

## THE SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF POEMS WRITTEN BY EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS OF HURRASUL AQIDAH TARAKAN AS A REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL WISDOM IN THE COASTAL REGION OF NORTH KALIMANTAN

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### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap konstruksi makna dalam puisi karya siswa kelas VIII Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan dengan menggunakan perspektif semiotik sastra Michael Riffaterre. Analisis difokuskan pada mekanisme ketidaklangsungan ekspresi yang mencakup penggantian arti, penyimpangan arti, dan penciptaan arti, serta penafsiran makna melalui pembacaan heuristik dan hermeneutik. Selain mengkaji aspek semiotik, penelitian ini juga menelusuri keterhubungan makna puisi dengan latar budaya pesisir Kalimantan Utara yang menjadi bagian dari kehidupan siswa. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan penelitian lapangan. Data dikumpulkan melalui kegiatan menulis puisi, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui proses reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan simpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa membangun makna puisi melalui pemanfaatan simbol, metafora, dan ungkapan puitik yang menggambarkan pengalaman emosional, seperti perjuangan hidup, rasa rindu, keletihan, dan harapan. Bentuk penggantian arti terlihat pada penggunaan simbol sebagai representasi perasaan dan pengalaman tertentu. Penyimpangan arti tampak pada pemakaian bahasa yang menyimpang dari makna literal sehingga menghasilkan efek estetis yang lebih kuat. Sementara itu, penciptaan arti diwujudkan melalui pengulangan unsur bahasa dan keterkaitan makna antarlarik maupun antar bait. Temuan penelitian juga memperlihatkan adanya representasi budaya pesisir Kalimantan Utara yang tercermin melalui gambaran laut, aktivitas masyarakat nelayan, dan lingkungan pantai. Akan tetapi, unsur budaya lokal tersebut belum muncul secara dominan karena sebagian besar puisi masih berfokus pada pengalaman pribadi penulis. Oleh karena itu, teori semiotik Riffaterre terbukti relevan untuk mengungkap makna dalam puisi siswa sekaligus memberikan dasar bagi pengembangan pembelajaran sastra yang lebih berorientasi pada penguatan kearifan lokal.*

**Kata kunci:** puisi, heuristik, hermeneutik, semiotika

### Abstract

This study aims to examine the construction of meaning in poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan using Michael Riffaterre's literary semiotic approach. The analysis focuses on the mechanisms of indirect expression, including displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning, as well as the process of meaning-making through heuristic and hermeneutic readings. In addition, the study explores the relationship between the meanings conveyed in the poems and the coastal cultural context of North Kalimantan, which forms part of the students' social and cultural environment. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method with a field research design. Data were collected through poetry-writing tasks, observations, and documentation, and were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students construct meaning in their poems through the use of symbols, metaphors, and poetic expressions that represent emotional experiences such as struggle, longing, exhaustion, and hope. Displacement of meaning is reflected in the use of symbols that represent particular feelings and life experiences. Distortion of meaning appears in linguistic expressions that deviate from literal logic, thereby enhancing the aesthetic effect of the poems. Meanwhile, the creation of meaning is realized through repetition and the interconnectedness of meanings across lines and stanzas. The study also indicates the presence of North Kalimantan coastal cultural elements, represented through images of the sea, fishermen's lives, and coastal environments. However, these local cultural aspects are not yet dominant, as most poems primarily focus on the students' personal experiences. Therefore, Riffaterre's semiotic theory proves relevant for uncovering meaning in students' poetry and provides a foundation for developing literary learning that integrates aesthetic experience with local wisdom.

**Key words:** poetry, heuristic, hermeneutic, semiotics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry plays an important role in literary expression because it enables individuals to convey thoughts, emotions, experiences, and perspectives through artistic language (Nurjannah et al., 2018). As one of the most expressive forms of literature, poetry serves as a medium through which writers transform personal and social experiences into meaningful aesthetic creations (Fathurohman, 2023). The effectiveness of poetry lies not only in its artistic form but also in its ability to communicate messages and meanings that invite interpretation from readers (Nurjannah et al., 2018). In this regard, poetry can be understood as an expression of the human soul articulated through aesthetic and meaningful language, relying on imagination, creativity, personal experience, and knowledge (Perdani et al., 2025).

