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Translating Chinese Traditional Wedding Semiotics Signs into English

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ABSTRACT

Chinese traditional wedding is a marriage ceremony established with a pre-arrangement between families involving a ritual procession. In this respect, this study deals with the semiotics translation of Chinese traditional wedding signs in the ritual processions located in Medan. The aims of this research are: to analyse the types of semiotics displayed in the Hokkien Chinese Traditional Wedding signs, to translate the semiotics of each sign Chinese traditional wedding in Medan realized in English, and to discuss the cultural value in the semiotics translation of Hokkien Chinese Traditional Wedding in Medan. The research focuses on the semiotics meanings of Chinese traditional wedding signs in Medan, North Sumatra, by the community of Hokkien. The study employed a qualitative research design. Interview and documentations were used as the data collection methods. The research results showed that: there are thirty signs of Hokkien Chinese Traditional Weddings discussed in this research consisting of semiotics meanings which influenced and gave an effect to the bride and groom in their wedding, the tradition that has been practiced consisted of the cultural category of ecology culture, material culture, social culture, organization culture, gesture, and habit culture in which the most dominant one was the social culture. Based on these, it was concluded that all of the signs used in Chinese traditional wedding for the pre-wedding and wedding ritual were in hereditary from generation to generation, though some modifications had been made.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Translation, Semiotics Sign, Cultural Category, Chinese Traditional Wedding*

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1. Introduction

Chinese traditional wedding is a ceremonial ritual within Chinese societies that involve a marriage established by pre-arrangement between families. Within the traditional Chinese culture, romantic love was allowed. A band of musicians with gongs and double-reed instruments accompanies the bridal parade to the groom's home. Similar music is also played at the wedding banquet. Depending on the region from which the bride hails, Chinese weddings have different traditions such as the Tea Ceremony or the use of a wedding emcee. Also, in modern times, Chinese couples often go to photo studios to take glamour shots posing in multiple gowns and various backgrounds.

The study deals with the semiotics translation of Hokkien Ethnic of Chinese

Traditional Wedding Signs. The research of this study is an original scientific research and has rarely been researched before. The research focuses on the semiotics meanings of Chinese traditional wedding signs which was held in Medan, North Sumatra, by the community of Hokkien and the theories used "Semiotics Translation's Theory" by Roman Jakobson (1959) and Semiotics Theory by C.S Peirce (1931). The term sign that used in this research refer to what Peirce defined about signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning.

The reason why this title was chosen is because it is original and has never been researched in Indonesia before. The importance of this study is conducted into



some reasons which are discussed as following:

First, the history of traditional Chinese's wedding was over 2,400 years of tradition and culture, and this have to be preserved and conserved, so the researcher dare to research it interms to find what is the different between the culture of traditional wedding in China and Indonesia. In here it is worth to describe about the Hokkien Chinese's traditional wedding systemization of apparently pre-existing elements of traditional Hokkien Chinese's wedding ceremony because Hokkien Chinese is the most dominant in Medan City, Indonesia.

Second, the explanation about the ceremony and the wedding in Chinese's tradition that remained constant were the chief objectives are to joining and enhancing the two families and ensuring succession with numerous descendants. Reverence to parents and ancestors, omens to encourage fertility and wealth, financial and social obligations contracted by both families at the betrothal, extensive gift giving etiquette, and the bride's incorporation into her husband's family are recurring elements. The interesting part is the wedding signs that they used in this wedding to be representing or be standing for another to enhance the meaning of this wedding culture especially in their dowry.

Third, the findings of this research have gave significant contribution to the society especially the Chinese in Indonesia which had mixed the culture and made change in the global society.

Fourth, the findings of this research have given contribution to the society in order that they can maintain the culture documentation that describes the context situation which contained of the social relationship among the tenors such as the relation between the speaker and the listener in accordance with the field being involved to determine the mode which is selected based on the paradigmatic relation of semiotics theory features. It also describes that culture context variables such as purpose out-goal and out-come, belief, hope and the context of ideology seen as a set of instutional frames which govern the social behavior of the society in their communicative interaction.

