



Savukh Rangin Ritual: A Study of Social Semiotics



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Abstract

Savukh Rangin is one of the oral traditions that is still alive and survived by Key community. It is performed to invoke God's Blessing, others, and the ancestors so that a baby could adapt to social environment where he/she was born. The ritual conducted is intended to keep the baby away from various kinds of illnesses or disturbance of natural surroundings. This study aims to reveal the meanings of verbal signs, nonverbal, manifest and latent in the ritual. The disclosure of meanings of verbal and nonverbal signs in Savukh Rangin ritual applied theory of social semiotics by Peirce (1975), which emphasizes on the signs of icons, indexes, symbols, and a means manifest and latent meaning according to Berger (2010). The analytical method used is descriptive qualitative analysis. The data collecting techniques used include interview, participatory, and observation techniques. The research results shows that the use of verbal and nonverbal signs referring to the lexical, significance, referential, associative, manifest, and latent meanings. The meanings are mediated systematically by all participants in the ritual. More dominant meanings in the ritual refer to the associative and referential meanings.

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1. Introduction

Human represents their identity through two important signs, namely verbal and nonverbal signs. The two signs are used to intend communication or social interaction with others and the environment as part of the

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attachment of human and their environment. Verbal signs are generally used in two forms namely oral and written ones. Especially, the communities who concern with written tradition, certainly have many documentations of cultural products inherited from generation to generation. Whereas those who do not have written tradition or script system, inheritance system of cultural products is generally only implemented verbally. Such inheritance is relying on the power of memory to store a number of very important cultural information and valuable cultures.

Kei speech community as part of Indonesian and world cultures also uses signs of verbal and nonverbal to express values, attitudes and norms of their lives. The use of verbal and nonverbal signs to express purposes, meanings, and messages inherited orally from generation to generation. Through the two types of the signs, the messages are communicated to others (Liliweri, 2014: 300). The manner of verbally inheritance at least enables the extinction of aspects of cultural and social values. Those values are produced and implemented to form personality and wisdom in facing changes of times and mindset. Nevertheless, the role of oral verbal signs also plays an important to preserve cultures from one generation to another.

The issues discussed in this paper is a ritual which its intensity begins to degenerately done in *Kei* social life. This ritual is called *Savukh Rangin* 'Ritual of Step on Land'. It is performed to invoke the blessing of all relatives *yain te* 'brother and sisters', *teen yanat* 'old and young', *Duad* 'God', *nit* 'ancestors', and *nuh met* 'land and sea'. Blessing of all the relatives becomes the expectations and reinforcement for the babies in order to live and grow up in the midst of the families and society. Regarding the ritual, Durkheim and Levi Straus tried to make a primitive cultural phenomenon. Whether it is totemism, or a myth or whatever, that can be understood by showing the relationship between the phenomenon and the rest of society and social structure (Badcock, 2011: 118).

The phenomenon of the use of verbal and nonverbal signs in ritual *Savukh Rangin* is quite unique. The uniqueness possessed by this ritual is its process, the involvement of the lexicon, and simple devices used to carry a particular meaning. For example, the use of a silver ring, how to take young coconuts, and the lexicon that are not commonly used, such as *momoin*, *mowain*, and *moil*. The lexicons are rarely used in everyday communication. Signs of verbal and nonverbal in the ritual lead function and meaning that need to be explicitly investigated.

2. Research Methods

This study is an analysis of the meaning of the signs of verbal and nonverbal based on the theory of social semiotics. The focus of the analysis is emphasized on the use of signs which mediate verbal and nonverbal ritual meaning of *Savukh Rangin* in *Kei* speech community. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research with observation approach, participatory observation, and interviews, and analysis of textual content (Bungin, 2007: 143). Qualitative data analysis method is used to reveal the meanings of metaphor, manifest and latent in the ritual text *Savukh Rangin* in *Kei* speech community.

Theory

The theory used to investigate the meaning of verbal and nonverbal signs in ritual *Savukh Rangin* is social semiotic theory developed by Peirce (1975) includes icons, indices, and symbols. (Kaelan, 2009: 196, Eco, 2009: 267-268), Berger (2010: 185-186) said that *manifest* meaning of a sign will be considered as one of general meanings and results as desired by the sign maker. The hidden meaning (latent) of a sign is not generic or it is already clearly referred, its meaning is hidden (latent) in the sign, it is in unconsciousness of sign maker's own, or to those who witness the sign.

3. Results and Analysis

The discussion on ritual *Savukh Rangin* includes (1) the meaning of verbal signs, (2) the meaning of non-verbal signs, and (3) the meanings of manifest and latent. Each meaning is explained in the following subsections.

