

## Research Article

## Language Meanings and Symbols in the Traditional Wedding Ceremony of Malay Deli

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**Abstract:** The ethnography study on the social life and culture or ethnic such as tradition, behavior, law, art, religion and language is a way of documenting and publishing a society. This study observed directly to the use of language in Malay Deli, Indonesia. It covers the grammatical, psychological aspects and social structure of wedding ceremony in Malay Deli Tradition. In the case of this study, data were collected from the poems and proverbs that have connections with the processional events of wedding ceremony in Malay Deli Tradition.

**Keywords:** language use, wedding ceremony, Malay Deli, tradition.

## INTRODUCTION

Married is one of the important stages of human life cycle. Through married, somebody will get status change, from single to be married, thus, the couple will be approved and needed as full members as society. In kinship system, married also influence character and family relationship even can shifting the rights and obligations to temporarily. For example, a brother is responsible for his little sister, but when she is married, the rights and obligations will be moved to her husband.

According to Admansyah (1987: 88), Malay Deli Society has 26 kinds of procedure of marriage which consist of:

1. Pioneer (*merintis*)
2. Small merisik (*risik kecil*)
3. Jamu Sukat (*jamu sukat*)
4. Big merisik (*risik besar*)
5. Asking for marriage (*meminang*)
6. Giving a Gold (*Naik Emas*)
7. Make a Promise in Marriage (*ikat janji*)
8. Marriage Contract (*akad nikah*)
9. Stolen Henna Night (*Malam berhinai curi*)
10. Small Henna Night (*Malam berhinai kecil*)
11. Big Henna Night (*Malam berhinai besar*)
12. Bringing Man Bride (*Mengantar pengantin laki-laki*)
13. Door Dashed (*Hempang pintu*)
14. Be Couple (*Bersanding*)
15. Flour Throwing (*Tepung tawar*)
16. Whip (*Cemetu*)
17. Having a cooked rice face to face (*Makan nasi hadap-hadapan*)
18. Handover man bride to woman bride
19. Ornate Bath (*Mandi berdimbar*)
20. Pray Surround (*Sembah keliling*)
21. Together in the Night (*Malam bersatu*)
22. Release the Obstacle (*Naik halangan*)
23. Borrowing the brides
24. Giving back the brides

Before asking for marriage section is held, it is usually done short searching (*merisik kecil*) for a wife; the character of this short searching (*merisik kecil*) is informal. The event of small merisik (*merisik kecil*) is held if a man intends to propose a girl for getting married who he likes or parental choice (Lubis, 1997: 75). According to Malay tradition, it is pointed a man or more who is believed to convey this asking for marriage, in Malay tradition called as envoy communicator or *bintara sabda* (Panuti, 1994: 105). The event of short searching (*merisik kecil*) principally is concealed by man's family because if this event is rejected by woman's family, this will be disgrace to man's family.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative method. Qualitative method is common used in this kind of human sciences research (Semi, 1993: 180). In this case, the researcher used an ethnography fieldwork; such as a systematic interview and other documentations.

## DISCUSSION

## Marriage Ceremony in Malay Tradition

1. Merisik (Searching a woman for marriage)

If a man intends to propose the woman that he likes to get married with, according to Malay tradition, it is must be pointed someone who is trusted. In Malay tradition, this pointed person is called as *Telangkai* (envoy communicator). The duty of *telangkai* is started from searching until sending the bride and handover, but sometimes it is only spying finished, then those who asking for marriage is assigned to out of family (Fang, 1993:115).

If the arrival of *telangkai* gets good response from woman's family, then it is assigned a good date and day to accept the arrival of man's family to merisik. Actually, it only needs 2 persons; they are 1 man and 1 woman, and sometimes just

need 1 woman. The material need is only betel and the equipments.

