

A Propaedeutic Augmentation of “Test” as a Signifying Universal Narrateme

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Received: 08-08-2025

Accepted: 05-12-2025

How to cite this article?

Ramakrishnan, M. 2025. ‘A Propaedeutic Augmentation of “Test” as a Signifying Universal Narrateme’. *Sampratyaya*, 2(2):15-38. <https://doi.org/10.21276/smpri.202512.22.a2>

Abstract

A folktale is a simple narrative form having figurative character filled with personages to accomplish certain actions, or involved in the temporal succession of functions. Of the thirty-one functions identified by Propp, by which the folktale genre can be defined, many of them can be subjected to in-depth study as they are potent enough to associate with human life outside the narrative discourse. The narrative schema, as per Proppian functions, which are paradigmatic in nature, displays a two-directional relation between the subject and the anti-subject with reference to the object. The folktales always present a pre-established schema of object transfer in which the object is treated as a locus where value is invested to qualify the object as an object of value, and once value is set around the object, both the subject and the anti-subject seek the same object of value, which makes the narrative dynamic and progressive. The ‘test’ becomes an important function within a narrative schema by which the hero/subject undergoes a rigorous procedure of demonstrating its competence of knowing-how-to-do, and the accomplishment of the ‘test’ facilitates the conjunction of the subject with the object of value, or with a sought-for-person, which eventually transforms the status of the subject. With the use of descriptive methodology, and also by employing structural theories of A.J. Greimas (1983), this study draws attention to the nature of “test” found in the folktales to contemplate the ‘test activities’ outside the narrative discourses. That means that by highlighting the appearance of “test” as a motif in folktales and its elevation to the level of function or narrateme by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology* (1968), this study theorises the significance of it both within and outside the narrative discourses, by arguing in favour of the inherent necessity of contemplating the invisible competence, a set of procedures through which the narrative subject “performs” the designated assignment(s) and such performance, as this study reveals, enables the narrative agent to ascertain its “ability” or “potentiality” that qualifies the hero/subject to progress towards the object, as per the prescribed task of a narrative programme. Therefore, by this augmentation of “test”, the signifying aspect of some of the universal features embedded in folktales can be found having their relevance outside the narrative world in shaping human society by providing opportunities to manifest one’s competence.

Keywords: Actants, Motifeme, Actualisation, Recurrence, Competence, Performance

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2.0 Introduction

Folklore, as the subject of Folkloristics that emerged in the nineteenth century (Dorson 1972), has long been collected and studied under the major groupings of oral literature, material culture, social folk customs and beliefs, and performing folk arts, and for Dorson these categories are neither ‘all-inclusive’ nor ‘mutually exclusive’ (1972:5). With the history of collection and use going back at least two thousand years, folklore continues to offer ample opportunities to test contemporary theories on the one hand and to understand human creativity, imagination and a vast amount of knowledge that reflects both the collective nature and continuity of human thought, on the other hand.

The material items that appear as genres or sub-genres within the four divisions of folklore, whether taken individually or together, contribute to the core task of studying folklife. Folklife is a broad and flexible term that reveals aspects of both traditional and modern societies, whether in rural or urban settings. Despite the fact that the items placed in these categories often show overlapping features, they cover all aspects of folklife, which is why folklore continues to assert its relevance as a field of inquiry across the humanities and social sciences. Beyond their creative, poetic, or intellectual appeals, Y. M. Sokolov (1950) captures their importance in his striking claim that “Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time it is also the vigorous voice of the present,” and that “Folklore has been, and continues to be, a reflection and a weapon of class conflict” (qtd. in Dorson 1972:17). Even this “social-political point of view” (cf. Sokolov 1950) should be understood as highlighting the functional role of folklore within a given society.

There are also interpretations of the paradox that folklore contains themes and ideas that may seem irrelevant to, or even violations of, the culture in which they exist, but these elements help create a world of fantasy, laughter, and humour—especially jokes—that allow community members to express suppressed tensions. Drawing on insights from Bronislaw Malinowski (1926), early folklore studies examined the various roles of folklore in its socio-cultural setting. William Bascom (1954, 1969) further strengthened this approach by identifying the functional roles of folklore and showing how each genre contributes to the well-being of society through specific cultural functions.

Whether helping in legal settlements, sharpening wits, validating conduct and beliefs, releasing pent-up hostilities, offering ego-reassurance, supporting divination, teaching moral values, expressing hopes, providing symbolism through substitution, or aiding cognitive processes, folklore has been recognised as relevant to both traditional and modern societies—even in a globalised world.

The functional dimension of folklore was further emphasised by Dorson’s hemispheric theory, which proposed that folklore should also be analysed through its ethnic, racial, and historical elements. Noting that the New World produced multiple overlapping traditions, Dorson urged folklorists to investigate the processes of syncretism, adaptation, acculturation, retention, accommodation, revitalisation, recession, and disappearance that shape folklore traditions (Dorson 1972:44).

This theory also highlighted the importance of historical and environmental factors, showing that folklore continually updates itself and remains relevant for understanding contemporary society. Since folklore appears in specific social and cultural situations—known as contexts—it is not merely a medium of communication but an active process of

communication. Therefore, the study of folklore must engage with theories of language, behaviour, communication, expression, and performance (Dorson 1972; see also Abraham 1969; Georges 1969; Dundes 1964; Goldstein 1967; Ben-Amos 1969, 1971).

This line of thought established that both the text and the event in which a tradition is performed or communicated are important for folklore studies and theory. Context adds depth to our understanding of culture, psycho-cultural relationships, and human creativity by showing how society is represented through action and performance. At the same time, non-contextual texts also offer ample scope for analysis, using critical theories widely discussed in the humanities and social sciences. However, by propaedeutic augmentation is considered here as a conditioned task that necessitates the accumulation of certain epistemological base to understand something as an extension of the accomplished task, that means that the contemplation of “test” (“narrateme”) found in folktales helps to generate a priori knowledge by which any non-narrative activities, where “test” (“motif”) is prominent, can be understood. Apart from different forms of narratives, ‘test’ occupies daily life of people, and it is inseparable as it appears to be a natural mechanism to expose subject’s competency or incompetency, and thus this gains its significance because it situates the test, which considered to be the modern and sophisticated mechanism of talent search and quality assessment, within oral literature – that makes this study relevant and contemporary.

2.1 Theoretical framework

As an extension of structural thinking, as a theoretical framework which is treated here as a platform on which other related theoretical components from the contemporary updates to be operated upon, this study theorises the nature and role of the “test” motif within and outside the narrative discourses, including oral literature. This structuralist perspective helps the study to highlight the point that universality and cultural specificity are the inherent features of the “test” motif, and when studied without contextual information, the text functions as an independent entity within a genre, allowing abstraction and comparison. And, as it elevates the “test” motif found in folktales to the level of narrateme, based on the Proppian identification of test as a function, this structuralist orientation operates as a handy methodological tool to extend a narrative component to understand the manifestation of its counterpart in the non-narrative activities.

