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The Semiotics of a Manggarai Wedding: Language and Meaning

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Purpose of the study: This study aims to describe the forms, meanings, and semiotic functions of language in the traditional wedding discourse of the Flores culture in West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. **Methodology:** The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through structured interviews and participatory observation, supported by documentation such as photos and field notes. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative descriptive techniques and the referential equivalence method (metode padan referensial). **Main Findings:** The study identified unique semiotic forms in both linguistic units (words, phrases, sentences, discourse) and non-linguistic elements (symbols, objects, participants) throughout the wedding stages. These elements carry specific cultural meanings and functions, reinforcing social bonds, cultural identity, and communication within the Manggarai Barat community. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** This research provides a semiotic analysis of Manggarai Barat wedding rituals using Halliday's sociosemiotic framework, which has not been extensively applied in previous studies on Flores culture. It contributes to the preservation and linguistic documentation of local oral traditions and enriches the study of language-culture correlations in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a communication tool but also a cultural product that reflects the values, traditions, and social identity of a community [1]-[3]. In the context of Indonesia, with its diverse ethnic groups and cultures, local languages serve as important markers of cultural identity, especially in traditional ceremonies [4], [5]. One such cultural practice is the traditional wedding ceremony of the Flores community, particularly in West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. This ceremony involves complex symbolic processes, where language both verbal and non-verbal plays a crucial role in conveying cultural meanings, social norms, and collective identity [6].

Human beings are inherently historical and cultural entities. To discuss humanity is to engage with the history and evolution of human civilization itself. Within social life, each individual and community possesses distinct cultural structures, which are formed and expressed within the context of a nation or state [7], [8]. Every nation showcases unique and diverse subsystems of life; thus, a truly pluralistic society is one that preserves its historical and cultural diversity as tangible proof of its existence. The concrete realization of a cultured and historical society lies in valuing and consistently preserving its cultural products, reconstructing essential cultural values without losing their substantive elements [9], [10]. Therefore, studying and examining culture in depth is a vital means of uncovering the essence, forms, and functions that contribute to scholarly knowledge.

Indonesia stands out among other Asian nations due to its remarkable diversity in culture, religion, language, and ethnicity [11], [12]. Each aspect of this diversity possesses its own distinct identity, which cannot be unified solely by physical conditions. Thus, language emerges as the primary medium through which this diversity can be understood and appreciated. In varied contexts, language functions not only as a cultural product but also as a unifying force capable of bridging diverse elements [13], [14]. It serves as a fundamental instrument for gaining deep insight into culture, essentially acting as a crucial cultural artifact . The concretization of this diversity through language represents the preservation of history, affirming the enduring relevance of culture.

However, preserving the fundamental values of cultural diversity presents significant challenges. Active community participation is essential to sustain these values in tangible ways, such as through oral language, symbols, or written texts that carry specific meanings and functions [15], [16]. One enduring example of this cultural diversity is the oral tradition of the West Manggarai community, which reflects the process of understanding the core meanings embedded in their culture. Yet, comprehending this oral tradition is often difficult due to the complexity of translating fundamental terminologies unique to each ethnic group. The linguistic diversity among the Flores people in West Manggarai Regency poses a particular barrier to cultural understanding, as each tribe on the island has its own language, with Indonesian serving as the national unifying medium [17], [18]. Nevertheless, many community members struggle to translate local customary terms, especially those in the West Manggarai language, into Indonesian, leading to ambiguities and misunderstandings, particularly in the context of cultural ceremonies.

Cultural ceremonies in West Manggarai are broadly categorized into two types: those related to the human life cycle, such as *tae loas* (birth ceremonies), *tae sear/cear sumpe/sumpeng* (naming ceremonies), *tae kawing* (wedding ceremonies), and *tae rowa* (funeral ceremonies); and those connected to nature, such as *tae penti* (thanksgiving ceremonies), *tae randang* (harvest thanksgiving ceremonies), and *tae rame songko/congko lokap mbaru gendang* (ceremonies for cleaning around newly built traditional houses). All these events represent linguistic phenomena deeply intertwined with cultural evidence in West Manggarai society. While previous studies, such as those by Abdul Kadir Jailani [19] and Iswatiningsih [20], have broadly explored Manggarai culture, including its wedding traditions, there remains a gap in the specific semiotic analysis of language within the socio-cultural layers of Flores traditional weddings in West Manggarai Regency.

