

Performance and Meaning in Wedding Pantun: An Ethnopoetic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the forms and meanings of pantun performed during wedding ceremonies in the Pasemah community of Padang Guci Hulu, Kaur Regency, Bengkulu, Indonesia. Using a qualitative field-research design, data were collected through participant observation, documentation of speech events, and semi-structured interviews with pantun performers and witnesses. A corpus of thirty-three pantun was compiled, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify typologies of form and domains of meaning. Findings reveal six major pantun categories advice, religious, humorous, love, affection, and karmina each fulfilling distinct yet complementary ritual functions. Advisory pantun transmit moral norms such as filial piety, patience, and gratitude; religious pantun ground household life in Islamic values; humorous pantun regulate collective emotions; love pantun normalize expressions of affection within ritual decorum; affection pantun emphasize empathy and social responsibility; and karmina pantun provide concise rhetorical closure. Across these forms, five dominant semantic domains emerge: family, religion, destiny (jodoh), communal life, and tolerance. Poetic conventions such as the sampiran–isi structure, ab–ab rhyme, parallelism, and local imagery of ecology and livelihood root pantun firmly in the Pasemah cultural landscape. Functioning simultaneously as entertainment, education, social control, and religious transmission, pantun serve as a multidimensional cultural instrument that affirms identity and cohesion within one of the community's most consequential life-cycle rites. Theoretically, this study contributes to ethnopoetic scholarship by linking text and performance, while practically offering authentic resources for cultural preservation and education. Limitations include the modest corpus size and lack of multimodal documentation; future research should expand across ceremonies and communities to map archipelagic variation.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 January 2025

Revised 15 March 2025

Accepted 2 April 2025

KEYWORDS

Pantun; Ethnopoetics; Wedding Ritual; Oral Tradition.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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Introduction

Language constitutes a primary manifestation of culture and a medium of social practice: it enables individuals and groups to collaborate, communicate, and assert collective identity (Becker, 1979; Erlina et al., 2025; Kridalaksana, 2013). Within this frame, oral traditions occupy a central position because they record and transmit values, norms, and knowledge across generations. Among the most widely disseminated oral forms in the Indonesian archipelago is the pantun, which

functions as an aesthetic vehicle for conveying counsel, gentle admonition, and entertainment without offending the addressee (Kridalaksana, 2009). Linguistically, the meaning of *pantun* is constructed through figurative expressions and semantic associations that bind words and sequences of words; formally, *pantun* is understood as a “classical poem” whose structural conventions are relatively stable (Nisaul Zahra et al., 2024; Pertiwi et al., 2025).

Formally, a *pantun* typically consists of four lines per stanza; the first two lines serve as the *sampiran* (prelude) and the last two as the *isi* (core), with a terminal rhyme scheme of ab-ab and an internal organization that supports coherence conventions long recognized in various speech communities (Bartosh et al., 2023; Purwanto, 2024). These are not merely technical rules but a scaffold that facilitates the delivery of social messages (counsel, critique, or emotional expression) in culturally acceptable figurative forms (Bagastian et al., 2023). Consequently, *pantun* can be read simultaneously as text (sound structure, rhyme, diction) and performance (situation, performer, audience, response) within its social context.

From a semantic perspective, the *sampiran*–*isi* linkage forges a bridge of associations: the *sampiran* is not decorative filler but a field of reference that prepares a cognitive and affective frame for the *isi*. The association may be analogical (imagistic resemblance), metonymic (proximate place/tool relations), or causal (sequential cause–effect), such that listeners infer the intended meaning through an economical yet evocative pathway. Coherence in *pantun* thus concerns not only rhyme and line count but also the compression of meaning how lexical choice, imagery, and parallelism synergize to produce messages that are incisive and memorable (Nisaul Zahra et al., 2024; Pertiwi et al., 2025). In the hands of an adept performer, managing the correspondence between *sampiran* and *isi* becomes a potent rhetorical device for admonishing without wounding, praising without excess, and advising without condescension.

