

Cultural Communication and Inheritance of Slametan Ritual Food Values

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Abstract: Globalization threatens the sustainability of Slametan tradition among youth. This study aims to uncover the communicative mechanisms of inheriting ritual food values in Gunungsari Village, Wonogiri Regency. This study gathered data from 15 cross-generational informants using a qualitative ethnography of communication framework and symbolic interactionism. Findings reveal that cultural inheritance occurs via domestic interaction, rewang, and formal rituals. Crucially, a symbolic reconciliation exists where digital media validates traditions for skeptical youth. The study concludes that Slametan tradition survives through a triangulated communication system: family, community, and digital validation, ensuring Javanese cultural resilience by harmonizing modern logic with traditional norms.

Keywords: cultural inheritance, ethnography of communication, ritual foods, symbolic interactionism

Abstrak: Globalisasi mengancam keberlanjutan tradisi Slametan pada generasi muda. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap mekanisme komunikatif pewarisan nilai makanan ritual di Desa Gunungsari, Kabupaten Wonogiri. Studi ini menghimpun data dari 15 informan yang mewakili lintas generasi melalui pendekatan etnografi komunikasi dan interaksionisme simbolik. Temuan menunjukkan pewarisan budaya terjadi melalui interaksi domestik, rewang, dan prosesi ritual formal. Poin krusialnya adalah rekonsiliasi simbolis di mana media digital memvalidasi tradisi bagi pemuda yang skeptis. Studi menyimpulkan bahwa tradisi Slametan bertahan melalui sistem komunikasi triangulasi: keluarga, komunitas, dan validasi digital yang menyelaraskan logika modern dengan norma tradisional, guna memastikan ketahanan identitas budaya Jawa.

Kata Kunci: etnografi komunikasi, interaksionisme simbolik, makanan ritual, pewarisan budaya

Slametan comes from the Javanese language *Slamet* which means safe. The purpose of *Slametan* is to pray for the well-being, order, security, and being awakened from danger or calamity (Depari & Lindell, 2023, p. 4; Kurniawati & Ahmadi, 2022, p. 53; van den Boogert, 2017, p. 362). This tradition is a means to show cultural expressions that have lived since the time of our ancestors (Carter, Moir, & Marthari, 2023, p. 17;

Filatova, Fedutin, Meschersky, Mamaev, & Hoyt, 2024, p. 122; Łukaszewicz, 2023, p. 116). The existence of culture and society as its prominent supporters becomes a combination closely related to the harmony of life (Levin & Mamlok, 2021, p. 2).

The urgency of this research stems from the declining interest of the younger generation in ancestral culture, particularly traditional foods, due to the heavy influx

of global culinary trends and Western culture. This phenomenon creates a widening communicative gap between generations regarding the symbolic meanings of the *Slametan* tradition, risking its transformation into a hollow ritual. As a generation born and raised in a world closely exposed to the currents of globalization and modernization, young people are vulnerable to the influence of popular culture from the West. This may cause the loss of ancestral culture and a decline in love for the nation's culture (Reweti, 2022, p. 376; Venkatesan, Lowenthal, Prem, & Vidaurri, 2020, p. 1044; Zhang & Mace, 2021, p. 10). Theoretically, this study addresses this gap by integrating symbolic interactionism with the ethnography of communication to demonstrate that nonverbal artifacts, such as ritual foods, serve as primary channels for cultural transmission. Socially and practically, the findings highlight *Slametan* as a vital social glue for maintaining Javanese identity, providing a strategic framework for community leaders to re-engage youth through participatory communication and protect local wisdom from the adverse effects of globalization.

The importance of local cultural heritage is a concrete effort to revive attention to the social environment, to protect life from the adverse effects of globalization (Lerario, 2022, p. 2448). Local cultural values thick with nobility will undoubtedly be appropriate if implemented in the lives of the younger generation, exposed to globalization (Sari, Setyowati, & Arsal, 2020, p. 17). The process of

cultural inheritance can take place if there are communication activities (Fatanti & Happy, 2019, p. 162). Cultural inheritance involves complex stages of socialization and internalization. These stages facilitate the acquisition of cultural competence through participation in social groups, where symbolic meanings are absorbed and reinterpreted by the next generation.

Noble values and cultural traditions held by social groups across generations must be transmitted as a legacy to ensure their survival. Communication is the essential vehicle for this cultural transmission, as culture is not innate but is learned through complex mechanisms of symbolic exchange (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2017, p. 97). This learning process is the most distinctive trait of culture; it ensures that messages and meanings are successfully passed from one generation to the next. The disruption of intergenerational communication and the absence of learning from ancestors will inevitably cause the younger generation to lose the cultural heritage.

The *Slametan* tradition is part of the culture of the Javanese people, inherited from generation to generation. The family is the earliest medium and the most influential on the success of cultural inheritance. Ritual foods consisting of more than three types of food with different processing methods will undoubtedly be problematic for the next generation to understand if there is no inheritance process by the previous generation or parents. The previous generation acts as the carrier of

values and culture, enabling a continuous cycle of cultural reception and transmission across generations. This study examines the effect of the inheritance process of the ritual foods in the *Slametan* tradition on the next generation's perception of the symbolic meanings communicated.

