



Analysis of the Meaning Structure in the Lyrics of the Bugis Song “Bunga Ripalla”: A Saussurean Semiotic Study

Abdul Rauuf Muri¹, Sumarlin Rengko HR²

¹²Program Studi Sastra Daerah Bugis-Makassar Fakultas Ilmu Budaya,
Universitas Hasanuddin

Corresponding E-Mail: E-mail: murimuri083@gmail.com

Received: 2025-10-21 Accepted: 2025-12-31

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.9447

Abstract

This study investigates the meaning structure constructed in the lyrics of the Bugis song Bunga Ripalla by H. Mustafa Bande using a Saussurean semiotic framework. Although regional song lyrics in Indonesia have been examined from linguistic and cultural perspectives, detailed structural semiotic analyses of traditional Bugis songs remain limited. Addressing this gap, the present research applies a descriptive qualitative design with lyric lines as units of analysis. Data were derived from an authoritative and widely circulated version of the song, verified through cultural informant consultation. The analysis operationalizes Saussure’s signifier–signified model to identify symbolic patterns and relational meaning structures. The findings reveal four dominant symbolic clusters: (1) elevation imagery (mountain/height) representing idealized expectation, (2) flight imagery (bird/wings) symbolizing striving beyond limitation, (3) boundary imagery (sky edge/path) signifying obstruction, and (4) floral imagery (fenced flower) representing restricted love. These interrelated signs construct a coherent emotional progression from idealization to disappointment and reflective acceptance. The study demonstrates that Bunga Ripalla constructs a unified emotional narrative through culturally grounded signifier–signified relations that reflect Bugis perspectives on love, aspiration, and social limitation. The research contributes to semiotic theory application in regional literature and expands scholarly attention to Bugis cultural texts.

Keywords: *Bugis song, semiotics, Saussurean semiology, cultural symbolism, Bunga Ripalla*

Introduction

Regional song lyrics remain under-studied within literary linguistics, particularly in structural semiotic analysis. While Indonesian popular songs have received considerable scholarly attention from discourse, stylistic, and cultural perspectives, traditional regional songs are often approached descriptively rather than analytically. As a result, the internal structure of meaning in many regional song texts has not been systematically examined. This gap is significant because song lyrics, like poetry, operate through condensed symbolism, figurative language, and patterned imagery that invite structural interpretation rather than surface description.

In the Indonesian cultural landscape, regional songs function as important carriers of local identity. They encode emotional values, social norms, and cultural worldviews in linguistic forms that are both aesthetic and symbolic. Within the Bugis community of South Sulawesi, songs are not merely entertainment but cultural texts that preserve language, transmit moral sensibilities, and reflect relational ethics embedded in everyday life. The Bugis lyrical tradition frequently employs natural imagery—mountains, sky, flowers, and birds—to communicate emotional experiences indirectly. Such symbolic density positions Bugis song lyrics as legitimate objects of literary and semiotic inquiry.

Previous research on Indonesian regional songs demonstrates the relevance of semiotic approaches for uncovering implicit meanings. Studies on Malay and other regional songs show that natural symbols often function as cultural codes representing identity, morality, and social structure. Semiotic analyses have also been conducted on contemporary Indonesian popular music, revealing how metaphor and imagery construct ideological and emotional narratives. However, most of these studies emphasize thematic interpretation or moral messages without systematically examining the structural organization of signifier–signified relations within the text. Moreover, research focusing specifically on Bugis traditional songs remains limited and largely descriptive in orientation.

From a theoretical standpoint, semiology as proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure provides a structural framework for understanding how meaning emerges through relations among signs. In Saussure's model, a linguistic sign consists of a signifier (the material form) and a signified (the concept it evokes), and meaning is produced relationally within a sign system rather than through direct reference to objects. This perspective is particularly relevant for song lyrics, where imagery functions symbolically and gains meaning through patterned contrast and association. Rather than offering an extensive theoretical exposition, this study adopts Saussure's basic signifier–signified framework as an analytical tool to examine how meaning is structured in the lyric text.

