



## Symbolic Meaning of *Kecak* Dance Performance in Balinese Culture

Rana Anyndya Purnomo Putri<sup>1</sup>

[anyndya01@gmail.com](mailto:anyndya01@gmail.com)

English Literature Department, Faculty of Tourism and Language, Universitas Pertiwi  
Universitas Pertiwi

Nirwan

[nirwan@pertiwi.ac.id](mailto:nirwan@pertiwi.ac.id)

English Literature Department, Faculty of Tourism and Language, Universitas Pertiwi  
Universitas Pertiwi

Makmun Fauzi

[makmun.fauzi@pertiwi.ac.id](mailto:makmun.fauzi@pertiwi.ac.id)

English Literature Department, Faculty of Tourism and Language, Universitas Pertiwi  
Universitas Pertiwi

Putri, R.A.P., Nirwan and Fauzi, M. (2024). Symbolic Meaning of *Kecak* Dance Performance in Balinese Culture. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 9(2), 389-396. doi: 10.37110/jell.v9i2.254

Received: 10-01-2024

Accepted: 15-02-2024

Published: 02-09-2024

**Abstract:** This research discusses the meaning and significance or semiotic theory of Balinese culture, focusing on a dance called the *Kecak* Dance. Researchers used descriptive qualitative methods using a semiotic theory approach from Osgood, C. E. Focus on meaning. Mouton. The sources for this research are several journals, videos and local residents. The collection technique in this research is the reading and note taking technique. The results of this research show that (1) There is a spiritual meaning in every *Kecak* dance movement. (2) There is a meaning that can be called a communication to Sang Hyang or God Almighty. (3) There is a meaning regarding the form of balance like diversity.

**Keywords:** Bali, *Kecak* Dance, Semiotics, Culture, Literature

### INTRODUCTION

Commonly, the symbol that we use called as Language, it is a means of communication means that language is a series of sounds that are systemic, in the form of symbols, are arbitrary, meaningful, conventional, unique, universal, productive, varied, dynamic, humane, and a means of social interaction that replaces the individual in stating something or expressing it to the interlocutor. in a social group as a tool for communication and the identity of the speakers. Language as an image of thought means that language is formed from thoughts, or forms of language (individually and spontaneously) imitate or follow the forms of thoughts or ideas. Language as a personality image means that language is related to the

ethics of language that one believes in. This language ethics is very closely related to the selection of language codes, social norms, and cultural systems that apply in a society. By using language with attention to language ethics, a person's personality will be said to be good.

According to Santoso, B (2006) in *Language and Cultural Identity* that language sometimes what is said is not always the real meaning because it might mean something else. Furthermore, there is a study that deals with meaning in language, that is Semantics. Language is a communication tool that is inseparable from the meaning or meaning of each spoken word. As a dynamic element, language is always analyzed and assessed using

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author

various approaches to study it. Among other approaches that can be used to assess language is the meaning approach. Semantics is one of the semantic fields that study meaning. Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies the meaning/meaning contained in a language. In other words, semantics is learning about meaning. Semantics are usually associated with two other aspects: syntax, the formation of complex symbols from simpler symbols, and pragmatics the practical use of symbols by communities in certain contexts. In linguistics, semantic is a sub-field that is devoted to the study of meaning. As attached to the level of words, phrases, sentences and units that are larger than discourse (called text). The basic area of this research is the symbols and meanings.

Symbols or signs can be seen as concepts that are considered by humans as a subtraction of something else. A symbol stimulates or carries a message that prompts thought or action. Symbols are objects, events, speech sounds or written forms that are given meaning by humans. The primary form of symbolization by humans is through language. But humans also communicate through signs and symbols in other forms such as painting, dance, music, architecture, clothing, jewellery and others. Bierwisch, Manfred. 1970. "*Semantics*".

According to D.R. Dowty (1991. p, 14) said that meaning is required to have and specifies how meaning to be correlated compositionally with the expression of the language in a systematic way, but it does not say what meaning are. The meaning seems at once the most obvious feature of language and the most obscure aspect of study. It is obvious because the language to communicate with each other, to convey what we mean effectively. But the steps in understanding something said to us in a language in which we are fluent are so rapid, so transparent, that we have a little conscious feel for the principles and knowledge which underlie this communicative ability. According to D.R. Dowty (1991. p, 14) said that meaning is required to have and specifies how meaning to be correlated compositionally with the expression of the language in a systematic way, but it does not say what meaning are.

