

Wedding Ritual Mompi'ohupi: Semiotics Approach

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Received 18 March 2026 ; accepted 24 April 2026 ; published 27 April 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines Mompi'ohupi wedding ritual practiced by Saluan community in Batui, Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi. Its tradition is deeply embedded in semiotic meanings and meticulously preserved to this day. The documentation scarcity and inadequate comprehension of the cultural symbols embodied in the ritual raise concerns about the potential erosion of cultural identity in the face of modernization. In this study, it aims to identify and analyze semiotic meanings of the signs within the ritual by applying Peirce's theoretical framework. A qualitative research design was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews and documentation involving traditional leaders and community members. The findings reveal that each element of the ritual including tampok leaves, puring flowers, popoloti leaves, pupur, suhangbalu grass, white rice, lamps, an umbrella, and doda leaves carries symbolic values representing purity, protection, harmony, prosperity, and spiritual enlightenment. This study contributes to preservation of local cultural heritage, enriches scholarly discourse in anthropology and semiotics, and put more sustainable efforts into protecting traditional practices amid the dynamics of globalization.

KEYWORDS

Mompi'ohupi ritual.
Saluan
Semiotics
Culture
Pierce

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the nations whose culture has been transmitted across generations. Every culture is distinctive. Its identity reflects uniqueness of society, which is shaped by individual beliefs in the norms, values, and collective ways of thinking that have been passed down through generations (Dewantara et al, 2023). Understanding culture reveals its implicit meanings. Each symbol, gesture, object, and utterance within a cultural practice carries a particular significance that can only be fully apprehended within the social context of its community.

Culture has been examined from various perspectives, including semiotics. There exists an intricate relationship between culture and semiotics. The term 'semiotics' is derived from 'semiology'. This study investigates cultural phenomenon of signs. Through semiotics framework, culture is narrowly defined as a system of codes that influence human behavior, though, and focus on signs and meanings (Berger, 2021). Pierce conceptualized semiotics as a mode of representation, whereas Saussure emphasized structural framework of signifier and signified. Saussure viewed language as a system of signs, which its meaning comes from every signifier and create a complete structure (Sehaba, 2024). Both perspectives are applied to interpret how signs convey meaning within a cultural context. Semiotics approach offers a comprehensive understanding of culture as a social construct that evolves alongside societal transformations.

One of wedding rituals still observed by the Saluan community in Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi, is the Mompi'ohupi ritual in Batui. This ritual constitutes a component of a series of customary ceremonies, particularly within the wedding tradition of both bride and groom. This practice is not merely a formality, but a profoundly embedded cultural heritage that traces back to

antiquity. The description of the customs below encompasses various elements of traditional wedding ceremonies, such as tampok, puring flowers, umbrellas, pupur or powder, and several others. Within the framework of this wedding tradition, each element carries a particular significance and symbolizes diverse aspects of the community's worldview and social organization.

This wedding ritual, especially in Saluan Batui, has rarely been studied in depth. Earlier researches mainly described ceremony without considering the deeper cultural and linguistic significance of the rituals (Makka et al, 2024). Both of them did not explain each meaning of signs in a semiotics framework. In this research, it presents a new perspective through Pierce's semiotics framework in order to understand its representamen, objects, and interpretants of each ritual element.

Considering the significance of preserving local culture and the growing paucity of documentation addressing cultural meaning symbolically, this research regarding to Mompi'ohupi ritual and semiotic approach is highly pertinent. Unhidden and complex signs in this wedding ritual can enrich human knowledge, particularly within field of semiotics, culture, and local studies. It is in urgent need of preserving local cultural identity amidst the currents of modernization and globalization. This situation calls for strategies that bring these two together while maintaining cultural identity and local values (Suharyanto and Wiflihani, 2024). This also raises more awareness to maintain the sustainability of cultural heritage in the present and future. Thus, this study seeks to describe and reveal each sign in Mompi'ohupi wedding ritual and its meaning in context of Saluan Batui community.

Koentjaraningrat's anthropological theory identifies seven key elements of culture—language, knowledge, social organization, livelihood systems, technology, religion, and the arts—which together form the structure of cultural life (Subchi et al, 2020). These elements interact dynamically to shape how people think, work, and express themselves. For instance, language serves as both a tool of communication and a repository of collective memory, while art and religion embody the aesthetic and spiritual values that sustain unity within a community.