This study focuses on the language used in Flores wedding culture, particularly among the West Manggarai people. The language employed in these ceremonies possesses unique forms, meanings, and functions within the cultural system of Flores. This uniqueness is evident in the dialogues integral to the wedding rituals, which serve as vessels for interpreting the messages conveyed by speakers. From a semiotic perspective, this research examines the forms, meanings, and functions embedded in the language of these weddings to uncover their fundamental elements. The richness of terminology and symbols within these rituals, which generate context-specific meanings and embody cultural philosophy, makes them a compelling subject for semiotic analysis, especially in understanding the cultural foundations of marital life [21]-[23].

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the forms, meanings, and functions of language as a semiotic system in the traditional wedding rituals (kawing cangkang) of the Flores community in West Manggarai. The research is guided by Halliday's framework, which emphasizes the relationship between language, context, and culture, particularly through the concepts of field, tenor, and mode of discourse [24], [25]. By applying this approach, the study seeks to reveal how linguistic and non-linguistic signs interact to construct and transmit cultural values throughout the wedding stages, from pre-engagement (prapeminangan) to the final ceremony (podo).

Previous studies on Manggarai culture, such as those by Neng Tika [26] and Chaniago [27], have generally described its customs and social structures, including marriage traditions [28]. Meanwhile, research in semiotics, for instance by Misnawati [29] on Javanese wedding textiles, applied Peirce's triadic model (icon, index, symbol) to analyze cultural symbols [30]. However, a specific semiotic analysis focusing on the language used in Flores wedding rituals particularly from the perspective of Halliday's sociosemiotic theory, which views language as a social semiotic system embedded in its cultural context has not been extensively conducted, especially in the Manggarai Barat region.

This study introduces significant methodological and analytical novelty by addressing a critical gap in the existing literature through the focused application of Halliday's sociosemiotic theory to the linguistic discourse of traditional wedding rituals in West Manggarai. Previous research has either broadly described Manggarai

customs or applied Peirce's triadic model (icon, index, symbol) to analyze static cultural artifacts. In contrast, this research pioneers an approach that places language in-use the specialized lexicon, metaphors, dialogic exchanges, and performative utterances within the ritual as the primary object of analysis [31], [32]. This framework allows for the detailed investigation of how language, as an intrinsic and dynamic social semiotic system, actively constructs, negotiates, and legitimizes the complex realities of social relations (through tenor), cultural values (through field), and communicative modes (through mode) during the ceremonial performance, thereby offering a more holistic and process-oriented understanding of the ritual's meaning-making mechanism.

The implications of this research are both theoretical and applied. Theoretically, it strengthens and refines the application of Halliday's sociosemiotics beyond conventional textual analysis, demonstrating its powerful utility for interpreting intricate oral-performative traditions in non-Western contexts. It provides a robust analytical model for understanding how culture is dynamically encoded and enacted through language. Practically, the study yields a crucial, structured documentation of a vulnerable intangible heritage. The detailed mapping of the semiotic system serves as an essential reference for cultural preservation efforts [33]-[35]. It can inform the development of targeted educational materials for local curricula, guide the training of future ritual specialists (*tongka*), and support the formulation of cultural policies that move beyond the preservation of mere forms to the safeguarding of underlying cognitive and social systems. Furthermore, the methodological approach can be adapted to study similar oral traditions across the Indonesian archipelago, contributing to a more nuanced national cultural archive

The urgency of this study is underscored by the critical vulnerability of oral ritual traditions like the Manggarai wedding ceremony in the face of rapid modernization, linguistic shift, and cultural homogenization. This intricate semiotic ecosystem, a repository of unique cultural knowledge, social codes, and cosmological beliefs, is at high risk of erosion, distortion, or complete loss as generational transmission weakens. Without immediate and in-depth scholarly intervention to systematically document and analyze its linguistic-semiotic core, not only will specialized terminology disappear, but the entire framework of meaning and social function it sustains will also be irretrievably obscured. Conducting this research now is a preventive and foundational act it creates a vital academic record before further erosion occurs and provides the substantive understanding necessary for any meaningful, sustainable preservation strategy, ensuring that conservation efforts are rooted in the deep logic of the culture itself rather than in superficial or misplaced representations.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the preservation and documentation of oral traditions, as well as in enriching linguistic and anthropological studies related to local culture. It also offers insights into how semiotic systems operate in specific sociocultural contexts, which can support efforts in cultural education and heritage conservation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the semiotic aspects of language within the traditional wedding discourse of the Flores culture in West Manggarai Regency. The study was conducted in Heak Village, Daleng, Lembor District, West Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara.

