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# Symbol Analysis on Acehnese Traditional Marriage

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## Abstract

This research is a qualitative study that describes the results of symbol analysis in Aceh traditional marriage. Data were obtained from observations at the wedding of A and D, as well as interviews with resource persons who are traditional elders in Aceh Besar. The data collected were five symbols. Triangulation activities were held by involving peers, traditional elders, and anthropologists. Symbol analysis used Charles Peirce's (1860) semiotic theory, namely the semiotic triangle: sign, interpretant and object. The results of the analysis were validated by traditional elders and linguistic experts with the conclusion that the interpretation produced using the semiotic triangle can be interpreted in the same way as the intent conveyed through speech acts.

Keywords: collocations; corpus; general election; SDGs

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif yang mendeskripsikan hasil analisis simbol dalam pernikahan adat Aceh. Data diperoleh dari observasi pada pernikahan A dan D, serta wawancara dengan narasumber yang merupakan tetua adat di Aceh Besar. Data yang dikumpulkan berjumlah lima simbol. Kegiatan triangulasi dilaksanakan dengan melibatkan teman sejawat, tetua adat, dan antropolog. Analisis simbol menggunakan teori semiotika Charles Peirce (1860), yaitu segitiga semiotik: tanda, interpretan, dan objek. Hasil analisis tersebut divalidasi oleh para tetua adat dan ahli bahasa dengan kesimpulan bahwa penafsiran yang dihasilkan dengan menggunakan segitiga semiotik dapat ditafsirkan sama seperti maksud yang disampaikan melalui tindak tutur.

Kata Kunci: kolokasi; korpus; pemilihan umum; SDG

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is rich in traditional culture, including rituals performed at certain ceremonies. Although these ceremonies or rituals are no longer performed in detail today, the symbols in them are still used in modern ceremonies. The symbols used in certain ceremonies are the main tools as well as the prayers delivered at the ceremony. Mbiti (1991: 131) states that symbols used in ceremonies or rituals are a means of communicating something that has religious meaning, Nabofa (1994: 9) says that the symbols of rituals or traditional ceremonies are produced from the spiritual and psychological experiences of the people who carry out the ritual. Therefore, analysing symbols in traditional culture is very interesting, because from the results of the analysis, the content of the messages and prayers that will actually be conveyed through the symbols used can be known.

Symbol analysis can be studied from many theories. One of the semiotic theories that can be used to interpret the meaning of symbols is Charles Peirce's theory with its semiotic triangle. Peirce revealed that semiotics is an infinite semiosis. The reader functions as a reader as well as a medium that produces meaning in the act of interpretation (Mambrol, 2016). This theory emphasises that interpretation can be done freely but logically, aided by Peirce's triangle of meaning. Zoest (1996: 148), Sobur (2009: 97), Suprayogo (2001: 49) used Peirce's semiotic theory as the theoretical basis for the research, because the theory cannot be separated from the idea that is comprehensive and relates sign elements logically. Therefore, this research uses Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics as the theoretical foundation, to analyse the symbols collected. This theory can be understood and applied easily to interpret symbols both generally and specifically.

Usually in marriage ceremonies or rituals in customs there are many symbols that have hidden meanings and when delivering these symbols, the symbol deliverer will convey sentences in the form of prayers and hopes. Therefore, in this study, the results of symbol interpretation using Charles Peirce's theory will be compared with the prayers and hopes conveyed.

Aceh as one of the indigenous tribes in Indonesia also has several traditional ceremonies. One of the ceremonies performed to date is the traditional marriage ceremony. In the Acehese traditional marriage ceremony, there are many symbols. But what is discussed in this study are the symbols of objects given by parents or invitees to the bride and groom during the marriage ceremony. Thus, this study aims at finding out the symbols of the objects used during the Acehese traditional marriage.

