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MARRIAGE RITUAL OBJECT AS CULTURAL SIGNS: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND SOCIAL VALUES IN KANGEAN SOCIETY

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Abstract
This study examines marriage ritual objects in Kangean society as cultural signs that construct identity and social values through a qualitative ethnolinguistic approach integrated with semiotic analysis. The data consist of key ritual objects observed across four sequential stages of the wedding ceremony, namely *pepentaan*, *akad*, *resepsi*, and *kokocoran*. The analysis applies a multi-layered semiotic framework (denotation, connotation, and myth) combined with a processual perspective to capture how meaning is produced across ritual phases. The findings reveal that ritual objects do not function as static symbols but as dynamic semiotic resources whose meanings shift according to their temporal and social positioning. At the denotative level, objects reflect structured functional roles aligned with ritual stages; at the connotative level, they encode values such as responsibility, legitimacy, prestige, and solidarity; and at the mythological level, they naturalize cultural ideologies related to marriage, social recognition, and communal participation. This study contributes to semiotic and ethnolinguistic scholarship by highlighting the role of material culture as an active agent in meaning-making and by introducing temporality as a critical dimension in the analysis of cultural signs.

Keywords: Ritual objects; Semiotics; Ethnolinguistics; Cultural identity; Social values; Kangean society

1. Introduction

The Kangean Islands, located off the coast of Madura, Indonesia, represent a culturally distinctive region shaped by long-standing interactions among fishermen, traders, and migrant communities. These historical encounters have produced a complex socio-cultural system in which language, customs, and ritual practices function as key markers of identity and social cohesion (Hayani et al., 2020). Cultural practices in this context are not merely inherited traditions but dynamic systems through which meanings are produced, negotiated, and transmitted across generations (Koentjaraningrat, 1984; Geertz, 1973).

Among these cultural practices, wedding rituals occupy a central and highly significant position in Kangean society. Marriage is not only a personal or religious event but also a social institution that reinforces kinship ties and communal solidarity (Noortyani et al., 2024; Mahmud, 2020). As noted by Orthaber (2023), ceremonial practices function as manifestations of collective belief systems and social relationships. In Indonesian contexts, wedding rituals serve as cultural arenas where values, norms, and social structures are publicly expressed and reaffirmed (Lestari, 2016; Aisyah, 2020).

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From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is inseparable from cultural practices and social identity. Ethnolinguistics examines how linguistic forms, expressions, and speech practices reflect a community's worldview, beliefs, and values (Baehaqie, 2017; Sugianto, 2017). In wedding rituals, ceremonial speech, traditional vocabulary, and ritual discourse function not only as communicative tools but also as carriers of symbolic meaning that encode cultural knowledge (Duranti, 1997; Noortyani et al., 2023). These linguistic elements are closely interconnected with non-linguistic components, including ritual objects, actions, and performances, forming a unified system of meaning.

To understand this system, semiotic theory provides a crucial analytical framework. According to Saussure (1916), a sign consists of the signifier and the signified, representing the relationship between form and meaning. This concept is further developed by Barthes (1972), who distinguishes between denotation and connotation, allowing deeper interpretation of cultural signs beyond their literal meanings. In addition, Peirce (1931) categorizes signs into icons, indexes, and symbols, emphasizing the relational nature of meaning-making processes. Through these perspectives, ritual objects, actions, and expressions can be understood as signs that convey layered meanings shaped by cultural contexts (Percles, 2021).

From an anthropological viewpoint, Geertz (1973) conceptualizes culture as a system of symbols through which people communicate and sustain shared meanings. Rituals, therefore, can be interpreted as "texts" that reveal underlying social structures and cultural values. Similarly, Turner (1969) highlights the symbolic and performative aspects of rituals in constructing social order, while Lévi-Strauss (1963) emphasizes the structural relationships embedded within cultural practices. These perspectives suggest that ritual elements including objects are not merely functional but deeply symbolic components of social life.

In Kangean wedding rituals, various objects such as *sere penang*, *beras koneng*, *kettan*, *gula kobi*, and other ceremonial items function as symbolic representations of cultural values. These objects embody meanings related to unity, commitment, prosperity, and harmony, reflecting the community's moral and social principles. Furthermore, practices such as gift-giving, reciprocation, and mutual assistance (*akarje* and *totolongan*) illustrate systems of social reciprocity that reinforce solidarity and collective responsibility (Adib, 2011; Nur & Syahril, 2022). As Mauss (1925) argues in his theory of gift exchange, such practices are fundamental mechanisms for maintaining social relationships and obligations within a community.