3.1 Verbal Signs in Ritual *Savukh Rangin*

Verbal signs in this study are as stated out by Saussure i.e. parole. Parole is a language in the level of its use in the community. Parole is the combination of signs concretely stated out in the forms of greeting, expression, gesture, action or objects product based on existing signs treasury as well as rules that have been agreed together

(Piliang, 1999: 349). The signs have also been functioned in ritual *Savukh Rangin* by Kei speech community. They are presented in the forms of texts of this study.

Text 01

Kei Language

O mvatok lauk dos bakhkakh, momoin mowain.

Uil lakhro, vatok afa sasian fo kako ratheak

Muan la afa ni fo m'ot nail afa sasian nang kako fo harvait

Kako harkhis ron, uil rai,

Vatok nail lakh katokh fo kako harheakh fo harvait fasian harharuak i, o mna nail afa sasian

Vatok dos bakhkakh nhov moil wain

English Language

Dispose of sins and mistakes, keep lamentation away in order to grow up, healthy, and strong.

Difficult and **miserable**, keep all badness away from children in order to grow up healthily.

Eat this stuff, keep all badness away from the child in order to survive his/her life.

Children's crying and sicknesses.

Dispose of dirty blood in order that the children get healthy and life.

The badness asks this child, you keep the bad things away.

Dispose of sins and cases as well as bad things.

Text 01 is the main text read out by the main figure in *Rangin Savukh* ritual. The text has some symbolic meanings. Verbal symbolic meaning in the ritual speech is analyzed as follows.

Text 02

Key Language

Beti wahaum nabhaliakh do Duad ntah lauk afa sasian nang o

O mel fo murat mkai duniai avon ran

English Language

In order that your face opens, God keeps all bad things away from you.

You grow up in order that you recognize all the worlds.

Text 03

Kei Language

Duad ntah lauk afa sasian nang o fo o meil rat tavek bakhan.

Duad ntah lauk khis raron nang oh, binaket nang o.

English Language

God keeps bad things away in order that you grow up.

God keeps sobs and diseases away from you.

Texts 02 and 03 are verbal expression texts done by the participants in *Savukh Rangin* ritual.

3.1.1 Referential Meaning

Referential meanings represented through verbal signs in the above texts are conviction request to God. The request is mediated in the form of speech *O mvatok lauk dos bakhkakh* (text 01). Verbal form referring to God is *O 'Thou'* to replace *Duad 'God'*. Verbal form expressing the request is lexicon *mvatok* 'dispose of' which in this context is to keep all matters of sins and mistakes away. Another referential form in this text is the speech *Muan la afa ni* (text 01). 'Eat this stuff'. The reference in this speech is *afa ni* 'this stuff'. *Afa ni* 'stuff this' refers to the white metal ring scraped while starving a coconut done by the main figure in the ritual.

3.1.2 Idiomatic Meaning

The expression *Bakkakh dos* represent the meaning of all mistakes and obstacles. The idiomatic form is also to express the meaning of worry feeling for the child's life in the future. This expression implies confidence if there are no obstacles in the forms of sins and mistakes, they will affect the growth and the future of the baby (child). Sins and mistakes are believed to be one of the main barriers to the growth and future baby's life. *Bakkakh* word is defined as any acts, deeds, speech, not a commendable attitude that might be done by parents of the baby. Therefore, it must be cleared by the washing of the child's face, and every participant who is present in this ritual. Participants wash their faces while expressing prayer and hope in God and ancestors so that the baby would become a useful one in family and community life.

3.1.3 Associative Meaning

The expression *afa sasian* 'bad stuff' (text 01) is a form of verbal sign referring to something indirectly. Meaning mediated by the form is referring to the meanings of the bad things, demon disturbances, and other forces that continue to monitor and interfere the growth of the baby. In essence, this expression implies human attitudes and actions existing in the real and unreal worlds. Whereas, the similar expression is as follows.

The expression *fasian* derives from *fa+sian* 'bad things', ugliness, or wrongness. The expression is associated with tangible and intangible natural creatures that would disturb or often frighten children. *Fasian* in this construction represents the meaning of any obstructions that hinder the growth of a child. *Fasian* (text 01) is the symbolic meaning of senses of worry or fear concerning the growth of a child.

Construction of *moil wain* (text 01) is a verbal form used to express a number of obstacles or hurdles faced by children in infancy. Therefore, it should be cleaned by washing face as a sign of support for a child ritualized. Here, it is supposed in order that the infancy of a child has no trouble in his/her life. He/she must be alive in tranquility and freedom from all things to impede him/her.

Construction *lakh katokh* 'dirty blood' appears in this text is to refer to associative meaning relating barriers that often interfere and make children live in discomfort. The barrier could be sickness, and natural forces, and other supernatural strength. Therefore, any barrier should be cleaned by washing face with coconut water as a symbol of cleansing and distancing barrier.

3.1.4 Lexical Meaning

Lexical meaning emphasis on the meaning referring to words rather than grammatical form (Rahyono, 2012: 17). Lexical meaning explicitly implied in the text (01), (2) and (3) are as follows.