Several recent studies have explored the cultural and symbolic dimensions of rituals within the Wonogiri Regency. Baehaqie (2017) conducted a semiotic analysis of the *Tingkeban* ritual in Pelem Village, identifying moral messages embedded within food lexicons, such as *tumpeng pitu* and *jenang procot*. While his work provides a foundational understanding of food as a linguistic symbol, the focus remains limited to the semiotic structure of food names textually, rather than the actual communicative interactions occurring in the field. Furthermore, Kornadi and Purwanto (2019) examined the *Wiwitan* tradition in Sumberejo Village, highlighting character values such as cooperation, religiosity, and social responsibility. Their study emphasizes local wisdom values from a general perspective but does not specifically address the communicative mechanisms required to transmit these values to the younger generation amidst the pressures of modernization.

In contrast to previous research that primarily focused on semiotic structures or general values, this study fills a critical gap by examining the communicative inheritance of the *Slametan* tradition within a specific and dynamic cultural environment. Wonogiri Regency serves as

a unique cultural crossroads, strategically located on the border between the provinces of Yogyakarta and East Java, which subjects its society to a rich blend of diverse Javanese cultural influences (Pemerintah Kabupaten Wonogiri, 2022). Historically known as the territory of Raden Mas Said, Wonogiri has also seen a significant rise in Islamic religiosity, marked by the growth of faith-based educational institutions. Specifically, Gunungsari Village in Wonogiri presents a compelling case; despite its modern infrastructure, evidenced by its location on a provincial highway, high digital connectivity, and numerous schools from primary to vocational levels, the community remains steadfast in practicing the *Slametan* tradition (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Wonogiri, 2024).

The resilience of this ritual food culture amid modernization, religious shifts, and rapid economic access makes Gunungsari Village an ideal site for observing the negotiation process of symbolic meanings. This study shifts the focus to the communicative inheritance and negotiation of meaning between generations, offering a new perspective on the process of cultural identity is actively maintained through symbolic interaction rather than viewing tradition as a static object.

This study is framed within the perspective of symbolic interactionism and the ethnography of communication. Symbolic interactionism, as established by Blumer (as cited in Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2023, p. 57), posits that individuals act toward things based on the meanings they assign to

them, which arise specifically through social interaction and the communicative process. In the context of the *Slametan* tradition, ritual foods are not merely physical objects but symbols that carry profound spiritual and social meanings constructed through communal interaction.

The study operationalizes this concept by employing the ethnography of communication to analyze the communicative events within the ritual. This approach focuses on collective cultural patterns. Meanwhile, the ethnography of communication focuses on the shared patterns of symbols and rules that govern communication within a specific speech community (Littlejohn, Foss & Oetzel, 2021, p. 390). This study analyzes the process by which older and younger generations negotiate symbolic meanings in the ritual through eight elements of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework: (1) setting, (2) participants, (3) ends, (4) act sequence, (5) key, (6) instrumentalities, (7) norms, and (8) genre (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

The integration of these two perspectives deepens the understanding of cultural inheritance. While symbolic interactionism helps identify the core values embedded in ritual symbols, the ethnography of communication reveals the specific rules, norms, and channels that ensure these values are successfully transmitted to the next generation in Gunungsari Village.

This research is expected to provide an overview of the importance of caring for

and maintaining the existence of traditional foods in the *Slametan* ritual as the identity of the Gunungsari Village community group, which can be learned through the process of meaning in symbolic communication. Understanding the meaning of food in the *Slametan* tradition and the inheritance of *Slametan* food culture demonstrates the actualization of effective communication necessary to maintain cultural wealth.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with the ethnography of communication method. Unlike general ethnography, which focuses on broad cultural descriptions, ethnography of communication specifically examines the patterns, functions, and rules of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, within a specific speech community (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017, p. 66). This method is chosen to analyze the symbolic meanings process of ritual foods in the *Slametan* tradition, which are communicated and negotiated between generations in Gunungsari Village.

The primary analytical framework utilized in this study is Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, which remains a gold standard in sociolinguistic analysis for conducting a systematic micro-analysis of communicative events (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2021, p. 390). Within the context of the *Slametan* ritual, this framework facilitates a multifaceted investigation. It begins with the setting and scene to analyze the physical and psychological atmosphere

of the ritual and the *rewang* (communal cooking) process. The participants are identified by their roles, specifically the older generation as cultural senders and the youth as receivers, while the end indicator focuses on the objectives of the interaction, such as the transmission of moral values and spiritual safety. Furthermore, the act sequence aspect tracks the chronological order of the ritual, from food preparation to prayer sessions. Meanwhile, the key aspect assesses the varying tones of communication, from the sacredness of prayers to the informal-educational tone observed during cooking. The analysis of instrumentalities focuses on the language of food and Javanese idioms as primary channels of transmission, complemented by an investigation into norms to identify the social rules governing speech and expected behaviors. Finally, the genre aspect categorizes specific forms of communication, including *ujub* (ritual speech), informal advice, and technical instructions.