Structural theory has been widely used in folklore studies to explore many dimensions of folklore, especially because of its influence in the 1960s. However, structural analysis had been introduced much earlier in works such as André Jolles’s *Einfache Formen* (1930), Lord Raglan’s *The Hero* (1930), and Vladimir Propp’s Russian edition of *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). The English translation of Propp’s work appeared in 1958 and was reissued in 1968, with an introduction by Alan Dundes. Dundes later developed his own structural approach in *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales* (1964), which inspired several structural models created by his followers (Dorson 1972). Moreover, if actions and tasks carried out by different characters overlap, this leads to the recognition that Antti Aarne’s (1961) taxonomy—based on performers—becomes inadequate. Characters cannot be consistently identified because they perform conflicting actions in different tales. Propp, therefore, through his analysis of Russian fairy tales, showed that it is the actions themselves that remain constant across tales, even when performed by different characters.

Propp called these actions “functions” and identified thirty-one of them, of which “Testing” (designated with the symbol “D”) was the twelfth function. The model proposed by Propp, in the place of the popular typology based on characters, was a welcoming affair and got the attention of young folklorists during the fifties and sixties (Dorson 1972). Even though the Proppian term “function” had been in currency, Dundes (1964) substituted it with “motifeme”—a term originally coined by Kenneth L. Pike—and proposed “allomotif” to bridge from Stith Thompson’s “vague use of motif” (Dorson 1972:35). The structural analysis had not been confined to a single stream, as scholars moved in different directions with evolved methods. For example, Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1963) explored the inherent structure in myth, and Dundes’ (1964) analysis emphasised paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures. However, as part of the criticism, structural analyses came to be understood as reducing folklore genres merely to universal models and formulas (Dorson 1972). Nevertheless, the Proppian model—along with its advancement by A. J. Greimas (1983) through his Actantial model—allows this study to expose both the universality and the cultural specificity inherent in the motif of “testing.” In this study, following Propp (1968) and Greimas (1983), as it treats narrative as a structural system with its units/parts and their inter-relationships, independent but coordinated functionalities, as equated with language or any social system, the ‘basic narrative elements’ or ‘units’ are treated as narratemes, by redesignating the simple term of function, that are irreducible components of a narrative.

2.2 Literature Review

Within the category of oral literature, the folktale genre has been given wide attention by scholars worldwide, and the structural and functional aspects, apart from its flexible language, are being simple, linear and enticing, folktales have been treated with various methods, models, theories and perspectives. While some of the studies on folktales have been either cited or refer to in this study, the following few entries have been reviewed as part of the structural requirement: Linda Dégh’ “Folk Narrative” (1972) offered a comprehensive account of folk narrative and it covers the history of narrative and its association with man throughout the civilization, history of collections and the essence of studies on folk narrative. André Jolles’ *Einfache Formen* (1929) treated oral literary forms as simple and spontaneous products associated with spoken language, and it opened the gate for various studies on narrative genres by folklorists. Don Ben-Amos’ edited volume *Folklore Genres* (1976) offered articles by eminent folklorists under part one, ‘literary and linguistic analysis of folklore’ and part two, ‘the ethnography of folklore genres.’ Importantly, Francis Lee Utley’s “Oral Genres as a Bridge to Written Literature” is found in the first part. In contrast, the second part has accommodated Roger D. Abrahams’ “The Complex Relations of Simple Forms” and Dan Ben-Amos’ “Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres.” D.L. Ashliman’s *Folk and Fairy Tales – A Handbook* (2004) notably presented a scholarly account of the definitions and classifications, examples and texts, and scholarship and approaches in relation to oral narratives, particularly folktales and fairy tales. His other book, *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language: Based on the Aarne-Thompson Classification System* (1987), has been considered as one of the useful text in guiding students and researchers in the field of folklore studies with geographical classification and tale type headings, and it also provides cross-references and index of titles and key words with which locating published tales becomes easy for folklore specialists. Jaime Gómez’s “Our folktales and the stories of others: Interpreting folk narratives from different cultures as a pedagogical tool” (2017) tries to develop an interpretive methodology for educational purposes by integrating folklore materials by using a multidimensional way of thinking.

By selecting fourteen tales that fall under the types ATU 333 and ATU 123 from the Aarne-Thompson-Uther international tale index, the article has outlined the importance of folktales for educational purposes. Alan Dundes' "The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique" (1997) is insightful because it offers a considerable amount of discussion on the concepts of motif and tale type with a critical perspective. As it highlights the number of studies available on motifs with critical inputs, this article has been often cited in this study. Pete Jordi Wood's *Tales from Beyond the Rainbow: ten TGBTQ+ Fairy Tales Proudly Reclaimed* (2023) has exposed the hidden and concealed tales with the motifs that revolve around gender fluidity, and also points out that even queer stories have a happy ending, which is stereotypical in other tales. This book has a good number of fairy tales that are collected and adapted by the author who presented these tales with illustrations, and it must be seen in the light of criticism on the *Motif-Index* assignment. His other book, *The Dog and the Sailor* (2024), has also been considered in the light of the censorship carried out while making the motif index, because this book is a reminder by claiming the existence of LGBTQ+ heroes in stories. In *S/Z* (1970/1974), by analysing Honoré de Balzac's novel *Sarrasine* (1830) published by *Revue de Paris*, the French theorist Roland Barthes approached the signifiers of narratives, grouped them into five narrative codes (such as hermeneutic codes; proairetic codes, semantic codes, symbolic codes and cultural codes) and claimed that these constitute the entire narrative. Some of these codes -hermeneutic and proairetic - construct the internal chronology while the rest function at a connotative level for adding depth to the narrative. Drawing insights from structuralism and post-structuralism, and heavily influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure, the structural linguist, he demystified the established link between a signifier and its meaning. Though he was logical in arguing, by going beyond structuralism and discarding the claim by narratologists for whom individual narratives tend to emerge from an overall system by which each narrative could lose its specificity, or Jacques Derrida's *différance*, no meaning could be found inherently associated with a sign; rather, meaning could arise when it establishes a relationship with other signs. Though according to Barthes, a narrative network is defined and a conceptual space is created by these codes to run the narrative, it is criticised for defining the codes vaguely. However, going by hermeneutic codes and their function of creating a mystery of text and involving in the process of revealing truths, and also considering the proairetic codes' function to create a narrative drive, unlike the narratemes or functions identified by Propp refer chiefly to the developments within a narrative, these codes interact with the reader and the narrative elements. Similarly, the semantic codes and their functions again help the readers to go beyond literal or denotative meanings to understand the resonances, or the characters that evolve through these semantic codes.

Further, both symbolic and cultural codes depend on the connotative reading to elevate the text to establish its relationship with the narrative structure to unfold the story. All these codes are considered essential for interpreting a text, which is considered a higher-level activity involving developed cognitive ability, whereas the narratemes or functions, with the requirement of limited cognitive ability, make the tales understandable and enjoyable. In 1971, a narrative theory based on the equilibrium had been developed by Tzvetan Todorov, and it had five stages of equilibrium, disruption of the equilibrium, recognition of the disruption, attempt to resolve the disruption, and return to a new equilibrium – a universal structure with specificity. Todorov's conception of narrative is based on the narrative construction that has its effect on human consciousness. And, Todorov's "Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1969) espoused a structural analysis of plot – the 'imaginary universe of the book' wherein other elements (culture, nature, society, etc)

subjectively intersect (Todorov and Weinstein 1969). It deserves acceptance due to its logicity, but it has been criticised for not applying to all stories.