The performative dimension becomes especially salient when *pantun* appears in ritual and communal spaces. The speech event who performs, for whom, at which phase of the ceremony, and with what audience response co-determines meaning. In wedding ceremonies, *pantun* can open dialogue between families, serve as a vehicle for symbolic negotiation (commenting politely on readiness, dignity, or hopes for the couple), and aestheticize the values the community seeks to uphold. In other words, *pantun* does not merely *say* something; it *does* something in the social order requesting, affirming, reminding, and binding solidarity through a poetic form shared and recognized by all participants.

The local context of this study is the Pasemah community in Padang Guci Hulu Subdistrict, Kaur Regency (Bengkulu Province), where *pantun* remains actively performed within wedding rituals. This locus matters for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrates the continuity of an oral tradition amid modernization and digital mediation while opening possibilities for discovering local variants in how *pantun* is formed, performed, and interpreted. Second, from a sociolinguistic standpoint, the Pasemah cultural ecology kinship relations, customary role stratification, and inter-village interaction networks likely shapes both poetic choices and semantic domains.

Prior research provides a foundation yet also reveals a gap. Studies in Malay communities such as analyses of the meaning and structure of wedding *pantun* and examinations of *pantun* in the Tundang Mayang performance tradition highlight the role of *pantun* in moral education, social harmonization, and the aestheticization of counsel (Kusnita & Lahir, 2022; Sari et al., 2015). These works typically map formal categories such as advisory, religious, humorous, romantic and thematic

domains, while foregrounding *pantun*'s relation to ceremonial procedure. However, research specifically focused on Pasemah Kaur wedding *pantun* balancing attention to poetic structure and performance situation remains limited. This limitation is nontrivial, because cross-community generalizations risk obscuring local variation, which is precisely what makes the archipelago's oral traditions diverse and instructive.

Accordingly, the present study adopts an ethnopoetic frame: a reading that links poetic architecture (rhyme, parallelism, diction, *sampiran*–*isi* relations) with cultural and performative context (performer roles, ritual staging, audience, response). Within this frame, analysis of form does not stop at inventorying formal features; rather, it seeks to explain how and why particular formal choices are used at particular ritual moments and what their social consequences are. For instance, the use of agrarian, maritime, or topographic metaphors may index a community's ecological orientation, while a *sampiran* that “circles around” the *isi* may function as a politeness strategy for delivering critique indirectly. This approach aligns with the view that *pantun* is both text and action working at the levels of poetics and praxis simultaneously.

In the context of marriage, the stakes of meaning are heightened because the moment reorders kin relations, legitimates the union of two families, and articulates a collective horizon for the new household. *Pantun* delivered by customary elders or designated performers can bind commitments, calibrate etiquette, and even “admonish” specific parties with decorum. Meanwhile, *pantun* voiced by peers can function as entertainment that diffuses social tension while preserving boundaries of propriety. Here the poetic form operates as an ethical apparatus: shared rhyme, rhythm, and imagery soften the force of the message so that the sensitive can discern what need not be said outright.

Compared with other oral genres (*syair*, *gurindam*), *pantun* possesses rhetorical advantages of concision and precision: it is brief yet saturated with cues. Such advantages suit ritual events that demand orderly flow; *pantun* inserts itself as a “cue marker” that tidies transitions across stages of the ceremony while maintaining collective mood. In addition, *pantun*'s economy of language affords room for improvisation: performers adapt diction and imagery to audience and situation while remaining within the bounds of formal convention (Bartosh et al., 2023; Purwanto, 2024). Thus *pantun* blends conventional stability with performative flexibility a combination that helps explain its endurance across diverse customary contexts.

In everyday perception, *pantun* is often deemed “easy to understand.” This judgment does not imply superficiality; rather, it signals a shared cultural competence for reading poetic cues. At the micro level, understanding arises from gradually linking imagery in the *sampiran* with the proposition in the *isi*; at the macro level, interpretation draws on a symbolic repertoire circulating within the community such as rice for livelihood, boats for life's journey, rivers for the flow of fate (Bagastian et al., 2023). Hence, documentation that is sensitive to context who performs, to whom, at what moment is a prerequisite for accurately analyzing semantic domains.