The research was based on signs as Sources Text (ST) and the Target Text (TT) to the meaning in English and it is categorized as an uncovered area in field of translation studies. A research that

conducted on the translation of a cultural text based on the meaning-based translation method had been done by Lubis (2009). It is different from the translation of the ideology meaning from the ST into the TT, meanwhile the writer research is concentrated on the signs meaning of wedding in Chinese traditional wedding.

Fifth, the translation of the signs of the Chinese traditional wedding into English is interesting and could enrich the knowledge of the reader in knowing more about semiotics, culture, meaning and sign.

Therefore, this research was conducted entitled "Translating of Chinese Semiotics Traditional Wedding Signs into English".

This research is about the signs of Chinese Traditional Wedding in Medan. The study focused on the semiotics signs used in the prewedding and wedding day and the research applied the theory of an Semiotics Translation by Roman Jakobson (1959) and the semiotics theory by Charles Sanders Peirce (1931).

Based on the background of the study above, the problems are formulated as the following:

1. What semiotics sign are displayed in Chinese traditional wedding in Medan?
2. How is the semiotics of sign Chinese traditional wedding sign in Medan realized in English?
3. How is the cultural value of each sign Chinese traditional wedding in Medan?

In accordance with the problems of the study, the objectives of this research are:

- a) to identify the types of semiotics sign displayed in the Chinese Traditional Wedding,
- b) to describe the semiotics of Chinese traditional wedding sign in Medan realized in English, and
- c) to describe the cultural value in the semiotics translation of Chinese Traditional Wedding in Medan.

The findings of the study are expected theoretically and practically to give more contributions in translation research for students.

1. Theoretically, findings of the study can add up new horizon to theories of cultural studies. In addition, the findings can become references for further researches.
2. Practically, findings of the study become some sort of guidelines for the teachers, lecturers, readers who are directly in charge in this area, in order to able to guide their students and for the society to know more about the meaning of

Chinese Traditional Wedding Semiotics signs.

This study is focused on signs of Hokkien Ethnic of Chinese Traditional Wedding in Medan. The data is limited to the 30 signs that used on the wedding in Chinese traditional wedding.

2. Literature Review

Western culture attracts Chinese people's attention unprecedentedly for China is becoming more open. For the rapid development of economy, Chinese people need to cooperate with westerners more frequently. It becomes particularly important for Chinese people to learn more about western countries' culture in their communication. In this respect a research was done by Guo and Wang (2016). It mainly focused on Chinese traditional marriage customs and western countries' marriage customs especially that of the United States. Though the research, different marriage customs were demonstrated and helped people to learn more about them. The paper attempted to show marriage customs of China and the US and analyzed the reasons of their marriage forms through contrasting their differences through comparative analysis between Chinese traditional marriage customs and American's marriage customs. From that, it was concluded that traditional culture played a leading role in them like in marriage values and religion.

In another study by Hassanabaidi and Heidari (2014) titled "The Effect of Semiotics Translation on Vocabulary Learning", it was asserted that culture is changing towards modality and mixture of media is invented and used in favour of daily needs. Visual advertisements accompanied by words, texts mixed with visual means of communication in children's picture books, motion pictures mixed with audio or even with written means of communication in cartoons or movies, are the least examples of the mixture of media or multimodality. To study the significance of the recent convictions in the application of multimodal tools in teaching vocabularies, the present study set out to investigate the extent of vocabulary learning within two different environments: audio-visual signs accompanied by semiotics translation (subtitles) versus audio-visual signs (no subtitles). Elementary level Participants watched the two different versions of *The Lorax*, a famous cartoon in Iran. To evaluate the effect of each set of

signs on their vocabulary learning, participants were required to answer three levels of questions. The obtained results were analysed using paired sample t-test. The results revealed a better performance of the group who received subtitles.