Despite the richness of these traditions, previous studies on Kangean wedding rituals have primarily focused on ritual discourse, linguistic expressions, or general cultural practices (Fitriana, 2025; Noortyani et al., 2024). While these studies successfully highlight the role of language and social interaction, they tend to treat ritual objects as secondary or complementary elements. Research that specifically examines ritual objects as central cultural signs remains limited. Moreover, studies integrating semiotic analysis with the construction of identity and social values particularly through material culture are still scarce.

This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive approach that positions ritual objects as key analytical units within a semiotic framework. In addition, the role of these objects in constructing collective identity, reinforcing social hierarchy, and sustaining cultural values in the context of modernization has not been sufficiently explored (Creswell, 2014; Sudaryanto, 2018). As traditional practices face increasing pressure from social change, understanding the symbolic function of ritual objects becomes increasingly important for preserving cultural continuity.

Therefore, this study aims to examine marriage ritual objects as cultural signs in Kangean society by applying a semiotic perspective. Specifically, it analyzes how ritual objects function as sign systems that construct identity and social values. Unlike previous studies that emphasize linguistic aspects or ritual processes, this research focuses on the symbolic meanings embedded in material culture and their role in shaping social relations and cultural identity.

The novelty of this study lies in three main aspects. First, it adopts an object-centered semiotic approach, positioning ritual objects as the primary unit of analysis. Second, it integrates semiotic theory with the concept of identity and social value construction, bridging symbolic interpretation with socio-cultural analysis. Third, it offers a holistic perspective by examining ritual objects, actions, and language as interconnected sign systems. Through this approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural meanings are constructed, maintained, and transformed within traditional societies, particularly in the Kangean community.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Semiotics and Cultural Signs

Semiotics forms the central theoretical foundation of this study, as it provides the analytical tools necessary to interpret marriage ritual objects as cultural signs embedded with layered meanings. Saussure (1916) conceptualizes the sign as a unity of the signifier and the signified, where meaning is produced through their relational structure rather than inherent in objects themselves. Within Kangean wedding rituals, objects such as *sere penang*, *beras koneng*, and *kettan* function as signifiers that point to broader cultural concepts, including unity, commitment, and harmony. This structural view positions meaning as a socially constructed phenomenon, emerging from shared conventions within a community rather than from the intrinsic qualities of the objects.

However, Saussure's framework has been critiqued for its limited attention to cultural context and ideological dimensions of meaning. To address this limitation, Barthes (1972) expands semiotic analysis by introducing the concepts of denotation and connotation, allowing signs to be interpreted at multiple levels. At the denotative level, ritual objects are understood as physical items used in ceremonies, while at the connotative level, they embody cultural values, beliefs, and social expectations. This dual-layered analysis is particularly relevant in Kangean rituals, where objects operate not only as functional tools but also as carriers of moral and social meaning, reflecting collective ideals about marriage and social responsibility.

Furthermore, Barthes' concept of myth adds a critical dimension by highlighting how cultural meanings become naturalized and taken for granted. In the context of Kangean society, ritual objects may function as mythic signs that reinforce dominant cultural values, such as gender roles, social hierarchy, and familial obligations. This suggests that semiotic analysis should not only describe meaning but also critically examine how meaning is constructed, maintained, and legitimized within a cultural system.

In comparison, Peirce's (1931) triadic model of signs icon, index, and symbol offers an alternative perspective by emphasizing the relational and interpretive nature of signs. While Saussure and Barthes focus on structural and cultural meanings, Peirce highlights how meaning emerges through interpretation and interaction. This perspective is useful for understanding how different members of the Kangean community may interpret ritual objects in slightly varied ways, depending on their social roles and experiences.

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Thus, this study adopts a critical semiotic approach that combines Saussure's structural model, Barthes' cultural interpretation, and Peirce's relational perspective. This integrated framework allows for a more comprehensive understanding of ritual objects as dynamic cultural signs that not only represent meaning but also actively participate in shaping social values and identity.

2.2 Ethnolinguistics and Cultural Meaning

Ethnolinguistics provides a crucial perspective for understanding how meaning is constructed through the interaction between language, culture, and social practice. Duranti (1997) emphasizes that language is not merely a tool for communication but a fundamental medium through which cultural knowledge is produced and transmitted. In Kangean wedding rituals, ceremonial speech, ritual discourse, and traditional expressions function as symbolic systems that encode cultural values and social norms, reflecting the community's worldview.