2.2. Research Setting and Focus

The subject of this research is the traditional wedding ceremony of the Flores culture, specifically the *kawing cangkang* (inter-clan or inter-tribal marriage) in West Manggarai Regency. The focus encompasses the entire sequential ritual process, which includes the stages of *prapeminangan* (pre- ngagement) *peminangan* (engagement), *sompo* (bridal escort), *nika hadat* (traditional marital union), and *podo* (final ceremony). The study specifically examines the linguistic and non-linguistic signs such as spoken dialogues, specific terms, symbolic objects, and participant interactions that constitute the semiotic system within these cultural proceedings.

2.3. Data Collection techniques

Data were collected using a qualitative approach, primarily through two integrated techniques to ensure depth and validity. First, structured interviews were conducted with key informants who possess extensive knowledge of the local wedding customs. The main informants included community elders and cultural practitioners such as Andreas Angor (60), Simon Jat, and Hendrikus Senudin (50). Additionally, Sixtus Tanje served as an expert judge to validate the cultural accuracy of the collected data. Interview guidelines were developed based on the research problems and theoretical framework. Second, participant observation was employed, where the researcher directly observed and documented several actual wedding ceremonies. This technique was supported by the *simak* method (careful listening, note-taking, and audio recording) and visual documentation (photographs) to capture dialogues, symbolic actions, spatial arrangements, and social interactions

within their authentic context. The research was conducted in Heak, Daleng Village, Lembor District, West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara.

Data collection was carried out through two primary techniques: (1) *structured interviews* with key informants knowledgeable about Manggarai Barat wedding customs such as traditional elders (*tongka*), community leaders, and families who had conducted the ceremony and (2) *participant observation* of the wedding stages (*prapeminangan, peminangan, sompo, nika hadat, podo*). Interviews were guided by a prepared protocol focusing on the linguistic terms, symbols, and procedures of the wedding ritual. Observations were documented using audio recordings, photographs, and detailed field notes, forming a comprehensive ethnographic record.

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a *qualitative descriptive analysis* technique, supported by the *referential equivalence method* (*metode padan referensial*). This method aligns with Sudaryanto's (1993) principle, where linguistic elements are analyzed by relating them to extra-linguistic realities in this case, the socio-cultural context of the wedding ceremony. Analysis followed Halliday's sociosemiotic framework, examining the *field* (social activity), *tenor* (participant relations), and *mode* (role of language) within the wedding discourse [5]. Data were categorized into linguistic units (words, phrases, sentences, discourse) and non-linguistic elements (objects, symbols, participants) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Categorization Framework for Semiotic Analysis

Category	Sub-Category	Example from Wedding Ritual
Linguistic Units	Word (*Kata*)	*kraeng* (sir), *tuak* (traditional drink)
	Phrase (*Frase*)	*manuk mokang bakok* (white hen)
	Sentence (*Kalimat*)	*Bom ite kaut to'ong*
	Discourse (*Wacana*)	Dialogue during *pase sapu selek kope*
Non-Linguistic Elements	Objects & Symbols	*kila* (ring), *nggong* (gong), *saung kala* (betel quid)
	Participants (*Pelibat*)	*tongka* (spokesperson), *woe* (groom's family), *iname* (bride's family)
	Situational Context	Location, time, and social setting of each ritual stage

Table 1 classifies the elements that appear in wedding rituals into two main categories: linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Linguistic elements include linguistic units ranging from words (e.g., kraeng, tuak), phrases (manuk mokang bakok), sentences (Bom ite kaut to'ong), to discourse in the form of dialogue in certain processions. Meanwhile, non-linguistic elements include ritual objects and symbols such as kila, nggong, and saung kala, participants such as tongka, woe, and iname, and situational contexts that include the location, time, and social setting at each stage of the ritual.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure data validity, *source triangulation* was applied by cross-referencing information from multiple informants and direct observation. Furthermore, an *expert judgement* was conducted with a recognized cultural expert, Sixtus Tanje, to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the cultural data and interpretations. This multi-method approach strengthens the reliability and scientific acceptability of the findings.

