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## SEMIOTIC STUDY OF TRAFFIC SIGNS IN PADANG

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### Abstract

The aims of the research was to find the signified and signifier of linguistic signs and signified and signifier of non-linguistic signs of traffic signs in Padang. The writer was interested in the theme because the use of signified and signifier in a sign is important. The object of the study is the signs located on Khatib Sulaiman Street, Padang. The type of the research is qualitative research. In collecting the data, the writer used purposive sampling technique. It means that the data were selected based on characteristic or criteria from the writer. The writer found ten traffic signs that were qualified for the study and divided them into linguistic sign and non-linguistic sign. The writer found that there were eight non-linguistic signs and two linguistic signs. All of the signs contained signified and signifier on the sign. The signs were simple and understandable for the drivers. Without the signified and signifier, a sign was useless because it became misunderstood and did not have any meaning. The writer gives two suggestions for the next researcher. First, the next researcher can develop more about the sample of the traffic sign. Second, the next researcher can take different theory because the experts for semiotic are quite a lot.

**Keywords:** *semiotics, traffic signs, linguistic signs, non-linguistic signs.*

### I. Introduction

The language that is used in traffic signs is very interesting, simple, and effective. The language design in traffic signs should be simple and effective because the drivers do not have a lot of time to see the signs while driving their vehicle.

To understand a sign, semiotics is needed. Semiotics is a

study about sign. Semiotics is very interesting because semiotics takes part and is used in every side of human life. In semiotics, every sign has signified and signifier. Signified is the concept of the sign and signifier is the form of the sign. Without signified and signifier, a sign does not have a meaning.

Semiotics is one part in linguistic. Linguistics is divided into

two parts. First is microlinguistic, and second is macrolinguistic. Semiotics is in macrolinguistic. According to Sobur (2003, p.11), semiotics or semiology means a study about sign. A sign has a lot of meanings based on contexts. Semiotics means a study about sign. The sign can be divided into two ways. First is in linguistic signs, and second is in non-linguistic signs.

Traffic signs are really important for drivers because when they drive their vehicle, traffic signs give the drivers information and signals. It will be dangerous for drivers if there are no traffic signs. If there is no traffic sign, there will be a lot of disorders, accidents, and traffics in the road.

The function of traffic sign is very important. There are many functions of traffic signs. According to Khisty and Lall (2005, p.278), traffic signs can be divided into three functions

1. Warning signs

Warning signs are used to make the drivers awareness higher by giving warning first to the drivers before crossing the road.

2. Disposition signs

The function is to give information to the drivers about the rule in the road. If the drivers do not obey the sign, there will be punishment for them.

3. Direction signs

The function of this sign is to give direction to the drivers.

To make an understandable road system by the road users, the traffic signs should fulfill some points. Those points are the rules on the road, for example to inform speed limit, to inform to turn around, to inform road condition, and to inform right direction. Those traffic signs are warning, disposition, and direction signs, which have their own function. For example, four square with yellow color tells the drivers that there is some danger in front. In addition, red circle means prohibition. The drivers should obey the sign. If they do not obey it, there will be punishment for them. Moreover, blue square with arrow means the directional signs, which gives the information about the direction.

The writer wanted to find the Linguistics sign and non-linguistics sign of traffic signs in Padang. The writer analyzed about the sign in linguistic aspect and non-linguistic aspect. The writer sees that it is very interesting because the traffic signs is very important for the drivers, and it can save people's lives in the road. Without traffic signs, the traffic will be not in order, and there will be a lot of traffic and accidents. Therefore, the writer formulated two questions to be analyzed in this research. First, what are the signified and signifier of linguistic signs of traffic signs in

Padang? Second, what are the signified and signifier of non-linguistic sign of traffic signs in Padang?

## **II. Review of Related Literature**

### **II.1 Semiotics**

Semiotics is the study of signs. Eco (1976, p.7) states that semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. There are many theories about semiotics from different linguists. Semiotics is interesting because semiotics is a field of study involving many different way of thinking in theoretical point of view and methodological tools.