2.3 Folktales and Motifs

Folktales are dynamic and contemporary, even though they contain elements of the past that are simply reinterpreted ideas. Their simple structure and spontaneous mode of production, shaped by oral transmission, have created great variety. The content elements and structural frameworks of folktales allow them to serve as creative expressions that transmit information, ideas, beliefs, emotions, and worldviews.

Because of their oral nature, folktales appear in many forms, with countless variations and versions. Their forms, contents, and functions vary widely, and many overlap, which often makes classification difficult. Yet they cannot be dismissed, because they are reflections of real life. Even though many types of oral literature contain stories, the folktale is a highly polished and complete form, enriched by diverse content.

While entertainment is the primary purpose of folktales, they also serve secondary purposes linked to human imagination, fantasy, and creativity. Folktales have been valued and popularised by literary artists long before they became subjects of scholarly study (Dégh 1972). The motifs they contain allow comparison across cultures and help identify both universal and culture-specific features.

Across disciplines, it is generally agreed that the structure of a folktale, shaped through oral transmission, follows six components: an initial setup, the introduction of a problem or conflict, a series of actions, confrontation, resolution, and an ending (Shearer 2013). This simple pattern—beginning, climax, and end—mirrors the human mind's way of organising experience and helps make life meaningful and less chaotic.

A folktale is traditionally told in prose, though some tales include verses within the prose to add poetic effect. These verses may serve as a narrative technique, the speech of certain characters, or a way to impress listeners or readers. When a tale is interesting, it is retold or reproduced, either in its original form or with changes in plot and characterisation (Thompson 1977:4).

The preservation of a tale—and therefore of tradition—depends largely on the narrator. A skilled narrator improves and enriches the tale, while an unskilled one weakens it. Thompson notes that the art of tale-telling is older than history and is not limited to any one continent or civilisation. Although stories differ from place to place, and the conditions of tale-telling change across time and cultures, they continue to meet the same basic social and individual needs (Thompson 1977:5).

Beyond their age, continuity, and shared elements across cultures, folktales also reflect cultural uniqueness through their types and motifs. As such, they have become an important resource for understanding human culture (Thompson 1977). Being products of artistic and creative effort, folktales are studied—either in parts or as a whole—to explore the aesthetic aspects of human imagination. They help explain the presence of various elements in a society and offer reasons for certain events or beliefs.

Folktales allow unrelated ideas, objects, and beings—including supernatural entities—to be brought together through the power of human imagination. They are often used to explore psychological unity across cultures, showing how universality and cultural specificity coexist in artistic expression. Because folktales convey messages in an interesting and engaging way, they remain a living art form, using both verbal and non-verbal features. They depend on skilled storytellers, who can sense and shape the emotions of their audience. As representations of human activity, folktales serve a universal purpose and are not limited to any culture or race. This explains why similarities and resemblances appear across cultures, even as individual creativity introduces unique details. Folktales use a range of narrative strategies and poetic language to express the narrator's aesthetic vision. Their anonymity makes them flexible, adaptable, and widely acceptable. As a result, themes, characters, and motifs can travel easily across communities and cultures.

Folktales reflect the cultural elements of the societies from which they come. They vary across cultures and also within a culture over time. Yet tales from around the world show that they are a refined form shaped by psychological needs. Human societies have created countless folktales through the processes of assimilation and association of ideas, events, and experiences.

Beyond their moral and didactic nature, many tales also teach how humans should behave toward other living and non-living beings in nature. This makes them valuable for understanding harmony, coexistence, and sustainability—important themes even today. Folktales are thus a major source of wisdom and knowledge to be preserved for future generations.

Although folktales have a simple form and structure, they hold universal appeal while emphasising local elements and cultural specificity. Their contribution to harmonious living is evident in world folktales, which promote ideas such as: the superiority of goodness, the triumph of love over evil, simpleminded goodness, the rewarding of ability or valour, the victory of wit over strength, punishment of bad behaviour, reward for humility, kindness returned, and cumulative effects (Wake 1886). These moral themes relate closely to the social relationships within a society, making folktales suitable for interdisciplinary study.

Linda Dégh (1972) argues that folktales follow certain formulas or building blocks. Although these tales share common structures, their quality and narrative value vary, and the best telling depends on the creativity of individual narrators. This highlights the uniqueness of each storyteller, even within a community that shares the same traditions and beliefs.

From a structural perspective, folktales are seen as universal because they rely on stable formulas that can change depending on how their components are arranged. Dégh identifies several elements that shape the composition and structure of a tale:

- Types and motifs (the basic content elements),
- The narrative framework (introduction, conclusion, and the narrator's interjections),
- Patterned figures of speech (used to describe characters, events, and climaxes),
- Formulaic verbal sequences (monologues and dialogues), and
- Repetition, which adds detail and texture to the basic tale structure (Dégh 1972:60-62).

Folktales have been studied across cultures using both traditional and modern theories because they convey complex meanings while reflecting language, culture, and human experience. However, this study focuses specifically on the role of one structural component—the motif—to show how a single motif can shape the overall structure of a folktale genre, illustrated through a suitable example. ‘Motif’, like ‘type’, plays a significant role in the systematic classification of folktales. However, this classification cannot be understood merely by deciphering an example as an independent entity or as one related to other examples of the same category within the folktale genre. Thus, segmenting a form to identify its components does not imply a hierarchical ordering or arrangement; rather, it is a differentiation intended to clarify and intensify their functionality by highlighting their necessity within a structural system. A traditional tale, having an independent existence and treated as ‘a complete narrative’, does not rely on another tale for meaning (Thompson 1977). Yet, even when it is told as part of another tale, it regains its independence only when it appears alone. Similarly, a tale type may consist of one motif or many (Thompson 1977).

For Thompson, “a motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power, it must have something unusual and striking about it” (Thompson 1977: 415). He broadly categorises motifs into three classes: (1) actors, including gods, unusual animals, marvellous creatures, and conventionalised human characters; (2) items forming the background of an action, such as magic objects, unusual customs, or strange beliefs; and (3) single incidents, which form the majority of motifs and often function as independent tale-types (Thompson 1977).

Recognising that many motifs exist as independent narratives, while others appear as parts of different tale types, Thompson argues that Aarne overlooked this fact by assuming that every motif originally belonged to a particular tale, even though many motifs frequently appear across types (Thompson 1977). This suggests that motifs may have been borrowed from tales where they originally belonged. Consequently, while the type-index helps identify genetic relationships among different versions of a type, the motif-index highlights the identity or similarity of narrative elements.

Criticism of motif and tale-type concepts, as Dundes noted, includes the Scandinavian folklorists’ argument that motifs are often interdependent within a tale. They proposed the idea of the “motif-complex”. A second criticism concerns the Eurocentric foundation of motif and tale-type concepts, which were developed from European data, may not always apply to non-Western traditions (Dundes 1997:196). Similar concerns about geographic limitations of the ATU index have been raised by K. Horálek (1974) and Marc Thuillard et al. (2018).