Because it has been discussed, the arrival is expected by woman's family. After woman's family welcome, then the meeting is opened by asking the purpose of the arrival. The envoy first shoves the betel and then asks woman's family how is the decision about their arrival. In the implementation, small *merisik* can also done by man's parents, all previous, it is known (surely) that asking for marriage will be accepted by woman's family. According to Faruk (1994: 91) the things that will be discussed in small *merisik* are the requirements from woman's family, such as:

- a. Dowry is the absolute giving from future husband to future wife obligatory based on Islam. Dowry is absolute rights for future wife, must be given to her and cannot be used for anything without permission from the person concerned. Dowry includes the gold, money, Holy Quran and others.
- b. Money affection is a help from man's side for the cost of wedding.
- c. Bride Rights, such as the room equipment, bedroom, dresser, etc.
- d. Labor Clothing is as man's given to his future wife.
- e. Preceded (*Kelangkahan* (Malay) is from word '*langkah*' in this context means "*dilangkahi* or preceded") if future wife has older brother or sister who is single so the older brother or sister will get replacement requirement such as labor clothing. According to Malay costum, this event is aimed to appreciate the older brother or sister who is still single. But if future wife don't have older brother and sister, this event don't need to be implemented.
- f. The decision of date, it is considered as important thing in formal meeting for both parties. It means that both of the parties still may to bargain until meet the deal.

The ceremony is implemented on overlay that has been provided by the experts of spokesman. As it is said before, in the ceremony marriage of Malay tradition today, it is implemented 3 ceremonies at once, they are: *merisik*, asking for marriage (*meminang*) and making a promise (*ikat janji*) which is guided by 3 *Telangkai*. The meaning of *telangkai* based on Malay tradition is the spokesman envoy in the name of family to tell the aims for both families. The number of *telangkai* is usually 6 persons; 3 persons are from man's side, one is for spokesman and others are for accompanying (*bintara sabda*), similar with *telangkai* of woman's side. Both spokesmen from the parties sit face to face and each spokesman is accompanying by *bintara sabda*. After both spokesmen sit face to face, the event is opened first by spokesman from woman's side with give the betel (opening) to spokesman from man's side while said the poem:

Sungai Deli airnya tenang

(*Deli river water is calm*)

Mengayuh biduk sambil berdendang

(*Plow pedaling while humming*)

Sungguh kami merasa senang

(*Indeed we were delighted*)

Kami ucapkan selamat datang

(*We are pleased to welcome*)

Diufuk cerah mentari pagi

(*In the bright morning sun*)

Bukan menyanjung bukan memuji

(*Not love not commend*)

Tiada usai kami menanti

(*Nothing was over we await*)

Kiranya tuan selamat sampai kemari

(*May the lord survived up here*)

Then say a greeting:

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Selamat datang kami ucapkan

(*The welcome we say*)

Mohon serta keberkahan dan keampunan

(*Kindly and blessing and forgiveness*)

Kehadirat Allah kita tujukan

(*Presence of Allah we aim*)

Semoga pertemuan mendapat kesyukuran

(*Hopefully the meeting gets gratitude*)

Menurut adat Resam Melayu

(*According to Malay tradition Resam*)

Apabila kita kedatangan tamu

(*When we had guests*)

Tepak sirih disorong selalu

(*Tepak betel always pushed*)

Begitu adat sejak dahulu

(*Once the tradition since the first*)

Kapur dan gambir tembakau di dalam

(*Lime and tobacco Gambir is in*)

Pinang menghadap sirih menyembah

(*Betel nut facing worship*)

Tertegun rasa hati di dalam

(*Stunned feelings in*)

Semoga tamu yang datang membawa tuah

(*Hopefully guests who come bringing good luck*)

While hold betel to be faced to guests, then spokesman from woman's side continue his poem:

Tepak sirih kami persembahkan

*(We dedicate betel)*

Sila nikmati dimakan

*(Please enjoy the food)*

Ujud beriring serta kiasan

*(Accompanied shapes and figurative)*

Setepak sirih sejuta pesan

*(Setepak betel million messages)*

Setapak sirih penuh berisi

*(Setepak full of betel)*

Jika sudah tuan hamba rasai

*(If you already master)*

Seandai pahit usah dikeji

*(If bitter need scorned)*

Seumpama manis usah dipuji

*(Such sweet praised)*

As a poem said:

Ikan bilis ikan tenggiri

*(Anchovies, mackerel)*

Dimakan nenek puan dari malaka

*(Grandmother eaten madam of Malacca)*

Silahkan makan sirih kami

*(Please visit our betel nut)*

Sebagai obat pelepas dahaga

*(As drug release thirst)*

The meaning of the opening poem above is to welcome the guests in order to say thanks to God and pray to bless the meeting for both families. According to Malay Deli culture, the betel case (tepak sirih) is given as the symbol that the host feels glad and expects the guests bring good news and then they invite the spokesman of man's side hand over the betel as the opening, the position of betel stem is pointing to spokesman of woman's side while said as:

