



Semiotic Interpretation In  
Javanese Wayang Kulit  
Performance Equipments In  
Deli Version

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# Semiotic Interpretation In Javanese Wayang Kulit Performance Equipments In Deli Version

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**Abstract:** This research is aimed at analyzed the meaning and symbols in the equipments used in wayang kulit performance by using the theory from Peirce. The data of this research are taken from the Javanese wayang kulit performance presented by Satrio Piningit Pujakesuma Sumatera Utara. This study is focused in the equipments used in wayang kulit performance and then analyzing the signs in semiotics with the meaning of each equipment. The writer concluded if there are (55%) equipments of icon, (25%) equipments of index, and (20%) equipments of symbol. In puppets, the dominant data is as much as icon (83%), because puppets are representations of human character, as for symbols (10%) and icons & symbols (7%). The music tools is dominant of index (75%), symbol (25%), and there are no icon found. While the display tools is dominant by symbol (100%), and there are no icon and index. The dhalang (puppeteer) realized the using of equipments in wayang kulit performance by doing some rituals and used the puppets as the symbols to express about human characters. This research is related to the academic study of how signs and symbols create meaning. Many symbols employed in the wayangkulit performance is not mentioned directly to the audiences.

**Keywords:** Semiotic, Interpretation, Javanese Wayang Kulit, Deli Version

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a big country that inhabited by 255 millions people, which has many ethnics and cultures. There are approximately 714 ethnics that spread from Sabang to Merauke. North Sumatera consist of several ethnics. One of them is Javanese. Javanese ethnic group in northern Sumatra was formed on July 10, 1980, named Pujakesuma that spearheaded by H. Mas Soekardi and friends in BKKJ (Badan Koordinasi Kesenian Jawa). The aims of the Pujakesuma are to explore, and develop arts and cultures of Javanese. There are many cultures preserved by Pujakesuma, one of the most famous culture is wayang kulit.

Wayang kulit has been growing to be an interesting entertainment which has moral messages. Even though the majority of audiences are old people, wayangkulit is also adjusted to young people in current interest. The phenomenon of wayang kulit as a culture heritage has philosophies and ethical values that basically taken from the human nature. The items required in wayangkulit have their own function and meaning like Kayongapuran that

described philosophically about human esoteric in a play that used when opening and closing as a signal to change the situation. In this case Semiotic can be a way to find about how meaning is created and how meaning is communicated. As the previous research that mention by Pauzan (2018) which analyzed her paper by using Peirce's theory : Icon, Index, and Symbol.

Southeast Asia has a rich tradition of puppetry, a theatre of varying style yet demonstrating many similarities. Apart from the generally accepted categories which most of Southeast Asian traditional theatre do, including those in Javanesesia, that can be classified into: (a) puppet theatre, (b) dance-theatre and (c) operatic theatre forms, it is possible to distinguish several elementary activities clearly outside these categories which still legitimately qualify as theatrical events, by virtue of the fact that these lesser styles require for them to be considered as such. In Javanesesia, according to Prof GHULAM SARWAR (2004), several forms of solo theatre exist in which the basic feature is storytelling by a single performer with or without musical accompaniment.

Yet, in certain communities in Javanesesia, several storytelling verses debates and elementary theatre styles continue to be active. While many of these are secular in character, some have retained their past connection with mysticism described in shadow play theatre. Traditionally, the Wayang Kulit was staged as an entertainment medium during religious festivals and important occasions, such as weddings, births and circumcision. Believed to have strong ties with the spirit world, Wayang Kulit "was conducted to invoke the spirits, to seek blessings and to offer thanksgiving for favours received". It used to be customary to make food offerings (berjamu) to the spirits. Apart from providing entertainment to the community, it also serves to impart moral values, as well as to pass down folklore and historical tales. While foreign epics such as the Ramayana, found their way to Javanesesia and became important, a repertoire of indigenous stories were expanded and these activities provide the opportunity for social interaction, entertainment, and preservation of tradition.

The true importance of these genre, particularly of the more elaborate ones that incorporate ancient stories that becomes a remembrance of the deeds of a culture hero and the restating of the myth explaining the origins of event. Through narration and the use of performance as elementary theatre, such tales are kept alive and the bridge of communications of the past are maintained.