For Propp, the tale-type index neglected the functions of motifs, despite classifying tales (Propp 1971:5–6). Dundes also observed that Aarne’s classification was based not on narrative plots but on characters, since the same tale might feature either animals or humans. Other criticisms include ‘overlapping’, ‘censorship’, and ‘ghosts’ (Dundes 1997:196–198).

Censorship, in particular, was addressed by Joseph P. Goodwin, who noted that the type-index intentionally excluded topics related to homosexuality and omitted large amounts of sexual and obscene material (Goodwin 1995). A similar critique comes from Cornwall (UK), author, illustrator and screenwriter Pete Jordi Wood (2023). As quoted by Jamie Wareham, Wood points out that in the Motif-Index, compiled in the 1920s and revised in the 1950s, Thompson (1955-58): placed ‘Homosexuality’ and ‘Lesbianism’ in a section titled

“Unnatural Perversions”, alongside bestiality and incest, and admitted omitting stories he considered “perverse” or “unnatural” (Wareham 2020:2).

Recognising that a comprehensive global collection of folktales is still incomplete, it becomes clear that creating a complete motif-index to study the logical relations among tales requires an enormous effort.

Thompson’s revised and enlarged *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-58) is available as an HTML application at rbedrosian.com and was released into the public domain for free use online in 2016. Originally published between 1932–1936, the index appears in six volumes (A–C, 1955; D–E, 1956; F–H, 1956; J–K, 1956; L–Z, 1957; Index, 1958). Thompson (1996) later reflected on compiling the Motif-Index in his autobiography.

The Motif-Index compiles, classifies, and numbers traditional motifs from thousands of mostly European folktales. Dundes (1997:195–202) notes that the index uses umbrella categories with more specific subentries, and provides an overview beginning on page 488. Volume III includes a large chapter titled “Test”, with subsections such as Identity Tests (Recognition), Test of Truth, Marriage Tests, Tests of Cleverness (and Ability), Tests of Prowess (Tasks and Quests), and Other Tests. Noteworthy entries include tests of guilt or innocence (H210), suitor tests, bride tests, chastity tests, wife tests, father tests, guessing tests, tests of fear, vigilance, endurance, survival, obedience, sensitivity, character, gratitude, valour, honesty, patience, curiosity, friendship, fertility, time, money, repentance, and others. Karen Bamford provides detailed explanations and examples of the H-Test motif and its subdivisions in the Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy edited *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature – A Handbook* (2005:233–259).

Although often referred to independently as Thompson’s Motif-Index, it is now used together with the Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) Index and is considered an essential tool for comparative folklore studies (Stein 2015:1). Dundes describes them as “the most valuable tools in the professional folklorist’s arsenal of aids for analysis” (Dundes 1997:195).

Thompson’s definition of a motif is both precise and cautious, emphasising its indispensable role in forming traditional narrative. A motif corresponds to any element of narrative structure when the term is applied (Benson 2003:23). Greimas and Courtés, in *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (1982), observe that the motif appears as a figurative unit whose meaning is independent of its functional role within a narrative. As invariables, motifs can be considered an autonomous structural level parallel to narrative articulation (Greimas and Courtés 1982:199).

Although the *Motif-Index* is described by Jan Harold Brunvand as “a huge catalogue of folk narrative elements that may variously combine to form whole folk narratives” (Brunvand 1976:15), Benson notes that this idea had already been anticipated by the Russian literary theorist, most erudite and original scholar, Alexander Veselovsky (1838-1906), who pointed out that a “cluster of motifs” constitutes a “plot”. According to Benson, this insight influenced the Russian Formalists, including Vladimir Propp, whose work prefigured Thompson’s *Motif-Index* (Benson 1999: 23–24, 252–253). It is further argued that the phrase “cluster of motifs” appears in several passages of Thompson’s *The Folktale*, particularly in connection with tales involving the dead helper (Thompson 1977:50).

At present, a substantial number of extensive motif and tale-type indices have been produced by folklorists worldwide. The list includes David S. Azzolin's *Tale Type- and Motif-Indexes: An Annotated Bibliography* (1987) and Hasan El-Shamy's *Motif Index of The Thousand and One Nights* (2006). Meanwhile, Uther—who offered several criticisms of the original index—argued that Thompson neglected older versions when examining earlier traditions, and that some tale types displayed dubious significance (Uther 2009:915).

Dundes's observation that “the identification of folk narratives through motif and/or tale type numbers has become an international *sine qua non* among bona fide folklorists” (Dundes 1997:195) is duly noted in this study. Accordingly, the task of augmenting a particular narrative motif of test, and exploring its transformation into a function or narrative, has been undertaken by drawing methodological insights from Vladimir Propp (1968), and A. J. Greimas (1983) to meet the objectives.

This involves a methodological shift in treating the narrative motif: it is contemplated as a function of dramatic personae, resulting in a framework capable of accommodating socio-cultural and political elements in understanding the function and in associating dramatic personae beyond the internal narrative structure. In other words, the narrative world is extended and expanded to refer to real-life occurrences, acknowledging that narrative constructs (Mihailovna 2025) cannot escape expressing and representing cultural values. Thus, they are projected as culture-specific narratives exhibiting universal structure and function.

2.4 Augmentation of Test –A Transition from Motif to Function/Narrateme

‘Motif’, like ‘type’, plays a significant role in the systematic classification of folktales; however, the classification could not be seen beyond any attempt at deciphering the example either as an independent entity or in relation to other examples of the same category within the folktale genre. Therefore, the segmentation of a form for identifying the components can not imply the process of hierarchical ordering and arrangement; rather, it is a differentiation to intensify their functionality by delineating their inevitability within a structural system. Being a traditional tale, having an independent existence and being handled ‘as a complete narrative’, does not depend on another tale for any meaning (Thompson 1977). However, even when it is told as part of another tale, it gains its independence only when it appears alone, and similarly, a type may have one motif or many (Thompson 1977). Whereas, for him, “a motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. To have this power, it must have something unusual and striking about it” (Thompson 1977:415). Generally, for Thompson, the motifs can be seen in three classes – actors (that include gods, unusual animals, marvellous creatures, and conventionalised human characters); items that appear in the background of an action (‘magic objects’, ‘unusual customs’, ‘strange beliefs’, etc); and single incidents (majority of motifs – by having independent existence, they become tale-types) (Thompson 1977). In fact, considering the existence of many motifs as independent narratives, and few of them appear in as part of other types, Thompson indicated that Aarne (1961) overlooked it by assuming originally every motif belonged to a particular tale despite it frequently appearing in other types (Thompson 1977), that is, a motif could have been a borrowed one from where it originally belonged. Therefore, while the type-index is instrumental in identifying the genetic relationships among the versions of a particular type, the motif-index facilitates the process of displaying the identity or similarity in the tale elements. As part of the criticism of the concepts of motif and tale type, as Dundes recollects that on the independence of motif, the Scandinavian folklorists by

suggesting that “individual motifs were more often than not found to be interdependent upon other motifs in a given tale, and she proposed the notion of “motif-complex” and second, the Eurocentrism associated with the concepts of motifs and tale type, as they emerged from the European data and assumed that they might not apply to non-Western data (Dundes 1997:196).

