. (2022) analyzed body movements in the Indonesian version of "Miracle in Cell No. 7." These studies share a common methodological approach but differ in their specific focus areas, illustrating the versatility of Barthes' semiotic theory in film analysis. This research builds on these foundations, focusing on the depiction of BIF in "Miracle in Cell No. 7," to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of intellectual functioning in media.

II. METHOD

In this research, researcher categorize it into a descriptive qualitative method, because the research data is in the form of screen captures showing scenes and words originating from the dialogue of the Miracle in Cell No.7 movie. According to Creswell (2010), a qualitative approach is a method used to form knowledge statements based on constructive perspectives, such as meaning that comes from personal experience, social values, and history. The aim is to develop a particular theory or pattern of knowledge. It can also be based on a participatory perspective which includes an orientation towards politics, issues, collaboration, change, or a combination of both.

1. Data and Source of Data

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The source of data for this research is the *Miracle in Cell No. 7* movie, directed by Lee Hwan-kyung and distributed by Next Entertainment World in 2013 (Avd, 2023). The data consists of several screen captures from six scenes in the movie, including images and dialogues relevant to the context of this research.

2. Technique of Collecting Data

In this research, data was collected using observation methods and writing techniques. As Sudaryanto (2015) says, the method of observing is by observing language use. In collecting data, researchers carried out several activities, including the following:

- a. The researcher watched the *Miracle in Cell No.7* movie.
- b. The researcher identified data through dialogue and actions related to good behavior carried out by main character in the *Miracle in Cell No. 7* movie.
- c. The researcher classified data obtained from the *Miracle in Cell No. 7* movie, sort through dialogue and actions of characters, then write down the data so that it makes it easier for researchers to analyze data that is closely related to the topic being discussed.
- d. The researcher chose parts of scenes in the *Miracle in Cell No. 7* movie that relate to the intellectual function and adaptive behavior of the main character.

3. Technique of Analyzing Data

According to Moleong (2007), qualitative analysis is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. The data analysis technique in this research was carried out by depiction of borderline intellectual functioning in the *Miracle in Cell No. 7* movie by using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, namely by referring to meaning systems, such as denotation, connotation, and myth.

According to Sudaryanto (2015), data analysis is the researcher's action in directly dealing with the problems in the data. This research is categorized as a qualitative method and the researcher as an instrument uses observation methods, documented to collect data, and referential methods to analyze data. The four steps are as follows:

- a. The researcher grouped data in figures related to the depiction of the borderline intellectual function possessed by the main character in the *Miracle in Cell No.7* movie.
- b. The researcher organized the data by selecting relevant data and classifying and interpreting it based on the concept of Roland Barthes' theory, namely denotation, connotation, and myth.
- c. The researcher made the interrelation between data description and theory to derive findings aligned with the research objectives, (1) to find out the denotation, connotation, and myth meaning of the main character in the *Miracle in Cell No.7* movie, (2) to analyze the representation of the intellectual function and adaptive behavior of the main character with borderline intellectual functioning in the *Miracle in Cell No.7* movie.
- d. The researcher drew a conclusion based on the analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION





Visual	Situation
	<p>Lee Yong-Goo was reaching for something in the pocket of his parking uniform.</p>
	<p>Lee Yong-Goo took an envelope from the pocket of his parking uniform.</p>
	<p>Inside the envelope were several bills.</p>
	<p>Lee Yong-Goo counted the money from the envelope.</p>

Figure 1. The main character takes a role as a parking attendant.

A. Denotation

Denotation according to Barthes (1968) refers to the direct or literal meaning of a sign or situation, without additional interpretation or deeper cultural meaning. In this scene, the researcher sees Lee Yong-Goo working as a parking lot attendant. He is wearing an orange parking attendant uniform, the characteristic of his job. This uniform includes a brightly colored traffic stick used to direct vehicles. Next to Lee Yong-Goo, a water bottle, and a parking stick is showing his equipment during work. The background of this scene is a parking lot, which indicates his daily work environment.

Lee Yong-Goo sits alone while counting the money he earns from his parking lot job. This depicts a routine activity after organizing and supervising the parked vehicles. From this situation, researchers can see that Lee Yong-Goo's job involves a lot of interaction with vehicles and drivers, as well as the responsibility of maintaining order in the parking area. This scene directly shows the basic aspects of Lee Yong-Goo's daily life as a parking lot attendant, without touching on any other symbolic or interpretative meanings.