Lotman's semiotic perspective provides another important view by conceptualizing culture as a "semiosphere," a space where traditions, artifacts, and practices function as systems of signs that produce meaning (Rickberg, 2022). Through this lens, rituals such as Mompi'ohupi can be understood as cultural texts that communicate moral and social values. Each gesture, offering, and word within the ceremony acts as a sign that reflects the Saluan worldview, linking semiotic meaning with social identity and continuity across generations.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative method. It also aims to explore the Mompi'ohupi marriage tradition of the Saluan ethnic group in Sisipan Village, Batui District, in greater depth. The researcher chose this location in order to obtain more comprehensive information about the cultural norms of the Mompi'ohupi marriage. Qualitative research focuses on a deep understanding of social and cultural phenomena (Anto, 2024).

The data collection techniques applied in this study were interviews and documentation. Interviews constitute a form of communication between several people through shared conversation (Ardah, 2024). This research used direct interviews in Sisipan Village, Batui District with three informants, namely Pak Sahrin (traditional leader), Mama Jul, and Bu' Sahrin. The data collection process involved asking various questions to informants possess knowledge or have been directly involved in the Mompi'ohupi ritual. Additionally, documentation plays an important role in complementing the data collection process in qualitative research (Nurmahdi, 2024). During the interview process, the researcher collected several forms of documentation to support data collection and relevant information regarding the Mompi'ohupi ritual, including voice recordings and photographs of the traditional Mompi'ohupi wedding equipment.

The researchers analyzed the data through thematic analysis. This technique enables data to be described in a systematic and detailed manner, so that data represent more than different perceptions

(Alamyar & Husain, 2024). The data were repeatedly read. The researcher then transcribed and identified the data related to signs in Mompì'ohupi ritual. The data were defined and described narratively based on interviewees' perceptions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Analysis of Signs in the Mompì'ohupi Wedding Ritual

3.1.1 Sign: Umbrella

Object: Protective tool

Interpretant: Protection

“Umbrella means protection”

In the semiotic analysis of this study, the umbrella is treated as a sign. From a referent perspective, umbrella is interpreted as a protective tool used by people during rain and heat. From an interpretative perspective, the umbrella is understood as protection, a meaning that can be grasped abstractly, where the umbrella signifies something that can provide a sense of security. These two senses correspond with the informant's explanation of their understanding of the umbrella as “protection” in the Mompì'ohupi process. In the aforementioned meanings, the umbrella not only has a concrete or physical sense, but it also conveys the connotative dimension of the umbrella. Thus, all three aspects work together to reinforce the literal meaning of the umbrella as protection.

3.1.2 Sign: Tampok Leaves/Croton Flowers (Bohinunuk, Dingin Susu, and Dingin Patola)

Object: Ornamental plants

Interpretant: Symbol of Beauty

“Tampok leaves means *sakinah mawadah warahmah* in Islam, meaning that the bride and groom's household will be filled with peace, love, and God's grace.”

Tampok leaves, commonly known as croton flowers, come in three varieties: *bohinunuk*, *dingin susu*, and *dingin patola*, which are indispensable in the Mompì'ohupi process in Batui society. Based on their referent meaning, these plants are recognized as ornamental plants, beautifying and enhancing the home garden of those who cultivate them with their colors and shapes. By interpretant, tampok leaves (Croton Flowers) are regarded as symbol of beauty due to their variety of forms and the sense of freshness they would impart to those who see them. According to the informant, the tampok leaves (Croton Flower) are interpreted as “*sakinah mawadah warahmah*,” which denotes a marriage filled with love, stability, peace, and harmony within the family. Thus, the tampok leaves (croton flower) demonstrate that beauty is not merely aesthetic, but can also be spiritually and culturally emblematic of what marriage should embody: a new life characterized by outward beauty and inner peace.