Despite the growing body of semiotic research on Indonesian songs, no detailed Saussurean structural analysis has been conducted on the Bugis song *Bunga Ripalla*, composed by H. Mustafa Bande. Existing discussions of Bugis songs tend to

focus on linguistic variation or general cultural themes, leaving unexplored the internal organization of symbolic imagery and its cumulative meaning structure. Consequently, the way signs interrelate to construct an emotional narrative within this traditional song remains insufficiently understood.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines how signifier–signified relations operate in *Bunga Ripalla* and how these relations form a coherent structure of meaning. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are key signifiers and signifieds structured in the lyrics of *Bunga Ripalla*?
2. What dominant symbolic patterns organize the song's meaning?
3. How does the overall sign system reflect Bugis cultural perspectives on love and limitation?

The purpose of this study is to reveal the structural organization of meaning in *Bunga Ripalla* through a Saussurean semiotic approach. By focusing on relational sign structures rather than thematic description alone, this research aims to contribute to the development of semiotic studies in regional literature and to strengthen scholarly attention to Bugis cultural texts as complex symbolic systems.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design grounded in Saussurean semiology to examine how meaning is structured in the Bugis song *Bunga Ripalla*, composed by H. Mustafa Bande. A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to interpret relational meaning rather than measure frequency or quantify patterns. The primary data consisted of the Bugis-language lyrics taken from a version considered authoritative based on three criteria: (1) consistency across widely circulated recordings and published lyric transcriptions, (2) stability of wording and line sequence across sources, and (3) confirmation by a Bugis cultural informant familiar with the traditional performance of the song. The researcher acted as the main instrument in selecting data, conducting close reading, identifying symbolic elements, and synthesizing structural patterns.

To ensure translation reliability, the Bugis lyrics were rendered into Indonesian through a two-stage verification process. First, the researcher produced an initial translation emphasizing lexical and semantic accuracy. Second, the translation was reviewed by a native Bugis speaker with linguistic competence to verify cultural nuance and contextual appropriateness. Revisions were made when literal equivalence did not adequately capture symbolic meaning. The unit of analysis was the individual lyric line (*larik*), treated as a sign-unit (*parole*). Each line was examined to identify dominant signifiers—defined operationally as lexical items or phrases functioning metaphorically, emotionally intensifying meaning, or recurring as thematic imagery. The corresponding signifieds were determined by analyzing contextual relations within the lyric and considering culturally recognized symbolic associations.

The analytical procedure followed three stages: identification of signifier–signified pairs, grouping of related signs into broader symbolic clusters, and structural synthesis to reveal the overall emotional progression of the song. Meaning was interpreted relationally, consistent with Ferdinand de Saussure’s principle that signs gain value through difference and association within a system. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed peer checking with colleagues familiar with semiotic analysis, validation by a Bugis cultural informant to confirm interpretive plausibility, and triangulation between linguistic analysis and cultural references. These procedures were applied to reduce subjectivity and strengthen methodological rigor while maintaining coherence with the Saussurean framework

Findings and Discussion

The semiological reading of *Bunga Ripalla* shows that the lyric builds meaning progressively through a chain of signs—each line functioning as a signifier that evokes a culturally recognizable signified—so that the overall “meaning structure” becomes an emotional narrative: idealization → striving → blockage → disappointment → collapse → residue of hope → reflective closure. This staged pattern is explicitly framed in the study’s results section, which states that the song contains layered symbolic meaning expressed through metaphorical language and natural imagery, and that each line is treated as a sign system (signifier–signified).

1) The opening: “height” as a sign of excessive expectation

In the early lines, the lyric establishes a strong sign-network around “height” to encode the speaker’s internal construction of expectation. “Wasengngi ro matanrē” (“I thought [it was] so high”) introduces the signified of subjective idealization—a mental act of elevating the beloved (or the relationship) beyond realistic reach.

The symbol intensifies through “Bulu’ē Latimojong” (Mount Latimojong) which is read not merely as geography but as a sign of grandeur and near-impossibility, strengthening the sense of distance between desire and attainability.