For the ease of students' vocabulary learning, the gateway into language acquisition, modality is the most common attended strategy in the rapid changing culture. The effect of various types of modality on vocabulary learning has been investigated by different scholars. Although all of their gained results agreed with using subtitles in favour of vocabulary learning, outcome of the present study did not support it. The result indicated that the VA participants performed better in comparison with the VAS group. As mentioned in the discussion part, factors such as low reading speed, level of language proficiency, and the distracting effects of subtitles might be effective in the related results of the research. The study had its own limitations especially in collecting relevant data from language institutes which embraced a few number of students and had their particular managing rules. Therefore, the result of the study needed to be generalized with more participants.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992:52), the design used in the research refers to the researchers' plan of how to proceed. Design decisions are made throughout the study – at the end as well as the beginning. Further, a qualitative research has five features, namely having natural setting and making the researcher as the key instrument, using descriptive words, concerning with process rather than simply with products, analyzing data inductively and having meaning as the essential concern. So, based on this definition, the way in which this study conducted followed these signs quoted.

3.2 The Corpus of the Study

In this study, the subject of research is the signs of Chinese traditional wedding in Medan. The data of the ST in this research were 30 signs which are take part in Chinese traditional wedding. The 30 signs were described then its meanings were found into English by interviewing several informants. There were two ladies aged 53 years old and 76 years old respectively and are known as the experts in this field. The questions were



written and the interviews were recorded for the further analysis. The wedding ceremonies were randomly selected from 2012 to 2017.

3.3 The Data Collection Methods

Ghony and Almanshur (2012:164) explained that data collection in qualitative research can be done by using natural condition technique, primary data source, and more on participation observation, deep interview, and documentation technique.

For collecting sufficient data, interview and documentation study were used as the data collection method. Type of the interview method used is semi-structured interview. Sugiyono (2010) has explained that there are some types of interviews:

- a) Structured interview: structured interview is used as a data collection technique if a data collector knows well what information that will be gained.
- b) Semi structured interview: this interview type is categorized as in-depth interview, because it is more flexible than structured interview.
- c) Unstructured interview: it is an interview where the data collector does not use any systematic interview guides. In unstructured interview, it is not sure about what data which will be gained.

The research used structured interview method. According to Moleong (2010:190), “structured interview is an interview where the interviewer determines itself the problems and the questions that will be asked.”

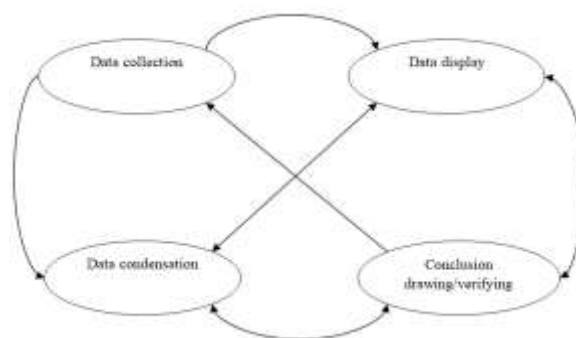
Faisal (in Sugiyono, 2010) explained that samples as data sources or as informants are better to fulfil the following criteria:

- a) Those who master or understand something through the enculturation process so it does not only about know; but it is also about carrying out.
- b) Those who are still involved in the research activity.
- c) Those who have adequate time to be asked information.
- d) Those who do not tend to give information from their own “package”.
- e) Those who are strange in the first so that the researcher feels more enthusiasm to take them as informants.

3.4 The Data Collection

In collecting the data, this study used naturalistic method by observing, recording, taking notes and interviewing. While data collection, pictures and wedding related books were utilised. This is because of the fact that the subject of this research is the signs in Chinese with focus on the dowry in

the traditional wedding.



Source: Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014)

4. Data Analysis & Findings

4.1 The Analysis of the Data

The data description and analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the observation transcripts, and translation of the signs and items. In this activity, field notes and other materials accumulated from the interview transcript were used for own understanding and then were translated into English. The information about Chinese traditional wedding ceremony which involved the families were described and analyzed to find the essential meanings of the semiotics, the inter semiotics, and the culture category. The analysis consisted of concurrent flows of activity namely data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing/verifying. The data was collected directly from the field and from the information gained from the informants.