Despite a substantial body of knowledge on *pantun*, three gaps remain salient. First, there is a prevalence of inventory-style description (lists of forms/themes) over analyses that link form to performative function. Second, there is a geographic bias Malay coastal communities are more frequently studied than inland communities such as Pasemah Kaur yielding an uneven representation of local variation (Kusnita & Lahir, 2022; Sari et al., 2015). Third, the need for high-quality documentation (text + audio/visual + speech-event metadata) is increasingly urgent amid

media change and intergenerational shifts. Without such documentation, *pantun* risks being understood apart from the “stage” that animates it.

Against this backdrop, the study aims to (1) describe in detail the forms of *pantun* performed within Pasemah Kaur wedding ceremonies covering stanza structure, *sampiran–isi* relations, rhyme patterns, diction, and other poetic features and (2) map the meanings that *pantun* encodes in relation to its social–ritual functions (family, religion, matchmaking, communal life, tolerance), while offering a conceptual footing for documentation, preservation, and ethnopoeitic reading. These aims are intended to yield descriptions that are accurate and replicable, alongside analyses that explain the linkage between poetics and praxis.

Theoretically, this study contributes on three fronts: it enriches semantic–poetic scholarship by showing how *pantun* meaning emerges through *sampiran–isi* correspondence, parallelism, and locally grounded imagery (Nisaul Zahra et al., 2024; Pertiwi et al., 2025); it strengthens a performative perspective by detailing relations between poetic form and ritual conduct who speaks what, when, where, and to what end often overlooked in formal inventories; and it expands the archipelagic map of diversity through fine-grained description of the relatively underrepresented Pasemah Kaur community. Practically, the findings inform cultural preservation and language/literature education: a well-documented, well-annotated corpus of wedding *pantun* can serve as authentic teaching material that cultivates cultural literacy, semantic sensitivity, and poetic appreciation; simple guidelines for annotated transcription (separating *sampiran–isi*, marking rhyme, glossing local lexis) enable communities and cultural institutions to build usable digital archives; and, at the policy level, strengthening a preservation ecosystem via collaboration among schools, arts studios, and local government will be pivotal for sustaining *pantun* traditions amid rapid social change. To maintain analytic focus, the study is delimited to *pantun* performed within wedding ceremonies in the Pasemah Kaur community of Padang Guci Hulu; “form” denotes poetic configuration (line count, rhyme, *sampiran* and *isi* relations, diction, markers of parallelism), while “meaning” refers to semantic domains reconstructed from text and performance (family, religion, matchmaking, communal life, tolerance); musicalization beyond rhythmic recitation and practices outside the wedding domain are excluded. Framing *pantun* as a cultural language binding word, voice, form, and value underscores the urgency of an ethnopoeitic reading that interlinks poetics and praxis; through precise formal description, contextually grounded semantic mapping, and attention to the performance stage, the study seeks not merely to document *pantun* but to explain how and why it functions as an ethical, aesthetic, and social instrument at the heart of a consequential life-cycle rite.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a field-research design. Following Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative methodology comprises research procedures that generate descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior (Moleong, 2019). Consistent with this view, Strauss characterizes qualitative inquiry as producing findings that are not obtainable through statistical procedures or other forms of quantification (Ahmadi, 2014). In line with its naturalistic orientation, the investigation was conducted in real-life settings (Sugiyono, 2019). Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied across sources, methods, and time. Data analysis

proceeded iteratively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, with analytic decisions documented throughout the process.

Results and Discussion

Classification of Pantun Forms

This study compiled 33 pantun performed within the wedding ceremonies of the Pasemah community in Padang Guci Hulu, Kaur Regency. Data were collected through observation of speech events and interviews with performers and witnesses of the rituals. Each pantun was documented as a textual unit (stanza), accompanied by contextual notes specifying the moment of its performance. The typology of six pantun forms reveals an architecture of values that complement one another within the marriage rite. The corpus identified six major categories: pantun of advice, religious pantun, humorous pantun, pantun of love, pantun of affection, and karmina pantun.