The following line (“Lebbipi ro tanrena,” “it turns out [it is] even higher”) marks an escalation: expectation is not only high—it becomes higher than first imagined, shifting the speaker from confident idealization toward early awareness of imbalance.

2) Centering the beloved: expectation becomes dependency

When the lyric states “Minasakku lao ri idi” (“My hope is for you”), the signified becomes more personal: the entire structure of “height” is anchored to a specific “you.”

Semiologically, this is important because it converts an abstract ideal into a relational dependency: the speaker's emotional investment is centralized on one object, increasing vulnerability when signs later shift toward refusal or impossibility.

3) The "bird/wings/flight" chain: imagined transcendence of human limits

Mid-lyric, the song pivots to conditional imagery: "Bennengngē manu' manu'" ("If only I were a bird") and "Sekke' wali makkepanni" ("having complete wings") function as signifiers of utopian capability—a wish to surpass ordinary human constraints in order to reach the elevated ideal.

The subsequent lines "Luttuka massuajang" ("I fly high") and "Massuajang lao ri idi" ("fly high to you") extend this logic: striving is depicted as flight, but its direction remains tethered to the beloved, suggesting devotion that is total yet precarious because it depends on the other's accessibility.

4) The turning point: blocked access and impossible pathways

A decisive shift occurs with "Siddi laleng tenriyola" ("a path not taken"), where "path/road" signifies an opportunity or route that cannot be realized—whether due to rejection, circumstance, or a boundary that the speaker cannot cross.

This blockage is reinforced by "Wirinna Bitaraē" ("at the edge of the sky"), which signifies a beautiful but unreachable threshold: a "road" located at the sky's margin implies the beloved/ideal remains visible yet structurally unattainable.

5) The core metaphor: "the fenced flower" and emotional injury

The song's title image becomes the semantic center in "Bunga ripallaki pale dirimu" ("You turn out to be a fenced flower"). Here, "flower" signifies beauty/love, while "fence" signifies prohibition, ownership, or social-emotional restriction; the word "pale" marks late realization.

The next line "Mupasajang rennuki" ("You disappoint my happiness") functions as the emotional climax: disappointment is no longer abstract; it directly impacts the speaker's sense of happiness as an inner collapse after idealization.

Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...

6) Collapse, residual hope, and closure

The lyric then returns to the "I thought..." pattern—"Wasengngi silampereng" ("I thought [it would be] forever")—signifying belief in permanence that proves illusory.

“Unganna maddunu’ē” (“the flower comes loose/falls off”) represents symbolic rupture: what was fenced (forbidden) shifts into loss (detachment).

“Podomo nataggiling” (“hopefully [they] turn back”) expresses a weakened, passive remainder of hope.

Finally, “Namapinra sēngērēng” (“and change the memories”) resolves the narrative by reframing the past—signifying acceptance and emotional reorganization rather than mere sorrow.

This arc matches the study’s overall conclusion that the song represents a dynamic movement of hope and disappointment through nature symbols (mountain, bird, sky, flower) that interlock into a unified structure.

Table: Summary of Signifiers and Dominant Signifieds

Lyric signifier (Bugis)	Literal gloss (ID)	Dominant signified (meaning)
Wasengngi ro matanrē	Kupikir begitu tinggi	Subjective idealization; elevated expectation Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Bulu’ē Latimojong	Gunung Latimojong	Grandeur; near-impossibility; distance Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Lebbipi ro tanrena	Lebih begitu tinggi ternyata	Escalating expectation; awareness of imbalance Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Minasakku lao ri idi	Harapanku kepada dirimu	Dependency; hope centered on “you” Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Bennengngē manu’ manu’	Andaikan aku adalah burung	Utopian wish to transcend limits Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...

Sekke' wali makkepanni	Mempunyai sayap yang lengkap	Readiness/capability as metaphorical "wings" Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Siddi laleng tenriyola	Satu jalan yang tak diambil	Blocked path; unrealized possibility Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...

