



LANGUAGE AND MEANING IN THE TAYUB TRADITION IN TEGALAGUNG VILLAGE TUBAN REGENCY THROUGH A SOCIOSEMIOTIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village, Tuban Regency, is a cultural performance that combines dance, music, and symbolic language reflecting the values and identity of the local community. This study explores how verbal and non-verbal language in Tayub carries social meaning using a sociosemiotic approach. Data were collected through observation and interviews with key cultural actors, including dancers (ledhek), musicians, and elders. The analysis applies Peirce's semiotic theory and the concept of symbolic interaction to understand how language and signs operate in Tayub performances. Findings show that Tayub functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium of communication, cultural preservation, and social bonding. Verbal elements such as song lyrics and spoken interactions convey messages of love, respect, and tradition, while non-verbal signs like gestures, costumes, and facial expressions carry symbolic meanings that reflect social roles and values. The use of language in Tayub is context-dependent and varies according to the performer, audience, and setting. This study highlights the importance of understanding traditional performances through a linguistic and semiotic lens to preserve their cultural significance and deepen appreciation of local heritage.

Keywords: *Sociosemiotics, Social Function, Symbolic Interactionism, Tayub Tradition, Language.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village, Tuban Regency, stands as a vibrant example of living cultural heritage that continues to evolve within its social and cultural context. Far from being a mere form of entertainment, Tayub is a dynamic performative practice that integrates elements of traditional Javanese dance, gamelan music, tembang (vocal expressions), and symbolic costumes. Each of these multimodal components carries semiotic potential, operating as signs that convey layered cultural values and social meanings to both performers and audiences. As such, Tayub functions not only as an artistic expression but also as a

communicative system that reflects, constructs, and negotiates the identity and values of the community that sustains it.

To decode the complexity of Tayub as a performative language, this study adopts a dual theoretical approach. First, it employs Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, specifically his triadic model of Representamen, Object, and Interpretant, as well as his classification of signs into Icon, Index, and Symbol (Afisi, 2020; Joesoef & Adralissman, 2023). Through this framework, the study explores how various elements within the Tayub performance signify meanings and how those meanings are interpreted within their cultural

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

setting. However, recognizing that meaning is not fixed but rather socially constructed through interaction, this study also draws on the theory of Symbolic Interactionism. This sociological perspective provides insight into how meaning emerges, is interpreted, and negotiated through ongoing interaction between performers and audience members within specific socio-cultural environments (Van, 2020; Mohammadzadeh et al., 2020; John-Steiner & Mahn, 2020).

While Tayub has been the subject of numerous academic inquiries, most previous studies tend to focus on its transformation from ritual to entertainment (Suryanto et al., 2019), its socio-economic function (Ventaja-Cruz et al., 2024), and its cultural significance in specific regional contexts (Renyaan et al., 2020; Nisa et al., 2021). There are also studies that apply semiotic methods to analyze Javanese cultural elements, such as Ali et al. (2022) examination of East Javanese signs in the film *Bumi Manusia*. In addition, Widiastuti et al. (2023) application of Symbolic Interactionism in the context of traditional performance provides a crucial basis for understanding social meaning in performance art.

However, despite these valuable contributions, there remains a notable gap in scholarship: few studies have synthesized Peircean semiotics with Symbolic Interactionism to analyze Tayub as a living sign system a socio-semiotic practice embedded in dynamic cultural communication. Existing research has yet to fully explore how Tayub's artistic elements operate not only as aesthetic features but as communicative symbols negotiated through performer-audience interaction.