Pantun of advice occupy a central position in Pasemah Kaur weddings, serving as a medium for transmitting moral values across generations. Subthemes include filial piety, mutual respect, patience in facing life's trials, discouragement of early marriage, faith in divine destiny, and gratitude for God's blessings. These reflect the community's need to instill ethical conduct at the threshold of household formation. Thus, pantun of advice function not merely as rhetorical ornament but as normative instruments that reinforce local values framed by custom and religion.

Religious pantun strengthen the spiritual legitimacy of marriage by grounding household life in faith. Subthemes urging obedience to God, avoidance of sin, and emulation of the Prophet as a model for family life illustrate a cultural syncretism between Pasemah custom and Islamic law. Within this context, pantun act not only as entertainment but also as cultural da'wah, delivering religious messages in an aesthetic and socially acceptable form. Religious pantun thus bridge ritual practice with the collective acknowledgment of spiritual authority.

Humorous pantun function as emotional regulators within the formal and rule-bound atmosphere of wedding rituals. By inserting polite humor, they keep the mood lively without diminishing the sacredness of the occasion. Their role extends beyond entertainment: they provide moments of relaxation, enabling audiences to endure lengthy ceremonial sequences. From a sociological perspective, humorous pantun foster social cohesion by generating shared laughter, thereby reinforcing solidarity among attendees.

Pantun of love highlight the emotional dimension of marital relations, often performed antiphonally as an exchange of affection between participants. Subthemes include longing, affection, mutual trust, seriousness in building a household, and recognition that destiny (jodoh) lies in God's hands. Love pantun affirm that marriage is both an emotional and spiritual bond, legitimized by divine will. From a performative angle, these pantun normalize the public expression of affection in ways that remain decorous and culturally sanctioned.

Pantun of affection underscore empathy and proper conduct in sustaining relationships, both within marriage and in wider social interactions. Subthemes such as spousal care, etiquette in treating others, and constructive attitudes toward life's challenges position affection as a foundational form of social capital. Their presence demonstrates that marriage is not only a private contract but part of a broader social order, where individuals are expected to show compassion and courtesy in everyday interactions.

Karmina pantun, although represented by only one example in the corpus, carry symbolic weight as epigrammatic utterances marking closure or transition within the ceremony. With their concise two-line structure (one line as sampiran, one as isi), karmina pantun communicate gratitude and humility in a compressed yet profound form. In performance, they often serve as rhetorical climaxes that leave a lasting impression on the audience.

Taken together, the six pantun forms in Pasemah Kaur weddings illustrate an integrated system where aesthetic, social, moral, and religious functions converge. Pantun are not simply positioned as verbal art but as performative devices that regulate emotion, affirm norms, and convey ethical messages within the framework of custom and faith. Through variation in form and subtheme, pantun create an effective communicative space in which essential messages are transmitted gracefully yet compellingly. This analysis confirms that wedding pantun serve as a multi-dimensional cultural medium simultaneously entertainment, education, social control, and reinforcement of collective identity.

Dominant Meaning Domains

The analysis of six pantun typologies performed during Pasemah Kaur wedding ceremonies reveals five dominant semantic domains that are deeply intertwined with the socio-ritual context. The first is the family domain, emphasizing hierarchical respect across kinship lines (parents–children, in-laws, extended kin), responsibility in managing household life, and effective intra-family communication. This value surfaces in exhortations for children to remain devoted to their parents even after marriage, underscoring that matrimony does not sever ties but rather expands the kinship network. Within this framework, pantun function as a cultural script that sustains intergenerational continuity and reinforces family as the nucleus of social identity.

The second is the religious domain, which anchors household life in spiritual and ethical foundations. Pantun in this category highlight obedience to divine commands, gratitude for blessings, prayer as daily sustenance, and prophetic exemplarity especially modeling one's household on the example of the Prophet as central moral guidance. In this sense, pantun operate as a form of cultural da'wah: transmitting Islamic values through an aesthetic, orally memorable medium. Religion thus emerges not only as spiritual backdrop but also as a normative axis through which marriage practices and family relations are framed and legitimated.

