

Symbolic Communication in the *Mappanre Tasi* Ceremony: A Semiotic Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the stages and symbolic meanings of the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual practiced by the Bugis community, highlighting the spiritual relationship between humans and nature, especially the sea. Addressing the limited research on the symbolic and linguistic dimensions of traditional rituals, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and an ethnolinguistic perspective to uncover underlying systems of meaning. Using a descriptive qualitative method, ritual symbols are analyzed through denotation, connotation, and myth,

supported by local ritual terminology. The findings identify six main ritual stages and sixteen symbolic elements, conveying meanings related to purity, sacrifice, harmony, and protection. Ethnolinguistically, these symbols serve as cultural expressions transmitting collective identity, social values, and local wisdom. Overall, the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual represents a holistic symbolic system integrating spiritual, social, and linguistic dimensions.

Keywords: Symbolic Communication; Ethnolinguistic; *Mappanre Tasi*; Bugis Culture; Traditional Ceremony

Introduction

The Bugis are a maritime oriented ethnic group whose identity, social organization, and worldview are deeply shaped by their coastal environment. For the Bugis, the sea is more than a physical space; it constitutes a vital source of life, livelihood, and cultural meaning. Central to this maritime identity is the value of *massompe'* (social solidarity), which governs interpersonal relations, guides collective behavior, and sustains social cohesion within and across communities (Akhmar, Rahman, & Yunus, 2024). Historically, the Bugis have engaged in extensive migration driven by economic, political, and social factors, yet seafaring practices and maritime rituals have functioned as enduring mechanisms for cultural continuity. Navigational knowledge, adaptive socio-economic strategies, and a resilient work ethic reinforce the centrality of the sea not only in their historical and economic life but also in the shaping of spiritual and social norms (Basmar et al., 2025; Hasanuddin, Rahman, & Yunus, 2024; Suliyati & Rochwulaningsih, 2025).

In Tengah Village, Pulau Sembilan District, the Bugis community exemplifies a maritime diaspora that actively negotiates cultural identity through collective memory, social networks, and symbolic communication practices. Here, coastal mobility is more than an economic strategy; it operates as a conduit for the transmission of maritime knowledge, the preservation of ritual traditions, and the reinforcement of communal solidarity (Sunarti et al., 2022; Andraena & Nugraha, 2025). The diaspora thus functions as a dynamic space for reconstructing ethnic identity, allowing the Bugis to navigate the tension between local traditions and global influences while maintaining a coherent cultural sense of belonging

(Saraswati, 2023).

One of the most emblematic practices sustaining Bugis maritime identity is the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual, a ceremonial sea offering performed by fishing communities. This ritual integrates social, spiritual, and ecological dimensions, reflecting a worldview in which human life, communal obligations, and the marine environment are inseparable. Previous studies have explored various aspects of the ritual, including its moral messages and modes of communication (Agus Santoso et al., 2015), alignment with Islamic educational values (Habriani, 2017), processes of cultural-Islamic acculturation (Indrawati, 2017; Huriyah, 2023), youth perceptions regarding ritual preservation (Kholfiyah & Khisbiyah, 2025), historical development (Rico, 2021), mythological and local wisdom elements (Musdalipah, 2023; Nur, 2022), and ritual chants as a form of oral literature (Wulandari et al., 2020). Collectively, these studies provide a rich descriptive understanding of the ritual; however, they fall short of systematically analyzing the symbolic mechanisms through which meaning is constructed and communicated.