However, focusing solely on language risks overlooking the role of non-verbal elements in meaning-making processes. Ethnolinguistic studies increasingly recognize that meaning is constructed through multimodal systems, where language interacts with gestures, objects, and ritual actions. In Kangean rituals, linguistic expressions are closely intertwined with material objects, suggesting that meaning emerges from the interaction between verbal and non-verbal signs rather than from language alone.

This perspective challenges traditional linguistic approaches that prioritize verbal communication and highlights the importance of integrating material culture into ethnolinguistic analysis. Ritual objects, therefore, should be understood as part of a broader communicative system, where they function alongside language to convey meaning. This aligns with contemporary approaches in linguistic anthropology that emphasize the inseparability of language, culture, and social practice.

Moreover, ethnolinguistics contributes to understanding how cultural identity is constructed through symbolic systems. Language and ritual practices together create a shared framework of meaning that defines group identity and social belonging. In the Kangean context, ritual objects reinforce this identity by embodying values that are also expressed in linguistic forms, such as respect, cooperation, and moral responsibility.

Thus, this study adopts an integrated ethnolinguistic perspective that views ritual objects as part of a broader system of cultural communication, where meaning is co-constructed through the interaction of language, objects, and social practices.

2.3 Culture as a System of Symbols

From an anthropological perspective, culture is understood as a system of symbols that shapes human perception, behavior, and social interaction. Geertz (1973) conceptualizes culture as a web of meanings that humans themselves have created, in which rituals function as symbolic "texts" that can be interpreted to reveal underlying social structures and values. In Kangean wedding rituals, this perspective suggests that ceremonial practices are not merely procedural events but meaningful performances that communicate shared beliefs about life, relationships, and social order.

However, Geertz's interpretive approach has been critiqued for focusing primarily on meaning without sufficiently addressing power relations and social structure. To complement this

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perspective, Koentjaraningrat (1984) provides a more systematic framework by identifying key elements of culture, including social organization, language, and ritual practices. This structural perspective highlights how cultural elements are interconnected and function together to maintain social order.

Additionally, structuralist perspectives, such as those proposed by Lévi-Strauss (1963), emphasize the underlying patterns and relationships that organize cultural practices. From this viewpoint, ritual objects can be seen as part of a structured system of symbols that reflects deeper cognitive and social structures within the community. This approach allows for a more analytical understanding of how cultural meanings are organized and reproduced.

At the same time, Turner (1969) emphasizes the performative and dynamic aspects of rituals, arguing that rituals are not only symbolic but also transformative processes that shape social relationships. This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding how wedding rituals in Kangean society function as moments of social transition, where identities and relationships are redefined.

By integrating interpretive, structural, and performative approaches, this study conceptualizes culture as a dynamic system of symbols in which ritual objects play a central role. This framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how cultural meanings are constructed, maintained, and transformed within Kangean wedding rituals.

2.4 Social Reciprocity and Symbolic Exchange

The concept of social reciprocity is fundamental to understanding how ritual objects function within systems of social relationships. In Kangean wedding rituals, practices such as gift-giving, reciprocation, and mutual assistance (*akarje*) reflect deeply embedded cultural values related to cooperation and collective responsibility. These practices demonstrate that ritual objects are not only symbolic but also relational, as they mediate interactions between individuals and families.

Mauss (1925), in his theory of gift exchange, argues that the exchange of objects is never purely economic but always involves social obligations and moral relationships. This perspective is highly relevant in the Kangean context, where the exchange of ritual objects signifies mutual commitment and the establishment of new social ties. Objects, therefore, function as carriers of social meaning that reinforce relationships and obligations.

However, Mauss's theory has been extended by later scholars who emphasize the role of power and social hierarchy in exchange systems. In Kangean society, the type and quantity of objects exchanged may reflect social status and economic capacity, indicating that reciprocity is not entirely egalitarian. This suggests that ritual exchange should be analyzed not only as a system of cooperation but also as a mechanism that reproduces social differentiation.

Furthermore, contemporary perspectives on social exchange highlight the symbolic dimension of reciprocity, where objects function as signs that communicate values such as generosity, responsibility, and solidarity. This aligns with the semiotic framework of this study, which views ritual objects as both material and symbolic entities.

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Thus, this study conceptualizes social reciprocity as a system of symbolic exchange in which ritual objects play a central role in constructing and maintaining social relationships, values, and structures.

2.5 Ritual Objects and Identity Construction

Ritual objects play a crucial role in the construction of identity, both at the individual and collective levels. Through their symbolic meanings, these objects communicate cultural values that define what it means to belong to the Kangean community, including respect, cooperation, and moral responsibility. Identity, in this sense, is not fixed but continuously constructed through symbolic practices.