The third is the marital destiny domain (jodoh), which mediates between divine providence and human agency. Pantun emphasize that while spousal union is ultimately in God's hands, sustaining the relationship requires effort faithfulness, honesty, and nurtured commitment. This dual orientation reflects a cosmological understanding that marriage is both a sacred trust and a moral endeavor. Romantic expressions within pantun, therefore, do not reduce to sentimentality; rather, they confirm a theologically grounded worldview where love and fidelity are embedded in divine will.

The fourth is the communal life domain, foregrounding the ethics of participation in the broader social fabric. Pantun highlight the etiquette of visiting, the importance of safeguarding reputation, cooperative labor (gotong royong), and maintaining harmony within the community. These values resonate with the communitarian ethos of Pasemah society, where collective honor is considered as vital as individual happiness. In weddings, pantun remind participants that matrimony

binds not only two individuals but also two families and, by extension, the community, making social harmony a crucial stake of the ceremony.

The fifth is the tolerance domain, which stresses acceptance of differences in character, habits, and perspectives within marriage and social life. Pantun in this domain advocate for maturity in resolving conflicts, discourage unnecessary disputes, and encourage compromise as a constructive mode of negotiation. The prominence of tolerance illustrates that pantun articulate not only ideals but also pragmatic strategies for managing inevitable differences. As such, pantun function as reflective tools, equipping individuals with cultural resources to navigate marital and communal dynamics with patience and wisdom.

From a formal perspective, the majority of pantun follow the classical quatrain structure with a sampiran–isi (prefatory–content) pattern and ab–ab rhyme scheme, while one instance of karmina (two-line pantun) adds structural variation. Diction is enriched with local imagery landscapes, farming, water flows, and tools of subsistence linking poetic text to the lifeworld of Pasemah society. Parallelism (e.g., “bitter–sweet,” “hardship–joy”) emerges as a recurrent device underscoring the balance of lived experience. In pantun jenaka (humorous pantun), comic effect is often generated through the inversion of expectations between sampiran and isi, which simultaneously entertains and reaffirms the pantun’s performative role in fostering social cohesion.

Taken together, these five meaning domains and their attendant poetic conventions create a symbolic ecology that positions wedding pantun not merely as aesthetic artifacts but as moral, social, and spiritual instruments. They integrate the cosmologies of family, religion, destiny, communal life, and tolerance into a cohesive poetic frame, enabling pantun to serve as both cultural heritage and living guidance within one of the community’s most consequential life-cycle rites.

Discussion

The social–ritual functions of pantun in Pasemah Kaur wedding ceremonies demonstrate that oral poetry operates not merely as verbal aesthetics but as a normative, religious, affective, and social instrument. *Pantun nasihat* (advisory pantun), for example, is commonly performed during transitional moments such as before or after the marriage contract. Its function is both normative and performative: to affirm the rights and obligations of the bride and groom, to synchronize the expectations of two families, and to instill ethical frameworks for household life. The formulaic sampiran–isi structure and stable rhyme render the messages memorable without sounding didactic. This finding resonates with Bahri (2019) study of Bugis pantun, which similarly act as “oral codes of ethics” within ritual, where moral instructions are couched in local metaphors to avoid sounding authoritarian.

Pantun agama (religious pantun) reinforces the spiritual legitimacy of marriage by placing religion as the primary foundation of household life. Themes urging obedience to God’s commands, avoidance of prohibitions, and emulation of the Prophet as a role model highlight the synthesis between Pasemah adat and Islamic teachings. Here, pantun functions not only as entertainment but also as a cultural mode of da’wah, conveying religious messages in an aesthetic and socially acceptable form. This aligns with Syam et al., (2024) work on Islamic oral traditions in the archipelago, which shows how oral texts serve as cultural vehicles for transmitting Islamic values in locally resonant ways.

