



An Analysis of Symbols Used in The Dowry of The Traditional Marriage in The East Rote Community

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history Received : Feb, 27th 2026 Revised : March, 20th 2026 Accepted : April, 25th 2026 OPEN ACCESS	This study entitled: “An Analysis of Symbols Used in the Dowry in The Traditional Marriage of the East Rote Community”.It addresses two research question: (1). What are the symbols that are used as dowry in the traditional marriages in the East Rote community? (2). What are the meanings of the symbols that are used as dowry in the traditional marriage in the East Rote community?. This study aims to identify, describe and analyze the types of symbols use and to explain the meanings of these symbols in the context of traditional marriage. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method. The study was conducted in Hundihopo Village, East Rote District, Rote Ndao Regency. The data source of this research were three informants. Data were collected through observation, interview, and recording techniques. The data were analyzed using identification, and description analysis techniques. The result of the study showed that symbols used in the dowry of the traditional marriage ceremonies in the East Rote Community have various meanings. The research identified ten (10) symbols used in the dowry in Hundihopo Village, East Rote Community, namely: Oli (Areca nut box), Raido (Betel), Pua (Areca nut), Ao (Lime), Rereli (Ring), Doi (Money),Niru/Dulang (Tray), De'dede (Lamp),Pou-Lafa/Pakaian Adat (Traditional Clothing), Silaka (Headband).
Keywords:	Symbol, <i>Meaning</i> , <i>Dowry</i>

1. Introduction

Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a system of meaning through which culture is expressed and transmitted (Halliday, 1978). Cultural practices therefore can be understood as systems of signs that communicate social values and collective identity (Geertz, 1973).

Semiotic theory provides a framework for analyzing how cultural objects function as signs. According to Saussure (1915), a sign consists of a signifier (form) and a signified (concept). Peirce (1982) conceptualizes meaning through a triadic relation of representamen,

object, and interpretant. Cultural objects used in ritual exchange operate as symbolic signs whose meanings are constructed through shared cultural interpretation.

In the East Rote community, traditional marriage involves a dowry known as *belis*. Beyond its material value, *belis* functions as a system of cultural signs that communicate respect, kinship relations, and social responsibility. This study analyzes dowry objects and their meanings using Saussurean and Peircean semiotic perspectives.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the symbols that are used in dowry in the traditional marriages in the East Rote community?
2. What are the meanings of the symbols that are used in dowry in the traditional marriage in the East Rote community?

2. Research Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to analyze the symbols used in the dowry of traditional marriage ceremonies. The study was conducted in Hundiho Village, East Rote District, Rote Ndao Regency, where traditional marriage customs are still actively practiced.

The data sources consisted of three informants selected based on the following criteria: traditional elders, parents who had experience giving or receiving dowry, and individuals aged between 40–69 years. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, picture-taking, video recording, and note-taking.

The data analysis followed several steps: transcribing interview recordings, translating data into English, classifying symbols, and interpreting their meanings based on semiotic theory, particularly the concepts of symbols proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce.

3. Research Findings and Discussion

Research Findings

Based on the data collected through interviews, observations, picture-taking, video recordings, and note-taking, it was found that the dowry (*belis*) in the traditional marriage ceremony of the East Rote Community remains an essential and meaningful cultural

practice. Dowry is presented during the Tu'u Belis ceremony, which marks the formal agreement between the groom's family and the bride's family.

The findings indicate that the dowry is not merely a material requirement, but a symbolic system that reflects social values, respect, kinship, and cultural identity. The informants explained that each object included in the dowry has been passed down through generations and is still recognized as culturally obligatory in traditional marriages in Hundiho Village.

From the analysis, the researcher identified ten (10) symbols that are consistently used in the dowry of traditional marriage ceremonies in the East Rote Community. These symbols are:

1. **Oli** (areca nut container)

Oli is a traditional container made from woven palm or lontar leaves, used to place betel leaves, areca nuts, and lime. According to the informants, Oli symbolizes respect and hospitality. It is usually presented to elders and guests as a sign of honor and acceptance. In marriage ceremonies, the presence of Oli indicates the groom's family's politeness and sincerity toward the bride's family.