The 30 signs discussed in this research are: sangjit (Chinese wedding ceremony), praying to god and ancestors, tea ceremony on wedding day, eating egg on wedding day, cutting the wedding cake, the wedding basket, dragon and phoenix, the character of *shuang xi* (double happiness), wedding invitation card, *angpau* (red pocket or red envelope), style frock (*cheongsam*), tea set for tea ceremony, wedding oranges, wedding eggs, *misua* (floor noodles) wedding wine, Chinese wedding lamp, Chinese wedding comb, Chinese wedding incense, Chinese wedding pineapples, wedding sandals, wedding flowers/bouquet of flowers, wedding dates and longan (dragon) wedding jewellery, wedding cake, Buddha maitreya statue, bride and groom prostrated in front of altar, matrimony invocation and wedding ring exchange.

4.2 Findings

After analyzing the data, the findings were obtained which are listed below-

1. It was found that the 30 signs of Chinese traditional weddings discussed in this research consisted of semiotics meanings

which influenced and gave an effect to the bride and groom in their wedding. The bride and groom were expected to follow the signs on the wedding as it has been tradition for many years.

2. The 30 signs of the Chinese traditional wedding showed the relation in semiotics translation theory by discovering the signs' meanings into semiotics meanings.

To begin with the engagement, after an unmarried boy's parents found a potential daughter-in-law, they located a matchmaker whose job was to assuage the conflict of interests and general embarrassments when discussing the possibility of marriage on the part of two families largely unknown to each other. The groom's family would then send an elaborate array of food, cakes, and religious items to the bride's family.

Before the wedding ceremony, two families would arrange a wedding day according to Chinese *tung sing*. Selecting an auspicious day to assure a good future for the couple is as important as avoiding what is believed to be an unlucky day. In some cases there may be no auspicious dates and the couple will have to review their potential date range. The final ritual would be the actual wedding ceremony where bride and groom become a married couple.

5. Discussion

The visual text is related to the analysis of narrative structures of an image. This involved the use of elements in an image to tell a story or illustrate or explain a causal process that take place over time. The first thing we need to do when looking for narrative values in an image is to identify the participants and the processes.

Marriage in Hokkien, linked two people who had been appointed by God as their soul mate. Their declaration as husband and wife is done in front of Buddhist priest traditionally at a religious ritual. This means a marriage is a worship of God throughout life that must be kept pure because they must continue their generation by giving birth to children. The marriage tradition of Hokkien society is very semiotic. Icons, indexes and symbols give a harmonious meaning between the cultural values that the Hokkien society has agreed upon with the moral values derived from human mind. Icons, indexes and symbols provide an abstract aesthetic cultural mark through various ornaments, clothing, motion, and background. Therefore, the values mentioned above must remain alive with the

community as it is still used today as a feature of Chinese mandarin ethnicity. The moral values in this marriage tradition are illustrated by the sincerity of the two pairs of brides who each receive their marital ties honestly. As its realization in the next life, they should not hurt each other. They must improve the quality of their love in order to survive in the face of obstacles and challenges.

The cultural values of Hokkien marriage tradition also need to be maintained because the rituals and cultural traditions are the ancestral heritage of the Chinese people. The reddish ornaments of the garments, the tradition of drinking tea, are all made to signify that both brides are back and forth and the various events in the world that guide their lives. Aesthetic value is closely related to cultural values, because the varieties of cultural ornaments become the whole set in the cultural context of the text of marriage.

The marriage tradition of Hokkien society contains local wisdom that depicts the sacred ties of male and female couples who maintain the honor and sacred relationship between the bride and groom. Besides local wisdom in unifying two big families harmoniously between mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandmother grandfather, nieces, nephew and cousins from two sides of the family. Revitalization in the Hokkien marriage tradition continues to occur every decade, since the Buddhist tradition is inherited from the older generation to the new. This cultural heritage shifts due to other cultural influences. What happens to the Hokkien community in Medan is different from the Chinese mainland. In Medan, Hokkien marriage traditions already behave with the nuances of the process of tradition in the field are no longer exactly the same with the tradition in mainland China. This tradition needs to be a customary preservation that also needs to be studied academically in universities and developed by local governments as a tourism industry.

