

# Evaluating Player Attitudes in Mobile Legends: An SFL Appraisal Analysis

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## Abstract

This study investigates how Indonesian university students express evaluative meanings while playing Mobile Legends by applying the Attitude subsystem of the Appraisal Framework within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). As competitive mobile games involve fast, spontaneous communication, player discourse often reflects emotional reactions, social judgments, and personal values that shape interaction quality. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from eight Mobile Legends players through written semi-structured interviews. The analysis focuses on three attitude types: affect, judgment, and appreciation, to identify how players linguistically evaluate gameplay experiences, teammates, and game elements. The findings show that affect is the most dominant evaluative resource, with players expressing excitement, frustration, stress, and satisfaction depending on match situations. Judgment appears through assessments of teammate skill, reliability, and behavior, while appreciation emerges in players' valuation of hero design, game mechanics, and visual quality. These patterns indicate that player communication combines emotional expression, moral evaluation, and experiential value in a dynamic way consistent with the Appraisal Framework. The study contributes to Indonesian digital discourse research by demonstrating how evaluative language in gaming is systematically constructed and highlights the need for greater awareness of positive communication practices in competitive online environments.

**Keywords:** Appraisal Attitude, Mobile Legends, SFL

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, digital communication has become a central part of social interaction around the globe. Particularly in Indonesia, young adults are actively engaging in mobile gaming platforms (Sudirman et al., 2022; Safitri et al., 2019). Competitive multiplayer games such as Mobile Legend promote real-time interaction, emotional expression, and evaluation between players, forming a complex discourse environment that influences social relationships and perception among gamers (Wu & Chang, 2025; Shi et al., 2024). Research shows that Indonesian gamers frequently use informal, spontaneous language in matches to coordinate strategies, evaluate performance, and respond emotionally to game situations (Arifah & Candrasari, 2022 ; Batubara & Saragih, 2024).

Although game discourse has been widely researched from psychological, intercultural, and interpersonal communication perspectives ((Heiden et al., 2019; Shliakhovchuk & Garcia, 2020; Yusuf et al., 2019), linguistic investigations focusing on real player attitudinal evaluation remain limited. Many studies highlight toxic communication, and verbal abuse among Indonesian gamers, which contribute to emotional pressure, stress, and reduced player confidence (Putri & Oktaviana, 2024; Martisa et al., 2023; Almajid, 2019). Meanwhile, other Indonesian discourse studies informed by SFL highlight the need to examine interpersonal meaning and attitudinal responses in digital communication. However, these works have not applied a fully appraisal-based attitudinal analysis to interactions in competitive mobile games, particularly within gaming communication contexts. As a result, there is still a strong need for linguistic attitude studies using the Appraisal Framework to analyze natural gamer responses in competitive game environments in Indonesia.

In applied linguistics, Martin and White's Appraisal Framework has been recognized as a robust model for analyzing evaluative language. This framework is parts of Systemic Functional Language proposed by Hallwhiteiday particularly in interpersonal metafunction. Appraisal is a method of analysis that uncovers the interpersonal significance of a text or speech by specifically assessing the attitudes expressed within it (Yoxan & Martisa, 2024). Appraisal theory focuses on the evaluation of attitude, engagement, and graduation (Hashemi & Mahdavi, 2023). It is based on three attitudinal dimensions namely affect (emotional responses), judgment (evaluation of people or behaviour), and

appreciation (evaluation of experiences or objects). This model has been widely used in Indonesian media and digital discourse studies (Hara et al., 2024; Oteíza, 2008).

However, research applying this framework to mobile legend game player, particularly among university students, remains underexplored. This research space is further reinforced by findings showing that competitive game evaluations are shaped by credibility, group hierarchy, and squad legitimacy negotiation, not only by mechanical skill execution (Boonchutima & Sankosik, 2021; Boella et al., 2008). Moreover, discourse studies on Indonesian digital communication confirm that emotional reactions often merge with moral positioning when evaluating social actors, especially in informal digital environments like social media and online games (Bettis et al., 2022; Audrin & Audrin, 2024) To address these gaps, this study aims to analyze how Mobile Legend players express linguistic attitudes and evaluate social actors in gameplay discourse using SFL-based Appraisal analysis. The investigation focuses on natural and spontaneous responses from Mobile Legend players in Indonesia’s university environment. By studying affect, judgment, and appreciation in unfiltered player responses, this research contributes to expanding digital game discourse studies in Indonesia from an applied linguistic evaluation perspective, while also encouraging awareness of positive communication practices in competitive mobile game communities.