Similar criticism on the basis of geographic concentration of ATU folktale type index had also come from K. Horálek (1974) and Marc Thuillard, et al. (2018). For Propp, the tale type index has ignored the functions of motifs, although the tales had been classified. (Propp 1971: 5-6). Dundes also indicated how Aarne’s classification was not on the basis of narrative plots but on the characters, as the same tale might carry either animals or humans (Dundes 1984: ix). Three other criticisms on the motif and tale type are ‘overlapping’, ‘censorship’ and ‘ghosts’ (Dundes 1997:196-198), and they are self-explanatory. The censorship criticism had also been addressed by Joseph P. Goodwin (1989) and for whom the type index had intentionally excluded topics related to homosexuality and also omitted a huge volume of sexual and obscene material (Goodwin 1995). The same criticism has also been raised by the Cornish writer and illustrator, Pete Jordi Wood (cf. Wareham 2020; Wood 2023, 2024), and according to him, as Jamie Wareham quotes, on filtering of LGBTQ characters, “Over one hundred years, very few people edited a catalogue of the world’s folklore with a system which logs different variations of tales across borders around the world. ... In the accompanying Motif Index of Folklore he compiled in the 1920s and revised in the 1950s, he lists ‘Homosexuality’ and ‘Lesbianism’ in a section called “Unnatural Perversions” with bestiality and incest. Open about his views, he admits he omitted many stories in the catalogue because they were ‘perverse’ or ‘unnatural.’” (Wareham 2020:2). However, accepting the fact that a thorough collection of folktales from across the world is yet to be achieved, attempting a complete motif-index of folktales to study and understand the logical relations among the tales needs a humongous effort.

This catalogue of *Motif-Index* was originally composed and published in 1932-1936, and has appeared in six volumes: Vol. I: A-C (1955); Vol. II: D-E (1956); Vol.III: F-H (1956); Vol. IV: J-K (1956); Vol. V: L-Z (1957); and Vol. VI: Index (1958). Thompson’s revised and enlarged edition of *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (1955-1958) was later published in the public domain for free utilisation on the internet in 2016. Thompson had discussed his composing of the *Motif-Index* in his autobiography (1996). The *Motif-Index*, in which traditional motifs of thousands of mostly European folktales have been compiled, classified and numbered, Dundes (1997: 195-202) uses an umbrella topic to present entries with more specific subcategories, and an overview of the motif-index is also included from page 488 onwards. The third volume has a chapter entitled Test, which carries many subdivisions such as Identity Tests: Recognition; Test of Truth; Marriage Tests; Tests of Cleverness [and Ability]; Tests of Prowess: Tasks; Tests of Prowess: Quests; and Other Tests. Some of entries of these subdivisions are noteworthy like tests of guilt or innocence (H210), Suitor tests, Bride test, Chastity tests, Wife tests, Father tests, Tests in guessing, Tests of fear, Tests of vigilance, Tests of endurance, Tests of power to survive, Tests of obedience, Tests of sensitiveness, Tests of character, Tests of gratitude, Tests of valour, Test of honesty, Test of patience, Test of curiosity, Test of friendship, Test of fertility, Tests of time, Tests of money, Test of repentance, etc. A brief explanation of each motif with suitable examples for the H-Test motif and its various components and subdivisions can be found in (between page numbers 233-259), and this entry has been contributed by Karen Bamford in the Jane Garry and Hasan El-Shamy edited *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature – A Handbook* (2005). Despite its independent existence and popularly referred to as

Thompson's Motif-Index, it has been found used now in folklore studies in tandem with the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index, and now they are together considered as an important tool for comparative folklore studies (Stein 2015:1), and for Dundes, they are "the most valuable tools in the professional folklorist's arsenal of aids for analysis" (Dundes 1997:195).

In fact, the definition of motif provided by Thompson is very precise and cautious since it signifies the role of it by identifying its indispensable role since a motif makes up a traditional narrative, or in other words, it is associated with the any element of a narrative structure when the term is employed (Benson 2003: 23). Greimas and Courtés pointed out that the 'motif appears as a figurative type of unit and its meaning is independent of its functional significance with respect to the narrative, as they appear as invariables, the motifs can be considered at the autonomous structural level parallel to narrative articulations.' (Greimas and Courtés 1982:199)

Although the *Motif-Index* is considered by Jan Harold Brunvand as "a huge catalogue of folk narrative elements that may variously combine to form whole folk narratives" (Brunvand 1976: 15), for Benson, this idea had been anticipated by Alexander Veselovsky who pointed out that "cluster of motifs" that constituted a "plot" has influenced Russian Formalists like Vladimir Propp whose study prefigured the *Motif-Index* of Thompson. Benson (1999: 23–24, 252–253). It is argued based on the point that the phrase "cluster of motifs" has been found invoked in several passages in Thompson's *The Folktale* in connection with tales involving the dead helper. (Thompson 1977:50). As of now, a good number of extensive motif and tale-type indices have been produced by folklorists worldwide, and the list includes David S. Azzolin's *Tale- Type and Motif-Indexes: An Annotated bibliography* (1987) and Hasan El-Shamy's *Motif Index of the Thousand and One Nights* (2006). Meanwhile, for Uther, who had few criticisms of the original index, Thompson neglected the older version while looking at older traditions and some of the tale types had shown dubious importance. (Uther 2009: 915).

Dundes's observation that "The identification of folk narratives through motif and/or tale type numbers has become an international sine qua non among bona fide folklorists" (1997: 195), has been noted in this study, as such the task of augmenting a particular narrative motif of test and its transformation into a function or narrative has been discussed drawing methodological insights from Vladimir Propp (1968) and A. J. Greimas (1983) for meeting the objective. There is a methodological shift in treating narrative motif for contemplating it as function of dramatic personae and it results in a framework to accommodate socio-cultural and political elements in understanding the function and associating dramatic personae outside the narrative structure, that is, the narrative world has been extended and expanded to refer to real-life occurrences to address that the narrative constructs (Mihailovna 2025) could not escape from expressing and representing cultural values for being projected as culture specific narrative with universal structure and function.

Initial equilibrium (not a function)

- A (or a) disruptive event (or reevaluation of a situation)
- B request that someone alleviate A (or a)
- C decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A (or a)
- C' C-actant's initial act to alleviate A (or a)
- D C-actant is tested
- E C-actant responds to test
- F C-actant acquires empowerment
- G C-actant arrives at the place, or time, for H
- H C-actant's primary action to alleviate A (or a)
- I (or I_{neg}) success (or failure) of H
- K equilibrium

Kafalenos' Reduction of Proppian Functions

(Afsari & Royanian 2015:91)

For Afsari and Royanian (2015:91), the Kafalenos' model is considered seemingly applicable to short narratives including folktales.

Although eight dramatis personae have been identified (the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, her father, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero/anti-hero), they are found to be grouped into the following seven spheres of action: the sphere of action of the villain; the sphere of action of the donor (provider); the sphere of action of the helper; the sphere of action of the princess (the sought-for person) and her father; the sphere of action of the dispatcher; the sphere of action of the hero; and the sphere of action of the false hero (Propp 2009/1968:79–80).

