



# The Semiotics of *Luck*: Interpreting Visual Metaphors in the Animated Film

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> 2024-05-14 <b>Revised:</b> 2024-06-07 <b>Accepted:</b> 2024-06-09</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Charles Sanders Peirce; Luck; Semiotics Analysis</p>	<p>This study examines the symbolic meanings conveyed through visual metaphors in the 2022 animated film <i>Luck</i>. Utilizing Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, the research aims to identify and interpret the signs present within the movie. The study employs a qualitative research paradigm and a descriptive approach, collecting data through repeated viewings of the film and cataloging the identified signs as icons, indexes, or symbols per Peirce's triadic model. The analysis reveals a total of 16 signs, comprising 3 icons, 4 indexes, and 9 symbols, which are then subjected to semiotic analysis. The findings demonstrate that the iconic signs, such as the photograph of the protagonist Sam as a child, symbolize his past. Indexical signs, like the list of orphanages he resided in, indicate his nomadic upbringing. Symbolic representations, including the four-leaf clover and the leprechaun characters, signify cultural notions of luck and fortune. The pervasive use of the color green and imagery like ladybugs further reinforce the thematic exploration of luck and prosperity. Overall, the movie <i>Luck</i> employs a rich tapestry of visual symbols to delve into complex concepts like fate, perspective, and fortune, enhancing the narrative depth and enriching the viewing experience.</p>

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## INTRODUCTION

Due to their social nature, humans need to communicate with others all the time. Linguistics is undoubtedly a tool used in communication. Humans can interact with each other not just through words but also through signs (Danesi, 2004). Signs can be any physical form imagined or made externally (via a physical medium) to represent an object, event, feeling, etc. that is known as a referent, or they can be physical forms created for a class of similar (or related) objects, events, feelings, etc. that are known as the referential domain (Sebeok, 2001). Movies use a variety of signals as a communication tool to draw viewers in and convey brief ideas. Examining the signals in movies or other media can change people's perspectives. The ability of movies to provide meaning and information through scenes is one of their strongest strengths. Every action, sound, picture, and detail in a film must have a purpose. Movies contain indicators that can be interpreted in the context of scenes, texts, visuals, and scenarios (Deledalle, 2000). Consequently, as movies are typically composed of several signs, one of the domains in which semiotics is applied is the film industry. Movies also depict real life in their depictions. Films can include a variety of topics, including disasters, science, romance, and even danger.

The movie is one of the multipurpose forms of entertainment media. The film serves as a source of entertainment, but its symbolism also suggests that it has educational, persuasive, and informational goals. Given its various applications and the community's widespread acceptance of it, the movie is among the most efficient ways to convey a message. If there is context and a wealth of meanings or symbols, the content of the movie will change. Films with a lot of signs, symbols, and emblems will make it difficult for the audience to understand the purpose and core of the work (Septiani et al., 2019). Numerous movies highlight the symbols in their narratives and the film *Luck* (2022) is one of them.

The main purpose of this research is to identify and explain the meaning of signs from the animated movie *Luck*. The symbolic elements in Apple's original movie *Luck* play an important role in conveying



deeper meaning and enriching the storytelling experience. Directed by Peggy Holmes and Javier Abad, the film delves into the intricacies of luck and perspective through a visually captivating narrative. Symbolism serves as a powerful tool within the film, allowing for the exploration of complex themes and emotions that resonate with audiences. By analyzing the use of symbols in *Luck*, we can gain insight into how these elements contribute to the overall thematic depth and impact of the animated production. *Luck's* movie is interesting to study using Peirce's semiotic theory based on its object to see the meaning and signs in the movie. The results of this study can be found using the concepts of icon, index, and symbol.

### **Semiotic**

The word *semiotics* derives its etymology from the Greek word 'semion', which means sign (Chandler, 2007). Although German philosopher, Lambert, first coined the term semiotics in the 18th century, the formal study of signs started in Europe and America in the middle of the 19th century. Semiotic analysis is a scientific or analytical approach to evaluating signs, where a sign is a tool that people use to interpret the world around them. Signs can be in the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, objects, or other semiotic elements (Sulistiawati et al., 2024). Any object having meaning that can be identified as a sign can be found anywhere, including signs that appear as words, signs in human movement, signs in traffic lanes, entry signs, the national flag, and more.