Lyric Signifier (Bugis)	Literal gloss (ID)	Dominant Signified (Meaning)
Wirinna Bitaraē	(Jalan di) tepian langit	Beautiful threshold; unreachable route Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Bunga ripallaki pale dirimu	Bunga dipagari ternyata dirimu	Forbidden love; boundary/ownership; late realization Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Mupasajang rennuki	Kau kecewakan bahagiaku	Emotional climax; happiness damaged Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Wasengngi silampereng	Kupikir akan selamanya	Illusion of permanence; absolute belief Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Unganna maddunu'ē	Bunganya terlepas	Rupture/loss; the bond collapses Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
Podomo nataggiling	Mudah-mudahan dia berbalik	Residual, passive hope Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...

Namapinra sēngērēng	Dan mengubah kenangan	Acceptance; re-framing memory as healing Artikel Analisis Lirik Lagu Bun...
---------------------	-----------------------	--

Discussion

Semiotic Interpretation

Consistent with the framework of Ferdinand de Saussure, the meaning of *Bunga Ripalla* is produced relationally within a structured sign system. “Height” gains significance through contrast with reachability; “flight” through contrast with limitation; “fence” through contrast with openness. The lyric does not narrate events directly but organizes emotional meaning through differences and associations among signs. The “fenced flower” retroactively reinterprets earlier elevation imagery: what was initially perceived as noble height becomes recognized as structural inaccessibility. This demonstrates how signifieds shift within the internal logic of the text.

Cultural Interpretation

The symbolic system reflects Bugis cultural sensibilities regarding dignity, social boundary, and emotional restraint. Natural imagery—mountain, sky, flower—operates as culturally intelligible codes rather than arbitrary decorations. The “fence” introduces a social dimension, implying that love may be constrained by social status, commitment, or communal norms. Thus, disappointment in the song is not merely personal but culturally mediated. The lyric encodes a worldview in which aspiration must confront structural limitation.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Semiotic analyses of Malay and Indonesian popular songs often emphasize moral messages or ideological content. In contrast, this study foregrounds structural meaning formation. Rather than extracting themes alone, it demonstrates how recurring sign clusters generate narrative progression. This structural emphasis extends previous regional song studies by showing how relational sign systems organize emotional development within a traditional lyric.

Contribution

This research contributes to three areas:

1. Semiotics: It demonstrates the applicability of Saussurean signifier–signified analysis to oral regional literature and highlights relational meaning formation.
2. Regional Literary Studies: It strengthens scholarly recognition of Bugis song lyrics as complex symbolic texts deserving structural analysis.
3. Cultural Linguistics: It reveals how culturally grounded imagery encodes collective perspectives on love and limitation.

By separating analytical findings from theoretical interpretation, this study clarifies how symbolic patterns construct a coherent emotional narrative. The song ultimately exemplifies how a regional lyric can function as a structured semiotic system reflecting both individual emotion and cultural worldview

Conclusion

This study shows that the song *Bunga Ripalla* by the late H. Mustafa Bande contains a complex and coherent structure of meaning through the use of natural symbols and emotional metaphors. A semiotic analysis of each line reveals relationships between signifiers and signifieds that represent hope, struggle, disappointment, and acceptance within a romantic relationship. These meanings are constructed gradually, forming a complete emotional flow from the beginning to the end of the song.

Therefore, the song functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for expressing human inner experience. Through a semiotic approach, this research confirms that Bugis oral literature has deep symbolic richness and strong reflective value. The limited number of semiotic studies on Bugis songs makes this research relevant as an initial contribution to the development of regional literature studies using modern theory. The findings are expected to open opportunities for further research on other Bugis songs using more diverse approaches. In addition, this study emphasizes the importance of preserving and studying regional oral literature as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.