**2.Method**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) This method is suitable for analysing interpersonal and evaluative language in real digital communication environments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study applies the Attitude subsystem of the Appraisal Framework by (Martin & White's, 2005) which consists of affect, judgment, and appreciation as the main theoretical tool for discourse analysis. A qualitative approach is used because it makes it possible to explore the spontaneous, context-based evaluations (Ishtiaq, 2019). It is suitable for this research because the players can express something that quantitative methods cannot fully capture, especially in competitive mobile game interactions.

The participants of the research are eight Indonesian university students from the English Literature discipline who actively play *Mobile Legends game*. A purposive sampling strategy is applied in determining criteria aligned with Indonesian competitive gaming discourse studies. This sampling method involves intentionally selecting participants who meet specific characteristics relevant to the research context (Nyimbilih & Nyimbilih, 2024). They are (1) minimum age of 20, (2) at least one year of ranked-match gaming experience, and (3) involvement in active squad or party-play community interactions, ensuring consistent peer communication within the game environment. Data were gathered through written semi-structured interviews, enabling participants to express personal feelings, peer judgments, and appreciation of game elements using their natural linguistic style, resembling everyday Indonesian digital verbal behaviour.

The discourse analysis follows three validation-enhanced stages namely presenting gameplay evaluation transcripts, contextual description of interaction situations, appraisal-based attitude classification, and inference of attitude construction patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is complemented by member checking, where analytical interpretations are returned to participants for confirmation, ensuring meaning alignment between gamer intention and researcher interpretation. Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted with linguistics researchers to minimize subjectivity and improve appraisal category reliability, and ethical research standards for Indonesian digital discourse were maintained, including voluntary participation, academic anonymity, and non-commercial data use.

**3. Findings and Discussion**

The findings in this study are examined with Appraisal Theory to understand how players express evaluations during matches. In Mobile Legends, game talk happens fast, like a live conversation where feelings come out first, then thoughts and opinions follow. For this reason, the interview questions were designed to ask about players’ real emotions, their views on behavior and skill, and what they value in the game. This makes the questions part of the analysis, helping the study capture natural meaning-making, not just technical explanations.

**3.1 Affect**

There are 8 questions created for participants to find out the *affect*. Following table is the informants’ responses toward question no. 1 namely How do you feel playing Mobile Legends in the new season?

Table 1. Informant Responses to question Number 1 of Affect

Informant	Responses
1	I feel a mix of excitement and pressure, which makes playing fun but also stressful when ranking up.
2	I become emotional when playing solo, especially when I react with harsh words.
3	I feel stressed when minors play ranked without understanding roles, cooperate poorly, and choose heroes randomly, disrupting teamwork.

Informant	Responses
4	I feel happy most of the time because I play with friends just for fun.
5	I feel emotional because many players this season have very high skills.
6	I feel excited, but says ranking is harder this season due to professionals and boosters pushing rank aggressively.
7	I feel mixed emotions—stress and pleasure—but playing with friends brings more enjoyment.
8	I feel tired sometimes, mainly when teammates start wars without watching the team or organizing team fights.

The table shows that informants describe their feelings (*affect*) as mixed but honest reactions shaped by match intensity and teammate behavior.

Due to space limitations, only one question for each type of appraisal framework is presented in the form of table. However, the summary of informants’ responses are still provided in this article.

Table 2. Summary of Participant Responses toward all questions about *Affect*

No	Interview Question	Summary of Participant Responses
1	How do you feel playing Mobile Legends this season?	All 8 players shared emotions honestly; most felt excited but also some pressure and tiredness during ranking matches.
2	Can you tell your most fun experience while playing?	8 players said the game can still be fun, especially when the squad plays well, which makes them satisfied even after difficult matches.
3	How do you feel when a teammate trolls in a match?	8 players felt annoyed and worried because trolling makes matches unstable and can lower their rank points.
4	How do you feel when teammates do not contribute, and do you want to quit the match?	Most players admitted feeling upset; some have considered quitting, but 2 players chose to finish the match even while feeling angry.
5	How do you feel playing with friends who are more skilled than you?	6 players felt confident and happy because stronger friends help them rank up and enjoy the game more.
6	How do you feel after losing streaks, and do you want to keep playing?	6 players felt stressed and paused playing; 2 kept playing to reach the top rank despite the frustration.
7	Does Mobile Legends make you want to keep playing again and again?	7 players felt a mix of tiredness and motivation; some continue playing due to time, money, or community investment.
8	How do you feel when a teammate feeds in a match?	8 players felt frustrated and angry because feeding (intentional or not) affects match results and teamwork trust.