There are several linguists and experts in semiotics that writer finds. These linguists and experts have their own theories and way of thinking in semiotics. The first linguist is Pierce. According to Peirce (in Chandler, 2007, p.29), semiotic was the formal doctrine of signs which was closely related to Logic.

In interpreting a sign, Pierce used the triadic model. Triadic model are representamen, an interpretant and an object. According to Pierce (in Chandler, 2007, p.31), a sign in the form of a representamen is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, to create in the mind of that person an equivalent

sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which makes sense is called the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object.

Second is Hjelmslev. Hjelmslev developed Saussure's system in his theory, which is dyadic system. Saussure's dyadic system consists of signified and signifier, but for Hjelmslev, he did not make it as signified and signifier but as expression and content.

At first, the theories of Hjelmslev and Saussure are almost the same. According to Hjelmslev (in Sobur, 2003, p.60), the difference between his theory and Saussure's is about the use of form and substance. Hjelmslev said that the use of form and substance is very important, because a sign is not only about the expression and content, which comes from inside the sign, but also comes from the outside of the sign.

The third linguist is Barthes. Barthes' theory is widely used to analyze advertisements that contain semiotics. Barthes' theory is about the denotation and connotation meaning. According to Barthes (in Sobur, 2003, p.69-70), in semiotics, denotation and connotation are describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified, and the analytic difference is made between two types of signified: a denotative signified and a connotative signified.

Fourth is one of the founder of semiotics, Saussure. The purpose of this study is to find the semiotics form of traffic signs and divided the signs into linguistic and non-linguistic sign. To find the form, the writer uses Saussure's theories in semiotics. For Saussure (in Chandler 2009, p.14), semiotics or semiology was a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. According to Saussure (in Chandler 2009, p.15), there is a dyadic or two-part model of the sign. He defined that a sign can be interpreted as a signifier (signifiant); the form which the sign takes and The signified (signifié) - the concept it represents.

A sign should have a signifier and a signified. Without signifier and signified, a sign is meaningless and can not be interpreted. A signifier means that the form of the sign, for example, the traffic signs, and body language. A signifier means that the mental construct. A signifier is more like a person's understanding about the form of the sign. For example, the traffic light has three colors. Each color has its own meaning. If a person can not understand the signified of the colors, he or she will misunderstand about the traffic light.

**II.2 Signified and Signifiers**

Semiotics is a study about sign. A sign consists of signifier and signified. The concept of signifier and signified is stated by Saussure.

The function of signifier and signified is very important. Without the signifier and signified, a sign does not have a meaning.

Saussure offers the dyadic or two part models of sign. The first is a signifier and second is the signified. According to Saussure (in Chandler, 2007, p.14-15), signifier is the form which sign takes, and the signified is the concept of the sign represent.

Saussure stated that the sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified. The relationship between the signifier and the signified refers to as signification. For example, the word "Open" in a shop is a sign consisting of:

A signifier : The word "Open"

A signified concept: The Shop is open for Business



Figure 2.1.2.1  
Example of Signifier  
(Source: google.com)



Figure 2.1.2.2  
Example of Signified  
(Source: google.com)

A sign must have both a signifier and a signified according to Saussure (inChandler 2009, p.15). The signifier and signified relation is very important. Signifier cannot stand alone without the signified. Signifier is what a sign looks like. People can see the sign visually. The signified is more like as mental construct. When people see or do not see the sign, people already know what the sign is about. That is what mental construct means.

According to Saussure (in Chandler 2009, p.16), the signifier is now commonly interpreted as the material (or physical) form of the sign. It is something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted.

### 2.3. Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Sign

A sign involves pairing a form and a meaning. A form and a meaning are as the same as a signifier and a signified. According to McGregor, (2009, p.6) depending on how the form and meaning are related, a sign can be divided into two. First is iconic signs, and second is symbolic signs. An iconic sign or icon is a sign that has a form that looks like its meaning in some way. According to McGregor (2009, p.6-7), the form of an iconic sign or an icon shows some characteristics of the corresponding concept, such as the telephone iconic sign. The form of a telephone sign usually does not

have any words on it and only has telephone icon on it. A symbolic sign or a symbol is a sign that the form is not similar to the meaning. For example, the multiple symbolic sign does not have any relation with the “X”.