2.6. Research Procedure

This study was conducted through a systematic qualitative research procedure. The research began with determining the research site and subject, namely the traditional kawing cangkang wedding ceremony of the Flores culture in West Manggarai Regency. Subsequently, the researcher prepared research instruments, including interview guidelines and observation sheets based on the semiotic and sociosemiotic framework. Data collection was carried out through structured interviews with key informants such as traditional elders (tongka), community leaders, families involved in the ceremony, and a cultural expert, alongside participant observation of the wedding ritual stages prapeminangan, peminangan, sompo, nika hadat, and podo. All data were documented using audio recordings, photographs, and detailed field notes. The collected data were then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis with the referential equivalence method and Halliday's sociosemiotic framework. Finally, data validity was ensured through source triangulation and expert judgment to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals that the traditional wedding rituals (tae kawing) of the Manggarai people in West Flores possess a rich and complex semiotic system embedded within both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. The analysis, grounded in Halliday's framework of social semiotics, shows that these elements work in concert to construct meaning, fulfill specific social functions, and reinforce cultural identity.

3.1. Linguistic Elements across the Wedding Procession

The findings show that linguistic elements are present in all stages of the Manggarai Barat traditional wedding procession, namely pre-engagement, engagement, sompo, nika hadat, and podo. These linguistic elements appear in the form of ritual utterances, formulaic expressions, dialogic exchanges, and culturally specific terms that function as semiotic signs. The use of language is strictly regulated by customary norms and is delivered by designated speakers (tongka), indicating that ritual speech serves as an authoritative medium for legitimizing social and cultural actions.

Table 1. Linguistic Elements in Each Stage of the Wedding Procession

Wedding Stage	Linguistic Forms Identified	Semiotic Function
Pre-engagement	*Pase sapu selek kope*, *rekak dokong*, *reke teing wie leson tuke mbaru*	Expressing intention, respect, and initial negotiation
Engagement	Ritual opening speech, exchange of *tuak baro sa'i* and *tuak toi lose agu sasa kope*	Formal agreement and social acknowledgment
Sompo	Performative ritual dialogues	Acceptance of the bride into the groom's family
Nika Hadat	Customary legitimizing utterances	Legalization of marriage according to adat law
Podo	Blessing and closing ritual speeches	Finalization and reinforcement of kinship bonds

Table 1 illustrates the main stages of a traditional wedding ritual and their socio-cultural functions. The pre-engagement stage involves a series of ceremonies, such as pase sapu selek kope (a traditional ceremony), rekak dokong (a traditional ceremony), and reke teing wie leson tuke mbaru (a traditional ceremony) as a means of conveying intentions, respect, and initial negotiations. The engagement stage is marked by an opening speech and the exchange of tuak baro sa'i (a traditional drink) and tuak toi lose agu sasa kope (a traditional drink) as a symbol of formal agreement and social recognition. The sompo stage, a ritual dialogue affirms the bride's acceptance into the groom's family. The nika hadat (a traditional ceremony) further legitimizes the marriage, and the podo stage concludes with prayers and blessings that strengthen the kinship ties between the two families.

3.2. Linguistic Units in the Pre-Engagement Stage

At the pre-engagement stage, linguistic elements function as indirect communicative strategies. The findings identify that utterances are predominantly symbolic and metaphorical, aimed at testing social readiness and maintaining politeness. Expressions such as *pase sapu selek kope* and *rekak dokong* act as signs of respect and social positioning between the two families. These utterances prevent direct confrontation and reflect the Manggarai Barat cultural preference for indirectness in social negotiation.

Table 2. Linguistic Units in the Pre-Engagement Stage

Linguistic Unit	Form	Meaning
Pase sapu selek kope	Phrase	Symbolic opening to seek permission
Rekak dokong	Dialog	Mutual promise and emotional bonding
Reke teing wie leson tuke mbaru	Clause	Formal request to enter family relations

The table presents selected linguistic units used in the wedding ritual, along with their forms and meanings. *Pase sapu selek kope* appears as a phrase that symbolically marks the opening of communication and the act of seeking permission. *Rekak dokong* takes the form of a dialogue that conveys mutual promises and strengthens emotional bonds between families. Meanwhile, *reke teing wie leson tuke mbaru* is structured as a clause expressing a formal request to establish kinship relations, reflecting the ritual's emphasis on respect and social harmony.