In this study, the first step that the researcher took was to determine the informants. The researcher selected the key informants from the Gunungsari Village community, namely individuals with experience participating in and carrying out the *Slametan* tradition. The informants include various age groups, both men and women. In addition, traditional leaders, cultural figures, and religious leaders serve as additional informants to enrich the data. The next step is conducting interviews with the informants, followed by creating an ethnographic record.

Data analysis was conducted using the developmental research sequence proposed by Spradley (2016, p. 92), integrated with Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework. First, domain analysis was used to identify broad categories of communicative events in the *Slametan* ritual. Second, taxonomic analysis was applied to organize these categories into a detailed structure based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework. Third, componential analysis searched for contrasts and specific attributes in the symbolic meanings of ritual foods. Finally, a cultural theme analysis was performed to synthesize these findings into a holistic understanding of cultural values inherited through communication in Gunungsari Village.

The informants were purposively selected to represent two groups, the younger generation (aged 23–35) and the older generation (aged 50–68). All informants are involved in the *Slametan* tradition and possess varying degrees of involvement in local community and religious forums. This research was conducted in Gunungsari Village, Jatisrono District, Wonogiri Regency. The research took place from December 2023 to March 2024.

The profiles of the fifteen informants, categorized in Table 1, constitute a purposive cross-generational demographic designed to capture the full spectrum of the *Slametan* tradition in Gunungsari Village. This cohort includes key stakeholders ranging from the younger generation (aged 23–35), who represent the cultural receivers, to the pre-elderly and elderly (aged 50–68), who serve as the cultural senders and custodians

Table 1 Research Informant Data

Code	Age	Activity	Hamlet
R (F)	55	Celebration cooks, daily administrators of the neighbourhood-level residents' group, and an Islamic forum administrator	Bolakrejo
DS (F)	55	A civil servant, members of the neighbourhood women's group, and the management of the Islamic forum	Bolakrejo
S (F)	65	Cashew traders and members of the neighbourhood women's group	Ngrandu
SD (F)	60	Cashew peeling workers, celebration cooks, and coordinators of the neighbourhood women's group (the head of the neighbourhood's wife)	Bolakrejo
D (F)	54	Cashew peeling workers, celebration cooks, and members of the Neighbourhood women's group	Sabuk
SN (M)	56	A civil servant, the District Leadership Coordination Forum, and members of the Islamic forum	Bolakrejo
TW (F)	23	Factory employees and youth group members	Ngrandu
D (F)	25	Caterers, youth group administrators, community-based health center volunteers, and members of the Islamic forum	Bolakrejo
W (F)	25	A teacher, youth group members, and village-level health mobilizers	Bolakrejo
M (F)	28	Vocational School Administrative Staff, members of youth groups, and members of the Islamic forum	Sabuk
L (F)	29	Housewife and youth group members	Kentheng
RA (M)	25	Honorary teachers and youth group members	Bolakrejo
SU (M)	68	Traditional leader (<i>Modin</i>)	Gunungsari
TCS (M)	50	Cultural artist (Puppeteer)	Wonogiri
MZ (M)	35	Religious leader (<i>Ustaz</i>)	Gunungsari

Source: Primary Data (2024)

of ancestral knowledge. Furthermore, the diversity of the informants' backgrounds, including traditional leaders (*Modin*), religious figures (*Ustaz*), cultural artists, and community administrators, ensures a comprehensive dataset that reflects various socio-linguistic dimensions of ritual food inheritance. By encompassing participants from different hamlets, such as Bolakrejo, Sabuk, Ngrandu, and Kentheng, this selection provides a robust foundation for analyzing the process of symbolic meanings, that is communicated and negotiated across the distinct social strata of the Gunungsari Village speech community.

FINDING

This ethnographic study reveals that the inheritance of ritual food

values within the *Slametan* tradition in Gunungsari Village constitutes a structured communicative event integrated into the community's daily activities. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews with 15 informants representing cross-generational cohorts (elders, parents, and youth), the research identifies that the transmission of cultural heritage occurs through three primary communicative channels: (1) the family environment, (2) social-communal activities (*rewang*), and (3) ritual processions led by traditional leaders.

Family Communication as the Primary Agent of Enculturation

The research data indicate that the family is the most crucial micro-unit in the inheritance of traditional values. This

process unfolds within the domestic sphere, specifically the kitchen, which functions as the primary setting or physical backdrop for communication. Informant S (the older generation) recounted that her knowledge of ritual foods was acquired from a young age through direct observation while assisting her parents. She noted that communication at that time was fluid, where explanations regarding the symbolic meanings of food were interspersed with chats.

It happened when cooking for the preparation of *Slametan* took place. So, when you help with cooking, you know from seeing the parents who are cooking, usually also interspersed with chats like that. But now I don't prepare offerings.... Since Simbah (father and mother) have passed away, I have not prepared offerings during *Slametan* (S, the older generation, interview, January 20, 2024).

While S noted a shift in belief, where she no longer provides *sesaji* (spirit offerings) due to heightened religious considerations, she maintains the composition of ritual food as a form of respect for parental tradition. As the younger generation, informants D, W, and TW stated that interaction during *Slametan* preparations serves as the main vehicle for information transfer. The Act Sequence of this communication begins at the planning stage.