From a semiotic perspective, identity is produced through systems of signs, where ritual objects function as markers of cultural belonging. These objects embody shared meanings that allow individuals to identify themselves as members of a particular community. At the same time, identity is also shaped by social interaction, where the use and interpretation of ritual objects reinforce group boundaries and social roles.

However, identity construction is not neutral, as it is influenced by power relations and social hierarchy. In Kangean wedding rituals, the type and quality of objects presented may reflect social status, indicating that identity is also linked to economic and social positioning. This suggests that ritual objects function not only as symbols of unity but also as indicators of difference.

Additionally, identity is constructed through the interaction between tradition and change. As Kangean society encounters modernization, the meanings and functions of ritual objects may evolve, reflecting broader social transformations. This highlights the dynamic nature of identity and the importance of understanding how cultural symbols adapt over time.

Thus, this study views ritual objects as key elements in the construction of identity, functioning as symbolic markers that both unify and differentiate members of the community.

2.6 Synthesis of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrates semiotics, ethnolinguistics, and anthropology to provide a comprehensive understanding of marriage ritual objects as cultural signs. Each perspective contributes a different dimension of analysis, allowing for a more nuanced interpretation of meaning.

Semiotics explains how ritual objects function as signs with layered meanings, ethnolinguistics highlights their connection with language and cultural communication, and anthropology situates them within broader systems of social values and cultural structures. The integration of these perspectives enables a holistic analysis that goes beyond descriptive interpretation.

Moreover, this framework adopts a critical approach by comparing different theories and addressing their limitations, rather than relying on a single perspective. This allows the study to capture the complexity of cultural meaning and avoid reductionist interpretations.

Through this integrated and critical framework, ritual objects are understood as active agents that construct identity, reinforce social values, and sustain cultural continuity. This provides a

strong theoretical foundation for analyzing the role of material culture in Kangean wedding rituals and contributes to broader discussions in cultural and semiotic studies.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative ethnolinguistic approach to examine marriage ritual objects as cultural signs in Kangean society, with particular emphasis on how these objects construct identity and social values. This approach is grounded in the assumption that cultural meaning is not inherently embedded in material objects but is actively produced, negotiated, and reproduced through social interaction, symbolic systems, and cultural practices (Duranti, 1997; Foley, 1997; Spradley, 1980). Within this perspective, ritual objects are not treated merely as physical artifacts used in ceremonial events, but as semiotic resources that function within broader systems of meaning involving language, action, and social relations (Hymes, 1974). Accordingly, this study integrates ethnolinguistic analysis with semiotic interpretation to explore how meaning emerges from the interaction between material culture and cultural context in wedding rituals, emphasizing that meaning is socially constructed and context-dependent (Kramsch, 1998).

In line with this approach, the analysis does not focus solely on the physical characteristics of ritual objects but extends to their symbolic functions within the cultural system. Ritual objects such as *kalambi panganten*, *pangeas dan dendenan*, *koade*, *mobil panganten*, *kamar panganten*, and various ceremonial items documented in the data are examined as cultural signs that carry denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings (Barthes, 1972). These objects are analyzed in relation to the social practices in which they are embedded, including decoration, gift exchange, hospitality, and communal participation, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how social values such as cooperation, status, harmony, and collective identity are constructed and represented through material forms (Geertz, 1973; Turner, 1969).

To achieve this, the study adopts a multi-level analytical framework that combines semiotic analysis based on Barthes (1972) and Peirce (1931) with ethnolinguistic interpretation. The analysis focuses on three interconnected dimensions: (1) the denotative level, which examines the literal form and function of ritual objects; (2) the connotative level, which interprets their symbolic meanings within cultural contexts; and (3) the mythological level, which explores how these meanings become naturalized as cultural norms and social values. This framework enables a systematic and theoretically grounded interpretation of how ritual objects function as signs that both reflect and construct the cultural identity of the Kangean community, while also acknowledging that meaning is dynamic and shaped by social interaction (Chandler, 2007).