References

- Abedi, J., & Lord, C. (2001). The language factor in mathematics tests. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 14(3), 219–234.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324818AME1403_2
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text*. Fontana Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16054-6>
- Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203014936>

- Chaer, A. (2014). *Linguistik umum*. Rineka Cipta. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24145.79203>
- Danesi, M. (2004). *Messages, signs, and meanings*. Canadian Scholars' Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203483077>
- Dayu, R., & Syadli, M. (2023). Semiotics and socio-cultural context. *Journal of Communication Studies*, 11(3), 201–215. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jcs.v11i3.45821>
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183747>
- Effendi, R., et al. (2024). Cultural symbols in regional songs. *Humaniora*, 36(1), 12–25. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v36i1.91234>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315003573>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1985). *Language, context, and text*. Deakin University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315836010>
- Herianah. (2017). Variasi pola kata dalam lirik lagu Bugis. *Sawerigading*, 23(2), 157–168. <https://doi.org/10.26499/sawer.v23i2.246>
- Ismawati, E., & Saptarini, T. (2020). Struktur dan makna lirik lagu. *Litera*, 19(2), 210–222. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v19i2.32145>
- Kridalaksana, H. (2013). *Kamus linguistik* (4th ed.). Gramedia. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.4904.6248>
- Lake, S., et al. (2023). Semiotic reading of regional song lyrics. *Semiotica*, 243, 89–110. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2022-0147>
- Lyra, H., et al. (2023). Local songs as cultural identity. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(1), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2023.2170049>
- Majiji, A., & Halfian, D. (2022). Semantic meaning in traditional song lyrics. *Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 8(1), 55–67. <https://doi.org/10.26877/jib.v8i1.10452>
- Merriam, A. P. (1964). *The anthropology of music*. Northwestern University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3111662>
- M U, Sari H, Hermansyah S, Maming K, Kahar A, Hasan, Elfahmi FK (2025), "Understanding Indonesian students' reading knowledge in digital literacy within socio-cultural of rural middle schools". *International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, Vol. 42 No. 5 pp. 432–448, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-12-2023-0239>
- Mudinillah, A., Kuswandi, D. ., Erwin, E., Sugiarni, S., Winarno, W., Annajmi, A., & Hermansah, S. (2024). Optimizing Project-Based Learning in Developing 21st Century Skills: A Future Education Perspective. *Qubahan Academic Journal*, 4(2), 86–101. <https://doi.org/10.48161/qaj.v4n2a352>

- Nur Rahmah Wahyuddin, Nur Eva Yanti, Riska Arnas, Sam Hermansyah, Utilization of Artificial Intelligence in EFL Learning from a Digital Literacy Perspective, <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v13i2.8331>
- Nöth, W. (1995). Handbook of semiotics. Indiana University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183179>
- Peirce, C. S. (1958). Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2105342>
- Permana, A., & Yusmawati. (2023). Semiotic analysis of Indonesian song lyrics. Bahasa dan Seni, 51(1), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um015v51i12023p033>
- Sam Hermansyah, Syamsu T, Syamsunir, Winda Pratiwi, K., Hamka, N., & Ramli, R. (2025). Improvement of Vocational Skills of SMK Muhammadiyah Rappang Students Through an Entrepreneurship-Based Training Program in Pancarijang District, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. Unram Journal of Community Service, 6(2), 326–333. <https://doi.org/10.29303/ujcs.v6i2.987>
- Sain, Y., & Hermansyah, S. (2025). Exploring the Language Attitudes of the Tolaki Community in Kendari: A Comprehensive Sociolinguistic Analysis. JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching, 13(2), 983–993. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v13i2.14415>
- Saussure, F. de. (2011). Course in general linguistics (W. Baskin, Trans.). Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/saus15236>
- Sasono, F., & Urfan. (2025). Language sign systems in Indonesian texts. *Lingua Cultura*, 19(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v19i1.10234>
- Sobur, A. (2003). Semiotika komunikasi. Remaja Rosdakarya. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3456.3289>
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1956). Theory of literature. Harcourt Brace. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203993224>
- Wahyuddin, N. R., Yanti, N. E., Arnas, R., & Hermansyah, S. (2024). Digital Literacy Integrated with Blended Learning in Improving EFL Students' English Language Skills: A Lesson Learned from the Independent Campus Program. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 4(4), 744-757. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v4i4.2351>