The data were collected during the marriage ceremony of A and D in Aceh Besar Regency. The symbols observed were only the symbols used at the culmination ceremony. This means that this research is limited to symbols that exist at the peak ceremony of the Acehese traditional marriage, while previous ceremonies, such as proposals and family meetings were not observed. The data were analysed using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triangle and tested with the speech acts conveyed when the symbols were given.

### 1.1. Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Semiotics

Peirce, whose full name is Charles Sanders Peirce, born in 1839, is a philosopher, but is better known as a logician centred on understanding humans and reasoning or science. The connection between reasoning and logic uses signs. The sign in question is an important element in communication. According to Peirce, every human uses signs to communicate, the sign is a system for reasoning. Reasoning requires logic. Logic requires semiotic theory. The focus of Peirce's semiotic theory is on the function of signs. Three important aspects are proposed by Peirce to analyse semiotics, known as the Triangle of Meaning. The three aspects are shown in Figure 1.

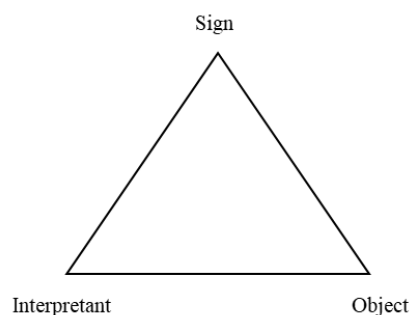


Fig. 1. Peirce's triangle of meaning

Signs, also known as symbols, are the main concept as the basis of semiotic studies to be analysed to find meaning as a form of interpretation or implied message. Signs are often physical or visual and can be seen and recognised by humans. The object is a reference to the sign or the result of interpretation based on aspects of meaning or the result of reference which is the social context. Often referred to as the reference of the sign being referred to. Interpretant contains the concept of thinking to characterise the sign and make the feature as a reference to interpret the sign. The characteristic is derived to be the object referred to. That is, the interpretant is a process of interpreting the sign into an object.

Generally, Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis is used to interpret symbols, in this case the symbols in an Acehese traditional marriage tradition. Through semiotic analysis, the meaning of the symbol is obtained, namely the accompanying message attached to the symbol, so that the symbol can be understood.

## 2. Application of Peirce's Semiotics to the Analysis of Acehese Marriage Symbols

The Acehese traditional marriage ceremony consists of four important stages as follows: (1) Preparation for the marriage, (2) Ceremony before the marriage, (3) Conduct of the marriage, and (4) Ceremony after the marriage. The preparation for marriage consists of three activities, namely (a) Jak Keumala, which is an event to explore the life of the bride and groom, (b) Jak Ba Ranub, which is an event to propose to the candidate, and (c) Jak Ba Tanda, which is an event to strengthen the sign.

The pre-marriage ceremony consists of five activities, namely (1) peugaca night, which is a ceremony for the bride and groom, (2) cutting or levelling teeth, (3) cutting fine hair on the forehead, (4) peumano ceremony, and (5) khatam Quran. Meanwhile, the wedding ceremony and the ceremony after the wedding are carried out without small activities. The highlight of the marriage ceremony is the Marriage Implementation Ceremony. Therefore, this research was conducted on the core ceremony, namely the Acehese traditional marriage ceremony.

The symbols identified during the observation at the A&D marriage were 5 (five), namely: (1) *bate ranub*, (2) *payong kuneng*, (3) aisle, (4) *peuseujuek*, (5) coconut and sugar cane seeds. These five symbols are symbols found in the core ceremony of the Acehese traditional wedding party.

In order to interpret the meaning of the symbols, the six symbols will be analysed using Charles Peirce's semiotic theory. The theory referred to in this case is the semiotic triangle theory that performs interpretation based on the characteristics of the symbol.