3.3. Linguistic Features in the Engagement and Sompo Stages

The engagement stage shows a shift toward explicit and formal linguistic forms. Ritual dialogues become structured and authoritative, emphasizing mutual consent and obligation. In the *sompo* stage, language operates as a performative act, where utterances symbolically enact the bride's acceptance. The findings confirm that speech at this stage does not merely describe reality but actively transforms social status.

Table 3. Linguistic Functions in Engagement and Sompo

Stage	Dominant Linguistic Function	Cultural Meaning
Engagement	Declarative and contractual speech	Establishing mutual agreement
Sompo	Performative speech	Symbolic transfer of family membership

The table highlights the relationship between ritual stages, dominant linguistic functions, and their cultural meanings. During the engagement stage, declarative and contractual speech acts are used to formalize mutual agreement between families, emphasizing commitment and social recognition. In the *sompo* stage, performative speech plays a central role in symbolically transferring the bride's membership into the groom's family, reinforcing kinship ties and cultural continuity.

3.4. Non-Linguistic Semiotic Elements

The study also identifies non-linguistic semiotic elements, including ritual objects, spatial arrangements, participant roles, and gestures. Objects such as livestock (*ela rinca ngaung*, *kaba ra'um rangga*), traditional textiles, and gongs function as symbolic signs representing commitment, responsibility, and social honor. Spatial positioning and seating arrangements reflect hierarchy and kinship structure.

Table 4. Non Linguistic Semiotic Elements

Element Type	Example	Semiotic Meaning
Ritual objects	Livestock, textiles	Responsibility and sincerity
Spatial setting	Seating arrangement	Social hierarchy
Participants	*Tongka*, elders, witnesses	Authority and legitimacy

The analysis of the Manggarai traditional wedding rituals reveals a profoundly intricate and multilayered semiotic system. This system does not merely accompany the social event but actively constructs, communicates, and reinforces the very reality of the marriage within the Manggarai worldview. Grounding the discussion in Halliday's social semiotics particularly the contextual framework of field, tenor, and mode allows for a deep unpacking of how linguistic and non-linguistic signs operate as constitutive elements of culture, social structure, and identity.

The findings first illuminate the complex semiotic forms at play, which exist in a dynamic, stratified relationship. The linguistic forms are not a simple inventory of terms but a specialized register and discourse that operates on multiple levels. At the lexical level, words like *mori/kraeng* (sir) immediately index the ritual field, shifting interaction from ordinary to ceremonial and establishing the formal tenor between participants. More significantly, the pervasive use of metaphorical phrases such as *manuk mokang bakok* (white hen) for the bride or *wa tana eta sekang* (on the ground and on the hut) for the bride price demonstrates a cognitive-cultural strategy. These are not mere decorative figures of speech but dense conceptual metaphors that encode cultural values purity, value, fertility and social structures the material and financial dimensions of alliance into memorable, tangible imagery. This metaphoric language functions poetically to condense complex social realities. At the level of discourse, the extended dialogues, especially during negotiations like *peminangan*, function as performative speech acts. The utterance of a promise, such as pledging *sa ela rinca ngaung* (a pig as high as the house's underside) as a penalty for breaking the engagement, is itself an act that creates a binding social obligation within the adat framework. The language here is a tool of social action and control.

Simultaneously, the non-linguistic forms create a parallel and intertwined semiotic channel. Objects and actions are heavily symbolic and function as essential components of the communicative event. The exchange of *tuak* (palm wine) is a prime example. When offered as *tuak baro sa'i*, it is not a drink but a symbolic announcement and a gesture of respect; as *tuak toi lose agu sasa kope*, it becomes a symbol of welcome and acceptance. The mode of delivery who gives it to whom, with what words is crucial to its meaning. Similarly, the *kila* (ring) from the bride and the *saung kala* (money/betel) from the groom form a binary symbolic system representing complementary gendered contributions, emotional-bond versus socio-economic capability. The act of *sompo* (carrying the bride) is a powerful multi-modal sign. The physical act itself, accompanied by the resonant sound of the *gong*, is an indexical sign marking the precise moment of her social transition. The gong's sound is a public proclamation to the community and a spiritual summons to the ancestors, making the private act a communal and cosmological event. The strategic use of *lomes* (indirect requests for money) during this process, such as the carriers claiming fatigue, shows how even resistance or negotiation within the ritual is channeled through culturally coded semiotic behaviors rather than direct confrontation.