Although poetry has been defined in various ways, its essential characteristic remains the communication of meaning or messages intended by the poet for the reader (Harijanti Sutji, 2020). Consequently, poetry is capable of evoking emotional responses such as joy, sadness, or empathy, depending on the interaction between the poet and the reader. The poet's skill in selecting and arranging words according to the intended message, as well as the reader's ability to comprehend and internalize the poem, determines the effectiveness of meaning transmission. When synchronization between author and reader does not occur, the intended message of the poem becomes difficult to convey accurately.

The diverse definitions of poetry proposed by scholars, its fundamental characteristic lies in its capacity to communicate the meanings, ideas, and messages that poets seek to convey to their readers (Waluyo, 2020). Consequently, poetry is capable of generating a wide range of emotional responses, including joy, sorrow, and empathy, through the dynamic interaction between the poet and the reader. The effectiveness of meaning

construction and communication is determined not only by the poet's skill in selecting and organizing language to convey intended messages but also by the reader's capacity to interpret and internalize the poetic text (Bagtayan & Ahyani, 2026). A lack of correspondence between the poet's intended meaning and the reader's interpretation may hinder a comprehensive understanding of the message encoded within the poem.

Literature comprises a wide range of genres and forms, including novels, romances, folktales, short stories, and poetry. (Perdani et al., 2025). Literature is inherently connected to the social conditions of society because it serves as a reflection of the social, educational, political, and cultural realities that shape human life. As a literary genre, poetry represents these realities through symbolic, concise, and meaning-laden language. Consequently, poets and writers are required to possess a sufficient understanding of poetic composition techniques to produce literary works that embody both aesthetic value and meaningful content (Julianto, 2024)

Literary works encompass various forms, including novels, romances, folktales, short stories, and poetry. Literary works cannot be separated from social conditions because they essentially reflect the realities of society (Ilham, 2025). Likewise, poetry serves as a literary medium that can represent social, educational, political, and cultural conditions within a community. Therefore, it is important for writers to equip themselves with an adequate understanding of poetic writing techniques in order to produce meaningful and aesthetically valuable literary works (Aini, 2013).

Poetry (Devannia Putri Rizky, Wikanengsih, 2021) is an expression of the human soul conveyed through beautiful and artistic language. As a literary work, poetry relies on an individual's imagination, creativity, experiences, and knowledge. Although poetry has been defined from various perspectives by

numerous scholars, its fundamental characteristic lies in its ability to communicate the meanings and messages that the poet intends to convey to reader (Harijanti Sutji, 2020). Consequently, poetry is capable of evoking a wide range of emotional responses, including joy, sadness, and empathy. These responses emerge through the interaction between two essential elements: the poet and the reader. The successful communication of meaning depends on the poet's ability to skillfully select and arrange words in accordance with the intended message, as well as the reader's capacity to interpret and appreciate the poem. When there is a lack of correspondence between the poet's intended meaning and the reader's interpretation, the message embedded within the poem may be difficult to understand comprehensively.

This study aims to investigate the aspects of meaning in poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan and to explore how these meanings reflect social conditions and local cultural traditions. The findings are expected to contribute to the enhancement of literary learning in schools by strengthening students' ability to express social realities and the cultural heritage of North Kalimantan through poetic works.

The meanings embedded in the poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan were analyzed using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, with particular emphasis on the concept of indirect expression, which includes displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning. To achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the poetic texts, heuristic and hermeneutic readings were employed as complementary interpretive approaches (Ediyono & Alfiati, 2019).

Beyond its function as a medium of personal expression, poetry can serve as an effective vehicle for preserving and transmitting local wisdom (Huda et al., 2025). Local wisdom

refers to the values, traditions, knowledge systems, beliefs, and cultural practices that are inherited and sustained by a particular community (Sulistijani, 2018). (Perwira, 2018) In North Kalimantan, especially within coastal communities, local wisdom is manifested through maritime traditions, environmental stewardship, communal solidarity, and respect for the natural environment. These cultural values constitute a rich source of inspiration for literary production and may be articulated through poetic imagery, symbolism, and narrative expression. Incorporating local wisdom into poetry writing not only enriches students' literary creativity but also reinforces their cultural identity and appreciation of regional heritage. Accordingly, investigating the extent to which local cultural elements are represented in students' poems is essential for understanding how literary education contributes to the preservation and promotion of local wisdom in contemporary educational settings.