This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing Tayub in Tegalagung Village as a complex semiotic and sociolinguistic system. It aims to investigate how meaning is embedded, constructed, and transformed within Tayub's performative structure, and how signs within the performance function in conveying cultural values. By applying both Peirce's semiotic theory and Symbolic Interactionism, this

research aspires to reveal how Tayub articulates identity, tradition, and social meaning through its layered and interactive performative language (Jaya et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2023)e. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Tayub as a cultural performance rich in semiotic and communicative dimensions, illuminating its role as a living tradition in the everyday life of its supporting community.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design (Tisdell et al., 2025; Patton, 2020; Neuman, 2019). A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the meaning and social function of the Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village, where the data analyzed consists of words, images, and observed behaviors, not numbers (Sugiyono, 2021; Fraenkel et al., 2014). A descriptive research design was utilized because this study aims to describe in detail and systematically the facts and characteristics of the Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village (Suryanto et al., 2019).

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through in-depth interviews with key informants, namely an elder who is considered to understand local history (Mbah Sastro), a senior Ledhek dancer (Ibu Warsini), and a senior kendang player (Bapak Karto). Secondary data was obtained from document studies, books, theses, and journals relevant to the research topic.

Data collection techniques included participant observation during Tayub performances, in-depth interviews, and documentation. To ensure data validity, this research used triangulation techniques (combining various methods and data sources) and member checks (reconfirming data with informants to ensure suitability) (Sugiyono, 2021).

The data analysis technique used was Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model (in Sugiyono, 2015), which includes three main stages that occur cyclically during and after data collection: (1) data reduction (selecting, focusing, and

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

simplifying raw data), (2) data display (presenting organized information in narrative form), and (3) conclusion drawing and verification.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section elaborates the results of data interpretation by contextualizing them within a comprehensive theoretical framework. The analysis is systematically arranged to explore the linguistic dimensions, socio-cultural roles, and layered signification processes inherent in the Tayub tradition of Tegalagung Village, Tuban Regency. Framed through a sociosemiotic lens, this discussion aims to reveal how language and signs function dynamically within the performative and communal practices of Tayub.

Background of the Tayub Tradition: From Ritual to Social Practice

The findings, primarily derived from narratives shared by Mbah Sastro, indicate that the origins of the Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village are deeply embedded in the ritualistic life of ancient agrarian societies. Mbah Sastro's remark that Tayub represents "ancestral heritage" underscores its transmission across generations, echoing Shils' theoretical articulation of tradition as a conduit of cultural continuity (Brooks et al., 2023; Ramshaw, 2019). Historically, Tayub bore a sacred role particularly during *ruwatan desa* (village cleansing rituals) or post-harvest ceremonies functioning as a symbolic medium for engaging with metaphysical forces, expressing divine gratitude, and venerating ancestral spirits and village guardians (*danyang*). The use of *donga-donga* (ritual prayers) and *sesaji* (ritual offerings) signifies a performative language embedded in symbolic communication, possibly linked to the veneration of Dewi Sri, the Javanese fertility deity (E. Kartikasari et al., 2020). Though the original mythologies have largely faded from public consciousness, the communal belief that Tayub brings "berkah" (blessings) and "kerukunan" (harmony) still resonates. Viewed through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, these values emerge from collective

interpretation, constructed through continuous interaction and performative repetition. The evolution from sacred ritual to social entertainment illustrates a negotiated transformation of meaning, where the tradition is recontextualized linguistically and semiotically to sustain its relevance across time.

Social Functions of Tayub: An Arena for Interaction and Meaning Negotiation

A comprehensive sociosemiotic analysis reveals that Tayub in Tegalagung Village has evolved into a multifaceted social practice whose meanings are continuously shaped and renegotiated by the community. One of its dominant contemporary roles is as a performative site for entertainment and social cohesion. Within these performances, everyday spatial settings are reimagined as a "social stage," enabling a temporary suspension of rigid social hierarchies and fostering an atmosphere of *communitas*, where individuals across socio-economic backgrounds can engage in egalitarian interaction and reinforce communal solidarity.

As articulated by Bapak Karto through the expression *kempal-kempal* (coming together), the communal gathering in Tayub events reinforces the shared belief that such performances contribute significantly to maintaining social harmony. Simultaneously, Tayub is intentionally positioned as a medium for cultural continuity. The act of *nanggap Tayub* (hosting a Tayub performance) transcends its surface function as entertainment, operating as a performative declaration of cultural identity and an intergenerational transmission of values and traditions.