Meanwhile, *pantun jenaka* (humorous pantun) operates as an affective valve within ceremonies laden with protocol. Through polite humor and reversals of expectation, this type of pantun balances the formality of ritual with lightness and joy. Far from being trivial, pantun jenaka functions to stabilize collective emotion and sustain audience attention across long ceremonies. Salleh (2011) found a similar dynamic in Riau Malay pantun, where humor fosters cross-generational cohesion and sustains collective engagement during communal gatherings.

Pantun percintaan (love pantun) has a distinctive performative role. Delivered reciprocally, these pantun convey expressions of affection and longing with dignity, normalizing public displays of intimacy without violating cultural norms. Oral literature that develops in society possesses local wisdom values and norms that are integrated with the culture of that society and serve to organize social life. Values and norms believed to be true by the local community and passed down from generation to generation serve as guidelines, guidelines, and references for behavior and interactions in everyday life (Hajar et al., 2024).

Similarly, *pantun kasih sayang* (pantun of compassion) provides light psycho-education on relational ethics how to treat one's spouse, engage with others, and cope constructively with life's challenges. The frequent use of relational markers ("we," "together") and lexical parallelism ("joy-sorrow") constructs a syntax of solidarity that fosters resilience in marriage. From an anthropological linguistics perspective, such pantun demonstrate how language functions as a medium for cultivating social solidarity. Hajar et al., (2024) revealed that pantun shows that compassion-infused pantun serves as a vehicle for embedding values of cooperation and collective responsibility within both household and community relations.

Although only one example was identified in the corpus, *pantun karmina* holds symbolic weight as a concise epigram marking closure or transition. With its two-line structure, karmina condenses gratitude and humility into a sharp rhetorical climax, leaving a strong impression on the audience. This supports Foley 1992 and Olszewski & Polkowski (2025) argument that brevity in oral tradition does not diminish meaning but adapts form to suit specific performative contexts.

Taken together, these findings affirm that Pasemah Kaur wedding pantun serve multifaceted roles: they entertain, regulate emotion, reinforce norms, and transmit moral-religious teachings within the framework of adat. The six identified forms intersect with five semantic domains family, religion, destiny, community, and tolerance creating communication that is both aesthetically pleasing and socially effective. In doing so, this study extends comparative work across the archipelago and underscores pantun as a multi-dimensional cultural instrument worthy of broader academic attention, particularly within ethnopoetics and performance studies.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, this study concludes that pantun performed in Pasemah Kaur wedding ceremonies embody an integrated cultural system where aesthetic form, moral instruction, religious legitimacy, emotional regulation, and social cohesion converge. The classification of six pantun types advice, religious, humorous, love, affection, and karmina demonstrates that each form fulfills a distinct yet complementary social-ritual function, while collectively reinforcing the community's ethical, spiritual, and relational values. These functions are anchored in five dominant semantic domains: family, religion, destiny, communal life, and tolerance, all of which articulate the normative frameworks that guide marital and social relations in Pasemah society. By combining poetic

conventions such as sampiran–isi structure, rhyme, parallelism, and local imagery with performative contexts, pantun operate as powerful communicative instruments that transmit cultural wisdom across generations. Ultimately, Pasemah wedding pantun are not merely verbal art but evidence-based pedagogical tools, cultural archives, and performative practices that sustain collective identity, while providing fertile ground for further ethnopoetic, comparative, and performance-oriented research.

This study contributes to ethnopoetic scholarship by documenting how pantun function as both poetic texts and performative acts that bind cultural values to ritual practice, while practically offering authentic resources for cultural preservation and language education. Nevertheless, the research is limited by its relatively small corpus of 33 pantun, the absence of full annotated transcriptions with audio-visual data, and incomplete documentation of performer profiles (e.g., age, gender, social role), which restrict deeper micro-linguistic and performative analysis. Future research should expand the dataset across different ritual contexts (engagements, post-wedding gatherings), incorporate multimodal documentation, and conduct cross-community comparisons to map regional variation. In addition, more systematic inquiry into gender and generational dynamics in pantun performance would enrich our understanding of how oral traditions evolve and adapt in contemporary Indonesian societies.

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