Ikan kakap hendak digulai

*(Snapper will be curry)*

Digulai lemak santan kelapa

*(Fat coconut milk curry)*

Mohon maaf majelis ramai

*(We apologize for any public assembly)*

Sambutlah salam dengan suara

*(Say hello to voice greetings)*

Then say a greeting:

Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Selain bersyukur kehadiran Tuhan

*(Also thanks to the presence of God)*

Kami datang membawa pesan

*(We come with a message)*

Salam takzim penuh keikhlasan

*(Sincerely sincerity)*

Dari keluarga yang tidak jauh dari pangkalan

*(From family not far from the base)*

Sungguh tuan hamba berlapang hati

*(It's an open heart lord)*

Menerima kami di rumah ahli bait yang bertuah ini

*(Receive us at this lucky house)*

Disongsong tepak penuh berisi

*(Supporting slap full)*

Takjub pula rasa di hati

*(Shane is also a sense in heart)*

Menang setapak laksana Hang Tuah

*(Win path like Hang Tuah)*

Dengan Hang Jebat kawan berseru

*(Hang Jebat cried with friends)*

Disongsong tepak dihela sembah

*(Support slap dihela worship)*

Demikian adat puak Melayu

*(Thus indigenous Malays)*

Dosorong tepak dihela sembah

*(Blown slap wheeled worship)*

Mohon restu sanak keluarga

*(Please blessing relatives)*

Mohon disantap budiman bertuah

*(We are lucky gentleman eaten)*

Sekapur sirih pembuka kata(*Preface the opening words*)

While spokesman hand over the betel, he invites the spokesman of woman's side to eat the betel. The meaning of poem above is to express the function of betel case (*tepak sirih*) based on Malay Deli culture. Besides, its fuction is as approving the agreement; the betel case (*tepak sirih*) is also as communication tool either in words or performances. Therefore, the betel case (*tepak sirih*) is given by man's side is as a symbol to inform certain aims and purposes.



Figure 1. The Betel Case

Kalau bukan karena kemudi patah

*(If not for a broken rudder)*

Usahlah tuan naik perahu

*(Master don't need boat)*

Usah tuan hamba berlagak latah

*(Do not pretend to master talkative)*

Lambat laun orang pun tahu

*(Sooner or later people already know)*

Bukan karena kemudi patah

*(Not because of a broken rudder)*

Patah galah dalam perahu

*(Broken pole in a boat)*

Bukan kami berlagak latah

*(We pretend not talkative)*

Kuasa Allah siapa yang tahu?

*(Who knows the power of God?)*

Kalau ada kaca di pintu

*(If there is no glass in the door)*

Mari letakkan di dalam perahu

*(Let's put in a boat)*

Kalau sudah tekad tuan begitu

*(If it is determined that the master)*

Tanamlah, kuasa Allah siapa yang tahu

*(Plant, the power of God who knows)*

The meaning of the poem above is the spokesman of man's side introduces himself to the spokesman of woman's side that he is an envoy from man's side.

### 1. Asking to Marriage (*Memintang*)

On the definite day, the group of man's side comes to woman's side. The number of group of man's side is settled in order to make the proper preparation when the group of man's side comes over. On this stage, they need to prepare the opening words to ask the marriage, the dowry, symbol exchange, the promise, the place for promise and the

equipment. Thus, woman's side is waiting for symbol exchange and the promise. When the procedure of marriage is over, the symbol gives back to the owner but now it's usually made from asking for marriage as the symbol and no need to give it back.

Talk about this symbol, there's a punishment. According to cultural law, if man breaks the promise the symbol which has given to woman still belonged to woman's side, it is called as symbol trampled (*terpijak tanda*). Otherwise, if the woman breaks the promise, they must give the symbol back doubly, it is called as symbol accompaniment (*mengiring tanda*). Except one of the candidate get the calamity such as crazy, illness and death, the symbol will be back as usual.