An iconic sign or an icon and a symbolic sign or a symbol have a common. Both of the signs do not have any sentences or words on the sign. According to McGregor (2009, p.8), both of iconic sign and symbolic sign are non-linguistic sign. It can be concluded that non-linguistic sign is a sign that only has iconic or symbolic sign on it, without any sentences or any words. Linguistic sign is a sign that has sentences or words on the sign. According to Reandy (2016, p.13-17), linguistic sign is a sign that has image and word on it. Non-linguistic sign is a sign that only has image on it without any explanation.



**Figure 2.3.** An Example of Linguistic Sign



**Figure 2.4.** An Example of non-Linguistic Sign

### III. Method of the Research

This research was a qualitative research. According to Creswell (2009, p.4), qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning of

individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem. This research did not involve with numeric, which is one of qualitative research characteristics

The writer took the data by documentation. The traffic signs needed by the writer were located on Khatib Sulaiman Street.

Khatib Sulaiman Street is one of the most crowded streets in Padang. The writer saw that the traffic signs on Khatib Sulaiman street was quite complete. From that, the writer took pictures of the signs, analyzed the pictures of the signs and separated the signs into linguistic and non-linguistic form, and finally analyzed them by using semiotics theory from Ferdinand de Saussures.

In this research, the data were the traffic signs taken on the street. In collecting the data, the writer needed around a week. The data were located on Khatib Sulaiman Street, one of the most crowded streets in Padang. The writer used purposive sampling technique. According to Patton (1990, p.12), purposive sampling technique means the data are selected based on the characteristics or criteria from the writer. The writer had two criteria in collecting data. First, the traffic signs were located in crowded street. Second, the signs had particular form of linguistic and non-linguistic form. The writer collected the data in two steps:

1. The writer took the pictures of traffic signs on Khatib Sulaiman Street.
2. The writer selected the pictures which contain linguistic and non-linguistic signs.

By using the pictures, the writer could analyze the data in two steps. First, the writer separated the linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs of traffic signs. Then, the writer analyzed the data with Ferdinand de Saussures' theories.

#### **IV. Finding**

##### **4.1 Linguistic and Non-linguistic Sign**

There were ten traffic signs that writer found on Khatib Sulaiman Street. In 2.1.3, the writer explained about the linguistic and non-linguistic sign means. A sign involves a pairing of a form and a meaning. A form and a meaning is the same as a signifier and a signified. According to McGregor, (2009, p.6), depending on how the form and meaning are related, a sign can be divided into two. First is iconic signs, and second is symbolic signs.

An iconic sign or an icon and a symbolic sign or a symbol have a common. Both of the signs do not have any sentences or words on the sign. According to McGregor (2009, p.8), both of iconic sign and symbolic sign are non-linguistic signs. From that statement, the writer concludes that non-linguistic sign is a sign that only has iconic or

symbolic sign on it, without any sentences or any words. Linguistic sign is a sign that has sentences or words on the sign

**4.2 Signified and Signifier of Linguistic Sign of Traffic Signs in Padang**

Linguistic sign is a sign that has words or sentences on it. According to McGregor (2009, p.8), both of iconic sign and symbolic sign are non-linguistic sign. Non-linguistic sign is a sign that only has iconic or symbolic sign on it, without any sentences or any words. Linguistic sign is a sign that has sentences or words on the sign.

The writer found two linguistic signs on Khatib Sulaiman Street. The first was no parking sign and the second was no stop sign. These signs were linguistic signs because the signs consist of sentences and words. The writer analyzed the linguistic sign with Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory.

**4.2.1 No Parking Sign**



**Figure 5.** No Parking Sign



**Figure 6.** Variation of No Park Sign

By using Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory, the writer found the signifier and signified of the signs. The signifier of the sign was the sign itself. The round, red, with P letter on the sign was the signifier. Saussure (2007) stated that the signifier is the form of the object.

The signified was the concept that is represented by the object. The concept came from the red and P letter on the sign. According to Affandi (2013), the red color of the sign means prohibition. The P stood for parking. It means that every driver was prohibited to park their vehicles. No sentence came from the red line that crosses the P. The use of red line was important because when drivers drove their vehicle there was no time to think about the sign. Simple and effective sign was needed in the road because the drivers did not need complex sign.