Lexicon *Duad* (text 02 and 03) represents the meaning of the Creator and Giver of life for humans. Prayer and hope of the participants requested to the Creator as spiritual support for the baby in the ritual. Participants invited who are attached to cultural moral obligation involve to pray for the salvation of the baby. Other lexicons also used jointly in the texts (01.02 and 03) are *afa* 'thing or goods' and *sasian* 'badness or ugliness'. *Afa* lexicon can be defined as anything that would hinder or impede the growth of the baby. While lexicon *sasian* 'badness/ugliness' in this context means meanness or ugliness that comes from nature around where the baby is.

3.1.5 Textual Relationship

Text (01) is supported by short texts that have a significant relationship. In this case, it appears the choice of diction that gives hope and prayer in order that the child could be alive and useful for everyone. Both of the following texts imply the expression of the participants when washing their faces.

Text 02 is very simple because it only consists of two propositions. The second proposition implies a message and hope as well as prayer to God in order that the child grows up in His protection. The phrase *wahaum nabhaliakh* 'your eyes open' is defined as a form of hope to a child in order to grow up and be able to distinguish what is good and what is bad. Here, there is also a prayer '*Duad ntah dishes afa pupil nang o*' God keeps bad things away from you '. It is a prayer of relatives who take part in the ritual. The prayer ends with a great hope, namely *O mel fo rat mkai duniai avon ran* 'recognizing all the worlds'. It is a prayer to support the child to grow up and know the contents of the world. That is, the child can master science well for his/her better future.

Text 03 also implies prayer support and hope in order that the child later avoids various problems to live in tranquility. Text 03 shows that the child is fully supported with prayer and affection. Prayer implies a request to God to keep illness away from the child's life to grow up well.

3.2 Nonverbal signs in Ritual *Savukh Rangin*

3.2.1 Mechanism of fetching coconut

Coconuts used in the ritual *Savukh Rangin* are fetched before sunrise. The one who takes the coconuts should be the biological father of the baby ritualized. He must be silent (no sound) for climbing coconut tree. How to take it should not be scuffed or fall down to the ground. The climber must bring coconuts one by one from the top to the ground. Coconuts fetching done before sunrise in order that other people do not bother fetching coconuts process.

Coconuts have been picked, then taking their water by piercing the tops. Before piercing coconuts to take their water out, incantation (text 01) has been expressed while scraping silver ring on the finger of the main figure of the ritual who also piercing the coconuts.

3.2.2 Young coconuts in the ritual

Coconuts used for ritual *Savukh Rangin* should be green ones. Green coconuts represent the meanings of purity, fertility, health, growth, happiness and free from all sadness. The green color is defined as a period of growth of the without any disturbance and obstacles. A child is expected to grow up healthily like a green young coconut. Another meaning of green young coconut represents the ritualized child is still unadulterated and has not been tainted by a variety of his/her thoughts and words. The baby has not known about the value of goodness and badness in life.

3.2.3 Silver ring (on ring finger)

A silver ring used in ritual *Savukh Rangin* is a cultural creation to add value to the sanctity of the ritual. The silver ring is scraped and rubbed at around coconuts before taking their water out. The symbolic meaning of scraping of the silver ring is to imply the power of nature to not interfere and even help the baby in his/her infancy. Another meaning is to honor ancestors who are believed by a society that they are also witnessing them when the ritual is being performed.

3.3 Manifest and Latent Meanings

In addition to verbal and nonverbal elements that imply certain meanings through ritual *Savukh Rangin*, there are also manifest and latent meanings. Manifest meanings implied in the ritual *Savukh Rangin* include: (1) A child grows up without obstacles, (2) A child can adapt to and be accepted in family and community, (3) Everyone hopes that a child grows up in the protection of Almighty God, (4) A child grows up in the protection of God and ancestors, and (6) A child grows up to be a brave one.

Latent meanings mediated by ritual *Savukh Rangin* are as follows: (1) Maintaining balancing between human and God, among others, and human and environment, (2) Reminding young generation that life balancing should be maintained in life, (3) Reminding society that in addition to the power of God, there are also forces of real and unreal nature, and (4) As media of inheritance of moral values and ethics to live in mutual support/sustain, respect and understanding in social and cultural environment of Kei society.

4. Conclusion

Based on the descriptions above, it can be concluded as follow:

Firstly, ritual *Savukh Rangin* applies verbal signs referring to associative, referential, idiomatic, lexical meanings and textual relations. Secondly, in ritual *Savukh Rangin*, it applies two nonverbal signs, namely green young coconuts and silver rings. Both nonverbal signs carry the appropriate function of this ritual. Thirdly, in addition, it is found that meanings of manifest and latent are revealed through verbal and nonverbal signs in the ritual. Manifest meanings include growth, health, social environmental adaptation, growing up in God's protection, and to be braver. Latent meanings include keeping balancing with God and inheriting moral values and ethics in children social environment.

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