### 2.1. *Batê ranub*

The handover of *bate ranub* (a container made of brass) takes place at the marriage ceremony, where the groom's family enters the residence of the woman's family. Upon arrival, the groom's family hands over the *bate ranub* before entering the house or the place where the ceremony takes place. Likewise, the bride's family hands over the *bate ranub* that has been provided. The exchange of *bate ranub* is held as the beginning of the wedding ceremony. *Bate ranub* consists of an arrangement of betel leaves sprinkled with flowers, as shown in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. Betel nut arrangement sprinkled with flowers

Following Peirce's semiotic theory, the *bate ranub* (a container made of brass) containing the arrangement of betel nut and flowers is a prayer for the continuity of the love bond between the two parties and also a prayer for the health of the extended family performing the marriage ceremony and a future that spreads the fragrance of the family name. This prayer is known after identifying the characteristics of betel nut and flowers. These characteristics are known to refer to prayers about the perpetuation of love bonds. Fresh green betel nut is the main characteristic of *bate ranub*, because if the betel leaf is no longer green, it is never used in the arrangement of *bate ranub*. Betel is also known as a health leaf because it contains many healthy substances and vitamins. In Aceh traditional marriage ceremonies, betel leaves cannot be replaced by other plant leaves. Flowers that spread fragrance mean prayers for the fragrance of family ties that are established until the end of life. This is inferred because the flowers sprinkled on the *bate ranub* are colourful flowers and none of them wither. Flowers that are not fresh and fragrant will not be sown on *bate ranub*.

## 2.2. *Payong kuneng*

*Payong Kuneng* is a yellow umbrella, one of the important symbols in Aceh's traditional marriage ceremony. *Payong Kuneng* is decorated with embroidery and golden-coloured beads. *Payong* is used by the male family when escorting the groom to the bride's house. The umbrella is used to shade the groom along the way (see Figure 3). After arriving at the bride's residence *payong kuneng* is placed left and right of the aisle.



Fig. 3. *Payong kuneng*

*Payong kuneng* characterises traditional ceremonies in Aceh. *Payong kuneng* is a hereditary tradition inherited from the Sultan of Aceh. So that the gold colour on the *payong kuneng* is believed to be a prayer for the family to achieve a golden period in their lives. *Payong kuneng* provides protection, so that those under the umbrella are protected from heat and rain. Heat and rain characterise the exchange of pleasure and distress in life. Therefore, the *payong kuneng* becomes a symbol used so that the bride and groom will always be protected from the storms of life, always together in one protection.

## 2.3. *Aisle*

The aisle is where the bride and groom sit during the Aceh traditional ceremony. The aisle in the Aceh traditional marriage ceremony is in the form of an Aceh house, consisting of three places. In the centre, where the bride and groom sit side by side, left and right of the parents of the bride and groom. The aisle is designed in such a way as to resemble an Aceh house, such as a pointed roof, depicting people kowtowing, a traditional mattress as a place to sit. The stairs to the aisle are three in number. The aisle is surrounded by *titai-tirai* which is often referred to as *tire perangkat*, as shown in Figure 4.



Fig. 4. Aisle in Acehnese traditional marriage

The reference to the characteristics of the aisle symbol can be elaborated even more broadly, namely that the three places on the aisle are put together. Left and right are the places of the bride's parents, in the middle of the two brides. This means that the kinship between the two parties must be well established, through the ongoing marriage. The place where the bride and groom sit is called the traditional mattress. The customary mattress means that the occurrence of marriage is based on custom, so that from the time of marriage, everything in the life of the bride and groom must be based on custom and uphold religion as a goal.

The designed aisle is not just a display and decoration of marriage. The semiotic triangle explains that besides being a prayer, the aisle also functions as a message for the bride and groom.

#### 2.4. *Peusejuek* (fresh flour)

The next symbol is *peusejuek*, which is held as a bargaining chip. As with the bargaining, *peusejuek* is also intended to convey prayers for the safety of the bride and groom. *Peusejuek* consists of leaves and the tops and stems of the leaves are taken. Several types of leaves are tied together, including pandanus leaves and *cocor bebek* leaves, as well as other leaves that are considered beneficial for health. Although these leaves are not meant to be eaten. The leaves are tied together, then the stems are dipped in water and sprinkled around the bride and groom. To accompany the tied leaves, rice and yellow sticky rice are placed on a plate. During the delivery of this *peusejuek*, prayers are also delivered. Therefore, those who deliver *peusejuek* are old people or considered elders, ustad or religious leaders. The prayers delivered are usually not heard clearly. However, it can be understood that *peusejuek* is a prayer for protection from Allah and to avoid unwanted things.