3.1 Materials

The data in this study consist of ritual objects and their associated meanings as observed in Kangean wedding ceremonies. These data are derived from three primary sources: (1) documented descriptions of ritual objects contained in cultural records, (2) observational data of wedding practices, and (3) verbal explanations provided by cultural informants regarding the meaning and function of each object (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014). The dataset includes a range of ritual elements such as *kalambi panganten* (wedding attire), *pangeas dan dendenan* (make-up specialists and tools), *koade dumi'* and *koade raje* (decorative structures), *mobil panganten* (wedding vehicle), *kamar panganten* (bridal room), *korse dan terop* (guest facilities), *angka'-angka'an* (food offerings), and *berkat* (take-home food packages). These objects are selected because they represent key components of wedding rituals and embody culturally significant meanings related to identity and social values (Koentjaraningrat, 1984).

The selection of data follows a purposive sampling strategy, in which ritual objects are chosen based on their cultural relevance, frequency of use, and symbolic importance within the wedding ceremony (Patton, 2002). This approach ensures that the data are not random but are directly aligned with the research objectives. In addition, the study considers both traditional and contemporary variations of ritual objects in order to capture the dynamic nature of cultural practices and their adaptation to changing social contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The informants involved in this study consist of cultural practitioners, community elders, and individuals who have direct experience in organizing or participating in Kangean wedding ceremonies. They are selected based on specific criteria, including their knowledge of local traditions, their role in the community, and their willingness to provide detailed explanations of ritual practices (Spradley, 1980). These informants function not only as sources of information but also as cultural interpreters who provide insight into the meanings and values associated with ritual objects (Bernard, 2011).

Data collection is conducted through a combination of observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews. Observational data are obtained by examining the arrangement, use, and interaction of ritual objects within the wedding setting, while interviews are used to elicit explanations of their meanings and functions (Creswell, 2014). All data are documented systematically through field notes, photographs, and audio recordings to ensure accuracy and completeness. The combination of multiple data sources allows for triangulation, which strengthens the validity and reliability of the dataset (Denzin, 1978; Miles et al., 2014).

3.2 Procedure

The analysis of data in this study is carried out through several systematic stages designed to ensure both analytical rigor and interpretive depth. The first stage involves data identification and classification, in which all observed ritual objects are categorized based on their form, function, and position within the wedding ceremony. This classification provides a structured foundation for subsequent analysis and enables the identification of patterns in the use of ritual objects across different stages of the ceremony (Miles et al., 2014).

The second stage consists of denotative analysis, in which each ritual object is examined in terms of its physical characteristics and practical function. This stage focuses on describing what the object is, how it is used, and where it is positioned within the ritual context. By establishing a clear understanding of the literal level of meaning, this stage serves as a basis for deeper semiotic interpretation (Barthes, 1972; Chandler, 2007).

The third stage involves connotative analysis, which interprets the symbolic meanings associated with each object based on cultural beliefs, social norms, and informants' explanations. At this stage, ritual objects are analyzed as cultural signs that convey values such as harmony, cooperation, status, and happiness. This analysis highlights how meaning is constructed through shared cultural knowledge and social interaction rather than through the object itself (Geertz, 1973).

The fourth stage is mythological analysis, based on Barthes' concept of myth, which examines how the symbolic meanings of ritual objects become naturalized as part of cultural ideology. This stage explores how certain values, such as gender roles, social hierarchy, and family responsibility, are reinforced and legitimized through the repeated use of ritual objects in wedding ceremonies.

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By uncovering these deeper layers of meaning, the analysis moves beyond description toward critical interpretation (Barthes, 1972).

The final stage involves ethnolinguistic interpretation, in which the results of the semiotic analysis are integrated with cultural context to explain how ritual objects contribute to the construction of identity and social values in Kangean society. This stage emphasizes the relationship between material culture, language, and social practice, demonstrating how ritual objects function as part of a broader system of cultural communication (Duranti, 1997; Foley, 1997).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employs several validation strategies, including data triangulation across multiple sources, member checking with informants, and repeated comparison of interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations are also carefully observed, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting local cultural values throughout the research process. Through these procedures, the study maintains both methodological rigor and ethical responsibility in the analysis of cultural practices.

4. Results

This study demonstrates that marriage ritual objects in Kangean society operate as a temporally structured semiotic system, in which meaning is not fixed but continuously reconfigured across the sequential phases of *pepentaan*, *akad*, *resepsi*, and *kokocoran*. Rather than functioning as isolated cultural symbols, ritual objects derive their significance from their relational positioning within these stages, where each phase corresponds to a distinct social function negotiation, legitimization, recognition, and redistribution. This finding challenges static semiotic interpretations by showing that meaning is not only layered (denotation–connotation–myth) but also temporally dynamic, emerging through the progression of ritual events and the shifting configuration of social relations embedded within them.