3.1.3 Sign: Pupur (Bedak)

Object: Makeup

Interpretant: Beauty

“Pupur means to beautify the bride's face, making her appear radiant”

Pupur functions as a sign in the Batui people's Mompì'ohupi process. From its referent meaning, pupur is identified as a fine powder that can enhance the makeup of the person wearing it. Furthermore, from its interpretant meaning, pupur signifies beauty, as it is used to highlight the face. According to the informant of the present study, pupur bears a special significance as it serve “to beautify the bride's face so she looks radiant.” Therefore, across these three definitions, pupur encompasses both literal and figurative interpretations, symbolizing the bride's radiant appearance on her wedding day. Thus, pupur embodies several meanings: in its literal form as facial essential component of bridal adornment.

3.1.4 Sign: Lamp

Object: Lighting device

Interpretant: Lighting

“Lampu means lantern or light”

A lamp is used as a sign in the Mompì'ohupi process. In its referent sense, a lamp functions as a lighting device that enables people to overcome darkness. Meanwhile, in its interpretant meaning, it represents illumination as a symbol of enlightenment. According to the informant's statement in the Mompì'ohupi process, the lamp is interpreted as a “light or lantern.” Therefore, the lamp can be understood as a tool that provides hope, direction, and purpose in life for someone embarking on new chapter. The lamp also conveys a multilayered meaning, where it may be interpreted pragmatically as a lighting device, symbolically as a representation of enlightenment, and culturally as a guiding lantern.

3.1.5 Sign: Doda leaves

Object: Traditional medicine

Interpretant: Wards off misfortune and brings coolness

“Doda leaves are meant to soothe the heart”

Doda leaves, also known as dadap leaves, are essential symbols in the Mompì'ohupi process, alongside tampok leaves. Referentially, doda leaves are interpreted as traditional medicine, commonly used by the community for natural treatment, especially for women after childbirth and for children to walk more quickly. Interpretatively, doda leaves are also regarded as a symbol of warding off misfortune and bringing coolness, believed to provide protection from adversity and to foster peace. Furthermore, according to the informant, in the Mompì'ohupi process, doda leaves signify a “heart cooler,” as they are soaked in a white bowl filled with water, which functions as a source of blessings. From these three layers of meaning, it is evident that the symbolic significance of doda leaves extends beyond their physical and medical functions to encompass emotional and spiritual dimensions that touch the human heart when used.

3.1.6 Sign: Popoloti' leaves (Pacar China leaves or Paci leaves)

Object: Natural hand dye (henna)

Interpretant: Decoration

“Popoloti' means completion of the traditional ritual”

Popoloti' leaves, also known as henna leaves, are used employed in the Mompì'ohupi process as symbolic signs. Referentially, popoloti' leaves (Pacar China Leaves/Paci leaves) function as a natural hand dye, commonly referred to as henna, serving a practical purpose as body dye. Interpretatively, these leaves are regarded as decorative elements used to beautify one's hands. However, according to the informant, popoloti' leaves in the Mompì'ohupi process, namely as “a sign of having undergone a traditional ritual.” Therefore, from the three perspective-referential, interpretative, and informant, based it can be conclude that popoloti' leaves are interpreted not only in terms of their physical and aesthetic functions, but also in terms of their symbolic values, which highlight cultural identity and social status within the marriage process.

3.1.7 Sign: White rice

Object: Basic food

Interpretant: Source of life.

“White rice means good fortune”

White rice is also employed as a symbolic elements in the Mompì'ohupi process. Referentially, white rice represents the staple food consumed daily in the community. It is regarded as a source of life, essential for survival and well-being. According to the informant, white rice is

further understood as “provision.” From the three perspectives, it can be discerned that white rice is not merely food but also a divine blessing, reminding humans to remain grateful to God. Thus, white rice carries multiple layers of meaning: functionally as a staple food; symbolically as a source of life, and spiritually as sustenance.

3.1.8 Sign: Suhangbalu (grass)

Object: Green plants growing on the ground

Interpretant: Resilience

“Suhangbalu means completion of all wedding ceremonies”

Suhangbalu or grass in Indonesian, marks of the conclusion of the Mompì’ohupi process and the series of wedding ceremonies. Referentially, suhangbalu refers to green plants that grow abundantly in the ground and are easily found in everyday life. Interpretatively, suhangbalu symbolizes resilience, reflecting ordinary life that nonetheless retains its usefulness. According to the informant, suhangbalu bears a deeper meaning as “a sign of completion of all wedding processes.” Therefore, from these three perspectives, it is clear that suhangbalu not only signifies the simplicity of life but also serve as an important culture symbol marking the conclusion of the entire wedding ceremony.