It happened on D-1, so when I recorded what groceries to buy, there was a chat between me and my parents. Parents explain what foods must be provided that are indeed in accordance with traditions since the time of the ancestors... I also observed what kind of food was provided by the parents for the *Slametan* tradition... Parents explain what food

must be provided, what the purpose is (W, the younger generation, interview, January 20, 2024)

Informant D emphasized that the concept of learning by doing is dominant, she understands the meaning of *ubarampe* (ritual components) through hands-on practice.

The interaction occurred when cooking for *Slametan* at home. So, the process I learned by hands-on practice. Looking at the parents and sometimes also asking if there is something they don't understand.... (D, the younger generation, interview, January 22, 2024)

Parents in Gunungsari Village, such as DS and SD, consistently involve their children without coercion. SD expressed her intention for this noble culture to be understood by her children through consistent involvement.

I want the children to continue, this is the noble culture of the ancestors.... I used to take my children to the kitchen, let them help me prepare the *Slametan*. The day before, I also had a discussion to take note of the grocery list before going to the market, so they would understand it in a long time. My second child, who is a girl, is the same; now my own house does *Slametan* as well. (SD, the older generation, interview, January 15, 2024)

Researchers' observation found that children were always involved in preparing for the *Slametan* event. Even starting from elementary school, teenagers are used to taking part in preparing *Slametan* food. They start with minor roles, such as just sitting in the kitchen to observe and accompany the mother, buying salt at the stall, packing crackers in plastic,

and delivering food baskets to the nearest neighbors' houses (participant observation, December 2023-March 2024).

The narratives provided by informants S, D, W, TW, DS, and SD represent a consistent pattern found across all 15 informants in this study. Although not every verbatim transcript is displayed due to space constraints, the collective data confirms that the domestic communicative environment functions as a robust enculturation space. Within the framework of the ethnography of communication, this family-based interaction demonstrates a shared communicative competence, where ritual food values are transmitted not through formal instruction, but through natural, repetitive participation in specific communicative settings.

***Rewang* Activities as Social Learning Spaces and Linguistic Code Negotiation**

Beyond the family, cultural inheritance is significantly amplified through social interactions in the *rewang* tradition (communal helping). The researcher identifies *rewang* as a vital speech situation where the intensity of inter-resident interaction facilitates broader cultural socialization. Informant D (the older generation) revealed that *rewang* serves as an organic, unintentional, yet highly effective pedagogical moment.

From the social point of view of the community, it is when *rewangan* or helping neighbors who will hold a *Slametan*. So yes, I find out by talking or also asking the elders like that. The learning was unintentional, yes while practicing like that. Observing while

chatting flows. (D, the older generation, interview, January 15, 2024)

This unintentional learning is a manifestation of participatory observation within the community. In the linguistic dimension, the researcher found that *rewang* serves as a field for code-switching and negotiation. Younger informants, such as TW, demonstrated a sophisticated use of *kromo inggil* (formal-style Javanese) when questioning elders in the *rewangan* kitchen. This linguistic choice is not merely for communication but serves as a social marker and a form of communicative competence. By utilizing *kromo inggil*, the youth acknowledge the elders' role as the custodians of tradition, thereby creating a safe space for knowledge transfer.

The interaction is when *rewang* or helping neighbors or relatives who want to celebrate *Slametan*. We make concoctions in the kitchen while telling stories, while observing as well, so we finally know more or less the food that is being prepared (TW, the younger generation, interview, January 15, 2024)

Furthermore, participant observations (December 2023-March 2024) revealed that this space is inclusive of all ages. Adolescents are socialized into the Gunungsari Village speech community through peripheral participation, taking on small but symbolic roles such as wrapping crackers or delivering *sega ater-ater* (food baskets) to neighbors. These actions are nonverbal communicative acts that reinforce their identity and belonging.

This collective social participation, observed across the 15 informants, confirms

that *rewang* (volunteer) acts as a living laboratory for cultural transmission. The interactional norms found here, ranging from *ngoko* (informal-style Javanese) used among peers to *kromo inggil* (formal-style Javanese) used toward elders, demonstrate the community's way of maintaining a hierarchical yet fluid communication system. This ensures that the intricate details of ritual foods are not just taught, but are experienced through communal labor and linguistic respect.

***Ngujubne* Procession as a Formal Genre and the Role of Traditional Leaders**

For male community members (represented by informant TCS), the primary communication channel for cultural inheritance occurs during the formal ritual procession. In this context, Grandfather Modin (the traditional leader), who serves as the key participant and custodian of tradition, possesses the linguistic authority to decode symbolic meanings. The centerpiece of this event is *ngujubne*, which the researcher identifies as a formal communicative genre. This genre employs a specific instrumentality, a combination of archaic, poetic, and sacred Javanese language that elevates the ritual foods from mere objects to spiritual symbols. Informant TCS explained the cognitive process of the male participants.