Economically, Tayub sustains the livelihood of its performers, though this financial dimension is often intertwined with artistic pride and moral obligation toward cultural preservation. Moreover, the performance setting functions as a site of emotional expression or catharsis, where participants channel personal sentiments through *ngibing* (dancing) and song requests, which often serve as coded narratives or subtle confessions (*curhat*). Notably, Tayub also operates within the symbolic economy of social stratification: the ability to sponsor a

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

performance becomes a display of symbolic capital, converting material wealth into social prestige, and thus reaffirming the patron's standing within the cultural framework of the village.

Deconstructing Sign Meanings in Tayub Performance

Sociosemiotic analysis using Peirce's framework reveals that every element of a Tayub performance functions as a complex system of signs. These meanings are not inherent but are constructed and understood through cultural competence and continuous social interaction in Tegalagung Village.

a. Visual Signs: Construction of Identity and Atmosphere

The appearance of the *Ledhek* (dancer) is at the center of visual signs that communicate role identity and establish the performance's atmosphere.

- **Dance Movements (Joged):** The graceful hand movements and hip sway are the Representamen. The Object is the cultural concept of "Javanese female gentleness," agility, and vitality. The Interpretan generated in the audience's mind is a sense of admiration and appreciation for the ideal embodiment of graceful femininity. These movements function as a Symbol because their relationship with the concept of gentleness is determined by established Javanese cultural conventions.
- **Costume and Makeup:** The magnificent costume (Representamen) is Iconically associated with a celebratory atmosphere (Object) due to its visual similarity to festivity. The choice of fabric motifs like Sidomukti (Representamen) Symbolically carries the meaning of prayer and hope for a glorious life (Object), a meaning understood by the community that shares the same cultural knowledge. The transformational facial makeup (*damel pangling*) becomes an Index of the dancer's role change from an everyday individual to a stage figure.

b. Auditory Signs: Narrative Structure and Value Transmission

Gamelan music and *tembang sinden* (singer's songs) actively shape the structure, atmosphere, and narrative meaning of the performance.

- **Gamelan Music:** Changes in tempo from slow to fast (Representamen) function as an Index that directly signifies a transition to a more dynamic part of the performance (Object). Certain types of *gendhing* (compositions) (Representamen) have a Symbolic meaning conventionally established in the *karawitan* (gamelan music) tradition to accompany specific stages in the performance (Object).
- **Tembang (Song Lyrics):** Lyrics containing *pitutur luhur* (wise advice) or *pasemon* (subtle allusions/satire) are highly Symbolic Representamen. Their Object is moral teachings and local wisdom, and their Interpretan is a deep understanding by listeners who comprehend their context. The *sinden*, in this case, is interpreted not merely as a singer but as a conveyor of important cultural messages, a role acknowledged and valued in social interaction.

c. Interactional Signs: Reciprocity in the Saweran Practice

The practice of giving money (*saweran*) to the *Ledhek* is an interactional sign laden with social and symbolic reciprocity.

- **Act of Saweran: Money (Representamen)** in this context is Symbolically interpreted as more than just a medium of exchange. It becomes a form of sincere appreciation, public recognition of entertainment quality, and economic support (Object). The amount or frequency of *saweran* received can function as an Index of the audience's satisfaction level or the *Ledhek*'s popularity. These meanings, from the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, are the result of a "definition of the situation" mutually agreed upon by the participants (*Ledhek*

and audience) through repeated experiences, where the act of giving and receiving becomes a reciprocal dialogue that reinforces norms and values within the performance.