Table 1. Signs in the Mompì’ohupi Wedding Ritual (Pierce’s Theoretical Framework)

No.	Pierce’s Theoretical Framework		
	Sign	Object	Interpretant
1.	Umbrella	Protective Tool	Protection
2.	Tampok Leaves/Croton Flowers (Bohinunuk, Dinging Susu, and Dinging Patola)	Ornamental Plants	Symbol of Beauty
3.	Pupur (Bedak)	Makeup	Beauty
4.	Lamp	Lighting Device	Lighting
5.	Doda Leaves	Traditional Medicine	Wards off Misfortune and Brings Coolness
6.	Popoloti’ Leaves (Pacar China Leaves/Paci Leaves)	Natural Hand Dye (Henna)	Decoration
7.	White Rice	Basic Food	Source of Life
8.	Suhangbalu (Grass)	Green Plants Growing on the Ground	Resilience

3.2 Discussion

The Mompì’ohupi tradition reflects a complex system of cultural meanings in which each element plays an essential and interconnected role. Tampok leaves consisting of three varieties, namely bohinunuk, dinging susu, and dinging patola, are considered equally important within the ritual. The absence of any of these elements is believed to disrupt the harmony and completeness of the ceremonial process. This shows that the ritual functions as an integrated cultural system in which each component contributes to overall balance and meaning, reflecting Koentjaraningrat’s view that culture consists of interconnected elements forming a unified system.

The preparation and application of popoloti leaves further demonstrate the symbolic depth of the ritual. The leaves are pounded and mixed with salt and lemon to produce a deeper and more durable red color, reflecting both practical knowledge and symbolic intention. The application of henna on specific fingers for men and women shows structured cultural patterns. For men, it is applied to the thumb, little finger, and middle finger, while for women, it is applied to the thumb, little finger, and ring finger of the dominant hand. This differentiation reflects cultural codes that signify gender roles and social identity within the Saluan community, in line with Koentjaraningrat’s perspective that cultural practices represent social organization and shared values.

Other elements identified in the findings such as pupur, lamp, umbrella, doda leaves, white rice, and suhangbalu also contribute to the symbolic structure of the ritual. Pupur represents beauty and the aesthetic preparation of the bride, the lamp symbolizes guidance and enlightenment, the umbrella signifies protection, doda leaves convey emotional calmness and protection from misfortune, white rice represents sustenance and prosperity, and suhangbalu marks the completion of the ceremonial process. These elements function together as a system of symbols that express cultural values and beliefs, which aligns with Lotman's concept of culture as a system of signs that continuously produces meaning.

The findings show that the ritual elements are not merely physical objects but represent the integration of cultural knowledge, social practices, and symbolic meanings. The interdependence among these elements illustrates how cultural systems operate as a whole, where each component contributes to maintaining balance and continuity within the tradition, reflecting Koentjaraningrat's view of culture as a unified system (Subchi et al, 2020).

Furthermore, each element in the ritual functions as a sign that conveys moral, social, and spiritual messages within the community. The ritual can be understood as a cultural text in which symbolic elements act as a medium of communication that transmits values, beliefs, and collective identity across generations, which is in line with Lotman's perspective on culture as a system of signs (Rickberg, 2022).

In conclusion, the Mompi'ohupi tradition embodies values of personal purification, readiness, respect for ancestors, and social harmony. The integration of symbolic elements highlights its function not only as a ceremonial practice but also as a meaningful cultural system that preserves and transmits the cultural identity of the Saluan community.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the symbolic meanings embedded in the Mompi'ohupi matrimonial ritual of the Saluan community in Batui. Employing a semiotic perspective grounded in Peirce's triadic model, the research elucidates the underlying meanings conveyed through each stage and artifact of the ritual. The findings reveal that the signs utilized in the ceremony such as tampok leaves, popoloti leaves, pupur, suhangbalu grass, umbrellas, lamps, and doda leaves symbolize essential values, including beauty, protection, purity, prosperity, and spiritual harmony. These results demonstrate that Mompi'ohupi transcends its function as a matrimonial rite, serving instead as a vital cultural legacy that preserves ancestral values and reinforces the cultural identity of the Saluan community.

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