To ensure a focused and systematic analysis, this study is confined to examining the meaning aspects of poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan. The analysis centers on the three forms of indirect expression identified in Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, namely displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning, (Pitaloka, 2020) as explored through heuristic and hermeneutic readings. Through the application of Riffaterre's semiotic framework and these complementary interpretive approaches, the study seeks to reveal poetic meanings associated with local wisdom, cultural values, and the social realities of North Kalimantan reflected in the students' poetic works.

This study aims to examine the aspects of meaning in poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan. The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of literary learning in schools by

enhancing students' understanding of the social conditions and cultural traditions of North Kalimantan as reflected in their poetic works.

The meaning aspects of the poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan were analyzed using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, particularly the concept of indirect expression, which includes displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning (Izzah et al., 2024). (Istiqalaliyah et al., 2025) To obtain a more accurate and comprehensive interpretation of the poems, heuristic and hermeneutic readings were employed as complementary analytical approaches (Hartati, 2019).

To ensure a more focused and systematic investigation, this study concentrates on the analysis of meaning aspects in poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan. The analysis focuses on the concept of indirect expression in Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, which consists of three aspects: displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning (Riskayanti et al., 2023). The study employs Riffaterre's semiotic approach in conjunction with heuristic and hermeneutic readings to interpret the poetic texts. Through the application of these theoretical and interpretive frameworks, the study seeks to uncover poetic meanings rooted in local wisdom, cultural values, and the social conditions of North Kalimantan as reflected in the students' poems (Marangga, 2020).

## 2. METHOD

In this study, Riffaterre's semiotic theory is employed not only as a theoretical foundation but also as a framework for data analysis (Siswantoro, 2010). The analytical process begins with a heuristic reading to identify the literal meaning of the poems based on linguistic conventions. Subsequently, a hermeneutic reading is conducted to interpret deeper layers of

meaning through the identification of forms of indirect expression, namely displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning (Naufalia et al., 2025). The resulting interpretations are then related to the students' social and cultural contexts in order to reveal representations of North Kalimantan's local wisdom embedded within the poems. Thus, the analysis focuses not only on the semantic aspects of the texts but also on the relationship between poetic meaning and the cultural realities that underpin its creation.

According to (Fadli, 2021) his study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which focuses on the systematic description and analysis of data in accordance with the research objectives and problem formulation. The research data were collected through tests, observations, and documentation and were subsequently classified and analyzed to describe the meanings embedded in the poems produced by the students (Aritonang et al., 2024)

The population of this study consisted of all eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan. The research sample was selected using a random sampling technique. The research instrument was a poetry-writing test, which was administered to assess students' initial abilities and to provide a basis for subsequent instructional activities (Purnomo, 2025).

Data collection was conducted through several stages, including an initial poetry-writing test, the implementation of follow-up instructional activities based on the evaluation of the test results, and a poetry-writing assignment on the theme of North Kalimantan culture supported by video media and instructional materials (Aritonang et al., 2024). The analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data display, data validation, and conclusion drawing. The meanings embedded in the poems were analyzed objectively using Riffaterre's semiotic theory through heuristic and hermeneutic readings to identify the relationship

between the students' poems and the cultural values of North Kalimantan (Hartati, 2019).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The poems written by the students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan were analyzed using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory. The analysis began with heuristic reading to identify the literal meanings of words, phrases, and expressions based on conventional linguistic rules. This stage was followed by hermeneutic reading, which aimed to reveal deeper poetic meanings through interpretation of the textual signs and symbols (Hartati, 2019)

Particular attention was given to the forms of indirect expression proposed by Riffaterre, namely displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning (Riffaterre, 1992). These aspects were used as analytical categories for examining how meaning was constructed within the poems. The hermeneutic interpretation was subsequently employed to identify symbolic representations, cultural values, and manifestations of local wisdom reflected in the students' poetic works. Through this analytical framework, the study sought to uncover layers of meaning that extend beyond literal interpretation and reveal the relationship between poetic expression and (Ricoeur et al., 1969).