There are punishments for people who do not obey the sign. The driver should pay for Rp 500.000 or get in jail for 2 months if they do not obey the law, according to Pasal 287 ayat (1). The signified of the object was that it was prohibited to park the vehicle



started from the sign until 15 meters after the sign.

#### 4.2.2 No Stop Sign



**Figure 7.** No Stop Sign

The second linguistic sign was the no stop sign. This sign also needed a signified and signifier. Without signified and signifier, this sign was useless because without the signified and signifier a sign was hard to understand. The use of no stop sign was also very important because it could reduce the traffic in the road. The use of no stop sign could avoid people from accident.

The signifier of the sign came from the sign itself. The round, red, with the S letter was the signifier of the sign. According to Saussure (2007), the signifier is the form which the sign takes. By using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, the writer found the signifier and signified of the sign.

The signified is the meaning that roles in the sign itself. According to Saussure (2007), the signified is the concept that is represented by the sign itself. The no stop sign is a prohibition sign. If a driver does not obey the sign,

the driver should pay for Rp 500.000 or get in jail for 2 months, stated in Pasal 287 ayat (1) law of traffic of Indonesia.

The Signified of the no stop sign was that the driver should not stop their vehicle and continue driving. According to Affandi (2013), the sign means no stop for vehicle started from the sign until 15 meters after the sign. If the drivers did not obey the sign, they got punishment because it was a prohibition sign.

#### 4.3 Signified and Signifier of Non-linguistic Sign of Traffic Signs in Padang

Non Linguistic sign is a sign that does not have any words or sentences on it. According to McGregor (2009, p.6-7), the form of an iconic sign or an icon shows some characteristics of the corresponding concept, for example, the telephone iconic sign. The form of a telephone sign usually does not have any words on it and only has telephone icon on it. In traffic sign, there are a lot of iconic signs, which means that the signs show some characteristics of the corresponding concept. In order to find the signified and signifier of the non-linguistic sign, the writer used Ferdinand deSaussure's theory. There were several non-linguistic signs that writer found on Khatib Sulaiman Street.



#### 4.3.1 The Mosque Sign



**Figure 8.** The Mosque Sign

The Mosque sign is a directional sign. Directional sign is not only about a direction, for example the arrow, but also a public place. The directional sign has characteristic. The main characteristic of directional sign is the blue color. According to Affandi (2013), the directional sign main characteristic is the blue color.

By using Saussure's theory, the writer found the signified and signifier of the sign. The signifier of the sign was the sign itself. The signifier was the square, blue color, and the picture of the mosque. The signified of the sign, according to Affandi (2013), tells to the driver that near the road there is a mosque.

One of the significant characteristics from non-linguistic sign was the similarities between the object and the sign. For the mosque sign, the writer found that the sign looked like the dome of a mosque. The sign means that there was a mosque nearby the sign.

#### 4.3.2 The Zebra Cross Sign



**Figure 9.** Zebra Cross Sign

The next sign that writer found was the zebra cross sign. This sign is also a directional sign. According to Affandi (2013), directional sign is a sign that shows public places and situations in the road. The zebra cross sign was a directional sign because it showed the situation that drivers would face.

A sign should have a signified and signifier on it. The signifier of the zebra cross sign was the square, blue color, and the picture on the sign. The signified of the sign was telling the drivers that there was a zebra cross ahead. The sign told the driver about a situation where the driver should be cautious for people that go to cross the road. The drivers should reduce the speed of their vehicle and let people cross the street.

4.3.3 Intersection Sign



Figure 10. Intersection Sign

The next sign that writer found was the intersection sign. This sign is a warning sign. The warning sign is a sign that is used to tell the drivers to be caution of dangers ahead. Warning signs are also used to make the drivers more aware by giving warning first to the drivers before crossing the road.

The warning sign characteristics were that the sign has yellow color and black note or direction. This intersection sign had a signified and signifier on it. The signifier of this sign was the yellow color with black direction on it. The signified of the sign was that this sign was three side intersection, and the drivers should give priority for the left side.