In order to understand the meaning in detail, the symbols contained in the *peusejuek* event can be analysed using Peirce's semiotic triangle. The compositions of the *peusejuek* is shown in Figure 5.



Fig. 5. Peusejuek

The *peusejuek* contains paddy and rice, the primary needs of Acehnese people. Paddy and rice become the epitome of survival. Next, it contains yellow sticky rice, symbolising bonding, immunity strength to face challenges. Turmeric symbolizes anti-inflammatory indicating that life is always together. Pandan leaves are used as a symbol of fragrance even when they are withered. Pandan leaves are also herbal plants that benefit even in old age. *Cocor bebek* symbolizes that a person should be able to leave in any condition and should give benefits to others. Water is a symbol of purity, which is clean, pure, healthy, and free from evil.

The description of the characteristics of the symbols displayed in detail is interpreted in the interpretation results. Although the prayers uttered as speech acts during the *menepung tawari* event for the bride and groom are not clear, the interpretation above has given an idea that *peusejuek* conveyed prayers so that in the future the bride and groom would have no difficulty in making a living, remain in harmony, be strong in facing the storms of life, and be able to give blessings until old age, make the family name proud and remain pure in deeds.

### 2.5. Sugarcane and coconut seedlings

A special feature of Acehnese weddings is when the groom's entourage brings sugar cane and coconut seedlings to complete the offering. The sugar cane and coconut seeds (see Figure 6) are planted but not on the same day as the wedding. The sugar cane and coconut seeds can be planted at most three days after the three days of the wedding feast. When handing over the sugar cane and coconut seeds, no speech acts are conveyed. Therefore, Peirce's semiotic triangle can be used to find out the implied meaning of giving sugar cane and sugar.



Fig. 6. Sugarcane and coconut seedlings

The meaning of coconut and sugar cane seeds can be known from the description of the results of the semiotic triangle analysis. Coconut seeds and sugar cane as a tool to convey prayers, so that the bridal family will have offspring or family members who are successful, happy, useful for everyone. The family that is built can also last, even though it goes through the hardships of life, but is able to produce a family that is always prosperous.

### 3. Conclusions

There are 5 (five) symbols found in the implementation of Acehese traditional marriage, namely: (1) *bate ranub*, (2) *payong kuneng*, (3) aisle, (4) *peuseujuek*, and (5) coconut and sugar cane seeds. According to the results of the analysis using Charles Peirce's semiotic triangle, the meaning of each symbol is as follows.

1. *Bate Ranub* is a prayer for the continuity of the bride and groom's bond of love and also a prayer for the health of the extended family performing the marriage ceremony and a future that spreads the fragrance of the family name.
2. *Payong Kuneng* as a symbol used so that the bride and groom will always be protected from the storms of life, always together in one protection.
3. The aisle as a symbol is arranged as a basis for the bride and groom to live a household life. The important basis is religion, custom and family ties. This means that the bride and groom must carry out worship, in order to remain under the protection of God, and towards prosperity. The aisle is also a symbol to remind that household affairs do not need to be interfered with by others.
4. *Peusejuek* is the delivery of prayers so that in the future the bride and groom will have no difficulty in making a living, remain in harmony, be strong in facing the storms of life, and be able to give blessings until old age, honour the family name and remain pure in deeds.
5. The coconut and sugarcane seedlings are symbols that the bride and groom's family will one day give birth to successful, happy family members, useful for everyone. The family that is built can also last, even though it goes through the hardships of life, but is able to produce a family that is always prosperous.

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