... For example, there is one person who does *Slametan* and believes that it then invites many people, so even though the one who does it is one family, because one RT (neighborhood unit) is invited, it is the same as spreading the tradition. The invited guests, for example, gentlemen,

inevitably they will know what food is served. Then they also listened to how Mbah Modin vowed.... If the mothers go through the *rewangan* or help cook at the neighbor's house. Inevitably, I finally understand what the food is.... (TCS, the cultural artist (puppeteer), interview, January 8, 2024)

Grandfather Modin acts as a communicative gatekeeper, translating the host's secular intentions into symbolic-religious prayers. During *ngujubne* (the ritual declaration of intent), he methodically mentions each type of ritual food, such as *nasi tumpeng*, *ingkung*, and *jenangan*, explaining their noble purposes and the prayers they represent. This verbalization is crucial because it ensures that all participants (the guests) receive the same cultural message.

Based on the collective insights from the 15 informants, particularly the male participants, it is evident that *ngujubne* serves as a vital pedagogical instrument for men, mirroring the informal learning that women experience in the kitchen. Based on the framework of the ethnography of communication, this procession is a high-context communicative event where the sociolinguistic norms are strictly maintained. The transition from the host's silent preparation to Grandfather Modin's vocalized *ikrar* (vow) represents a complete cycle of symbolic communication, ensuring that the inheritance of ritual food values is validated both socially and spiritually across the community.

Responses, Negotiation of Meaning, and Information Access Among Youth

Gunungsari Village society resides in a developed environment with

adequate access to formal education (from elementary to vocational high schools) and robust digital connectivity. This socio-technical environment shapes a highly critical and analytical attitude among the younger generation, leading to a unique communicative tension between modern rationality and ancestral tradition. Based on the framework of the ethnography of communication, informant TW acknowledged an initial phase of skepticism, which represents a period of decoding resistance where traditional messages are questioned before being internalized.

Although there were doubts at the beginning, whether this kind of food should be provided, whether I really have to preserve this tradition because it is part of the ancestral tradition in Java, I finally found out a lot from my parents and the community around me (TW, the younger generation, interview, January 15, 2024).

The youth's initial response often moves from a neutral stance to a sophisticated cognitive negotiation. This involves a multi-channel validation process: (1) discussing with parents (interpersonal communication), (2) consulting elders (authoritative cultural communication), and (3) validating information via the internet (mediated communication). This triangulation of meaning allows the younger generation to find a logical and emotional resonance with the ritual foods. This transition towards acceptance indicates that the inheritance of *Slametan* values in Gunungsari Village is not a static imposition but a dynamic, interactive process. The younger generation

acts as active participants who re-interpret traditional symbols to fit their contemporary identity.

It turns out that after asking and talking to parents and discussing with the elders, there is a noble meaning, and it has become our cultural tradition, right. I also read it on the internet, yes I understand and accept. (W, the younger generation, interview, January 20, 2024).

After some time observing and figuring out, I finally accepted... I think this is the position in Java, so I also want to do it. (D, the younger generation, interview, January 22, 2024).

The findings from the collective experiences of the 15 informants illustrate that despite the deep penetration of modernity and formal education, the mechanisms of symbolic communication in Gunungsari Village remain remarkably robust. The preservation of cultural identity is achieved through the strategic use of specific settings (the kitchen and ritual spaces), linguistic instruments (the shift between Javanese codes), and interactional norms that allow for doubt, dialogue, and eventually, a self-determined commitment to *nguri-uri* (preserving) the ancestral heritage. This reinforces that the Gunungsari Village speech community has successfully harmonized modern logic with ritual sanctity, ensuring the continuity of the *Slametan* tradition through a resilient intergenerational communicative bond.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section interprets the findings by showing that the inheritance of *Slametan* food traditions in Gunungsari

Village is not merely a process of cultural repetition, but as symbolic and communicative practice embedded in everyday domestic and communal interactions. Through the lenses of symbolic interactionism and the ethnography of communication, this study demonstrates the process of producing, negotiating, and sustaining meanings attached to ritual food across generations through parent-child communication and broader community participation.

Parent-Child Communication through Symbolic Interactionism and Domestic Praxis

Communication in the interaction that has been established between parents and children also affects children's skills in processing social information (Brummelman & Thomaes, 2017, p. 1765). Communication between parents and children plays a vital role in providing positive input and building a situation that facilitates human development, creating optimal conditions for the growth of a child's social and cognitive resources (Segrin & Flora, 2019, p. 77). This study develops these ideas by situating the Gunungsari Village family as a domestic speech community where the family serves as more than just a medium. It is a primary setting where the developmental environment is structured through ritual-based communication. Based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'setting' appears in the domestic kitchen and the family home as the initial cultural exchange occurs.

Based on the interview with DS (the elder), it was found that for the first time,

a member of the Gunungsari Village community knew about the variety of ritual foods in the *Slametan* tradition from her parents and her grandmother. Since childhood, the people there have often seen and helped their parents process ritual food. Children pay attention to their parents' ways of preparing ingredients, cooking, and serving ritual food displays, following the rules passed down by their ancestors. The interaction between children and their parents is illustrated through direct communication and by capturing information through observation during the cooking process. This activity demonstrates the involvement of the enculturation process, shown by the awareness itself, through observing parents that the food in *Slametan* is a part of the ancestral culture that must be preserved. The children undergo a socialization process with their parents as their agents as they learn the ways to prepare, process, and serve food. Based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'act sequence' comes in the form of enculturation, in which physical presence in the kitchen acts as a nonverbal pedagogical instrument. In addition to the framework, this highlights that the 'participants' involved in this speech community are the parents, who act as the primary senders (enculturation agents), and the children, who serve as the receivers.