Indonesian people live with cultural diversity, and should understand the meaning of culture. The word culture is a language that comes from two languages namely Sanskrit and English. According to Sanskrit, the word

culture means *buddhayah*, which means the plural form of the word buddhi, which means mind or reason. Meanwhile, according to English, culture comes from the Latin, namely Colere, which means processing or working. The term culture is also used in Indonesian with an absorption word, namely 'kultur'.

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world which has extraordinary natural beauty. Around 5776 large and small islands that line the equator have a lot of natural beauty. In addition, the diverse population consisting of hundreds of ethnic groups has its own uniqueness which has distinctive customs. Bali Island or commonly known as the Island of the Gods is an area rich in culture. Various kinds of culture exist in Bali from ancient times to the present which have been passed down from generation to generation. The island of Bali has distinctive customs and arts. These customs and arts are closely related to the Hindu religion they adhere to. For the Balinese, art has become a part of their daily life. Art is always needed and is always there in every social activity in Bali such as religious, social, cultural activities and others. Carving, painting and dancing activities are always carried out in every social or religious event.

"Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values norms and social practices which affect behaviors of a relatively large group of people" – (Lustig & Koester 2013 chapter 10). Culture generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Cultures can be "understood as systems of symbols and meanings that even their creators contest, that lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another". Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society". As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, arts, norms of behavior, such as law and morality, and systems of belief.

Art reflects the beliefs or views of the humans who created it, including the reasons underlying the creation of a work of art and the meaning of beauty contained in the work of art. Art provides guidelines for various human behaviours related to beauty, which basically

includes creative activities and activities of appreciation. Folk art is the foundation of Indonesia's true culture. In its development, art is never separated from the context of the community that supports it. Each region shows the nature of each region that becomes its identity. Similarly, other regions in Indonesia have different cultural and historical backgrounds.

The structure of the dance is a peeling system, the details of dance movements starting from the description of the form and then qualifying with a linguistic approach into sections starting from the lowest level to the highest level. It can be started from motion elements, motion motifs, motion phrases, motion sentences and motion groups. The point is that small movements up to larger ones can be identified. How the smallest dance movements are arranged so that larger dance movements are formed which eventually materialize into one dance form, but the most important thing is to look for a systematic relationship of movements that are arranged in a whole relationship.

Bali is a world tourist destination that has a variety of cultures, one of which is the Kecak Dance (also known as the "Cak" Dance or Fire Dance/*fire dance*). Unlike other dances that use musical instruments (gamelan), Kecak dance "cak cak ke cak cak ke". In qualitative research using the theory of 'Semantic Understanding' (Charles Osgood). One of the dance arts that the researcher will discuss is the Kecak Dance. This dance has a story, history, to its distinctive dance philosophy. The dance originates from the island of Bali. The island, which is famous for its tourist destinations, has a unique dance called Kecak. With its uniqueness, the Kecak Dance is favoured by some immigrant communities who are interested in learning it. "Cak, Cak, Cak" is a distinctive sound that researchers usually hear when watching Balinese Kecak Dance performances. The Kecak dance is a dance drama performed by 50-150 dancers. This dance consists of dancers who are mostly men who sit cross-legged in a circle. The clothes he wore were in the form of a sarong and a square cloth which had black and white colours like a chessboard which was tied in a circle to the dancer's waist.

The Kecak dance is quite popular on the island of Bali. Not only famous, this dance is usually also used as a ceremony to welcome

guests, as well as religious ceremonies. Kecak dance is one of the dances originating from Bali. This dance is also known as the Fire Dance or Cak dance. This dance is a mass entertainment performance dance. This dance is performed by several male dancers, wearing a black and white checkered cloth covering the shape of a chessboard. This dance is played without using musical accompaniment in the form of gamelan or other musical instruments. By sitting in a row to form a circle pattern and accompanied by a rhythmic call that reads "Cak, cak, cak" with the movement of raising both hands. The Kecak dance is also a sacred dance. It can be seen from the movements of the dancers that they are burning with fire, but they do not experience pain and are not burned at all.