4.1 Semiotic Structuring Across Ritual Phases

The sequential organization of Kangean wedding rituals reveals that each stage constitutes a distinct semiotic domain in which ritual objects perform different signifying functions. In the *pepentaan* stage, objects brought by the groom's family operate primarily as indexical signs that point to intention, seriousness, and social legitimacy, transforming material offerings into evidence of relational commitment. These objects do not merely symbolize abstract meanings but function as tangible indicators of future obligations, thereby embedding social negotiation within material exchange. This indexical function highlights that meaning at this stage is grounded in relational verification, where objects serve as proof of readiness to establish a formal bond between families rather than as symbolic representations detached from social action.

As the ritual progresses to the *akad* stage, the semiotic function of objects shifts significantly from indexicality to symbolic authority, reflecting the transformation of social status through institutional recognition. Here, objects such as wedding attire and ritual settings operate as symbolic signs that legitimize the transition of the couple from unmarried individuals to a socially and religiously recognized unit. This stage marks a critical shift from relational negotiation to formal validation, where meaning is no longer contingent on intention but is stabilized through institutional frameworks. Consequently, ritual objects in this phase function less as indicators of future commitment and more as markers of accomplished transformation, reinforcing the idea that identity is constituted through socially sanctioned symbolic processes.

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In the *resepsi* stage, the semiotic logic undergoes another transformation, shifting toward visibility, scale, and public recognition as primary sources of meaning. Objects such as *koade raje*, *korse*, and *terop* function as signs of social display, where their significance is derived not from their intrinsic properties but from their capacity to generate visibility and collective acknowledgment. This stage effectively transforms marriage into a public spectacle, where the legitimacy established during the *akad* is amplified through communal recognition. In this context, ritual objects operate within a mythic framework, naturalizing the expectation that marriage must be publicly celebrated and socially validated, thereby embedding individual life events within collective cultural narratives.

The *kokocoran* stage introduces a contrasting semiotic dimension characterized by performativity and redistribution, where objects such as money and musical elements facilitate participatory engagement and emotional expression. Unlike previous stages that emphasize structure and formality, this phase foregrounds fluidity and collective interaction, temporarily destabilizing hierarchical distinctions through shared celebration. The act of *sawer* (money scattering), for instance, functions not only as entertainment but as a symbolic redistribution of resources, reflecting a cultural logic in which social cohesion is reinforced through the circulation of material and emotional capital. This shift demonstrates that ritual meaning is not linear but dialectical, oscillating between structure and fluidity across different phases of the ceremony.

4.2 Denotation as Cultural Structuring

At the denotative level, ritual objects appear to serve practical and functional roles within the wedding ceremony, yet a deeper analysis reveals that these functions are already embedded within a culturally structured system. The distribution of objects across the four ritual stages is not arbitrary but reflects an underlying cultural logic that aligns material elements with specific social purposes, such as negotiation in *pepentaan*, legitimization in *akad*, recognition in *resepsi*, and redistribution in *kokocoran*. This indicates that denotation itself is not a neutral or purely descriptive level of meaning but a structured layer that organizes how objects are used and understood within the ritual context.

Moreover, the functional differentiation of objects across stages suggests that denotation operates as a foundational mechanism through which cultural systems regulate social interaction. For instance, objects used in *pepentaan* are selected to facilitate relational alignment, while those in *resepsi* are designed to accommodate large-scale participation and visibility. This functional specialization reflects a broader cultural principle in which material arrangements are systematically aligned with social objectives, demonstrating that even the most "practical" aspects of ritual are deeply embedded in symbolic structures.

Thus, denotation should be reconceptualized not as a pre-symbolic level of meaning but as an integral part of the semiotic system, where function and meaning are inseparable. By structuring how objects are distributed and used across ritual stages, denotation provides the material foundation upon which connotative and mythological meanings are constructed and sustained.

4.3 Connotation and Social Value Formation

At the connotative level, ritual objects function as carriers of social values that are contextually activated within different stages of the wedding ceremony, revealing that meaning is not fixed but relationally produced. In the *pepentaan* stage, objects signify respect, responsibility, and seriousness, reinforcing cultural norms related to politeness and collective decision-making. These

meanings emerge not from the objects themselves but from their role within a structured interaction that prioritizes negotiation and mutual agreement, highlighting the importance of relational ethics in Kangean society.

During the *akad* stage, connotative meanings shift toward sacredness, legitimacy, and moral commitment, reflecting the alignment of marriage with religious and ethical frameworks. Objects in this phase symbolize not only the formalization of a relationship but also the internalization of moral responsibilities associated with marital life. This indicates that connotation operates as a mechanism for embedding cultural values within individual identity, transforming social expectations into personal obligations through symbolic representation.