To address this gap, the present study integrates an ethnolinguistic approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to examine the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual as a complex system of symbolic communication. By analyzing ritual language, material offerings, spatial arrangements, and ceremonial actions as interrelated signifiers, this study aims to reveal how the ritual encodes cultural values, social norms, and ecological ethics. Moreover, it explores how ritual practices mediate the relationship between humans and the sea, sustaining a shared sense of maritime identity that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. In doing so, the research contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of the ways in which ritual functions as a form of cultural communication, linking tangible practices with intangible meanings in a socially and ecologically embedded context.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Roland Barthes' semiotic theory with an ethnolinguistic perspective to analyze the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual as a complex system of cultural signs. By combining these approaches, the research examines not only the observable actions within the ritual but also the layers of meaning encoded in ritual language, material offerings, and

ceremonial procedures. This dual perspective enables a comprehensive understanding of how ritual functions as both a communicative practice and a mechanism for sustaining Bugis cultural identity. Furthermore, it situates *Mappanre Tasi* within a broader theoretical framework, bridging semiotic analysis with ethnolinguistic inquiry, and highlighting the interdependence of symbols, language, and social structure.

According to Barthes (1972), signs operate at three hierarchical levels: denotation (the literal meaning), connotation (culturally constructed meaning), and myth (naturalized and socially accepted cultural ideology). Denotative signs are immediately observable, while connotation reflects shared cultural understandings, and myth represents the ways in which these meanings become internalized as unquestioned social norms. This hierarchy allows researchers to trace how seemingly simple ritual acts can acquire layers of ethical, spiritual, and social significance over time. By applying this framework to *Mappanre Tasi*, it becomes possible to understand how rituals simultaneously communicate, educate, and regulate behavior within the Bugis community.

In the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual, denotative meanings are expressed through tangible actions such as preparing offerings, arranging ceremonial items, reciting prayers, and casting symbolic objects into the sea. Each act has a clear, literal purpose that can be documented and observed. For example, the act of placing food or symbolic items in the water literally signifies “feeding the sea” to honor its life-giving role. At this level, the ritual is primarily a sequence of procedural steps that structure communal participation and ensure that the ceremony follows established cultural norms.

Beyond these literal acts, the ritual carries connotative meanings that convey devotion, gratitude, respect for marine resources, and acknowledgment of social and ecological responsibility. The preparation and presentation of offerings are understood by participants as moral acts that reinforce communal solidarity and reflect the ethical relationship between humans and the environment. Recitations of prayers and ritual chants further enhance these connotations by embedding social values, collective memory, and cultural knowledge within verbal performance. Thus, the ritual functions as a medium through which intangible cultural principles are transmitted across generations.

Over time, these connotative meanings are transformed into myths, representing naturalized cultural ideologies that guide social behavior and ethical reasoning. In the Bugis

context, the ritual becomes a vehicle for perpetuating a cosmological worldview in which the sea is simultaneously sacred, productive, and morally regulated. As a mythic system, *Mappanre Tasi* establishes a set of expectations for behavior, instills environmental ethics, and reinforces collective identity, making the symbolic meanings of ritual actions appear self-evident and unquestionable to the community.

Following Eco (1976), cultural symbols function within networks of social conventions that enable shared interpretation and understanding. Ritual acts are embedded within these networks, ensuring that participants recognize their significance and interpret them consistently within a cultural framework. Similarly, Danesi (2007) highlights that symbols are not merely aesthetic or decorative; they actively shape collective worldviews, transmit social norms, and communicate moral codes. In this way, *Mappanre Tasi* is more than a traditional performance it is a socially structured mechanism for reproducing cultural values and maintaining communal cohesion.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective (Hymes, 1974), ritual language plays a central role in linking social, cultural, and cosmological dimensions. Linguistic expressions within *Mappanre Tasi* such as chants, prayers, and ritual utterances encode hierarchical relations, social values, and collective memory. These verbal elements act as instruments for the transmission of knowledge, reinforcing identity and continuity across generations. Through the interplay of language and action, participants internalize cultural norms and ethical principles, which in turn inform everyday behavior and decision-making within the maritime community (Harr, 2025; Tavárez, 2025; Washington, 2024).