This Fire Dance or Cak Dance also has another name, namely the Sang hyang Dance which is performed when there is a religious ceremony. In this event, generally the dancers are possessed by spirits and can interact with the ancestors or gods who have been purified. The dancers are usually used as a medium to convey His word. When possessed, they also perform actions beyond expectations. For example, doing some quite dangerous moves or making sounds that they rarely make. Wayan Limbak is a creator figure of the Kecak Dance. In 1930, he introduced this dance to various countries, assisted by a painter from Germany named Walter Spies. The male dancers who dance this, will shout the word "Cak, cak, cak". It was from this call that the name Kecak was created. The dancers are also accompanied by the strains of music in the form of rattles which are deliberately tied to the feet of the dancers from the cast of Ramayana characters. The dancers then act in the circle. By playing a number of dances taken from the Ramayana story, he tries to save Shinta from the evil hands of Ramayana. This Kecak dance also involves visitors who watch performances at the Kecak dance as part of the uniqueness of the show.

Kecak come from the Sang Hyang, which could be a move convention in which the artists will be in an oblivious state when communicating with the gods or spirits of the predecessors and after that pass on their trusts to the community. Kecak move may be a mass execution move or excitement and tends to be expressive dance. Specifically, the craftsmanship of parts that are not particularly utilized in devout customs such as revere,

*adalan* or other ceremonies. Sacrosanct shapes in this Kecak move are often appeared in terms of *kerauhan* or *masolah*, specifically mysterious insusceptibility so that they are not burned by fire. This move is one of the numerous conventional Balinese Dance that can pull in household and remote visitors who come to Bali. The Kecak move itself can be seen within the Uluwatu visitor region each day at 18:00 WITA.

Researchers found several studies that have the same object as the current researcher. In the study entitled "*Construction of the Message of the 'Kecak' Dance in the Badung Society, Bali*", Sumiati, Lasmery RM Girsang (2018). This study focuses more on the relationship between the Kecak Dance and something sacred. The Kecak dance is just an art performance that has magic value or tricks in every movement, for example in the scene of putting out a fire. In this study also discusses the moral values of humanity contained in the Kecak Dance so that it can become a tourist attraction, so that from watching the Kecak Dance performances the audience can take the essence of the philosophy of a good life.

The second studies that have the same object as the current researcher. In a study entitled "*Nonverbal Communication in a Kecak Dance Performance in Balinese Culture (Ethnographic Study of Communication Regarding the Meaning of Nonverbal Communication of Kecak Dancers in a Kecak Dance Performance in the Tourist Area of Denpasar Bali)*" Ayu Anggaswari, Niluh (2014)". This study aims to determine The Meaning of Nonverbal Communication in the Kecak Dance Performance in Balinese Culture. The purpose of this study was to determine the meaning of facial expressions, time, space, movement and clothing of the kecak dancers. This study uses a qualitative research approach with an ethnographic communication approach only.

The purpose of this study, which become the object is the Kecak Traditional Dance from Bali that will be studied in one branch of linguistics semantics. It will be studied more deeply about the symbols and meanings contained in every movement arranged in it, so that can be explaining and explained the meaning of what the dancer wants to convey, there may also be a message or message implied in it but not known by the reader. So, in this research, the reader will be getting a lot of information, in addition

to knowledge of the science of traditional dance is also, of course, the symbols and meanings in Kecak Dance of Balinese Culture. The analysis in this research only concerns the symbols and meanings. Because basically semantics is one branch of linguistics that discusses the systematic study of meaning.

## **METHOD**

The research approach used in this problem is to use a qualitative approach. According to Strauss and Corbin in Creswell, the definition of qualitative research is the kind of research that produces inventions that cannot be achieved/gained by using statistical procedures or other means of quantification (measurement). Qualitative research in general can be used for research on people's lives, history, behavior, engineering organizations, social activities and more. One reason to use a qualitative approach was the experience of in which this approach can be used to find and understand what is hidden behind the phenomenon that sometimes is something difficult to grasp in satisfactory.

Researcher here aim to reveal the symbols and meanings trough collecting data from the Balinese Cultural background as a direct source. So, the researcher does not test the hypothesis in this research, but the researcher only presents the data and facts obtained in the field, the interprets the data and analyzes the data. So that there will be a gap between the practical level and the existing theory.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the researcher presents the research results in the form of a description of the results of research data analysis that is well organized. Research data is presented informatively, communicatively and relevant to the research problem and objectives. The results of this research are presented in the form of descriptions and images accompanied by explanations so that readers can easily read and understand the results of this research. Researchers present this data systematically and efficiently so as to provide optimal clarity for readers.