Social meaning is an emergent product of human engagement rather than a fixed reality. Blumer said that the interpretive process is mediated through various symbolic systems, ranging from linguistic

structures and religious values to cultural customs and social norms, which allow individuals to coordinate their actions (Côté, 2019, p. 118). Every movement displayed by parents while preparing and serving ritual food is a nonverbal language that their children can observe and understand. An inheritance scheme with a natural pattern like this comprises parental actions that children can directly observe. This has become the culture of the Gunungsari Village community, which is generally carried out by the community (participant observation, December 2023-March 2024). This research extends Blumer's premise by identifying kinetic symbolism as a vital communicative code, suggesting that in ritual inheritance, meaning is constructed not only through verbal symbols but through the language of action. Based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'instrumentalities' used to transmit cultural values without relying solely on oral speech are represented by the non-verbal codes and physical gestures.

Based on an interview with M, the young generation learns about various ritual foods by observing the process done by their parents. Like the old community, the young community has also been introduced to various traditional *Slametan* foods by parents since childhood. The community believes that various types of ritual food are noble traditions from parents and ancestors that must be passed on. According to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'ends' or the ultimate goal of the communicative interaction between generations is

constituted by the preservation of these traditions. This shows that the enculturation process has occurred in people's minds since they were little. It is characterized by adjusting thoughts and actions that harmonize with its culture. Only then is the socialization stage carried out by parents, involving their children every time they process ritual food, where communication occurs with parents as cultural agents or communicators. This finding enriches the theory of symbolic interactionism by suggesting that action precedes definition, where children participate in the ritual labor before fully internalizing its symbolic complexity.

The old and young people said that the family is the first medium for learning the variety of ritual foods in the *Slametan* tradition. Interactions that play a role in constructing the meaning of ritual food occur when a person or their family is positioned to host the *Slametan* tradition. Parents and children communicate during *Slametan* preparation, such as discussion activities when shopping for food ingredients. Communication between parents and children during the processing and cooking of ritual food also transfers values and culture. According to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'genre' is the interactions that function as informal ritual within the family, where the transfer of cultural values is not perceived as formal instruction but as a fluid symbolic exchange.

Communication in interaction occurs symbolically, meaning that the messages

captured are in the form of language and parents' gestures, which require an interpretation process. As West and Turner (2021, p. 56) argue that human interaction is based on the exchange of symbols where meaning is not inherent but is created through the active process of interpretation between participants. The people of Gunungsari Village can define the meaning of the *Slametan* tradition and the variety of ritual foods up to the stage of internalization carried out by themselves. In general, the communication pattern in the inheritance of food values in the Gunungsari Village community will involve the role of parents or families as the primary agents of the value transmission. The process of inheriting the values and culture of this variety of *Slametan* food takes place naturally and flows throughout the activity of preparing *Slametan* food at home. Based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, in this context, the 'norms' are provided by the domestic environment to ensure the sustainability of cultural identity across generations.

Inheritance of *Slametan* Food through Society as a Speech Community

Society is one of the three main ideas of symbolic interaction as conveyed by Mead (as cited in Côté, 2019, p. 178). Mead argued that society is viewed as a dynamic process in which people act in association with one another. These social interactions are characterized by the exchange of symbols, which allow individuals to coordinate their actions and build a shared social reality. The society is constructed

through continual and varied interactions among people, emphasizing the interactive and meaning-making process (Fernback, 2019, p. 112).

Humans as individuals will act individually. However, as social beings, humans also collaborate and meet each other as members of a group. Life in a group is a long process of determining actions towards others and interpreting others' definitions. In the process proposed by Mead (as cited in Côté, 2019, p. 178), humans realize that the acts of adjusting to one another exist to form a concept of themselves as individuals. This study develops Mead's concept by identifying it in Gunungsari Village, where society is not just a static association, but also a collaborative speech community where ritual food serves as the primary symbolic anchor for social adjustment. The self-reflection mentioned by Mead (as cited in Côté, 2019, p. 178) is achieved here through the shared labor of preparing tradition, where an individual's identity is mirrored in their ability to participate in communal ritual norms. Putting in the context of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the collaborative process happens in the 'setting' of the social environment of Gunungsari Village, and the 'participants' involved are the villagers, from the elders to the youth. They function as the active 'participants' who maintain social order through shared labor.

Social environment is a setting where a group of relatively independent people lives together, shares the same culture,

and carries out most of their activities within the group (Macionis, 2024, p. 120; Rahayu & Wigna, 2016, p. 8; Verkuyten & Yogeaswaran, 2020, p. 2). The social environment is another term for a group of people or society that has a form of an established order of life. The existing order will serve as a source of compliance, namely a set of rules, norms, values, and sanctions that govern a person's way of life and determine their actions in various situations. Society becomes a concrete form of diversity, composed of individuals with different perspectives. However, uniquely, they can adapt to each other and integrate (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, & Carr, 2021, p. 56; Macionis, 2024, p. 97). By applying the ethnography of communication, this study proposes that this established order is maintained through specific interactional norms. According to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'norms' of interaction dictate the individuals' ways to behave and communicate during the preparation of ritual food, ensuring social harmony and compliance with ancestral values. The integration of diverse individuals in Gunungsari Village is made possible because the community shares a communicative competence regarding *Slametan*, a shared understanding of the use of specific linguistic codes and behavioral guidance during communal tasks, ensuring that social diversity does not lead to cultural fragmentation. Putting in the context of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'instrumentalities' or the linguistic tools of the community involve the codes, such as

the specific Javanese terminologies used during communal work. In addition to the framework, the 'ends' of this communal communication aim to achieve social integration and the successful transmission of cultural identity.