There are several types of wayang puppetry or shadow play available in Javanesesia such as the classical Javanese Wayang Kulit Purwa which is very well known in the southern section of the Javanese Peninsula, particularly in Johor. Three other styles of shadow plays which are active in Javanesesia include Wayang Kulit Gedek, which represents a southward expansion of the Nang Talung and continues to use the Thai version of Ramayana story, Wayang Kulit Melayu which developed as a result of 'borrowing' the influence of Javanese Wayang Kulit Gedog and the stories are based on Javanese hero Panji, and finally Wayang Kulit, which is based on Ramayana epic. Wayang kulit in Javanese is a product of the Javanese villages and is the pre-eminent form of shadow play theatre. Patricia MATUSKY (1997) described internal evidence suggests that the Wayang Kulit (shadow play) is possibly introduced from Hindu Java during 1293 - 1520.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

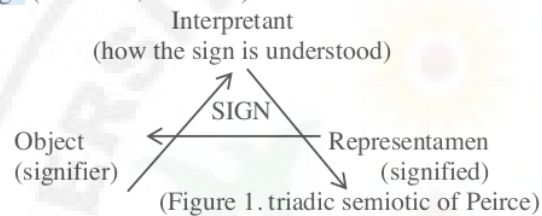
### Semiotics

The history of Semiotics derived from Greek "semeion", the word of sign. According to Hippocrates as quoted in Sebeok (2001: 4), Semiotics arose from the scientific study of the

Physiological symptoms induced by particular diseases or physical states. He said if Semiotics as a branch of medicine for the study of symptoms - a symptom being, in effect, a *semeion* 'mark, sign' that stands for something other than itself. Then continued by Aristotle that quoted if Signs is consisting of three dimensions: (1) the physical part of the sign itself, (2) the *referent* to which it calls attention, and (3) its *evocation* of a meaning.

### Signs <sup>12</sup>

A sign is traditionally defined as something which stands for something else. All meaningful phenomena (including words and images are signs). To interpret something is to treat it as a sign (Chandler, 2017: 19).



Peirce also formulated signs into three part model such as : 1) An *interpretant*: not an interpreter but rather the *sense* made of the sign. : 2) The *representamen*: the form which the sign takes (not necessarily material though usually interpreted as such) – called by some theorists the 'sign vehicle'. 3) An *object*: something beyond the sign to which it refers (a *referent*) (Peirce in Chandler, 2007: 29). The interaction between the representamen, the object and the interpretant is referred to by Peirce as 'semeiosis' (Chandler, 2007: 30)

According to Peirce in Chandler (2007), there are three types of signs, they are : degrees iconic, indexical, and symbols.

#### 1. Icon <sup>15</sup>

According to Peirce in Chandler (2007: 40), An iconic sign represents its object 'mainly by its similarity' (Peirce 1931–58, 2.276). Note that despite the name, icons are not necessarily visual. An icon is a sign that interrelates with its semiotic object by virtue of some resemblance or similarity with it, such as a map and the territory (Cobley, 2001: 31). Icon also called the signifier (the physical/material) resembles the signified (concept) so the relationship is obvious. Icon can be a figure of someone as a character of human life, for example, like Sengku in *wayangkulit* that describe as a tricky person. As mention by Winckler (2011: 77) Icon is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such object actually exist or not. Which icon is something that can be seen by eyes such as photography, portrait of something, cartoons, gestures, and metaphors.

#### 2. Index

According to Peirce in Chandler (2007: 42), Index is a sign that 'indicates' something. The Index is connected to its object 'as a matter of fact' (ibid.,4.447). There is 'a real connection' (ibid, 5.75) which may be a direct physical connection. For example is bonang that indicates as victory to againts our lust.

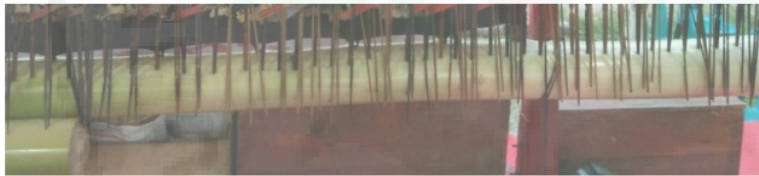


Figure 1. Bonang

Peirce refers to a 'genuine relation' between the 'sign' and the object which does not depend purely on 'the interpreting mind' (ibid., 2.92, 298). Index is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object (Winckler, 2011: 78).

### 3. Symbol

According to Peirce in Chandler (2007: 38) symbols are based purely on conventional association. Symbol is the signifier (the physical/material) does not resemble the signified (concept) so the relationship between the two must be taught. The example of this is the using of *gedebog* (banana tree trunk), which symbolizes the earth as a place of human lives.



(pic. 45 :dhebog)

Peirce also mentions if a symbol is a sign which would lose the character that renders it a sign if no one person to interpret it. The relationship between the sign is purely conventional, arbitrary or human made.