Kecak dance really reflects Balinese society at that time. The Kecak dance is a dance that uses a circular pattern with several male

dancers. This dance has the meaning of togetherness and unity between humans in conveying gratitude to God and hope to other people.

Kecak dance is a traditional Balinese dance. The Kecak dance is played by dozens of men sitting in a circle. Call out the word "Cak" with a certain rhythm with both arms raised. The movements are simultaneous and compact. The cohesiveness of the movements in the Kecak dance contains religious rituals. Apart from that, it also reflects togetherness and harmony. Togetherness and harmony are not only in the Kecak dance. However, also in life in the family, school, community, and nation. Togetherness and harmony are important in realizing the unity and unity of the Indonesian nation.

First symbols are monotonous movements. According to dance books and symbols, this Balinese dance has monotonous movements or not much variation. The dancers move their hands above their heads while sitting in a circle. Apart from that, according to the Kecak Dance paper from Bali SMA Negeri 1 Lebahabng, Cirebon, the Kecak dance movements at Garuda Wisnu Kencana (GWK) Ubud or in other places are like someone performing worship at the SangHyang ceremony.

Dance accompaniment, no musical instruments are played during the Kecak dance. The dancers will make 'cak cak cak' sounds to form a cappella music. Someone acting as the leader will give high or low notes, someone else will lead the story line. In this dance there are several visible props such as burning coals, frangipani flowers, rattle bracelets, black and white shawls, masks, and offerings which make it seem sacred and mystical.

The drama that is played, the Kecak dance tells the story of the Ramayana which tries to free Dewi Sinta from Ravana's hands. Broadly speaking, there are five parts to the story. Part one, tells of the existence of the Ramayana and Dewi Sinta in the forest, then followed by the appearance of the golden deer. At the end of the story, Dewi Sinta was successfully kidnapped

by Ravana, then taken to Alengka, which was Ravana's kingdom. The second part tells the story of Dewi Sinta who was held captive in the kingdom of Alengka. He was guarded by Ravana's niece, Trijata. Sinta is sad and hopes that the Ramayana will come to free her. The third part, Hanoman as the Ramayana messenger comes to Sita. He hints that Ramayana will save Sita. At the end of the story, Hanoman ravages the Alengka palace. He burned buildings and gardens. Then in the fourth part, it tells of the battle between Ramayana and Ravana who was assisted by Hanoman. The fifth part tells of the Ramayana's victory over Ravana. Dewi Sinta was successfully freed and was reunited with the Ramayana.

The drama shown also has a moral message conveyed by the characters. For example, the character Ravana is depicted as a greedy figure who takes other people's rights by force. Meanwhile, the character Dewi Shinta depicts a lover who is loyal to the Ramayana, as is Rama who never gives up when saving Shinta.

Another symbol used by the first dancers is cloth, the cloth itself is of several types, the first is kamen or the first cloth used, usually the one used in the Kecak dance is black cloth, usually the color used is related to the color of the cloth that will be used next.

Furthermore, Saput is a black and white cloth that has a symbol which in Bali is rwa bhineda or the meeting of good and bad. Rwa Bhineda itself Historically, this perspective is thought to have been discovered around the 9th to 10th centuries. Bali, which at that time consisted of many conflicting sects, was united by Mpu Kuturan in one solid concept (Runa, 2006:2). In Balinese Hindu society, Rwa Bhineda is defined as 'the unity of two different things'. In a sense, the reality of life in this world is manifested in two different sides, but its presence cannot be separated from one side to the other.

The existence of the concept of duality in a policy cannot be separated from the historical factors of Balinese society which were built

because of Hindu religious culture. Bali is even known as 'Hindu Dharma', which shows that religious activities are influenced by the dominance of Hindu traditions (Miharja, 2013: 55). The religious behavior that the Balinese Hindu community has believed in for generations is built by five principles of belief called 'Panca Sradha'. This belief causes the Balinese people to always maintain balance in all their activities. Therefore, the concept of duality emerged based on Balinese Hinduism, known as 'Rwa Bhineda, a value that still exists and is highly upheld by the Balinese people today. The existence of the Rwa Bhineda concept indicates that the Balinese people actually recognize the existence of complementary binary positions which are influenced by space (village), time (kala) and real conditions in the field (patra) (Suwardani, 2015:251).