Peirce's Semiotic or Sign Theory designates a meaning, reference, and representation type. Three interconnected components of communication make up Peirce's semiotic: a sign, an object, and an interpreter. According to Peirce cited in (Chandler, 2007), semiotics is a triadic paradigm that explains the relationship between the interpretant (the potential meaning or sense produced of the representation) the object (what it stands for or represents), and the sign (that is, what it symbolizes).

Charles Sanders Peirce is famously known for his triadic model and trichotomy concept (Atmaja, 2021) which consists of the following:

1. Representamen (or Sign): The representamen is the entity responsible for representation, embodying the sign itself. It possesses the capability to symbolize something else.
  - a. Qualisign is a sign that transforms into a sign based on its inherent characteristics.
  - b. Sinsign is signs that transition into signs based on their configuration or manifestation in the physical world.
  - c. Legisign is a sign that evolves into a sign based on an agreed-upon rule, a tradition, or a set of regulations.
2. Object: The object is the entity to which the representamen alludes, representing the entity itself. It may manifest in actuality or the realm of imagination.
  - a. Icon is a sign that exhibits similarity to the object it signifies or a sign that employs resemblances or shared attributes with its intended meaning.
  - b. Index is a sign that establishes a connection or proximity to its representation.
  - c. Symbol is a sign in which the correlation between the sign and its referent is defined by an accepted convention or mutual accord.
3. Interpretant: The interpretant is the cognitive construct that emerges within the consciousness of an observer (an individual or another sign system) upon encountering the representamen. It encapsulates the significance attributed to the sign.
  - a. Rheme occurs when the symbol's interpretation signifies a meaning that can further be elaborated upon.
  - b. Dicisign (dicentsign) emerges when there exists a genuine relationship between the symbol and its interpretation.
  - c. Argument arises when a sign and its interpretation possess a universal quality.

### **METHODS**

This study employs a semiotic analysis technique inside the qualitative research paradigm. Research with written results that are presented inductively is known as qualitative research (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). Qualitative research outputs will be controlled and condensed. After that, the information will be given verbally and visually. Additionally, the descriptive approach involves conducting research and presenting the findings in an organized way using preset procedures and methodologies. The findings are then compared to reality as it already exists. Through the use of the film that served as the research subject, the investigator carried out a semiotic investigation. Because semiotic study reads the markers in a film, the

researcher is an instrument that determines the film's success. Semiotic analysis is the method employed. This semiotic strategy is applied by closely examining all movies, news articles, and books, paying particular attention to the terminology and notice mechanisms. Research is being done on icons, indices, and symbols in the interim. The film *Luck* serves as the primary source for this study. Scholars are expected to consider the coherence of the text and its context in addition to the coherence of meaning inside the movie and between its segments.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers found and selected 16 images based on the footage in the movie, there are 3 icons, 4 indexes, and 9 symbols in this chapter. The author uses Charles Peirce's theory of icons, index, and symbols to analyze the data.

### *Icon*



**Figure 1.** Photo of Sam as A Child (Time 05:34)

In the picture above, there is a picture of little Sam that has the words “Sam's first weekend visit”, this photo was taken many years ago when Sam was still a child. She is standing in front of the door of an orphanage. This photo depicts what Sam looked like in the past.



**Figure 2.** The Leprechauns in The Land of Luck (Time 24:04)

In the picture, there are two leprechauns. In this movie, the leprechaun is one of the creatures that also inhabits the land of luck and creates luck for people on Earth. A leprechaun (Irish: leipreachán) in Irish mythology is a male fairy that inhabits the land of Ireland. Along with other fairies, Leprechauns inhabited the land of Ireland before the arrival of the Celts. They are described as old men who enjoy mischief. They traded by selling pebbles or became shoemakers. They were said to be very rich. The picture above shows what a leprechaun looks like. By using their luck magic, these faeries enable a leprechaun to bestow luck on

himself or others. Leprechauns are also capable of conjuring riches—either actual gold, which the faery fiercely guards, or faery gold, which fades with time and is used to mislead naive mortals.



**Figure 3.** Manequineko Statue (Time 20:46)

In the picture above there is an icon of a manequineko statue. A lucky cat statue originating from Japan. The Maneki-neko, also known as The Beckoning Cat or The Prosperity Cat, is a widely recognized emblem of prosperity and good fortune. These cats frequently wave their paws to welcome people in front of eateries, stores, residences, schools, and particularly temples (a shrine is even devoted to this symbol) (Swanson, 2019). However, lucky cat figurines are rarely used in homes. Lucky cats are also often called money cats. So, as the name suggests, these cats are primarily used to bring wealth prosperity, and of course, good luck.