### Wayang Kulit

*Wayang* itself comes from a sentence that reads '*Ma Hyangâ*' which means walking towards the highest (here can be interpreted as spirit to God). While there are some people who understand that the word of wayang comes from the Javanese language which means *bayang-bayang* (shadow). The hypothesis of wayang is derived from the evidence that the audience can watch the performance of wayang by only seeing the shadow that is moved by the mastermind who concurrently serves as the *dhalang* (puppeteer).

The term wayang kulit consists of two words; they are wayang and kulit. Wayang is derived from the word bayang that means shadow and the word kulit means leather that is exactly the main component in the making of wayang. With combining these two words, we will get a depiction of a shadow puppet performance in the form of storytelling. The shadow of the puppets and the master is called dalang who conducts a wayang performance. There have been some discourses among the western scholars, such as G.A.J. Hazeu, Brandes, and Rassers, as well as Indonesian scholars, such as Soeroto and K.P.A. Kusumodilogo regarding the origin of the Javanese wayang (Mulyono, 1978). To sum up their various opinions, most of the scholars agree that the Javanese wayang was originally coming from either indigenous Java or Hindu-Java (Java with Hindu influence) (Mulyono, 1978).

Wayang kulit is perhaps one of the most archaic surviving traditions of storytelling using a shadow play in the Java, Indonesia, and probably in the world. Shadow play theatre is said to have its roots in many places in the world such as India, China, Egypt, Turkey, Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand), and Europe (Dahlan & Ahmad, 2012). However, the origin of Javanese wayang kulit itself is largely unknown. Wayang kulit has various stories, such as the wars between the good and the bad, some profound philosophies, spirituality and mysticism, some great love stories, comedy, and even political commentaries. It has been educating and entertaining Javanese people throughout centuries. The camaraderie is lasting even today, even when there had been so many shifts of ruling kingdom in the land of Java; from the pre-historic time to the Hindu-Buddhist period, the Islamic period, the Dutch and Japanese colonialism, and now at the time of Indonesian independence.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted by using descriptive qualitative research. Ary, et al. (2010) state that qualitative research is seek to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. In conducting this qualitative research, the researcher focuses on analyzing semiotic interpretation in Javanese *Wayang Kulit* Equipments Performance in Deli Version. The source of the data was collected from Javanese *Wayang kulit* performance that presented by Satrio Piningit Pujakesuma Sumatera Utara in Lapangan Pasar 5, Village Office of Rengas Pulau Sub-District Medan Marelan. This study was focused on the equipments used in *wayang kulit* performance and then analyze the signs in semiotics with the meaning of each equipment. There would be 48 equipments that provide information in the data analysis.

In this study, all the equipments used in *wayang kulit* performance were collected by observation and then took the pictures of equipments used in Javanese *wayang kulit* performance on Sunday, March 10<sup>th</sup> 2019. To get all of the data, the writer would use a camera to get the picture, a tape recorder to record a *dhalang* (puppeteer) as the transcript. In analyzing data, the writer collected the data by watching the performance of Javanese *Wayang kulit* that presented Satrio Piningit Pujakesuma Sumatera Utara and taking 48 pictures of Javanese wayang kulit equipments by using a camera which related to the sign in Semiotic. After that the writer would analyze the type of semiotic signs in *wayangkulitequipments*. The writer also interviewed the *dhalang* (puppeteer) by using a tape recorder to describe the interpretation of *wayang kulit* equipments by using triadic sign of Peirce, and then realizing the meaning of using equipments in *wayangkulit* based on *dhalang*'s opinion, Mr. Ki Dalang Sunardi.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

There were 3 types of semiotic sign used in Javanese *wayang kulit* performance equipments, they were : Icon, Index, and Symbol. In puppets, the writer found 27 equipments of icon (84%), which descriptions such as : Arjuna, Antasena, Cakil, Gatot kaca, Sengkuni, Semar, Yudhistira, Bima, Nakula, Sadewa, Abiyasa, Antareja, Baladewa, Bisma, Burisrawa, Cakil, Durna, Drupadi, Duryudana, Krisna, Kunti, Pandu, Parikesit, Srikandi, Petruk, Gareng and Bagong. While the symbol of puppets were 5 equipments (10%), which described such as : Arimbi, Gatot kaca, Abimanyu, Sentanu and Gareng. Beside that, there are 2 equipments that include in 2 categories of Sign icon and symbol, Gatot kaca and Gareng. In music tools

the writer also found if there were 12 equipments that categorized into index and symbol. 9 of them were included in index (75%) such as : *Bonang, Saron, Kenong, Kethuk, Slenthem, Rebab, Kempul, Kempyang and Gambang*, and 3 of them were included in symbol, such as : *Gamelan, Gendang and Gong*. The other equipments that writer found was display tools that consist of 7 equipments, which all of them were categorized into symbol, such as : *Kelir, Cempurit, Dhebog, Kothak, Keprak and Cempala*. Therefore, from the data that had been analyzed before, the writer found that 27 equipments were included in icon (55%), 12 equipments of index (25%), and 10 equipments of symbol (20%)