Combining Barthes' semiotics with ethnolinguistics allows for a multi-layered analysis of ritual symbols and their embedded meanings. At the denotative level, researchers observe the material and procedural elements of the ritual; at the connotative level, they uncover culturally embedded meanings of morality, social harmony, and environmental ethics; and at the mythic level, these values are naturalized as unquestioned principles guiding Bugis maritime life. This integrative framework highlights the dynamic interplay between symbolic communication, language, and cultural ideology, revealing the complex processes through which rituals construct and sustain collective identity.

Furthermore, ritual practices such as *Mappanre Tasi* can be understood as adaptive cultural strategies that respond to social change while maintaining continuity of collective memory (Assmann, 2021; Ronström, 2020). Symbolic acts are flexible yet anchored in tradition, allowing communities to navigate new social or ecological challenges without losing cultural coherence. In this sense, the ritual is not merely a reenactment of the past but a living cultural system that mediates identity, environmental engagement, and social transformation in contemporary Bugis society.

In conclusion, analyzing *Mappanre Tasi* through the combined lens of Barthes' semiotic theory and ethnolinguistics reveals how rituals function as multi-dimensional systems of meaning. The ritual encodes ethical, social, and ecological values at multiple levels, while ritual language ensures transmission across generations. Ultimately, *Mappanre Tasi* exemplifies the intricate ways in which symbolic communication, collective memory, and cultural ideology converge to sustain Bugis identity and their sacred relationship with the sea, providing insight into the enduring significance of ritual in maritime societies.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach integrating ethnolinguistic and semiotic perspectives to examine the symbolic meanings of offerings in the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual of the Bugis community. Symbols are treated as dynamic cultural processes negotiated through social practices and collective interpretation (Cerulo, 1997; Petrilli, 2012; Rothenbuhler, 1998; Turner, 1969; Liu, 2024; Thellefsen, Dewi, & Sorensen, 2025). Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders, religious figures, and community members, and documentation including field notes, photographs, and video recordings. Analysis was conducted iteratively, involving organization of data, repeated readings, coding, thematic categorization, and construction of interpretative narratives, with trustworthiness ensured through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin, 1978). This integrated methodology allows for a holistic understanding of how language, ritual acts, and symbols collectively construct, sustain, and transmit cultural meanings in the *Mappanre Tasi* ceremony.

Analysis and Discussion

The Procession of the *Mappanre Tasi* Ceremony

The *Mappanre Tasi* ceremony is a complex six-stage ritual that reflects Bugis cultural values, maritime spirituality, and linguistic expression. Each stage embodies a combination of material, verbal, and symbolic elements that encode social norms, communal identity, and spiritual beliefs:

1. Preparation of Offerings and Ritual Materials: Women of the community prepare sixteen offerings, including *Asepulu Pute*, *Berre Cella*, *Manu Tapa*, *Kopi Lotong*, and *Lopi-lopi*. Each offering is carefully crafted and arranged according to traditional conventions, with its form, name, and intended function reflecting specific cultural meanings. For example, *Asepulu Pute* symbolizes purity and communal harmony, while *Berre Cella* represents gratitude toward the sea and ancestors. This stage demonstrates how material culture, ritual practice, and linguistic categorization intersect, as the names of the offerings themselves carry semantic significance and collectively reinforce a sense of group identity.
2. Gathering of Residents and Carrying of *Lopi-lopi*: Members of the community gather and bring *lopi-lopi*—small boats or containers filled with the offerings—onto a larger ceremonial vessel. This stage showcases the value of *massompe'* (social solidarity), as the activity requires cooperation and coordinated effort. Linguistically, the term *lopi-lopi* encodes the notion of transporting hopes and prayers, illustrating the intimate relationship between language and ritual action. The repeated verbal cues, chants, and guidance during this stage also reinforce social cohesion and collective responsibility.
3. Lifting the *Lopi-lopi* onto the Ship: Men lift the *lopi-lopi* onto the main vessel, symbolically transferring the community's prayers and aspirations from the terrestrial to the maritime domain. This stage exemplifies the ethnolinguistic relationship between action and meaning: verbal instructions, ceremonial songs, and chants structure behavior, transmit norms, and preserve cultural memory. The physical act of lifting also

reinforces gendered roles within the ritual, as men and women participate in complementary ways, linking bodily performance with spiritual intention.