#### ***Index***



**Figure 4.** Conversation Between the Orphanage Administrator and Sam (Time 04:10)

In the scene above, one of the workers at the orphanage says "If it were up to me, yes, but you're 18 now" after Sam had previously asked to stay a few days at the orphanage until Hazel found a family who would adopt him. "But, you're 18 now" indicates that Sam is 18 years old and should leave the orphanage and live independently. In general, an orphanage will protect and take responsibility for a foster child until the foster child is 18 years old because, according to the orphanage, the foster child is an adult.



**Figure 5.** List of Child Placement Agencies (Time 06:13)

In the picture above, there is a list of various names of child placement agencies or orphanages belonging to Sam. This indicates that Sam has moved around in many orphanages since he was a child



**Figure 6.** Sam's Books (Time 07:31)

The picture above shows some introductory business books on Sam's desk. The existence of these books indicates that Sam is learning about business using these books.



**Figure 7.** Bob Gives Instructions to Sam (Time 52:56)



In the cut scene above Bob instructs Sam to meet him somewhere. Bob explains where Sam should go. The sentence "go to Luck Tower right past the lost Sock Dispensary" means that Sam is instructed to go to "Luck Tower" bypassing the "Lost Sock Dispensary" which is on the right. In this context, "Luck Tower" is the name of a place or building, and "Lost Sock Dispensary" is the name of a specific location used as a reference point. So, the sentence gives directions to reach a place by using other locations as directions.

### ***Symbol***



**Figure 8.** Lucky Penny (Time 15:35)

The picture above shows a coin with a picture of a four-leaf clover which is categorized as a symbol of good luck. Since owning the penny, the life that was originally always filled with accidents and misfortune has now turned into full of luck. Lucky pennies are coins that people believe can bring good luck. People may carry lucky pennies in their pockets, keep them on their bedside table, or throw them into a fountain for a wish. Belief in the power of lucky pennies is often based on superstition or personal experience. Sometimes, "lucky pennies" can be used metaphorically to describe something unexpected that happens. For example, if you find a penny on the ground when you need a few cents to buy something, you could refer to it as a "lucky penny".



**Figure 9.** The four-Leaf Clover (Time 43:07)

The four-leaf clover is a widely recognized lucky charm that represents good fortune and is culturally recognized. According to traditional beliefs, this kind of clover brings good fortune. Since finding a genuine four-leaf clover is still uncommon and considered lucky, the four-leaf clover mythology endures today. The four connotations of trust, hope, love, and luck are still most frequently associated with each leaf of the clover today. There are still people who understand it in terms of the Trinity and the mercy of God. There are several uses for this symbol: it can be engraved on one's body, sculpted into coins for good luck, or put on greeting cards to wish people luck. All around the world, the four-leaf clover has the same metaphorical significance (Beyer, 2012).



**Figure 10.** The Dragon, CEO of Land of Luck (ITime 42:23)

In the movie *Luck*, the dragon character is a symbol of the power of funds being the luckiest creature ever. She is responsible for all the luck that is distributed to humans. One of the most prominent symbols in China's numerous stories, folklore, and customs is the dragon. Because the inhabitants of ancient China were mostly dependent on the weather for agriculture, they prayed for just the proper quantity of rain, which allowed the dragons to coexist with humans and offer protection and wisdom. As such, the dragon is considered the foundation of everything good and positive in Chinese culture. The dragon has long been seen as a lucky animal that grants people good fortune and favors (Willow, n.d.).



**Figure 11.** Bob the Black Cat (Time 22:55)

Bob is a symbol of bad luck. Bob's association with bad luck is in line with traditional superstitions that view black cats as harbingers of bad luck. This symbolism can be used to explore the power of belief and superstition in shaping our perceptions and experiences. However, the text in the scene above "Ha! In Scotland, black cats are considered very lucky" indicates that some cultures also consider black cats to be good luck. Although black cats are now considered lucky, in the past, they were thought to be connected to magic and were therefore frequently connected to wizards (Park, 2015).