Javanese *wayang kulit* used the puppets as the symbols to express about human characters. Commonly the human characters consist of two sides, good and bad. The using of music tools and display tools also used to express the atmosphere of *wayang kulit* performance, about human feeling as the media of communication of philosophical and ethical values. The *dhalang* (puppeteer) realized the using of equipments in *wayang kulit* performance by doing some rituals such as prepared *sajen*(the food for God) and pray as the provision of the *dhalang* in performing *satu malam suntuk* (all night long) from 10 pm until 5 am. This time was taken because the performance was ideal at this time whereas *wayang* only could be seen in the night using *blencong*. The position of the puppets usually put by a *dhalang* in his right side for the goods and the bad in his left side. The *dhalang* also believed that a *kayon* (background of wayang such as mountain, forest, and houses) should not be used carelessly because it will make unlucky future.

For the Javanese people, Pandawas brothers are equally important with the clown servant characters that were known as Punakawan (clown servant characters, consists of Semar, Petruk, Gareng, and Bagong). These characters are purely of Javanese origin, as there is no discernible South Asian equivalent for them (Woodward, 1989). It consists of several characters with Semar is the oldest one. He has the complex personality represented in Javanese wayang. He is full of ambivalences and acts both as Arjuna's servant and teacher or mystical guide. Semar is a male with short and ugly figure combines male and female physiognomies(Woodward, 1989). The presence of Semar can be seen in Figure 12 with 38 x 36 cm body size and total height 60 cm. The total opposite of refined Arjuna, Semar is very crude. Being one of the peasantry, he represents the 'real' Javanese culture as opposed to the artificial courtesy of a nobleman, he speaks in Ngoko Lugu (Low Javanese language, used by the lowest strata of the Javanese people), and he farts, burps, and makes rough jokes. But behind all of that he never strays from the path of truth and responsibility (Woodward, 1989). Such kind of determination is highly regarded in the Javanese perception. Semar holds a unique spot in Javanese mysticism based on the fact that he surpassed the social order, which is perceived as an intact part of the mystical path (Woodward, 1989).

A wayang kulit is a two-dimensional puppet made of leather. Walujo (1995) had described the wayang kulit as a puppet doll made of animal skin - such as cow skin or buffalo - which had been flattened, cut, shaped, painted, and decorated with many colors to make the different characters more easily distinguishable. Based on the source of the story, the types of puppets in Java include wayang kulit purwa, which originates from the stories of Ramayana and Mahabarata, wayang madya from Serat Pustaka Raja Madya, wayang gedhog from Serat Panji, wayang klitik from Serat Damarwulan (Mertosedono, 1986), wayang golek from Serak Menak, and wayang beber from Serat Panji. Other types of puppets that emerged in the twentieth century include, wayang kancil (stories about animals or stories from Serat Kancil Kridamartana), wayang dupara (stories of babad), wayang suluh (stories of the struggle to expel the Dutch colonial power), wahyu puppets from the Serat Perjanjian Lama, wayang sadar (stories from the Wali Sanga), and wayang buda (stories from Sutasoma). The types of

puppets that still exist to day include wayang kulit purwa, while others are said to be quite rare or even extinct nowadays (Soetarno et al., 2007).

The core of Javanese culture, though not its entirety, can be traced from wayang. Wayang, which was originally an oral storytelling method, is now a performance art. Like art in general, it has multiple functions such as conveying cultural messages directly or covertly and instilling and reinforcing certain cultural values. In disseminating knowledge, wayang can be a very reliable communication medium in a society that still relies on oral knowledge transmission and other unwritten traditions (Retno et al., 2017). Furthermore, Javanese culture, as the most populous subculture in Indonesia, has a considerable influence on the rest of Indonesian culture (Sardjono, 1995).