Village communities, which still strongly embrace the culture of gathering and cooperation, impact their various communication forums or interactions. The habit of gathering is still effortless to find in Gunungsari Village, starting from routine community service activities to sweeping the streets, neighborhood gatherings, Islamic forums, *rewang* or activities to help neighbors who have wishes, to the habit of gathering and exchanging stories at the patrol post in the afternoon to chat (participant observation, December 2023-March 2024). Based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'act sequence' of these gatherings follows a traditional pattern, performed with a key of cooperation (*gotong royong*) and informal intimacy that characterizes village life. *Rewang* activities and *Slametan* processions are community communication forums that serve as media for transmitting the value of various *Slametan* foods. This study enriches this observation by categorizing *rewang* not only as a social forum but also as a speech situation that facilitates a high-intensity symbolic exchange. Using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the researcher identifies *rewang* and the subsequent *Slametan* procession as the distinct 'genre' of communicative events, each with its own structured rules of speaking and action. In

this setting, the transmission of ritual food values is not an explicit pedagogical act but a performative inheritance, where cultural meanings are passed on through the rhythm of collective action. This demonstrates that society in a traditional-modern hybrid survives by transforming communal work into a medium of symbolic continuity.

The Process of Interpreting and Negotiating Ritual Food Meanings

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, researchers can learn the way of a message conveyed by parents to their children is interpreted based on the subjective meanings assigned to symbols. Moreover, it also helps determine subsequent behavior and attitude in response to the message. Messages received by children are not only accepted but also are filtered through an interpretive process when they actively construct meaning from the interaction (Braithwaite, Suter, & Floyd, 2017, p. 2). The interpretation of ritual food in Gunungsari Village involves complex cognitive and mental involvement that children align the cultural symbols provided by their parents with their own evolving social reality.

Through in-depth interviews with all informants and consideration of the results of direct observations in the community, the researcher found that the elderly showed a firm position regarding their views towards the symbols used in various ritual foods at that time. This traditional interpretive frame defined the position parents represented when they first grasped the symbolic meanings of the variety of

ritual foods within the *Slametan* tradition from their parents.

D (the older generation) testified that at that time, she received the symbolic meanings of the noble value of the *Slametan* tradition and its ritual food with high reverence. Based on Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'key' or the psychological tone of the communication was represented by the reverence, which was characterized by unquestioning respect and sacredness for the older generation. D (the older generation) admitted that she was very familiar with the *Slametan* tradition. She viewed it as a hereditary symbolic system inherited from her ancestors. Similar to D (the older generation), DS and R (the older generation) also expressed the same thing. At that time, they received symbols about the tradition of *Slametan* and the various food brought by parents and elders in their neighborhood. The symbolic meaning they internalized was that the *Slametan* food represented a devotion to the spirits of the ancestors. At that time, this collective belief was shared by significant others in the community's mind, making it a commonplace interpretation.

The information obtained from the parents aligns with the core of symbolic interactionism, in which meaning is derived from social consensus. Looking back, the development of the world during the youth of the elderly was not as advanced as it is today, in terms of technology and science. Access to information was restricted, meaning the interpretive tools were limited to oral tradition. Based on

Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'instrumentalities' for the older generation were primarily oral and face-to-face, unlike the multi-channel digital tools available today. Cell phones had not touched the lives of the people of Gunungsari Village, and landline phones were only for the elites. Unsurprisingly, the symbolic perspective of the young parents in Gunungsari Village was simple and traditional, as their generalized other was confined to the village's immediate physical and religious boundaries.

Based on the interviews with DS and S (the older generation), it was found that they wanted the children to learn and continue their ancestral traditions related to the variety of *Slametan* food as a commitment to preserving the culture. Ritual food is also seen as a symbol of alms to maintain harmony with neighbors. Getting children used to the atmosphere of preparing and processing ritual food in the kitchen, involving them in small things, is a strategic communicative effort. In the context of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, this is an intentional structuring of the 'setting' and 'act sequence' to ensure that the symbols are interpreted correctly as children grow older.

Persuasive communication is defined as a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince others to change their attitudes or behaviors regarding an issue through the transmission of a message in an atmosphere of free choice. The effectiveness of this symbolic message depends on the emotional appeal,

its relevance to the audience, and the credibility of the relationship between the sender and the recipient (Perloff, 2017, p. 83). Involving children in preparing for the *Slametan* tradition in Gunungsari Village, from shopping and cooking to serving, is a form of performative persuasion, where parents act as cultural communicators to shape the child's interpretive process. In the context of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the 'participants' role is reinforced by the status and credibility of the sender (the parents) that directly influence the reception of the symbolic message.