#### Displacement of Meaning

The first poem, entitled *From Afar I Learn to Endure (Dari Jauh Aku Belajar Bertahan)*, demonstrates displacement of meaning through the use of metaphors and symbols that substitute literal meanings with deeper poetic significance. The expression "*weaving hope at the edge of silence*" does not refer to the physical act of weaving; rather, it symbolizes an inner effort to preserve hope amid loneliness and uncertainty. Similarly, the phrase "*the sky often changes color*" represents the unpredictable nature of life circumstances, while "*longing that never fades*"

symbolizes emotional resilience and enduring affection. The expression "*foreign land*" extends beyond a geographical reference and signifies feelings of social and emotional alienation. Furthermore, the symbol "*star*" in the line "*I entrust my longing to the silent star*" represents hope and prayers directed toward a transcendent power.

The second poem, *A Plate and a Mountain of Dreams (Sepiring dan Segunung Mimpi)*, also exhibits displacement of meaning through symbolic language. The expression "*an endless pile of books*" symbolizes a long and demanding intellectual journey rather than a mere collection of books. Likewise, "*I contemplate the meaning of every struggle*" reflects a process of self-reflection and personal evaluation. The phrase "*longing grows thicker*" symbolizes increasing emotional attachment over time, while "*dreams that remain beyond reach*" represent aspirations that have yet to be realized. In addition, the line "*the night sky becomes a faithful companion*" symbolizes solitude as a space for reflection rather than a simple description of time and setting.

Another poem reveals displacement of meaning through the use of emotionally charged symbols. The phrase "*prayers in their eyes*" does not function as a literal visual image but rather symbolizes affection, hope, and sincerity expressed by significant others. Similarly, "*whispering hope amid exhaustion*" represents continuous emotional support despite physical and psychological fatigue. The symbol "*light*" in the line "*the child they believe will bring light*" signifies success, transformation, and the promise of a better future. In this context, light functions as a symbol of achievement and liberation from hardship.

The third poem demonstrates displacement of meaning through the central symbol of a "*backpack*." Rather than serving merely as a travel accessory, the backpack symbolizes the burdens of life, including hopes, prayers, and

aspirations. The expression “*a backpack full of stories*” represents accumulated life experiences, while the phrase “*my steps remain light*” symbolizes perseverance and optimism despite numerous challenges. Likewise, “*a new place*” signifies a new stage of life characterized by uncertainty and adaptation.

The fourth poem illustrates displacement of meaning through natural imagery and physical conditions that symbolize the speaker’s emotional state. The expression “*days feel heavy*” represents psychological and emotional pressure rather than the literal passage of time. Similarly, “*stumbling steps*” symbolize a difficult struggle, while “*a weary heart*” reflects emotional exhaustion. The image “*cloudy skies covering the light*” signifies the loss of hope and direction, whereas “*storms*” symbolize recurring life challenges and obstacles.

Overall, the poems reveal that displacement of meaning is the most dominant form of indirect expression employed by the students. The frequent use of universal symbols such as stars, light, journeys, skies, storms, prayers, and backpacks indicates that students tend to construct meaning through familiar experiences and emotional reflections. These symbols enable abstract concepts—including hope, perseverance, longing, struggle, and self-development—to be communicated in a more poetic and aesthetically meaningful manner.

### **Distortion of Meaning**

The first poem demonstrates distortion of meaning through the use of diction and expressions that deviate from ordinary linguistic conventions, thereby creating semantic ambiguity. The phrase “*prayers keep walking*” departs from literal logic because prayers do not possess the physical ability to move. This deviation opens interpretive possibilities in which prayer is understood as a constant spiritual companion throughout the speaker’s life journey. Similarly, the statement “*silence is not an*

*enemy*” challenges the conventional perception of loneliness as a negative condition. Instead, solitude is reinterpreted as a space for self-reflection and personal growth. The expression “*being strong does not mean being without tears*” further distorts conventional notions of strength by redefining resilience as the capacity to endure despite emotional vulnerability.

The second poem exhibits distortion of meaning through expressions that depart from everyday linguistic logic. The phrase “*the night sky becomes a faithful companion*” is semantically unconventional because the sky cannot literally function as a companion. However, this distortion reinforces the intimate and personal experience of solitude. Likewise, the expression “*silent complaints without sound*” creates semantic tension because complaints are typically associated with vocal expression. In the poem, however, suffering is conveyed through silence rather than speech. The line “*these silent steps*” also attributes the quality of silence to movement, creating poetic ambiguity that suggests struggles often occur without recognition or public acknowledgment.