This tradition remains relevant to the present and becomes a lifestyle of the present community of Hokkiens in Medan. As a cultural heritage, the Hokkien young people also need to understand their own culture tradition and the understanding of Hokkien culture will expand their knowledge of their traditions.

To sum up, it is hoped that this research will lead to the compilation of a



book of marriage tradition that combines ritual, social, values, norms, aesthetics and local wisdom of Hokkien society in Medan related to the semiotic visual analysis of text and the descriptions of the ceremony as well as the revitalization of the sign of items and the change of its values.

6. Conclusions

After analyzing the data of signs in Chinese Traditional Wedding, the conclusions of this research are:

Semiosis signs that are displayed in Chinese Traditional Wedding in Medan symbolized as a ritual that represents the couple's transition into adulthood which showed respect to the God and Ancestors. It is also a sign of respect, for a family gathering, to apologize, to express thanks to your elders on one's wedding day in order to connect large families on the wedding days and the rest of their lives as a blissful union. It also shows a respect and gratitude, wealth, and the *Cheongsam* reflecting an upper class traditional wedding dress for woman in China. The signs are also symbolized as good luck, fertility, longevity in Chinese culture, and cleanliness. The Chinese's wedding lamp is symbolized as the burning love of the wedding couple and addition of sons to the family. Then, the wedding cake is symbolized as the beginning of life as husband and wife.

The semiotics of Chinese traditional wedding signs in Medan are realized in English in various ways. For example, *Sangjit* has meaning of engagement, wedding basket symbolizes a home to fill furniture and goods, dragon and phoenix symbolizes a blissful union, the Character of *Shuāng Xǐ*: double happiness for bride and groom, wedding invitation card symbolizes a respect, *angpao* symbolizes wealth, oranges symbolizes good luck, wedding eggs symbolizes fertility, *misua* symbolizes longevity in Chinese culture, incense symbolizes respect to God and ancestors, pineapples as the symbol to accumulate the wealth in business and homes, etc.

The cultural category in the semiotics translation of Chinese Traditional Wedding in Medan consists of: ecology culture, material culture, social culture, organization culture, gesture and habit culture. Ecology culture can be seen in *Sangjit*, Chinese wedding combing ceremony, praying to God and ancestors, tea ceremony, eating egg on wedding day, wedding basket, wedding invitation card, red pocket, *cheongsam*, wedding oranges, wedding eggs, Chinese wedding comb, Chinese wedding incense,

Chinese wedding pineapples, wedding sandals, wedding flowers, wedding dates and *longan*. Material culture can be seen in *Sangjit*, Chinese wedding combing ceremony, praying to God and ancestors, tea ceremony, eating egg on wedding day, cutting wedding cake, *cheongsam*, wedding oranges, wedding eggs, *misua*, wedding wine, Chinese wedding pineapples, wedding sandals, wedding dates and *longan*, wedding cake. Social culture can be seen in *Sangjit*, Chinese wedding combing ceremony, praying to God and ancestors, tea ceremony on wedding day, eating egg on wedding day, cutting the wedding cake, the wedding basket, dragon and phoenix, the character of *Shuāng Xǐ*, wedding invitation card, *angpao*, *cheongsam*, tea set for tea ceremony, wedding oranges, wedding eggs, *misua*, wedding wine, Chinese wedding lamp, Chinese wedding comb, Chinese wedding incense, Chinese wedding pineapples, wedding sandals, wedding flowers/bouquet of flowers, wedding dates and *longan*, and wedding jewelry, and wedding cake. Organization culture can be seen in praying to God and ancestors, dragon and phoenix. Gesture and habit culture can be seen in tea ceremony on wedding day, wedding invitation card, and wedding jewelry.

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