In contrast to the elderly, the young people expressed a more critical position when they first received messages about ritual foods. They feel the emergence of skepticism, which in symbolic interactionism is a form of interpretive tension. Correlating to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, the shifts in the 'key' of the interaction from reverence to critical inquiry reflect a change in the 'norms' of interaction where the younger generation feels empowered to question and seek logical foundations for traditions. Skepticism does not necessarily lead to rejection but to a deeper minding process. It can be an internal conversation in which they try to discover more deeply to find a modern logic for ancient symbols from parents, older relatives, and other sources.

Departing from the critical thinking of the youth, they eventually develop a curiosity about the *Slametan* tradition. The initial confusion is eroded after they

engage in a social validation process, discussing details with elders to confirm the information. Informant W said he also sought explanations from elders and credible articles from the internet to learn about the meaning of ritual food. This study develops symbolic interactionism by showing that the interpretive process in the modern era involves digitally mediated interaction, in which the internet serves as a secondary agent that validates traditional symbols. Correlating to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, digital media thus emerge as the modern 'instrumentalities' bridging the gap between traditional oral codes and modern logic.

When a person's point of view towards a symbol is neutral, a symbolic reconciliation can occur. In modern society, traditions are no longer accepted blindly but are subject to continuous reinterpretation to align with contemporary values and personal identities (Giddens & Sutton, 2021, p. 476). The youth show a movement or shift in their anchor of meaning. This move is driven by the entry of new, acceptable

information from elders and internet media through the confirmation stage. This shift proves that the self is a dynamic process that can harmonize ancestral values with contemporary knowledge.

Figure 1 illustrates the process when ritual food symbols are transmitted through interaction. As recipients, young people engage in cognitive negotiation. In this study, the youth chose to accept the symbols after previously being in a state of skepticism or interpretive neutrality. A shift in meaning occurs through multi-source learning. The assimilation of values materializes, and a change in attitude follows, moving from ignorance to a self-determined desire to preserve the *nguri-uri* (hereditary culture). Correlating to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, this conscious acceptance marks the final 'ends' of the communicative process, where the objective is no longer forced compliance but a meaningful symbolic reconciliation. This confirms that the norms of interaction in Gunungsari Village allow for critical dialogue, ensuring that the inheritance of

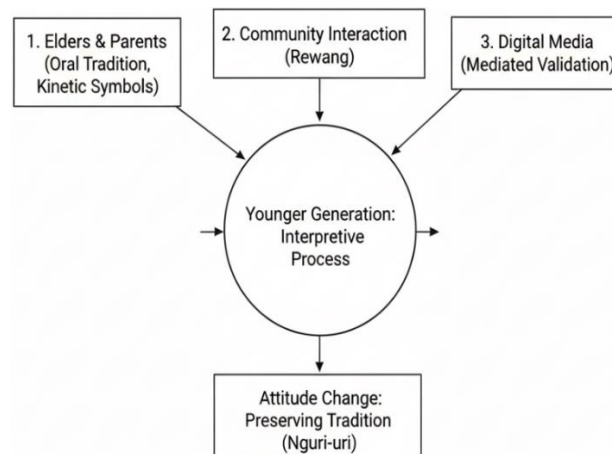


Figure 1 Symbolic Reconciliation Framework in Cultural Inheritance
Source: Primary Data (2024)

tradition is not a forced compliance but a conscious symbolic acceptance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the inheritance of *Slametan* ritual food values in Gunungsari Village, Wonogiri, is achieved through a multi-layered communicative mechanism that harmonizes domestic praxis with social interaction. In answering the research objective, this study finds that the family serves as the primary domestic speech community where the transfer of cultural meaning occurs through practical symbolic interaction. Parents do not merely socialize children through verbal instruction. They involve them in the kinetic process of food preparation in the kitchen. This ensures that the language of action, the physical acts of cooking, and serving, internalize symbolic meanings within the younger generation long before these values are formally articulated.

Furthermore, this research reveals that communal social structures, specifically *rewang* and the ritual processions, act as vital speech situations that facilitate performative inheritance. These forums enable the transmission of ritual knowledge through collective labor and social adjustment, maintaining the community's identity as a cohesive speech community amidst modern pressures. The study also identifies a critical shift in the interpretive process among the youth, while they initially exhibit skepticism due to modern influences, they eventually reach a state of symbolic reconciliation. This is achieved

by validating ancestral oral traditions through discussions with elders and via digital media, showing that technology now serve as a secondary agent in preserving traditional symbols.

In summary, the process of cultural inheritance in Gunungsari Village is not a passive repetition of tradition, but a resilient and active negotiation of meaning. However, this study also opens new avenues for further academic inquiry. Future research is recommended to explore the digital enculturation process more deeply, specifically the role of social media platforms in reshaping the rituals interpretation process in other rural contexts. Additionally, further studies could investigate the gendered dynamics of symbolic interaction within the kitchen or perform a comparative ethnography between rural and urban-migrant communities. Exploring these areas will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the process of Javanese symbolic systems that have adapted to the increasingly complex global landscape.

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