These functions—known as narrative elements, units, or narratemes—made it possible to study the folktale as a unified structure. Despite the criticism that Propp ignored verbal elements of the folktale, scholars such as A. J. Greimas (1983), Tzvetan Todorov (1969), Claude Bremond (1973 cited in Bordwell 1988), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1963), Gérard Genette (1980), Roland Barthes (1977), Jonathan Culler (1975), among others, treated the Proppian framework as a starting point for structural narratology (Bordwell 1988:5). In doing so, they equated narrative with literary narrative, leaving the study of folktales to specialists (Meister 2013). To some extent, the Proppian scheme is applicable to other narrative and media texts beyond the folktale genre; for example, the underlying structure of cinema narratives can be revealed using Propp's model (Hartmann 1986).

However, both Greimas and Lévi-Strauss considered Propp's scheme as general or universal (Bordwell 1988). Greimas's structuralist perspective begins with addressing the ambiguity in *Morphology*, where Propp uses the term dramatis personae first to describe “actors” and later to mean “actants.” An actant is defined as one who “accomplishes or undergoes an act, independently of all other determinations,” and it is meant to replace both the traditional character and Propp's dramatis persona. An actant can also be projected onto the semiotic square, taking four positions: actant, antactant, negaactant, and negaantactant (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 5–6).

Following Propp's own suggestion, and drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of difference and binary oppositions (Trifonas 2015), Greimas reduced Propp's thirty-one functions to twenty functional categories by pairing the following and retaining the rest:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1) Fn3 vs. Fn4 | 2) Fn6 vs. Fn7 |
| 3) Fn8 vs. Fn8A | 4) Fn9 vs. Fn10 |
| 5) Fn12 vs. Fn13 | 6) Fn16 vs. Fn18 |
| 7) Fn21 vs. Fn22 | 8) Fn25 vs. Fn26 |
| 9) Fn28 vs. Fn29 | 10) Fn30 vs. Fn31 |

(Ramakrishnan 1997, 2002, 2022).

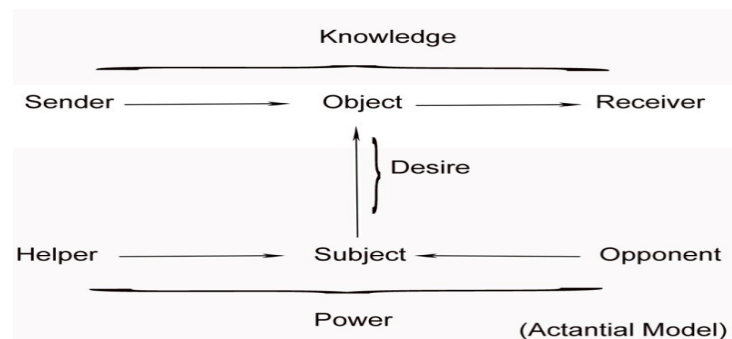
This has been described as “a reduction of Lévi-Strauss’s reduction of Propp’s actants and functions” (Katilius-Boydston 2015).

Further, Greimas reduced Propp’s seven spheres of the *dramatis personae* to six actantial roles based on syntactic logic, with the Proppian categories noted in parentheses:

Subject (Hero) **vs.** Object (Sought-for person)
 Sender (Father/dispatcher) **vs.** Receiver (Hero)
 Helper (Helper/provider) **vs.** Opponent (Villain/False hero)

Drawing on Lévi-Strauss’s theory of oppositions, Greimas (1983) argued that these reduced categories share common attributes and modal existence. These three actantial pairs are arranged to reflect three levels of relationships based on the orientation of the actants:

Seeing its applicability and relevance for discursive analysis, each category of actant can be understood as both accommodative and inclusive. This model shows that narrative texts are action-oriented, and it identifies each actant as an active cognitive being whose character and temperament allow it to fit into the passional configurations expressed through “being” and “doing.” Within the discursive programme, subjects are treated as modalised beings who manifest themselves through these actants—actors with designated actions that fulfil their actantial or thematic roles.



A narrative text may therefore be conceptualised as a syntactic organisation of acts, or as a collective expression of opposing actions within a narrative schema. Greimas (1983) interprets narrative subjects in performative terms, such as the *subject of state* and the *subject of doing*. For a subject to qualify as a subject of doing, it must, by presupposition, possess the competence required for performing the act.

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Chomsky (1957) introduced the concept of competence as a virtual system, comparable to language, and opposed to performance in the same way that speech is opposed to *langue*. For him, competence is the aptitude to produce and understand an infinite number of syntactically correct utterances. Competence thus refers to a “knowing-how-to-do,” whereas “doing” refers to the production of performance. This potential “knowing-how-to-do” implies the manipulation of grammatical rules. However, competence also involves a “having-to-be,” a system of constraints that forms the content of competence. If an act is understood as “causing to be,” competence is “that which causes to be”—all the prerequisites and presuppositions that make action possible. Every sensible behaviour, therefore, presupposes a virtual narrative programme and a corresponding competence.

Competence exists at two levels. *Model competence* is a hierarchical organisation of modalities—“willing-to-do” or “having-to-do”—governing “being-able” or “knowing-how-to-do.” *Semantic competence* is located in the deep structure of language and is logico-semantic in nature, functioning as a virtual narrative programme. Together, these form the subject’s competence. Thus, the narrative trajectory of the subject consists of both the *syntagm of competence* and the *syntagm of performance*. Within the signification process, competence integrates both semiotic and narrative structures, giving them the status of “having-to-be” (a system of constraints) and grounding them in “knowing-how-to-do.” Modal competence thereby activates semantic competence and turns it into an operating process (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 44–45).

A “test” is therefore a signifying process that qualifies or disqualifies a subject by assessing its “knowing-how-to-do.” In folktales, subjects may acquire competence through the simulated performance of others, or sometimes through the stimulation itself. In the narrative paradigm, *parole* (doing or performance) presupposes competence; the act of doing presupposes the competence of the signifying subject. A subject becomes competent depending on its modality of being-able or knowing, or both; at the narrative level, this depends on the subject’s modal state of wanting, being able, or knowing how to act.

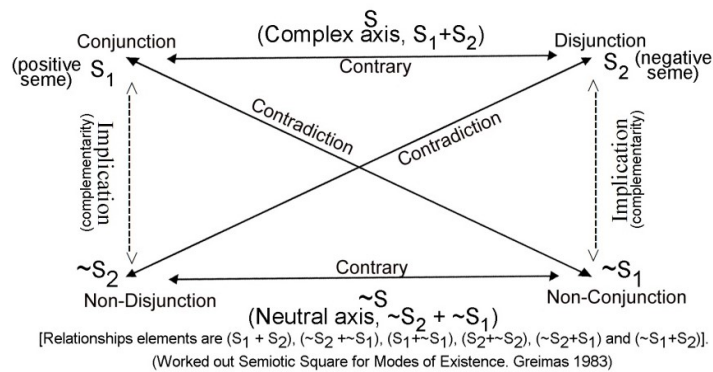
Thus a “hero” is not always a hero throughout the narrative. A subject becomes a hero only at a given moment, which means narrative organisation concerns positions rather than fixed characters. An actor is therefore an empty continuum that can be progressively filled by one subject, or sometimes two. The subject’s signifying existence depends on its conjunction with the object of value (Greimas 1987:151). A subject is recognised as a hero not only by having qualities but also by performing acts; in either case, its ability to perform must be tested before it is entrusted with heroic responsibilities. The pragmatic dimension distinguishes the actualised subject from the realised subject, while the cognitive dimension differentiates the hidden hero from the revealed hero (Greimas and Courtés 1982:142). Heroic qualities are always tested, often through deceptive tests (Greimas and Courtés 1982:370–371). This forms the foundation for examining the test function within the narrative programme.