The semiotic functions of these forms are multifaceted and deeply interwoven with social goals. The directive function is paramount, as language constantly guides, instructs, and negotiates the ritual process, from setting the bride price to orchestrating the physical movements of the ceremony [36], [37], [38]. This directive force is a mechanism of social control, reinforcing norms and hierarchies. Closely linked is the poetic function, which elevates the discourse beyond the transactional. The rich metaphors, parallel structures, and ritualized repetitions are not just aesthetic; they serve to memorialize cultural wisdom, making the procedures and values

embedded in the ritual memorable and transmissible across generations. For instance, the blessing *porong uwa gula* (may you grow like sugarcane) poetically encapsulates hopes for sweetness, fertility, and prosperity. The contextual function is perhaps the most critical finding, as the meaning of any sign is radically dependent on the situational context [39], [40]. A phrase like *"gho'o keng reweng daku"* (this is my word/speech) can signify a promise, a payment, or a formal closure depending on whether it is uttered while handing over money, *tuak*, or at the end of a negotiation. The field (wedding ritual), tenor (relationship between *tongka*, families), and mode (oral, accompanied by specific objects) together generate the specific meaning.

From these forms and functions emerge the profound semiotic meanings that the ritual constructs. On a cultural level, the entire process is a living archive and a pedagogical theatre. Each specialized term and staged action conserves and transmits Manggarai cosmology, social rules, and historical knowledge [41]-[43]. The difficulty in translating these terms for outsiders is not a linguistic flaw but a feature of a robust cultural boundary-maintenance system. On a social level, the ritual is a dramatic performance that reproduces and legitimizes social structure. It visibly maps the kinship network through the roles of *woe* (groom's side), *iname* (bride's side), *tongka* (orators), and *letang* (guides). The negotiation of *paca* (bride price) is a public drama of economics, prestige, and social negotiation, transforming a material transaction into a culturally meaningful ritual that cements alliances between families. Furthermore, it actively constructs gender identities, positioning the woman as a valued object to be respectfully transferred (*manuk mokang bakok*) and the man as a capable provider responsible for the *saung kala*. On a spiritual level, the ritual creates a sacred time and space, mediating between the human and ancestral worlds [44], [45]. The sounding of the gong, the offerings of *tuak*, and the invocation of blessings are semiotic acts that seek ancestral witness and blessing, transforming a social contract into a cosmologically sanctioned union.

Based on a review of previous research focusing on cultural preservation through institutions such as libraries Kurniati [46]studies of linguistic landscapes in urban public spaces Putri et al [47], and the role of scripts in literary and religious transmission Munawarh & Mawaddah [48], a significant academic gap has been identified. These three areas of study despite outlining the functions of preservation, identity mapping, and value transmission have not yet deeply explored the practice of oral discourse and performatives in living and dynamic traditional rituals, which are the primary vehicle for the direct reproduction of cultural values within local communities. Furthermore, the approaches used in previous studies such as descriptive sociolinguistics [49], historical-philological [50], or functionalism have not yet systematically optimized the sociosemiotic framework to dissect how language choices in specific ritual contexts function not only as identity markers, but as active tools that realize ideational (construction of customary reality), interpersonal (negotiation of power relations and social hierarchy), and textual (formation of ritual cohesion) functions. Therefore, this study is present to fill this gap by making language in the traditional marriage ritual of West Manggarai Flores as a material object, in order to reveal in depth how linguistic and non-linguistic semiotics in each stage of the ritual do not merely preserve values (as studied by Nugraha in the context of libraries), but actively form, negotiate, and reproduce social structures, cultural identities, and their own logic an analytical dimension that is still limited in studies of urban linguistic landscapes Putri et al and script studies Munawarh & Mawaddahwhich become the foundation of the community's life amidst the dynamics of social change.