B. Connotation

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Connotation according to Barthes (1968) refers to the deeper or symbolic meaning associated with a sign or situation, which goes beyond the literal definition. In this scene, Lee Yong-Goo who works as a parking attendant, wears an orange uniform, not only denoting his occupational identity but also depicting his social and economic status. The orange color of his uniform can be interpreted as a symbol of enthusiasm and motivation. This color can raise enthusiasm and encourage someone to take action (Zakawali, 2024). The traffic stick he carries reflects the little authority he has in the job, although in the grand scheme of life, his power is very limited. The drinking bottle beside him indicates the need for physical endurance in his job which demands outdoor presence, often in unpredictable weather conditions.

As Lee Yong-Goo sits alone counting the money he earns, the researcher can see the symbolism of solitude and hard work that is not always appreciated by society. The money he counts, while representing the rewards of his hard work, can also be seen as a symbol of the financial struggles he faces every day. Lee Yong-Goo's solitude at the moment mirrors the condition of many manual laborers who often feel isolated in the hustle and bustle of city life. The parking lot in the background, often perceived as a transitional or temporary space, illustrates Lee Yong-Goo's position in the social structure as someone who is often overlooked by those just passing by.

C. Myth

According to Barthes (1972), myths are how meaning is added to cultural signs, shaping certain ideologies and worldviews. In the context of the scene of Lee Yong-Goo working as a parking attendant, the myths formed can reveal a deeper view of the role and identity of manual laborers in society. Lee Yong-Goo wears an orange uniform and holds a traffic stick, which not only shows his job, but also creates an image of powerlessness in the social hierarchy. The uniform and work tools become symbols of an identity that is regulated and limited by strict work rules, emphasizing the narrative that manual laborers are often considered part of the functioning machinery of society, but are not personally valued.

Lee Yong-Goo sits alone while counting his money, addressing the myth of the working man struggling in solitude and without adequate social support. This scene highlights the ideology that hard work and personal sacrifice are often not recognized or rewarded in a society that judges people based on economic status. This myth reinforces the view that individuals like Lee Yong-Goo, although vital to the daily workings of society, are often marginalized and overlooked. The parking lot as a backdrop reinforces this narrative, as a temporary and transitional space, reflecting his social position that is perceived as transient and impermanent, even though his work is an integral part of the smooth running of urban life.

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2024), intellectual disability is defined as significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Adults may struggle in

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workplaces where they receive no accommodations for challenges in concentrating, following complex instructions, multitasking, and exercising independent judgment. Individuals with BIF are more likely to succeed when supported and given concrete, predictable tasks (ABA, 2017). In this research, the researcher analyzed to prove that the main character in the Miracle in Cell No.7 movie does not fully experience intellectual limitations, but rather has borderline intellectual function through the selected scene.

a. Personal Care

In Figure 1 Lee Yong-Goo's ability to continue working as a parking attendant and managing his finances shows independence in caring for himself and work responsibilities.

b. Job Responsibilities

In Figure 1 as a parking attendant, Lee Yong-Goo shows the ability to do work that requires responsibility and practical skills, showing independence in work tasks.

c. Managing Money

In Figure 1 when Lee Yong-Goo sits alone counting his money, this shows his ability to manage money.

d. Recreation

There are no specific points indicating the recreational aspect in this analysis.

e. Organizing School and Work Tasks

In Figure 1 the organization and supervision of parked vehicles show Lee Yong-Goo's ability to organize work tasks. Then in Figure 6 Lee Yong-Goo's rescue actions in emergencies such as fire show good practical abilities in dealing with critical situations and organizing the necessary actions.

IV. CONCLUSION

Research conducted on the film Miracle in Cell No. 7 is categorized as a qualitative descriptive method and semiotic analysis to reveal significant insights regarding depicting the main character as a borderline intellectual function in the media. This research shows how the film challenges common myths and stereotypes about intellectual limitations by examining specific screenshots and using Roland Barthes' theory. This shows Lee Yong-Goo as a person who is capable and responsible in his work. These depictions collectively highlight that individuals with limited intellectual functioning can lead meaningful lives, thereby encouraging a more inclusive and realistic understanding of their abilities.

By depicting characters in depth, these films help change societal perceptions, reduce stigma, and increase acceptance of individuals with limited intellectual functioning. Lee Yong-Goo's portrayal underscores that intellectual limitations do not determine a person's worth or limit their potential to contribute positively to society. Overall, realistic and inclusive media representations such as these can serve as important tools for education and social change, expanding our understanding of the potential and capabilities of individuals with intellectual

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disabilities and limited intellectual functioning. This encourages the creation of a more empathetic and inclusive society.

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