Although Greimas places both the “false hero” and the “villain” under the broader category of “opponent,” their narrative existence confirms their social reality. As Lévi-Strauss related myth to cultural aspects such as cosmology and worldview (Propp 1968:2), folktale characters also reflect social realities. Actantial agents are defined through their

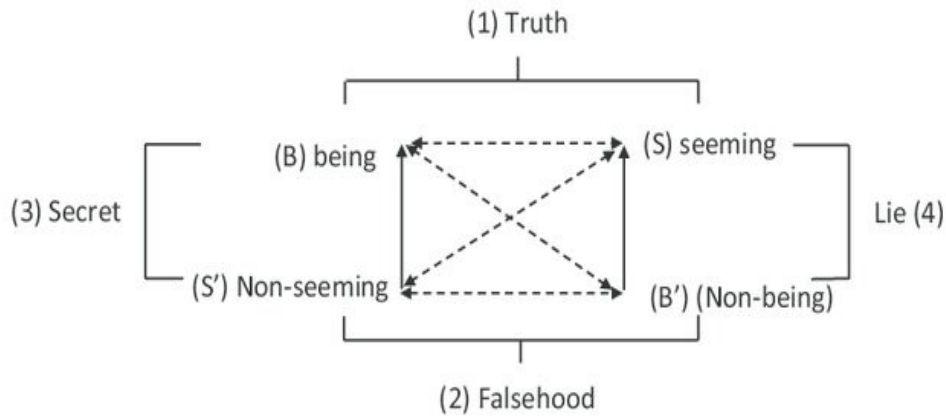
relations to one another and to the object, which functions as the centre of the narrative schema. This schema is shaped by both negative and positive transformations caused by the activities of the villain and the subject. Positive action counterbalances negative action, producing a polemic structure that reveals the presence of double narratives. Hence, a folktale cannot be considered a homogeneous whole. For Propp, the hero is positively overdetermined and the villain negatively overdetermined; both are qualified through deceptive tests (Greimas and Courtés 1982:370–371).

The relationships among some actants are complex because they depend on the veridictory modalities. Greimas developed the semiotic square to represent truth values associated with the subject, opponent, and false hero (Greimas and Courtés 1982:116). These veridictory modalities manifest in four complex terms—truth (being and seeming), lie (seeming and non-being), secret (being and not-seeming), and falsehood (non-seeming and non-being).

Although Saussure considered a scientific analysis of parole as nearly impossible, Greimas (1983) worked within the dichotomies of langue/parole, deep/surface structure, competence/performance, and immanence/manifestation, treating them synchronically and on the same level. He situated “the actants of discourse, the units of narrative semantics, and the functions of discourse, the units of narrative syntax” at the same level of semiotic and narrative structures (Schleifer 1987:85). Believing that language must be studied as a synchronic system of signs, Greimas (1983) developed the semiotic square to represent the deep structure of discourse.



The semiotic square becomes the smallest system capable of generating meaning; it presents the meaning of semes and is applicable to narrative discourse as well (Angermüller 2003:201). A semiotic square for verity is provided here to illustrate this point, and this visual representation of verity through the semiotic square reflects it as a unitary in principle by including networks and indicating its applicability like other models. Interestingly, this veridictory, or the square of veridiction, facilitates a deep contemplation of the dynamics of true/false in any semiotic act which also includes texts. That means that when true/false evaluation is subjected to interpretation it implies the conjunction of both being and seeming in which, logically, both are accompanied by and associated with each other, for instance, here, both being and seeing may appear as identical or opposite – giving opportunity for a change through transformation with or without a corresponding transformation of variable.



(Veridictory square. Greimas and Courtés 1982:310) (fig. veridictory square).

Considering the modal nature of the concepts associated with these terms, within a discursive structure, the “test” becomes a viable means for establishing and proving truth values according to the roles and positions in a narrative. Based on the Proppian analysis of functions, Greimas and Courtés (1982) note that the test recurs throughout the narrative syntagm of folktales, and this recurrence ensures its formal identification. As they argue, a test represents the discursive figure of the transfer of the object: a reflexive conjunction (appropriation) takes place simultaneously with a transitive disjunction (dispossession). The subject’s participation in a test marks it as a doing subject engaged in a quest for the object. Further, the test presupposes the existence of an anti-subject who pursues an inverse narrative programme, thereby highlighting the polemic structure of the narrative. The test consists of three connected utterances: confrontation, domination, and consequence (either acquisition or privation). Although qualifying, decisive, and glorifying tests all share the same syntactic structure, they differ in the canonical narrative schema through their semantic investments and the nature of their consequences: the qualifying test leads to acquisition, the decisive test to performance, and the glorifying test to recognition (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 339–349).

A test is therefore a signifying activity for examining the nature, quality, and competence of an actant or actants, through which their role and position within the actantial framework are determined. It can be considered a sign because, as Eco (1976) states, a sign “is taken as significantly substituting for something else.” Without the test, the semantic content of a narrative cannot be transformed to close its programme. A test within a narrative programme—carried out through cognitive tasks marked by distinctive signifiers—may alter the narrative syntagm through paradigmatic or syntagmatic transformations.

Propp’s twelfth function (“D”), the first function of the donor, is crucial because it qualifies an actant to become the subject/hero. As a process of assessing narrative competence, testing is broadly conceived and not restricted to any particular form. The thirteenth function (“E”), the hero’s reaction, is coupled with the twelfth, and while the former is conditioned by the latter, the hero’s reaction can be positive or negative (Propp 1968:42). Propp lists several types of tests and corresponding reactions, including situations in which: (1) the donor tests the hero (D1–E1); (2) the donor greets or interrogates the hero (D2–E2); (3) a dying or deceased person asks for a service (D3–E3); (4) a prisoner begs for freedom (D4–E4); (5) a suppliant requests mercy (D5–E5); (6) disputants demand division of property (D6–E6); (7) other requests are made (D7–E7); (8) a hostile creature attempts to destroy the hero (D8–E8); (9) a hostile creature engages the hero in combat (D9–E9); and

(10) the hero is offered a magical agent in exchange (D10–E10) (Propp 1968:39–43). These diverse tests allow the subject to reveal its worthiness to receive the donor's assistance, qualify its narrative status, and advance along the narrative trajectory. They also extend the story by building confidence in the hero through proven competence.

As discussed, “test” as a motif is central to Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, where some test motifs function like Proppian functions, while others resemble themes. As a narrateme, the test appears according to its consequences, making it amenable to morphological analysis. Barthes's remark clarifies this point: “There is a world of difference between the most complex randomness and the most elementary combinatory scheme, and it is impossible to combine (to produce) a narrative without reference to an implicit system of units and rules” (Barthes 1977: 80–81). At the surface level, narrative discourse reflects underlying deep structures, and syntagmatic events follow logical sequences governed by actantial roles, which are “polysemic figures known for their multiple virtualities” (Greimas 1977). The test mediates between competence and performance, producing results that either elevate an actant or eliminate it from the hidden programme.