4. **Voyage to the Middle of the Sea:** The main vessel departs from the shore and travels to the middle of the sea, marking a liminal transition from the profane (daily life) to the sacred (ritual space). During the voyage, participants engage in ritual utterances, *tari* (chants), and recitations that regulate movement, maintain social order, and articulate collective intentions. The linguistic structure of these utterances demonstrates the way ritual language encodes respect for natural forces, ethical conduct, and cosmological hierarchy, effectively linking human action to the spiritual environment.
5. **Recitation of Prayers:** At the ritual site, traditional prayers such as “*Bismillahi rohmaanirrohim, oo Nabi Helere, tatarimai pabbereku*” are recited. These prayers reflect a hybridized linguistic and cultural practice, combining Arabic-Islamic expressions with Bugis language forms. The verbal expressions serve multiple functions: they communicate respect for ancestral spirits, request protection and safe livelihoods, and reaffirm the participants’ connection with the sea and its guardian entities. This stage highlights the syncretic nature of Bugis maritime spirituality, where language itself functions as a medium of cultural continuity, moral instruction, and symbolic negotiation between humans and the supernatural.
6. **Release of *Lopi-lopi* into the Sea:** Finally, the *lopi-lopi* are released into the water, symbolically sending the community’s spiritual messages, gratitude, and hopes to the sea. The act of floating the offerings, combined with associated verbal expressions, demonstrates how material objects, language, and ritual symbolism work together to produce shared meaning. Observers and participants understand that the floating *lopi-lopi* carry prayers for safe fishing, abundant harvests, and communal well-being, reinforcing the interconnection of cultural, linguistic, and ecological dimensions in Bugis maritime life.

Through these six stages, the *Mappanre Tasi* ceremony not only preserves Bugis cultural heritage but also actively encodes social norms, spiritual beliefs, and linguistic creativity. The interplay between offerings, ritual actions, verbal expressions, and symbolic meanings illustrates how language and practice jointly construct a semiotic system that sustains both identity and cohesion in a coastal community.

The Symbolic Meaning of the *Mappanre Tasi* Ceremony

The ritual incorporates 16 key symbols, analyzed using Barthes' semiotic levels (denotation, connotation, myth) with an ethnolinguistic perspective. Names, preparation methods, and associated practices illustrate how language encodes cultural knowledge and mediates spiritual and social relations.

Table 1. Key Symbols of the *Mappanre Tasi* Ceremony (Ethnolinguistic Perspective)

Symbol	Denotation	Connotation	Myth / Cultural Meaning
Asepulu Pute	White sticky rice	Purity, respect	<i>Asepulu</i> = unity; <i>Pute</i> = purity, connecting humans with the sacred sea
Asepulu Lotong	Black sticky rice	Community cohesion	Represents solidarity; <i>Lotong</i> evokes bond/strength linguistically
Utti Raja	Plantains	Abundance, fertility	<i>Utti</i> = banana; <i>Raja</i> = greatness; linguistic symbolism of prosperity
Tello Manu Kampong	Free-range eggs	Unity, gratitude	<i>Tello</i> = egg; represents spiritual and social protection
Berre Pute	White rice	Blessing, staple food	<i>Berre</i> = rice; reinforces sustenance and cultural memory
Berre Cella	Red rice	Strength, protection	<i>Cella</i> = red; color as linguistic-cultural code for vitality
Manu Tapa	Roast chicken	Offering, respect	<i>Manu</i> = chicken; <i>Tapa</i> =