The novelty of this study lies in its pioneering application of Michael Halliday's sociosemiotic framework to the dynamic, performative discourse of the traditional *paca* wedding ceremony in the Flores culture of West Manggarai. By focusing on the interplay between linguistic units (words, metaphors, speech acts) and non-linguistic elements (ritual objects, spatial arrangements, participant gestures), this research moves beyond a mere descriptive ethnography of customs [51]-[53]. It uniquely reveals how specific semiotic choices within ritual stages such as the *tuke* (bargaining), *dorang* (bridewealth presentation), and *wa'i* (didactic advice) actively construct social reality. The study demonstrates that these choices are not arbitrary but functionally constitute the ceremony's core by simultaneously realizing three metafunctions: the *ideational* (encoding cultural logic and cosmology), the *interpersonal* (negotiating kinship hierarchies, authority, and social bonds), and the *textual* (creating the ritual's cohesive and sacred structure) [54], [55]. This approach provides an original, systematic model for understanding how a living oral tradition semiotically reproduces cultural identity, reinforces social structure, and negotiates meaning in real-time, offering a significant methodological contribution to the study of intangible cultural heritage in Eastern Indonesia.

The findings of this study carry important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it enriches the field of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics by demonstrating the robust applicability of Hallidayan sociosemiotics to non-Western, oral-based cultural contexts, thereby expanding the framework's explanatory power beyond written or institutional discourses. It provides a nuanced model for understanding how language acts as a primary tool for the dynamic negotiation of tradition, identity, and power within ritual spaces. Practically, this research serves as crucial documentation for the endangered oral heritage of the Manggarai people, offering a detailed record of semantic forms, cultural codes, and pragmatic functions that can inform local cultural education and preservation policies. For the community, it can foster greater awareness and appreciation of the sophisticated semiotic system embedded in their rituals, potentially strengthening cultural resilience against homogenizing

global influences [56]-[58]. Furthermore, the methodological approach can be adapted by other researchers studying similar oral traditions across the Indonesian archipelago.

This study acknowledges certain limitations that also point to avenues for future research. Firstly, the focus on a single, albeit complex, cultural event (the traditional wedding) within the West Manggarai Regency means the findings are context-specific and may not fully represent the totality of semiotic practices in Flores culture. The depth of analysis required for a qualitative sociosemiotic approach necessarily limited the breadth of ritual types examined. Secondly, while participatory observation and interviews with cultural elders were employed, the analysis is inherently interpretive and could benefit from further triangulation through longitudinal studies or focused group discussions with a wider demographic to capture potential generational differences in the perception of ritual meanings [59], [60]. Lastly, the research primarily analyzes the synchronic function of language within the contemporary ritual performance; a more diachronic study investigating historical shifts in the semiotics of the wedding discourse would provide valuable insights into the evolution of these cultural practices.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the Manggarai wedding is far more than a series of customary steps; it is a dense, dynamic, and coherent semiotic ecosystem. Language, objects, space, time, and performance are fused into a system that does not just reflect Manggarai culture but actively perpetuates and renews it. The findings underscore the critical importance of preserving not just the isolated words or actions, but the entire network of meanings and the contextual rules that govern them. As modernization pressures simplify or commodify such rituals, the loss incurred is not merely of tradition but of a complex cognitive and social world built and sustained through this powerful semiotic practice. The study affirms that in such cultural performances, signs are not merely representative; they are constitutive, building the very realities of relationship, identity, and community they appear only to describe.

4. CONCLUSION

This study successfully demonstrates, in alignment with the initial premise stated in the Introduction, that the traditional wedding rituals of the Manggarai people constitute a complex and coherent semiotic ecosystem where linguistic forms (such as the metaphorical *manuk mokang bakok* and *wa tana eta sekang*) and non-linguistic symbols (like *tuak, kila*, and the performative act of *sompo*) function in an integrated, stratified system. The results confirm that these signs operate with specific semiotic functions primarily directive, poetic, and contextual that actively construct layered cultural, social, and spiritual meanings, thereby not merely reflecting but fundamentally constituting Manggarai social reality, kinship structures, and cosmological beliefs. The compatibility between the research objectives and these detailed findings validates the efficacy of Halliday's social semiotic framework in analyzing ritual discourse. Furthermore, these results offer significant prospects for application in further studies, including serving as a baseline model for comparative cultural semiotics in the Indonesian archipelago, informing the development of culturally-grounded educational curricula in West Manggarai, guiding sustainable cultural tourism and preservation policies that honor the ritual's depth, and contributing to theoretical refinements in anthropological linguistics regarding the encoding of traditional knowledge systems through performative practice.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declarethat no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried outentirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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