In the *resepsi* stage, connotative meanings are closely linked to prestige, hospitality, and social inclusion, where the scale and elaboration of ritual objects reflect the host's ability to fulfill communal expectations. Here, objects function as indicators of social competence, demonstrating the capacity to engage with and contribute to the community. This stage highlights the role of material culture in mediating social relationships, where meaning is produced through the interaction between objects, participants, and the broader social context.

In contrast, the *kokocoran* stage encodes values related to joy, redistribution, and collective participation, emphasizing the importance of shared experience in reinforcing social cohesion. The symbolic circulation of money and the collective engagement in music and dance illustrate how cultural values are enacted through performative practices, where meaning is generated through participation rather than representation alone. This demonstrates that connotation is not merely interpretive but also performative, emerging through the embodied interaction of individuals within the ritual context.

4.4 Myth and Cultural Naturalization

At the mythological level, the meanings associated with ritual objects become naturalized as cultural ideology, shaping how individuals perceive and engage with social reality. The progression from *pepentaan* to *resepsi* constructs an implicit narrative in which marriage is framed as a movement from private intention to public validation, reinforcing its status as a socially regulated institution. This narrative is not explicitly articulated but is embedded in the structure of the ritual and the distribution of objects, demonstrating how cultural ideology operates through repetition and normalization.

The emphasis on visual display and material abundance in the *resepsi* stage further reinforces the association between marriage and social prestige, naturalizing the expectation that significant life events must be publicly celebrated. This ideological framework positions visibility as a key component of social value, suggesting that recognition is not only desirable but necessary for the validation of social identity. In this sense, ritual objects function as mechanisms for reproducing cultural norms that link material display with social legitimacy.

Similarly, practices in the *kokocoran* stage naturalize the idea that celebration must involve collective participation and redistribution, presenting these values as inherent aspects of cultural life rather than socially constructed practices. The repeated enactment of these rituals reinforces communal expectations, embedding them within the cultural consciousness of the community. Thus, myth operates as a process through which cultural meanings are stabilized and transformed into taken-for-granted truths.

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4.5 Ritual Objects and the Dialectics of Identity

The analysis indicates that identity in Kangean society is constructed through a dialectical process involving both individual transformation and collective recognition, mediated by ritual objects across different stages of the wedding. The *akad* stage formalizes identity transformation through symbolic validation, yet this transformation remains incomplete without the public recognition provided by the *resepsi*, highlighting that identity is both institutional and socially negotiated.

At the same time, variations in the scale and presentation of ritual objects reveal the presence of social differentiation, where material display functions as an indicator of economic capacity and social status. This introduces a hierarchical dimension to identity construction, suggesting that ritual objects simultaneously unify the community and reproduce structural inequalities. The coexistence of these functions reflects the complex role of material culture in mediating both cohesion and differentiation within social systems.

The *kokocoran* stage partially reconfigures this hierarchy by emphasizing redistribution and collective participation, creating a temporary space in which social distinctions are softened through shared engagement. However, this does not eliminate structural differences but rather rearticulates them within a framework of communal celebration, demonstrating that identity is continuously negotiated through dynamic interactions between structure and agency.

4.6 Analytical Table of Ritual Objects

Ritual Stage	Object	Semiotic Type	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Pepentaan	Lamaran items	Index	Objects brought by groom	Commitment, respect	Marriage as negotiated obligation
Akad	Wedding attire	Symbol	Formal clothing	Legitimacy, purity	Marriage as sacred institution
Resepsi	Koade raje	Symbol/ Myth	Decorative stage	Prestige, recognition	Marriage as public spectacle
Resepsi	Food & berkat	Symbol	Food distribution	Generosity, inclusion	Social obligation to share
Kokocoran	Money (sawer)	Symbol	Scattered money	Redistribution, joy	Collective participation
Kokocoran	Music	Index/ Symbol	Musical performance	Emotional engagement	Shared cultural identity

5. Discussion

The extended analysis confirms that marriage ritual objects in Kangean society cannot be adequately understood through static semiotic frameworks that isolate meaning at a single level of interpretation. Instead, the findings demonstrate that meaning is produced through a dynamic interaction between temporal sequencing, social relations, and cultural ideology, where objects continuously shift their semiotic function across ritual stages. This challenges the dominant Saussurean tendency to treat signs as stable structures and supports a more processual understanding of meaning aligned with Peircean and performative perspectives, in which signs are constantly reinterpreted through social practice. In this sense, ritual objects are not merely representations but active participants in the construction of cultural reality.