The table shows that player evaluations in Mobile Legends are expressed through natural feelings, personal benchmarking of behavior and skill, and valuation of the gameplay experience. This sequence follows the Appraisal Attitude domains, where emotional responses appear first, followed by social judgment, before forming appreciation. These responses reflect authentic, spontaneous meaning-making during competitive matches among university players.

### 3.2 Judgment

There are 3 questions created for participants to find out the *affect*. Following table is the informants’ responses toward question no. 1 namely How do you assess your team's skills while playing? Do you feel there are better or worse players in the team?

Table 3. Informant Responses to question Number 1 of Judgement

Informant	Responses
1	I judge my team's skills by their decisions, positions, and teamwork, and I focus on adapting and doing my role well.
2	I evaluate teammates by the emblems they choose and how they rotate during matches.
3	I judge team performance by role impact, where tanks are expected to lead well, and random hero picks often disrupt balance.
4	I notice better and worse players based on visible skill differences compared to my own.
5	I assess myself and others from improvement across seasons, and I feel confident when gameplay runs

Informant	Responses
	smoothly.
6	I trust teammates more when their skill level is higher, especially when playing with friends who support ranking goals.
7	I judge match focus by whether players are still cooperative and not in a losing mindset.
8	I evaluate players through rank level, average wins, and match statistics shown in their game profile.

The table shows that informants express Judgment by evaluating player competence, role contribution, teamwork trust, and match behavior, using their own standards and experience. Below is a summary of interview questions and real player responses, organized to show how Mobile Legends players communicate and evaluate match experiences naturally.

Table 4. Summary of Participant Responses toward all questions about Judgement

No	Interview Question	Summary of Actual Participant Responses
1	How do you assess your team’s skills in matches? Do you notice better or worse players in your team?	All 8 participants evaluated team skill honestly and acknowledged a clear skill gap, where stronger teammates help the match, while weaker ones may reduce team performance.
2	What is your view on hero skills in Mobile Legends? Are some heroes stronger or weaker?	8 participants gave clear personal opinions from experience, stating that some heroes are stronger because their skills are impactful and adaptable, while others can feel weaker depending on the matchup.
3	How do you evaluate communication and behavior with other players during matches?	4 participants highlighted fairness, familiarity, and respect in interaction norms, while the rest focused more on trust in teamwork rather than judging it using strict social labels.

The table confirms that players evaluate matches mainly by assessing teammate and hero reliability, skill capacity, and fairness of interaction, which reflects the core of linguistic Judgment in Appraisal Theory.

### 3.3 Appreciation

There are 2 questions created for participants to find out the appreciation. Following table is the informants’ responses toward question no. 1 namely What elements of Mobile Legends do you like the most (e.g. graphics, heroes, storyline, game mechanics?)

Table 5. Informant Responses to question Number 1 of Appreciation

Informant	Responses
1	I appreciate hero uniqueness, smart game mechanics, and immersive graphics that make matches feel strategic and engaging.
2	Game mechanics are my favorite part because they make every match meaningful and competitive.
3	I enjoy heroes and the balance of micro–macro strategy, where skill timing and teamwork feel most visible in real play.
4	Game mechanics, strategy flow, and hero skill execution are where real ability shows up in matches.
5	I value graphics quality, especially when supported by good devices that make the game more comfortable to play.
6	I appreciate the variety of heroes, their connected but different storylines, and character skills that make gameplay feel richer and fun.
7	I like the game overall, especially the skins that add excitement and personal expression to matches.
8	Graphics are highly appreciated because visually pleasing design makes matches more enjoyable to watch and play.

The table shows that players appreciate Mobile Legends by valuing visual quality, strategic mechanics, and hero variety as meaningful gameplay experiences.

The following table summarizes how players value and describe positive impressions of game elements and learning exposure, reflecting their personal Appreciation judgments in Mobile Legends discourse.