If engagement or married has not been approved while fasting month and Eid comes, in that time sister from man's family should bring the beef and spices to woman's family. The beef is brought with salver closed in the basket. As a response from woman's family, the basket will give back with cooked meat inside tomorrow afternoon.

### 2. Henna night

In this section, woman bride comes to wedding stage. Host invites several close family, neighbors and friends. The bride is get flour throwing (*tepung tawar*), first henna is touched to hand's bride then flour throwing is implemented to get blessing. Next they pray together and continue with give henna to the bride at their hands and feet and also the man bride. In addition, the event is closed with the dance of henna to make the event be more attractive.

### 3. The promise of marriage

When a man will be married, a man from woman's side guide the man bride to the special place, called as *Pataratna*, it is a mat which is fold into 2 layer and wrapping with beautiful cloth and put pillow in the right and left side. Then the man bride is covered with batik cloth (*songket*).

In front of the *Pataratna* (place for wedding), it has been put:

- a. A woman's betel is on right side of *pataratna*
- b. A glass of water is on left side of *pataratna*
- c. 2 whites candles, one is on right side and another is on left side of *pataratna*
- d. Flour powder is on right side of *pataratna*
- e. A plate of sweet fruit, salt, ucid and ginger
- f. A man's betel is on left side of *pataratna*

When the wedding is started, 2 white candles are set on fire and the man is covered with batik cloth. The wedding is lead by *Tuan Kadhi*. When this event is over, a man bride with his group should bring back to the beginning of place after get permission first from the host.



Figure 2. Promise for the Marriage

#### 4. Bringing the Bride

According to Malay culture, the bride is given the clothes of *Teluk Belanga* complete with *Tengkuluk* made by *Songket* or *Batik* (Malay clothes), the belt that is called *Pending* made by *Songket*, the head of belt is made by silver and related each other. At the right of waist is put ceremonial knife (*keris*), right hand hold the betel wrapping with gold paper, the length of the betel is as handfull.

The equipment in bringing the bride, such as:

- a. A place to put jewelry
- b. A complete a meal/meat/fish served with cooked rice
- c. 2 betel greetings
- d. Some of betel which is served by family
- e. Kinds of flower consist of white rice, yellow rice, etc.

After this even is done, the group is ready to go to woman bride. The group stops about 30m before woman's house and sister goes forward while bring the betel to meet the sister from man bride and send the greeting then they inform that they are already arrived.



Figure 3. Bringing the Brides

On the woman's side, she sits on the wedding stage with complete clothes based on cultural clothes, such as clothes and jewelry, the chain, safety pin, ear studs, the rings and the crown. Her hair is tied as hair bun with flower. There are 2 girls in right and left side of the bride. There is carpet from the door until wedding stage for way to man bride when he

comes. Tray puts in the corner of door contains of chilly and flower to be stepped by man bride then go to the wedding stage. There are other section before go to the wedding stage, called "hempang pintu" (but today it is rarely implemented by Malay people), man bride sit in right side of woman bride, then they change the betel for each other and everything is given to woman bride. Bamboo wedding (*Balai*) is put in front of the wedding stage.

#### 5. Flour Throwing

While both of brides sit in state on wedding stage, flour throwing is implemented. The number of people to flour throwing should be odd number. The material used in this section consists of 3 main parts:

- a. Spreader ingredients: white rice, yellow rice, and potpourri
- b. Spatter ingredients: water with lime and fresh flower, *kalinjuang* leaf, double leaf deer, orange leaf, tied together and used as a tool sprinklers
- c. The censer is a place to burn the incense. Spreader ingredient is put on the right hand, before sowing; the bride is smoked on the censer the spread to flour throwing. The bride must give a respectful greeting to people who do flour throwing such as their parent or the older family.

After it has been finished, the next section is *cemetuk*. This section is bow from kneeling position so the head of woman bride touches man's feet.



Figure 4. Flour Throwing

#### 6. Having a Cooked Rice Face to Face

After flour throwing section is done, the next section is having cooked rice face-to-face with both families but only for the woman, the man is forbidden to attend this section. The food is special in this section; consist of kind of food, cake and fruits.