4.3.4 The U Turn Sign



Figure 11. The U Turn Sign

The next sign is the U turn sign. The function of this sign is very important in the road. Without this sign, there would be a lot of disorders in the street which can lead to the traffic jam. This sign is a directional sign. It can be seen from the square and blue color of the sign.

The directional sign was a sign that gives direction and also the situation in the road. The U turn also had a signified and signifier on it. The signifier of the sign came from the blue color and the square shape of the sign. The signified of the sign was that it is allowed to turn for the opposite direction. Without the no U turn, a lot of traffic jam could happen because drivers just turn around at their will. The use of no U turn sign was important in the road.

4.3.5 No U Turn Sign



Figure 12. No U Turn Sign

The no u turn sign is a prohibition sign. It means that if a driver does not obey the sign, the driver will get punishment from that. According to Pasal 287 ayat (1), the driver should

pay for Rp 500.000 or get in jail for 2 months. The use of the no U turn sign is very important because it can reduce the traffic jam.

The prohibition sign was a sign that should be obeyed by the drivers. The no U turn sign had a signified and signifier on it. The signifier of the sign was the red color and the round shape of the sign. The signified of the sign was that every driver could not change his/her direction in this turn. If drivers turned on the no U turn, there could be disorder on the road. The position of the U turn sign is already predicted by the government. Government made the no U turn sign on the crowded street in order to avoid traffic jam.

**4.3.6 Section Sign**



**Figure 12** Section Sign

The section sign is an order sign. It can be seen from the round and blue color on it. The order sign is a sign that should be followed by the drivers. The order sign should be followed by the driver to make the traffic in order. The

section sign had a signifier and signified on it.

The signifier of the sign came from the sign itself. The signifier of the sign was round shape with blue color and with white direction. The signified of the sign was every driver should follow the direction that came from the order sign in order to make harmony in the road. The direction was a pattern that is easy to be followed by the drivers. If the pattern was in a word, when the driver drove the vehicle in high speed, they did not have time to think and read the sentences. It could make a lot of disorder in the street.

**4.3.7 Traffic Light sign**



**Figure 13.** Traffic Light Sign

The next sign is a traffic light sign. The traffic light sign is a caution sign. This sign gives signal to the drivers to be caution for the condition ahead. The caution sign also makes the drivers more aware of the condition of the road ahead. This sign is very important for the drivers.

The traffic light sign had a signified and signifier on it. The

signifier of the sign was the yellow color with the diamond shape on it. The signified of the sign was that the drivers should be cautious because it would be a traffic light ahead of the road. The drivers should decrease their vehicle speed.

#### 4.3.8 No Truck Sign



**Figure 14.** No Truck Sign

The no truck sign is a prohibition sign. This sign should be followed by the drivers. If the drivers do not follow the sign, they will get punishment. The punishments are paying fine for Rp 500.000 or get in jail for 2 months. The prohibition sign should be followed by every driver.

The no Truck sign also had a signified and signifier on it. The signifier of the sign came from the sign itself. The signifiers were the round shape with red color on it and the picture of the truck. The signified of the sign was no truck allowed. If the truck drivers passed the road, they would get punishment. The reason why there was a no truck sign was that the road was the main road in the city. There was a lot of traffic jam caused by small cars. If the truck

also used the main road, it could cause a very long traffic jam

## V. Conclusion

After doing the research, the writer concluded that the function of signified and signifier in semiotic study was very important. Without signified and signifier the meaning of the sign could not be delivered by the sign, especially for the use of traffic signs.

The traffic signs could be divided into two parts. First was linguistic sign, and second was non-linguistic sign. Both parts had the same functions. The only difference was in what the sign looked like visually. The linguistic sign had a word or sentence on it, while non-linguistic sign only consisted of symbol or picture. It did not have any words or sentences on it.

The signifier of the sign came from the sign itself, what the sign looked like, and the signified of the sign was the meaning that came from the sign. The writer found ten signs on Khatib Sulaiman Street and found each of the signifier and signified of the sign. The function of the signified and signifier in a sign was very important. Without signified and signifier a sign was useless.

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