Table 6. Summary of Participant Responses toward all questions about Appreciation

No	Interview Question	Summary of Actual Participant Responses
1	What elements of Mobile	All 8 players personally valued hero design, play strategy, game mechanics, and graphic

No	Interview Question	Summary of Actual Participant Responses
	Legends do you like the most?	quality, describing them as exciting and meaningful parts of their gameplay experience.
2	Do you feel Mobile Legends helps improve your English ability?	All 8 players confirmed that the game gives them exposure to mixed-language interaction, quick message exchanges, and confidence in digital communication, even though improvement happens indirectly rather than through formal learning.

The table shows that players appreciate Mobile Legends by valuing its design quality, gameplay strategy, and communication exposure as meaningful experiences. These personal valuations support the next discussion on how game elements are assessed linguistically under appreciation.

Table 7. Overall Attitude System type in Mobile Legends Game

No	Attitude System	Type of Data	Number of Data
1.	Affect	Happy-Unhappy	8
2.	Affect	Satisfaction-Pleasure	8
3.	Affect	Insecurity-Disquiet	8
4.	Affect	Unhappiness-Antpathy	7
5.	Affect	Security-Confident	6
6.	Affect	Desire	8
7.	Affect	Dissatisfaction-Ennui	7
8.	Affect	Unhappiness-Misery	8
9.	Judgement	Veracity	8
10.	Judgement	Capacity-Capable	8
11.	Judgement	Normality	4
12.	Appreciation	Reaction as Quality	8
13.	Appreciation	Reaction as Impact and Quality	8
Total			96

The findings show that Mobile Legends players express interpersonal meanings through three key Attitude categories—*affect*, *judgment*, and *appreciation*—consistent with (Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal Framework. Emotional reactions emerged as the most dominant, with players expressing excitement, stress, frustration, and satisfaction depending on match conditions. Such spontaneous affective expressions reflect the fast-paced and high-pressure nature of competitive gaming and align with studies noting that digital interaction often amplifies emotional responses in real time (Thompson et al., 2018); (Audrin & Audrin, 2024). These patterns also confirm earlier research on Indonesian gaming discourse, where frustration toward trolling, feeding, and poor teamwork is common among players (Putri & Oktaviana, 2024); (Martisa et al., 2023).

Judgment was also strongly visible as players evaluated teammate competence, reliability, and communication style. Participants frequently assessed player behavior through role execution, teamwork willingness, hero choice, and strategic decision-making—indicating that judgment in gaming is tied to both skill and moral expectations. This supports (Martin & White, 2005) view of judgment as the evaluation of people’s behavior and aligns with findings that credibility, group hierarchy, and trust significantly influence player interactions in competitive games (Boonchutima & Sankosik, 2021). The blending of emotional reactions with moral assessments also reflects how Indonesian digital discourse often merges affect with social positioning (Thompson et al., 2018)

Finally, appreciation appeared in how players valued game elements such as graphics, hero design, mechanics, and the immersive gameplay experience. These evaluations highlight that players’ enjoyment is shaped not only by performance but also by the aesthetic and strategic qualities of the game, consistent with prior studies on digital media appreciation (Hara et al., 2024) Players also noted incidental English-language exposure, echoing findings on gaming as a source of informal language learning (Yusuf et al., 2019). Overall, the results confirm that affect, judgment, and appreciation operate together in shaping player communication, demonstrating that Appraisal Theory effectively captures the evaluative nature of spontaneous gamer discourse within Indonesian competitive gaming contexts.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study shows that player communication in Mobile Legends Game naturally contains strong evaluations that fit the Appraisal Attitude system. Players rarely separate emotion, judgment, and value when talking about their matches. They express all of them at the same time, especially when a game is stressful or competitive. Most participants showed clear emotional responses (*affect*), such as feeling excited when they win together with a stronger friend, but feeling angry or anxious when a teammate trolls or feeds. Players also made honest judgments about skill and reliability,

especially when discussing heroes and team performance. For appreciation, players focused on what they personally value in the game, mainly graphics, mechanics, and teamwork experience.

The findings add to Indonesian digital discourse research by showing that real, fast, and emotional game talk is linguistically meaningful, not only psychologically impactful. Many negative comments in the gaming space create pressure that can affect confidence and motivation, especially for student players. At the same time, squad-based play can create safety, trust, and enjoyment, which help reduce tension and build stronger social bonds.

In the future, similar studies can include more players, voice-chat logs, or comparisons between games to explore attitude patterns more deeply. Understanding how players evaluate and how words influence others is important for building healthier and more aware gaming communication, especially in student communities.

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