Wayang unites Javanese society as a whole in two ways. Horizontally in that, it is found in all geographic areas in Java, and vertically since it is enjoyed by all social groups in Javanese society (Koentjaraningrat, 1984). In wayang kulit - the most popular wayang in Java - the role of the puppeteer is central. It is the puppeteer who moves the puppet characters into "life," by improvising according to the puppeteer's ideas and concerns. The position of the puppets in Javanese culture is very central because wayang is at the core of Javanese culture. Wayang plays a role in Javanese culture, so the puppets serve as a reference for philosophy, orientation, behavior, and expectations of the Javanese people. The essence of Javanese culture is a person who has a jiwa-jawi (Javanese soul), in the sense that a person is considered Javanese if he applies his Javanese principles in his daily life (Achmad, 2013).

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this part the data were taken from the performance of Javanese *wayangkulit* in Deli version. The writer identifies the data based on Charles Sanders Peirce theory which divided semiotic signs into three types are icon, index, and symbol. The writer also using the triangle periodic that consisting of object, representament, and interpretant. There were 3 types of equipments used in Javanese *wayangkulit* performance they were puppets, music tools, and display tools.

Every puppet has their own characters of human that reveal about kindness, cunning, tactful which depend on their shape, for instance the ugly red face of Sengkuni that described as a bad person. Red color symbolizes the nature of violent and abusive. It differ with lack face which is symbolizes the maturity and determination, in accordance with the character of Arjuna who has firm establishment and unyielding. Besides the puppets, the using of music tools can also be aware of its meaning by listen the sound of it. Each sound of music tool has different tones depend on the pitch of the music playing. For instance is a gong that played by one thump and has the meaning of death. From this music tools has the dominant semiotic sign of index and symbol is dominated in display tools while icon is dominated in puppets. There is no icon and index in display tools because the equipments which depicted here are the illustration of the universe of human life, such as the using of cempurit that symbol as a person who is standing using his feet.

Related to the previous studies, the finding of this study was supported by Hariani (2018). Her study entitled "Semiotic Analysis on Idol Group Logo : A Study of type of Sign and meaning of Korean Groups' Logo". The purpose of this research was to analyze the meaning of logos that using in Korean Idol group. The writer analyzed each of logo by using Pierce's Semiotic Triangle Theory by showing its object, representamen, and interpretant. Every logo has different meaning refers to the name, album, member of the Korean idol group (object). The logo of Korean Idol group was used to make people easy to remember



and also as an identity. In this paper the researcher found that the use of symbolic or iconic representamen can reveal the correlation between the representamen and its object or interpretant within the context.

While Pauzan (2018), in his study entitled *A Semiotic Analysis of the John Wick 1* in Using Charles Sanders Peice's Semiotic Theory. He conducted his study about Signs of Icon, Index, and Symbol in some scenes in the John Wick 1 film. This study explain about the scene completely by verify the kind of signs. In analyzing the meaning of each sign, the meaning was interpreted primarily from the relationship between the represent a men and the object and the research of Azis (2017), entitled *Semiotics of Wayang Golek Lingkungan Seni Giriharja's Show as a Learning Source of Civic Education*. This study is centered on fortifying aspects of knowledge (civic knowledge) student only, with using qualitative approach. The results showed that semiotics *Wayang Golek Lingkungan Seni Giriharja* can be maximized as a learning resource civic education in citizenhip competencies development of student. In his paper said if the values of Semiotics is referred to in this research as the symbolic values contained in the *Wayang Golek Lingkungan Seni Giriharja*.

From this analysis the writer described if the dominant equipments used are the puppets which consist of 27 characters. The realization of this paper found that icon is mostly used than other types of signs index and symbol, and therefore my results are supported by the paper of Hariani (2018) which found that all of the data are consist of icon and symbol, but not by Azis (2017) which found that the values of Semiotics was referred to in his research as the symbolic values of semantic contained in *wayang golek* while in this paper the writer analyzing about Javanese *wayang kulit*.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the semiotic signs used in the Deli version of Javanese wayangkulit performance equipment, the authors conclude that there are iconic equipment (55%), index equipment (25%), and symbol equipment (20%). wayang, the dominant data are icons (83%), because wayang is a representation of human characters, as for symbols (10%) and icons & symbols (7%). Dominant instrument index (75%), symbol (25%), and icon not found. While the props are dominated by symbols (100%), and there are no icons and indexes. Based on the results of the research above, the authors suggest to other researchers or readers who are interested in analyzing the signs of semiotics in wayangkulit to learn more about the theory of semiotics not only from C. Peirce, but also other experts such as Roland Barthes. Wayang Kulit is currently the oldest and most popular form of puppet theater in the world. Research can be used as a message medium to apply Javanese wayang kulit characters in character education for students and this research can be used as a reference to determine the local potential of Javanese wayangkulit, especially in North Sumatra.

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