2. **Pua** (areca nut)

Pua is one of the most important cultural elements in East Rote society. It is used in almost all traditional ceremonies. In the dowry context, areca nut symbolizes friendship, unity, and openness in communication. Offering Pua shows that both families are willing to establish a harmonious relationship through marriage.

3. **Raido** (betel leaf)

Raido is always paired with areca nut and lime. The informants stated that betel leaf represents respect and togetherness. It functions as a social symbol that strengthens relationships between families. In traditional weddings, Raido signifies the closeness and mutual acceptance between the groom's and bride's families.

4. **Ao** (lime)

Ao is a white powder traditionally made from burned seashells. It is used together with betel leaf and areca nut. In the dowry ceremony, Ao symbolizes completeness and balance. Without Ao, the act of chewing betel is considered incomplete, just as a marriage is incomplete without agreement and harmony between families.

5. **Rereli** (ring)

Rereli is a symbol of love, unity, and eternal commitment. The informants explained that the circular shape of the ring represents an unbroken bond between the husband

and wife. In traditional marriage ceremonies, the ring signifies the seriousness of the groom and the formal binding of the marital relationship.

6. **Doi** (money)

Doi functions as a symbol of appreciation and responsibility. Traditionally, dowry was given in the form of livestock or traditional objects, but money is now commonly used. However, informants emphasized that Doi does not represent the purchase of the bride. Instead, it is known as *susu oe* (mother's milk), symbolizing gratitude to the bride's mother for raising and nurturing her daughter.

7. **Niru/Dulang** (tray)

Niru is a tray used to carry dowry items during the ceremony. It symbolizes politeness, transparency, and respect. The open shape of the tray allows all items to be seen clearly, indicating honesty and good intention from the groom's family. Although modern trays are now used, the symbolic meaning remains unchanged.

8. **De'dede** (lamp)

De'dede is a traditional lamp symbolizing light and guidance in life. According to the informants, the lamp represents hope, wisdom, and clarity for the married couple. It reflects the expectation that the couple's life will be guided by light, peace, and mutual understanding.

9. **Pou/Lafa** (traditional clothing)

Traditional clothing worn by the bride and groom represents cultural identity and social status. The groom wears *lafa*, while the bride wears *pou*. These clothes signify readiness to enter married life and acceptance of cultural responsibilities within the East Rote community.

10. **Silaka** (headband)

Silaka, also known as *Ti'i Langga*, is a traditional headgear worn by men. It symbolizes leadership, dignity, and responsibility. In the context of marriage, Silaka represents the groom's role as the head of the household and his readiness to lead and protect his family.

These symbols are consistently presented during the *Tu'u Belis* ceremony and are recognized by the community as essential components of a valid traditional marriage. Overall, the findings demonstrate that dowry symbols in the East Rote traditional marriage ceremony function as a system of cultural communication. Each symbol conveys moral

values, social roles, and collective identity, reinforcing kinship ties and preserving ancestral traditions.

Discussion

The findings reveal that dowry objects function as symbolic signs within a cultural system of meaning.

From a Saussurean perspective, each dowry object operates as a signifier representing a culturally shared concept. For example, the ring signifies unity and commitment, while money signifies responsibility and appreciation toward the bride's family.

From a Peircean perspective, dowry objects function as symbols whose meanings are determined through cultural convention. The representamen refers to the physical dowry object, the object refers to the cultural value represented, and the interpretant refers to the meaning understood by community members.

The interpretation of dowry symbols is sustained through social interaction, supporting the view that meaning is socially constructed within cultural practice. Thus, dowry functions as a system of cultural communication that conveys values of respect, kinship, responsibility, and cultural continuity.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the dowry in traditional marriages of the East Rote Community consists of ten symbolic items, each carrying specific cultural meanings. These symbols represent respect, unity, responsibility, social harmony, and cultural continuity. The dowry functions not only as a material requirement but also as a meaningful cultural symbol that strengthens kinship and preserves traditional values.

The study suggests that the East Rote Community should continue preserving the symbolic meanings of dowry traditions despite modern influences. Future researchers are encouraged to explore similar cultural symbols in other regions or examine changes in dowry practices over time.

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