Bride sit on the head of the dish, there is a cooked rice mixed with coconut milk put in cup wrapping with silk surrounded and the inside of the rice is hidden a slice of meat or chicken. The bride should race to take it. Based on the story, who's the success to get it will be more competent in managing household. The leader in this section is usually a wedding guider. Wedding guider should have skill to make cheerful situation. When this section is finished, they are having lunch together. In this part, wedding guider takes some of rice to the

cup then ask woman bride to eat with hand to man bride.



Figure 5. Having Cooked Rice Face-to-Face

The main purpose of this section is to introduce each other for both families. While they are having lunch together, they also can talk together in order to tighten the relationship and to know the structure of both families. This section is the first service from woman bride to her husband.

#### 7. The Handover

After 'having cooked rice face-to-face' section is finished, the brides take a rest for a while then continue for the next section is the handover. In this section, it is told the word of this section and the advice for both brides. The family from man bride tells about the plan to borrow the brides to introduce them to whole family who cannot attend for the wedding.

When the Handover section is over, the brides stand in front of the wedding stage to give respect to the guests, especially for woman's family. Then the wedding guiders from both parties accept the handover from bamboo carrier (*balai*). Woman's family give the dish of food with beef/chicken as a replied from man's family. The betel will be shared by woman bride to her whole family.



Figure 6. The Handover

#### 8. Submerged and Ornate Bath

In the morning towards the wedding, submerged is implemented by woman bride. White clothes spread out in her lap then the thread is twisted to her head like the chain. The candle is set and the wedding guider start to cut some of her hair then the bride ready to take the submerged section.

When all of guests return to back, the bride is asked to go down to the yard, the place to carry on the submerged and ornate bath, it is also called as *Bergumba*. In Malay culture, this action is aimed to clean self physically and mentally to avoid the bad luck and expect the lucky in building new family.

The place of submerged and ornate bath is provided:

- a. A bowl of water with various flower, lime, areca nut and pandan. The bowl is decorated with plait of coconut leaf like centipede.
- b. A bowl of water which is prayed to avoid all of bad luck
- c. A bowl of water which is prayed to expect the lucky
- d. A bowl of water mixed with various flower
- e. A pail of water
- f. 2 coconuts peeling
- g. 2 eggs
- h. 2 candles
- i. A mirror
- j. The threads for both brides
- k. The flour
- l. A tray
- m. Areca nuts
- n. The incense
- o. The betel

Both bride sit on the place for submerged first then flour throwing is implemented by several family from woman side, the bride change their costum to bath then ornate bath is conducted.

- a. Both of brides are wrapping with long clothes at their shoulder
- b. A tray is put on their feet
- c. Each wedding guiders take one of areca nut then clapping it to brides' hands until broken. The first bride break the areca nut is the winner. The wedding guider exchnage the areca nutthen sweep it from head to the feet of brides fro 3 times. Then the areca nut is thrown in order to avoid the bad luck.
- d. Then each wedding guiders take the coconut then fight then until break on the brides' head. The purpose is to avoid the dispute between the brides.
- e. The brides stand on the tray; wedding guider puts an egg on the tray then asks the bride to break it. The aim is to get children as soon as possible.
- f. The wedding guider waters the brides with various garden flowers and a bowl of water which is prayed.
- g. The brides are asked to eat the betel while look towards to mirror.
- h. Each wedding guider wrap 3 threads to the waist of brides, at the edge of threads is tied tightly then wedding guider set on fire the candle and go around for 7 times then burn the threads until broken off. The aim is for the relationship between husband and wife be more harmonious and only the death breaks the relationship. Generally this event is attended by family and be more attractive because they pour each other and may not be angry. When this event is held, the yard is free to use except inside of house.

Therefore, there are several events which are now rarely used by Malay people, such as together in the night (*malam bersatu*), the complication, borrowing bride, bringing back the bride, take woman bride to move. It is maybe concerning to

adapt the development of era and period which is practically and fast.

## CONCLUSION

The ethnography research concludes that *Telangkai* (an envoy communicator) plays an important role in communicating the events in Wedding ceremony of Malay Deli of North Sumatra, Indonesia. The duty of *telangkai* is started from searching until sending the bride and handover. The envoy first shoves the betel and then asks woman's family how is the decision about their arrival. He uses many poems and proverbs to communicate the man's proposal to marry the woman in her resident. In the implementation, short searching for a wife to be (merisik) managed by *Telangkai*, he also is a mediator for the marriage will be accepted by woman's family

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