

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Wedding is universally regarded as one of the most significant social ceremonies. Beyond its legal function of uniting two individuals, it also embodies cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions that mirror the values of a community (Rehiraky, 2024). In many societies, marriage is not merely a formal ritual but a rite of passage that marks the transition into a new stage of life. This process involves symbols and rituals that carry profound meanings, representing identity, beliefs, and traditions passed down across generations. Communication within a wedding context is not limited to spoken language; it also occurs through signs and symbols that reflect kinship, social structures, and religious or customary beliefs. Thus, every element—from rituals and attire to symbolic objects—serves as a medium for expressing cultural identity and values.

Culture, as the product of human thought, customs, and traditions, functions as a guide for behavior, shaping interactions, preserving identity, and maintaining social harmony (Sibarani, 2004). In Indonesia, wedding traditions remain one of the most enduring cultural practices. These customs play a central role in uniting families and communities, and are legally recognized under Article 2 of Law Number 1 of 1974, while also being preserved as cultural heritage across generations.

Each region in Indonesia has its own distinctive marriage customs. One common element is the dowry, which serves as an essential component of marriage. A dowry refers to items given according to customary law, determined by the social status and lineage of the groom's family, and offered to the bride's family as a reciprocal exchange (Daeng, 1985, p. 307). It symbolizes the bride's transition from her father's lineage to her husband's lineage (Aman, 2009, p. 2). The dowry is not only a family obligation but also a collective practice involving extended relatives, intended to demonstrate honor, wealth, and capability. In patrilineal societies, where lineage follows the male line, dowry becomes a prerequisite for a valid marriage, with the groom providing money or symbolic objects to the bride.

The Rendu community in Nagekeo Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, is one of the indigenous communities that still upholds the dowry custom. The dowry is a crucial prerequisite for the legality of marriage in the patrilineal Rendu wedding system. According to customary law, the dowry is a gift given by the man to the woman in order for the marriage to be deemed lawful. The dowry, locally referred to as "Dheo Ngawu," is more than just a material gift; it is a cultural symbol that shows respect for women, fortifies family bonds, and facilitates communication between the families of the bride and groom. Because Dheo ngawu is a representation of the utmost respect for a woman who would be married in a traditional wedding, it is a sacred component for the Nagekeo community, preventing men from being arrogant with women (Mola,

2022). According to the Dheo Ngawu, men are entitled to control their household, express their opinions, and incorporate women in their tribe.

In order to give a dowry in Rendu, both couples must go through a number of customary discussion processes or stages of the wedding. One of these is the stage where both parties negotiate the dowry to be given, including the type, amount, and time of delivery. As a result, everything in the dowry-giving stage depends on both parties' consent. According to Rendu Village wedding customs, the woman's family also responds when a man offers a dowry. Horses, buffalo, gold, cows, goats, lambs, dogs, chicks, coconuts, betel nuts, palm wine, and other items are examples of the man's dowry symbol. A big pig, Mbay songket cloth (agi bai), Nage/Boawae woven cloth (hoba pote/hoba Nage), rice, mats, pillows, kula (traditional gourd plates that are now replaced by tin plates, glasses or ceramics), ipe (woven sacks), and clothing are all examples of the compensation that the woman must provide (Engo, 2018). Both couples' dowry symbols are employed in wedding ceremonies because they have distinct significance.

While the Dheo Ngawu tradition employs signs, symbols, or expressions that are not only verbal or physical but also contain profound meanings that are only comprehensible in a certain cultural context, there is symbolic communication (Rizky, 2023).

The language used to express prayers and promises, the clothing worn by the bride, groom, and family, the rituals performed, and the items offered or utilised during the ceremony are all examples of symbolism in a traditional Rendu wedding. In

addition to serving a practical purpose, each of these components has symbolic significance that connect people to their ancestors and society.

The symbolic elements of dowries and wedding customs in many cultural contexts have been the subject of several studies. For example, Tenda (2024) identified and categorised twenty-three symbols into cultural icons, indices, and symbols in a semiotic examination of dowry symbols in the Ulupulu Village marriage ritual. In a similar vein, Fadilla et al. (2024) investigated symbolic meanings in traditional Minangkabau weddings, emphasising the function of rituals and colours as symbols of spiritual messages and cultural values. However, rather than offering a thorough examination of symbolic communication as a dynamic cultural process, these studies mostly concentrated on recognising symbolic patterns and classifying their meanings in various societies. On the other hand, the symbolic transmission of Rendu traditional weddings, which is still thought to be unknown, is thoroughly examined in this study. Furthermore, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, which separates sign into two primary components—signifier (form) and signified (meaning)—has not yet been used to examine such traditions. This study uses this theory to investigate the forms of Dheo Ngawu as signifier and their corresponding meanings as signified in an effort to close the gap.

Moreover, there are a lot of powerful symbolic components in Rendu traditional weddings, but there is still very little knowledge of symbolic communication in this type of wedding. The entire community, particularly the younger generation who are

beginning to be impacted by modern culture, frequently does not fully comprehend the various rituals and symbols involved in this wedding.

Based on the description above, the researcher is interested to know the uniqueness of giving dowry in wedding customs as well as the meanings contained in each symbol of the dowry. Therefore, the researcher conducted a study entitled: **"Symbolic Communication in Rendu Traditional Wedding "Dheo Ngawu": A Study on Cultural Semiotics"**

1.2 Research Questions

In light of the aforementioned background, the research questions are formulated as follow:

1. What are the forms of symbolic communication in Rendu traditional wedding "Dheo Ngawu"?
2. What are the meanings of the forms of symbolic communication in Rendu Traditional Wedding "Dheo Ngawu"?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Reference to the research problem, this research is done to:

1. Find out the forms of symbolic communication in Rendu traditional wedding "Dheo Ngawu".

2. Find out the meanings of the forms of symbolic communication in Rendu Traditional Wedding “Dheo Ngawu”.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The benefits of this study are as follows:

1. This study is expected to increase the researcher knowledge about the symbolic communicationin Rendu traditional wedding “Dheo Ngawu”.
2. This study may become a reference for future researchers who intend to study similar topics.
3. The results of this study can provide information and knowledge to readers about the meanings of symbolic communicationin Rendu traditional wedding “Dheo Ngawu”.