**Figure 12.** Dominant Use of Green Color (Time 33:02)

The dominant use of green in this film is symbolic of luck, prosperity, and good fortune. In the film, this symbolism is evident in the green color of the Lucky Machine and the abundance of green foliage in the Land of Luck. This reinforces the idea that the film associates the color green with positive outcomes and desirable experiences. Green is also a symbol of nature, growth, and vitality. The lush greenery in the Land of Luck represents the abundance of nature and the potential for new beginnings and growth. This symbolism resonates with the movie's theme of personal transformation and growth. However, given that words that indicate "green" are frequently derived from terms that imply "growth" and "movement," it's probable that this lends this hue a sense of "energetic" as well (Johansson et al., 2019).



**Figure 13.** Black Clouds and Color Tones That Turn Darker (Time 1:15:12)

The clouds darken and the atmosphere becomes gloomy when there is a leak in the fortune machine so that no luck in the land of fortune and good fortune can be shared with humans. Black clouds are usually associated with darkness, storms, and difficulties. Black clouds symbolize impending challenges, obstacles, and potential danger. This symbolism is frequently employed to evoke a sense of foreboding, tension, or uncertainty in a narrative. So, black clouds are a symbol that contains meanings related to danger and uncertainty.





**Figure 14.** Ladybug That Delivers Good Fortune Leaves to The Luck Makers (Time 41:55)

In the cut scene above, it is explained that the ladybug delivers leaves to the foreman. The leaves are used to make lucky crystals. Throughout history, ladybugs have captured the imagination of many cultures. In Nordic mythology, they are associated with Freyja, the goddess of love and fertility. In Slavic folklore, they were believed to bring happiness and were called "God's little cows". During the Middle Ages in Europe, ladybugs were often considered a symbol of protection. Farmers believed that if ladybugs landed on their crops, they would be blessed with a bountiful harvest. In many Asian cultures, ladybugs are seen as a symbol of good luck and protection. In some regions, releasing ladybugs is believed to grant one's wishes. Native American tribes, such as the Cherokee, regard ladybugs as a sign of protection and good luck. The appearance of ladybugs is thought to signify that a wish will soon come true. Because the ladybug controls aphid populations, ancient farmers saw her as a favorable sign (Bashir, 2023).



**Figure 15.** The Luck Makers (Time 42:16)

In the cut scene above, it is explained that the pig is the creator of luck in the land of luck. In some cultures such as China, Japan, ancient Egypt, and ancient Greece, pigs symbolize luck, wealth, and prosperity. This is because the word "pig" in Chinese has a similar sound to the word "prosperity". Pigs are also often depicted in Chinese art and literature as symbols of good luck and prosperity. Pig statues (Inoshishi) are believed to bring good luck and are often placed in temples and shrines. In Ancient Egypt, pigs were associated with the goddess of fertility and reproduction. Female pigs were worshipped as the goddess Hathor, and pork was eaten in rituals to promote fertility. In Ancient Greece, pigs were sacrificed to the goddess Demeter, goddess of harvest and fertility. Pigs were also eaten in harvest celebrations as a symbol of abundance and fertility.



**Figure 16.** Tower 13 (Time 53:49)

The picture above shows a tower with the number 13, the tower is in the land of bad luck and misfortune. In some cultures, the number 13 is unlucky. According to the Stress Management Center and Phobia Institute in Asheville, North Carolina, the majority of hotels, hospitals, and airports also refrain from utilizing room and gate numbers, and over 80 percent of high-rise structures in the United States do not have a thirteenth floor. So, the number 13 in the picture above symbolizes the bad luck that people often fear.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study's findings indicate that the film *Luck* (2022) makes extensive use of symbols to imply deeper meaning. According to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, these symbols may be divided into three groups: icon, index, and symbol. Three icons, four indices, and nine symbols were discovered by the researchers in many movie sequences, as reported in the findings and discussion. Icons signs that are visually similar to the items they stand for. One image that symbolizes Sam's past is the picture of him when he was a child at the orphanage. Index signs that are associated or have a cause-and-effect relationship with the thing they are supposed to depict. Sam was a nomad, as evidenced by the number of orphanages he resided in. Symbols are signs, the meaning of which is established by consensus or cultural tradition. The four-leaf clover is a commonly known lucky charm. We can comprehend how the movie *Luck* employs visual components to examine concepts like fate, perspective, and luck by dissecting these symbols. These symbols provide the tale with a higher level of significance in addition to improving the watching experience.

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