Discussion

The findings of the study highlight the Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village, Tuban Regency, as a dynamic socio-cultural practice that continues to evolve while maintaining deep-rooted ritualistic significance. Originally functioning as a sacred expression in agrarian rituals such as *ruwatan desa* and post-harvest ceremonies, Tayub served as a symbolic bridge between the community and metaphysical forces, often involving ritual elements like *donga-donga* (prayers) and *sesaji* (offerings) directed toward Dewi Sri, the Javanese goddess of fertility (D. Kartikasari et al., 2020). This ritualistic dimension aligns with Shils' notion of tradition as a medium of cultural continuity, where practices are sustained through generational transmission (Partarakis et al., 2021). Despite the decline of its mythological associations, Tayub remains a performative site of "berkah" (blessings) and "kerukunan" (harmony), symbolically negotiated through communal participation. From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, these meanings are constructed through collective interpretation and interaction, demonstrating how Tayub has shifted from sacred ritual to secular festivity while preserving its cultural significance.

Moreover, the Tayub performance now serves multiple social functions. It acts as a communal space where social boundaries are momentarily dissolved, fostering *communitas* a sense of collective unity across social strata (Hartanto et al., 2021). The act of *nanggap Tayub* (hosting a performance) becomes both a symbol of cultural pride and an expression of social identity. It is through this performative repetition that cultural memory is transmitted and renewed, reflecting Hall et al. (2024) theory that meaning is not fixed but continually constructed through representation. Economically, Tayub also supports local artists and musicians, but its significance goes

beyond monetary exchange; it operates within a symbolic economy where sponsoring a performance transforms financial capital into social prestige, as theorized by Bourdieu (2018). The practice of *saweran* (money-giving), for example, is rich with symbolic meaning, functioning as both a form of appreciation and a performative affirmation of social ties and communal values.

Through a sociosemiotic lens particularly using Peirce's triadic model of signification the performance of Tayub is decoded as a layered system of signs. Visual elements such as the *Ledhek's* (dancer's) costume, makeup, and movements are not merely aesthetic; they function as cultural symbols of femininity, vitality, and celebration. The *joged* (dance movements) act as Symbols representing Javanese ideals of grace, while fabric motifs like *Sidomukti* convey hope and prosperity (Kartikasari et al., 2020). Auditory signs, such as gamelan rhythms and *tembang* lyrics, serve as structured narratives that transmit local wisdom and moral messages, elevating the *sinden* (female singer) to the role of cultural narrator. These signs acquire meaning through shared cultural knowledge and social interaction, reflecting Halliday (2019) conception of language as a semiotic system embedded in social function. Interactional elements, particularly in the practice of *saweran*, further demonstrate how Tayub becomes a dialogic space for meaning-making, where gestures of giving and receiving signify mutual respect, satisfaction, and socio-cultural acknowledgment. These findings affirm that Tayub is not a static tradition but a performative, communicative practice shaped by collective experience and continuously reinterpreted through social and semiotic engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study titled "Language and Meaning in the Tayub Tradition in Tegalagung Village, Tuban Regency Through a Sociosemiotic Approach," it can be concluded that the Tayub tradition in Tegalagung Village is a dynamic cultural phenomenon that has evolved from a sacred

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

agrarian ritual into a multifaceted social practice. In its contemporary form, Tayub functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for social integration, cultural preservation, economic empowerment, emotional catharsis, and even as a marker of social status. These functions are not fixed; rather, they are actively constructed and negotiated by the local community through continuous social interaction. The Tayub performance itself operates as a complex sign system, wherein visual, auditory, and interactional elements function as icons, indexes, and symbols that communicate cultural values, construct social reality, and reinforce communal identity.

In line with these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, for the local community and artists, it is essential to continue nurturing a sense of love and ownership toward this tradition. Artist regeneration should be encouraged through training programs, workshops, and mentorship to ensure the sustainability of cultural values across generations. Second, for the local government of Tuban Regency, tangible support is needed in the form of performance facilitation, cultural promotion, and the integration of traditional arts into local education curricula to instill appreciation for Tayub from an early age. Third, future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative studies on Tayub practices in different regions or examine how modernization and globalization impact the tradition's meaning and existence.

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Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

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