Within the actantial scheme—composed of participants whose functions are defined relationally—the donor's significance becomes clear through its role in testing. Because actants stand in binary opposition, the donor's test validates whether the subject can achieve conjunction with the object at the end of the narrative scheme. Since the subject is often hindered by an opponent, the donor's test becomes essential by providing the necessary means to overcome obstacles. As narrative discourse involves multiple stages of transformation, the test serves as a qualifying parameter for performance, reinforcing the momentum of transformation.

Through abstraction from narratives and real-life situations, the “test” can be conceptualised as a system with units and rules. It serves as a signifying entity that produces meaning across deep and surface structures: as a seme at the deep level, as a lexical manifestation at the surface level, and as a meaning-signifier at the polysemous level. While “test” in folktales once appeared simple, it has evolved into an indispensable mechanism shaping social realities, now functioning as a complete system with components and sub-components. Although “test” has no independent existence as a deep-level seme, it gains significance only through its interaction with other systems.

For instance, as a motif—“a figure or combination of figures...subject to replication” (Bertetti 2017)—the test identifies a tale in Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. As a function or narrateme, it produces syntagmatic or paradigmatic changes in Proppian morphology. Similarly, tests in education, employment, licensing, or even vehicle test drives operate as parallel structures in real life. Propp's examples of tests (“D”) and reactions (“E”) help standardise the test as a signifying system that can be represented through language or other media. As a semiotic system, the test brings with it structures that shape, impede, or modify meaning.

Within a narrative programme, when a task is assigned to the hero—with specific conditions that cannot be altered—the test becomes standardised by two factors: the hero's willingness to undergo it, and the impact of success on the narrative programme and on the reader or listener. Since test and reaction together reveal the hero's hidden competence and enable progression toward the object, the standardisation of the test has already taken place

by establishing it as a universal narrateme in world folktales. Emerging as a universal system, akin to narrative grammar or linguistic grammar, the “test” provides communities with opportunities to devise meaningful instances that fit into the test system—one that excludes mere “luck.”

Having an elaborate discussion on the preconditioned nature of ‘test’ in folktales, simultaneously exposing the latent ability of the subject, preferably to qualify it as well as ending all the speculations of incompetency attributed to the subject, as the veridictory square reveals it, by which test becomes a signifying act within a narrative, requires further semiotic deliberation considering social contexts. Interestingly, ‘test’ emerges as a signifying entity within and outside the narrative world by having a philosophical intersection with the principles of potentiality and actuality, by which motion, causality and ethics associated with the involving subject can be studied. Among them, potential refers to the power, capability, or the possibility one is said to have, later to become real in their own. However, actuality is seen in contrast to the potential, as it refers to what is currently happening, and therefore, Aristotle associates pleasure and happiness with actuality, and he explained it in terms of *energeia* (‘work’) and *entelechy* (‘complete’, i.e., “being-at-an-end”) (cf. Sachs 1995, Aristotle 1989). Whereas Aristotle treats potential in the weak sense of it as something that ‘might chance to happen or not to happen’ and also in the stronger sense as ‘how something could be done well’ (1989:5:1019a-1019b). That is, in this context, the test can be seen as a medium by which the inherent potential of the subject will be exposed to be an actualised one. In other words, as *energeia* is extended to *entelechy* due to its activity that makes the *entelechy* to be extended to *energeia* (Sachs 2024), that is, when the test makes the potential to be actualised, the actualised implies the former. In fact, within the narrative programme, the text facilitates the subject to be conjoined with the object, but in the non-narrative programmes that engulf our daily life, the test mediates the subject to reach its object of value – in both cases, the test becomes a signifying process as it adds new meaning to the subject at another level of value addition. That is, seeing test as a standard and universal framework with different manifestations with basic function as its essence, that segregates the heroic world from the ordinary world within and outside the narratives, by doing its transformative role beginning with initial stage and overcoming the luminal, it draws cultural codes to localize or create specificity or to contextualize, and also brings in ideological codes to establish and negate with power relations.

However, unlike, oral literature, the test in modern life has emerged as a virtual system with its own procedures and conditionalities, to put the actualization, that is, a passage from potential to actualized to be realized, has created a lot of discourses for and against the test and testing processes by commodifying the cognitive abilities of testing and being tested. But within the pedagogy, a test design has its own conceptual framework with many features and their arrangements in such a way to present and represent information, to convey the intended meaning, and to facilitate the examinees to make use of their expertise and gather the information solicited (Solano-Flores 2021). Within the social semiotics, where a test is seen as a communication process, it consists of actions, materials and artefacts, that is, both conceptual and perceptual resources are mobilised for information gathering. Roland Barthes’ codes are relevant here to understand the meaning generation that happens in the pedagogic testing activities which incorporates texts, audios, visual images and video clips, that is, each form of test is standardised in its goal and objective and to achieve it draws signs (in their indexical, iconic and symbolic forms) to specify and communicate the intended meaning, or participating elements as signifiers make influence on the representation of meaning the standardised test intended to communicate. Therefore,

this propaedeutic augmentation of “test” found in folktales as motifs, and later its elevation to the level of function/narrateme by Propp (1968), reiterates the point that the contemplation of forms of “test” in modern societies is possible provided that one must have a basic understanding of the “test” presented by the oral narratives.

2.5 Conclusion

This article on the propaedeutic augmentation of “test” facilitated with the instances of oral narratives has demonstrated the elevation of test from the level of motif to a narrateme, which legitimises its role in conditioning the modality of the subject. By not treating ‘test’ as a motif in the sense of Stith Thompson (1946:415), ‘as a smallest element in a tale’ and handling it as a functional component or narrateme (Propp 1968), this study has pointed out the emergence of test as a semiotic system with its own signifiers and relations for producing and representing as well as influencing meaning, which has opened up discussion with reference to competence, or potentiality, and performance, and actuality. For stressing the importance of testing as a signifying tool, by which the potentiality or competence of the subject is actualized to be realized (that is, to be conjoined with the object or object of value), the philosophical importance of actuality, mediated through testing, has been highlighted since the actuality implies the Aristotle’s ‘active intellect’ of the subject who has the ‘knowledge in its being-at-work.’ (Davidson 1993: 3; Sachs 2001). From the semiotics of action, a test has been defined as a ‘syntagmatic organisation of acts’ (Greimas and Courtés 1982:6) set by the agency outside of the subject, and these acts may be simple or complex programmes that depend on the nature of the programme the subject involves. However, as this study has indicated, as part of the implication of the test, the subject and the object/object-of-value, the test makes them have a conjunction relationship between the subject and the object as realised entities through the actualisation caused by the disjunction relationship of these subject-object entities. Further, this study also implies the fact that the actualised value (to make an object-of-value), defined as “any value invested in the moment, or in the syntactic position, when the object is in a disjunction relation with the subject” (Greimas and Courtés 1982:9), has a decisive role in setting the subject move towards the object. Finally, therefore, like oral literature where test is one of the structural components, it has been considered as an inevitable aspect of social life, accelerated with the commodification of basic amenities and services, including education and employment, due to globalisation, making human life inescapable from being tested.

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