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Furthermore, the study reveals that temporality plays a crucial yet often overlooked role in semiotic analysis. While Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth effectively explains the layering of meaning, it does not fully account for how meaning evolves across ritual sequences. The Kangean case demonstrates that meaning is not only stratified but also sequentially reorganized, where the same object may acquire different semiotic functions depending on its placement within *pepentaan*, *akad*, *resepsi*, or *kokocoran*. This suggests that semiotic analysis should move beyond vertical models of meaning (layers) toward horizontal models (processes), where temporality becomes central to understanding how cultural signs operate.

In addition, the findings contribute to ethnolinguistic theory by extending the concept of meaning-making beyond language into the domain of material culture. While ethnolinguistics traditionally focuses on the relationship between language and culture, this study shows that ritual objects function as non-verbal extensions of linguistic systems, participating in the same process of meaning construction. The integration of objects, actions, and limited verbal discourse within the wedding ritual suggests that meaning is distributed across multimodal systems, where materiality plays a role equivalent to language in encoding and transmitting cultural values. This challenges language-centered approaches and supports a more holistic understanding of cultural communication.

Another critical contribution of this study lies in its analysis of how ritual objects mediate the relationship between individual identity and social structure. The findings demonstrate that identity is not simply constructed through symbolic representation but is actively negotiated through participation in ritual processes. The *akad* stage formalizes identity transformation at an institutional level, yet this transformation gains social validity only through the public recognition provided by the *resepsi*. This indicates that identity is both performative and relational, requiring continuous reinforcement through social interaction. At the same time, variations in the scale and elaboration of ritual objects reveal the persistence of social hierarchy, suggesting that identity is also shaped by material conditions and access to resources.

Moreover, the dialectical tension between social cohesion and differentiation becomes particularly evident in the distribution and use of ritual objects. On one hand, objects such as food offerings and communal decorations promote inclusivity and collective participation, reinforcing social bonds and shared identity. On the other hand, the scale and visibility of these objects function as indicators of economic capacity and social status, reproducing hierarchical distinctions within the community. This dual function highlights the ambivalent role of ritual objects as both unifying and differentiating elements, reflecting broader dynamics within social systems where equality and inequality coexist.

The *kokocoran* stage provides a particularly important site for examining this tension, as it introduces elements of redistribution and performative participation that temporarily reconfigure social relations. The act of *sawer* and communal dancing creates a space in which material resources and symbolic capital are circulated among participants, suggesting a form of social balancing that mitigates, but does not eliminate, structural inequalities. This aligns with Maussian perspectives on gift exchange, where reciprocity functions as both a mechanism of social cohesion and a reinforcement of obligation. However, the Kangean case extends this framework by demonstrating how redistribution is embedded within performative practices, where meaning is produced through participation rather than solely through exchange.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the study contributes to ongoing debates in anthropology and cultural studies regarding the role of material culture in meaning-making processes. While traditional approaches often treat objects as passive carriers of cultural meaning, the findings here support a more active view in which objects function as agents within social systems. Ritual objects do not merely reflect cultural values but actively shape and reproduce them through repeated use within structured practices. This perspective aligns with contemporary material culture studies that emphasize the agency of objects and their role in shaping human behavior and social organization.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to capture the complexity of cultural phenomena. By combining semiotics, ethnolinguistics, and anthropological approaches, the analysis is able to account for both the symbolic and social dimensions of ritual objects, as well as their dynamic interaction across time and context. This interdisciplinary framework not only provides a more comprehensive understanding of Kangean wedding rituals but also offers a methodological contribution that can be applied to similar studies in other cultural settings.

6. Discussion

This study demonstrates that marriage ritual objects in Kangean society function as dynamic cultural signs whose meanings are constructed through their sequential positioning within *pepentaan*, *akad*, *resepsi*, and *kokocoran*. Rather than being static symbols, these objects operate within a temporally structured semiotic system that produces, negotiates, and reinforces identity and social values. The findings highlight that meaning is not only layered but also processual, shaped by the interaction between material forms, social practices, and cultural context. Ritual objects simultaneously mediate individual transformation, collective recognition, and social differentiation, reflecting the complex interplay between cohesion and hierarchy in the community. This study contributes to semiotic and ethnolinguistic research by emphasizing the role of material culture as an active agent in meaning-making and by introducing temporality as a key dimension in analyzing cultural signs, offering a more dynamic framework for understanding ritual practices in contemporary cultural studies.

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