Next, *selempot* is a red scarf. If the three fabrics used are put together, they will become one black, red and white, namely tridatu. Tridatu means tri kona, namely birth, life, and death.

Shirtless, this is because in the first year Kecak was created, namely in 1930, people did not wear clothes in their daily activities, so it is characteristic that Kecak dancers, especially men, were asked to wear uniforms. shirt or shirtless. Kecak dancers not only process the sound, but they also process the bare-chested body so that the dancer can show the body movements of the Kecak dancer himself.

Another symbol is footwear, so that it can directly touch the ground/mother nature, will add to the spirit of the steps used by the dancers, apart from that, the dancers will have more freedom in performing the Kecak dance.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the Symbolic Meaning of Kecak Dance Performance in Balinese Culture based on theory from Dowty D.R (1991), the use of semantic theory can be seen from the many aspects of the dance whose meaning still coexists with aspects in human life. One of the functions of language is to identify a group.

This means that using language the identity of an individual or a group can be known. Language can be used to demonstrate personal identity a person, because each individual has a different language style from other people. As a means of identifying group identity, the language used by a group can indicate the group's social status or a play on ethnic words. Language can be used as a means of identifying social status, because people hear high social status have a different language style from people with low social status. Language can also be used as a means of identifying ethnicity, because each ethnic group usually has its own language which is different from other ethnicities. This is related to cultural identity, because to categorize ethnicity you must understand the cultural elements that exist in society, in this case language.

Researchers concluded that in ancient Bali the communication that people used to communicate, especially to Sang Hyang or their ancestors, was through offerings or by providing food. They still preserve this culture in their daily lives, because the Balinese people believe that Sang Hyang is always around them protecting their place of residence.

## REFERENCES

- Anggaswari, N. A. (2014). *Komunikasi Nonverbal dalam Pagelaran Seni Tari Kecak di Kebudayaan Bali* (thesis). UNIKOM, Bandung.
- Bierwisch, Manfred. 1970. "Semantics" in J.Lyons, ed., *New Horizons in Linguistics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 166–84.
- Cempaka, A. D. (2018). *Sekala Niskala: Duka Tak Sebatas Indera*. <https://cinemapoetica.com/sekala-niskala-duka-tak-sebatas-inaera/>. Retrieved September 3, 2023.
- Dowty, D. R. (1991). *Word meaning and Montague grammar: The semantics of verbs and times in generative semantics and in Montague's Ptq*. Kluwer Academic publ.
- Erawati, N. M. P. (2019). *Tourism and Creative Culture: A Study of the Kecak Dance in Bali*. *Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan*, 5(1), 1–6.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies. *Critical Policy Studies*, 7(2), 177–197.



- <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2013.798239>
- Hobart, M. (2007). Rethinking balinese dance. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 35(101), 107-128.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810701233979>. Hovland, C. I.,
- Miharja, D. (2013). Local Customs, Culture and Religion: *A Study of the Balinese Ajeg Movement, Balinese Hinduism*. *Kalam: Journal of Religious Studies and Islamic Thought*. Vol. 7, no. 1, p. 53-78
- Osgood, C. E. (1979). *Focus on meaning*. Mouton.
- Ramdani, A. H. (2016). *Semiotics Analysis of the Photo of the Hags*. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. p. 96.
- Runa, I W. (2006). *The Influence of Religion and Belief (Sect) on Community Mindsets in Revealing the Tenganan Village System*. Working Papers. Denpasar: Faculty of Engineering, Warmadewa University
- Santoso, B. (2006). Language and Cultural Identity. *ISSN Universitas Dian Nuswantoro*, 1.
- Sari, V. F. (2018). *Artist Culture Preservation of the Kecak Dance as a Traditional Balinese Dance*. *Artist Culture Preservation of the Kecak Dance as a Traditional Balinese Dance*.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*.
- Sumiati, S., & Girsang, L. R. M. (2018). *Konstruksi Pesan Tari „Kecak“ Pada Masyarakat Badung, Bali*. *Bricolage: Jurnal Magister Ilmu Komunikasi*, 4(01).  
<https://doi.org/10.30813/bricolage.v4i01.1068>
- Trinh, N. T., Hoa, P. V., & Phuc, T. H. (2017). Halliday's functional grammar: Philosophical foundation and epistemology. *Jurnal Humaniora*, 29(2), 207.  
<https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v29i2.24295>