Symbol	Denotation	Connotation	Myth / Cultural Meaning
			roast; denotes ancestral connection
Kopi Lotong	Black coffee	Courage, resilience	<i>Lotong</i> = black; symbolic of decisiveness and fortitude
Daung Siri	Betel leaf	Sacredness, communication	<i>Siri</i> = honor; linguistic marker of respect and ritual purity
Tole	Cigarettes	Offering to supernatural	Medium of spiritual communication
Tole Daung Utti	Banana leaf cigarettes	Simplicity, ecological respect	Combines verbal and material symbolism of nature
Kaluku	Coconut	Blessing, safety	<i>Kaluku</i> = coconut; linguistic representation of purity and protection
Dupa	Incense	Purification, spiritual connection	Smoke conveys prayers and intentions to spirits
Manu Kampong	Village chicken	Protection, prosperity	<i>Manu</i> = chicken; ritual and linguistic expression of safety
Bembe	Goat	Sacrifice, humility	Linguistic-cultural encoding of devotion and balance
Lopi-lopi	Small boats	Respect, prayer delivery	<i>Lopi-lopi</i> encodes the idea of sending hopes and spiritual messages

The findings of this study reveal that the 16 symbols used in the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual form a cohesive semiotic system that reflects the Bugis community's cultural, spiritual, and

social worldview. Each symbol operates at multiple levels of meaning. At the denotative level, the symbols represent tangible offerings such as rice, chicken, or small boats, while at the connotative level, they convey values such as protection, unity, abundance, and gratitude, which are recognized and shared by the community. For example, Berre Cella signifies protection, and Tello Manu Kampong emphasizes communal cohesion. At the mythical level, these symbols embody collective beliefs linking humans, ancestors, guardian spirits, and the sea, with *lopi-lopi* symbolically carrying prayers to the sacred realm. The semiotic analysis demonstrates that ritual acts, offerings, and symbolic elements are not isolated; instead, they collectively construct, maintain, and transmit Bugis maritime identity, providing a structured cultural framework through which the community communicates its spiritual and social values.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, the ritual terminology such as *asepulu*, *lotong*, *siri*, and *lopi-lopi* shows the inseparability of language, ritual, and culture. Each term functions as a linguistic vessel conveying collective values, social norms, and spiritual concepts, while the verbal expressions and ritual practices reinforce one another. This perspective highlights that *Mappanre Tasi* is not only a performative tradition but also a linguistic-cultural system, where words and actions together encode cultural knowledge, express ethical norms, and mediate relationships between humans, ancestors, and nature. In this way, the ritual exemplifies cultural mediation and ethnolinguistic encoding, demonstrating that language plays a central role in sustaining Bugis maritime identity, transmitting local wisdom, and preserving spiritual and ecological values across generations.

Conclusion

The *Mappanre Tasi* ritual of the Bugis community functions as a cohesive system of symbolic communication integrating social, spiritual, and ecological dimensions. The ritual practices operate at multiple semiotic levels denotation, connotation, and myth conveying meanings that extend from concrete ritual actions to collective beliefs linking humans, ancestors, and the sea. These practices collectively express values such as gratitude, respect, unity, and protection, forming a framework through which the community maintains social cohesion and spiritual continuity. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, the

ritual terminology and verbal expressions demonstrate the inseparability of language, ritual, and culture. Words, chants, and ritual acts serve as instruments for encoding cultural knowledge, social norms, and spiritual concepts, reinforcing communal identity and transmitting maritime values across generations. Overall, the *Mappanre Tasi* ritual exemplifies how traditional practices operate as both semiotic and linguistic-cultural systems. It highlights the dynamic interaction between symbolic acts and language in sustaining cultural continuity, mediating relationships between humans and the natural world, and preserving the Bugis maritime identity. This study underscores the importance of combining semiotic and ethnolinguistic approaches to fully understand the cultural, social, and spiritual significance of ritual practices in coastal communities.

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