Another poem demonstrates distortion of meaning through linguistic constructions that challenge conventional semantic expectations. The phrases “*prayers in their eyes*” and “*hope whispered softly*” represent semantic distortions because prayers and hopes are abstract concepts that cannot literally be seen or heard. These deviations deepen the emotional resonance of the poem by transforming abstract feelings into vivid poetic images. Furthermore, the expression “*doubt that refuses to grow*” personifies doubt as something that can be restrained or controlled, thereby emphasizing the speaker’s internal conflict. The rhetorical question “*Am I strong enough to become that hope?*” functions not as a request for an answer but as an expression of anxiety and self-doubt.

The third poem presents distortion of meaning through figurative language that departs

from ordinary linguistic usage. The expressions “*a backpack full of stories*” and “*a backpack carrying hopes*” constitute semantic deviations because stories and hopes are intangible entities that cannot literally be placed inside a backpack. These distortions create metaphorical and personified meanings that enrich the poem’s symbolic dimension. Similarly, the line “*this small backpack is not merely an ordinary object*” shifts the reader’s attention from the backpack’s material function to its emotional and symbolic significance, representing the speaker’s experiences, aspirations, and personal journey.

The fourth poem reveals distortion of meaning through figurative expressions that challenge everyday logic. The phrase “*cloudy skies cover the light*” functions as a semantic deviation because light cannot be entirely concealed in a literal sense. Nevertheless, the expression effectively conveys feelings of despair and uncertainty. Likewise, “*strength collapses without a sound*” departs from the literal understanding of collapse as a physical and audible event, thereby symbolizing a silent process of emotional breakdown. The expression “*prayer became the place of support*” also represents a semantic distortion, as prayer is not a physical object upon which one can lean. Instead, it symbolizes spiritual reliance and emotional resilience. In addition, the repeated use of the conjunction “*however*” creates structural tension that reinforces the emotional struggle embedded within the poem.

Overall, distortion of meaning functions as an important strategy for enriching poetic expression in the students’ works. Through semantic deviations, personification, rhetorical questions, and unconventional imagery, students move beyond literal language and create broader interpretive possibilities. These distortions enable emotional experiences such as loneliness, uncertainty, struggle, and resilience to be expressed in a more imaginative and aesthetically powerful manner. The findings suggest that

although the students predominantly employ simple and familiar symbols, they have begun to demonstrate an emerging awareness of figurative language as a means of constructing deeper poetic meanings.

### Creation of Meaning

The first poem constructs meaning through repetition, line development, and the interconnected relationships among stanzas. The repeated phrase “*From afar, I learn*” functions as a structural device that intensifies the theme of continuous self-development. Each repetition expands the meaning of “*learning*” beyond mere endurance to encompass self-discovery, gratitude, and emotional maturity. Additional meaning is generated in the closing lines, “*May tomorrow come, and may I return not only as Anahan, but with a soul that has grown strong and peaceful.*” Here, the notion of “*returning home*” transcends its literal sense and acquires a symbolic dimension, representing spiritual growth and personal transformation. Consequently, the poem evolves from an expression of longing and distance into a reflection on self-realization and resilience.

The second poem develops meaning progressively through the relationships among its stanzas. The opening stanza introduces an internal conflict between longing and aspiration, while the following stanza deepens the sense of isolation through symbols such as the night, a pen, and coffee. The final stanza adds a layer of optimism and determination, thereby transforming the emotional trajectory of the poem. Repeated references to moving forward and sustaining hope reinforce the theme of perseverance. The culmination of this meaning-making process appears in the line “*every tear is a seed of a bright future.*” In this context, tears, which conventionally symbolize sadness, are reinterpreted as the beginning of growth and possibility. The symbol of a “*seed*” further expands the meaning of suffering as a productive

process that ultimately leads toward future achievement.

The third poem generates meaning through a gradual development from beginning to end. Initially, the poem presents “them” as figures of sacrifice, support, and expectation. The middle section introduces the speaker’s internal struggle, particularly the burden of fulfilling these expectations. Meaning is further enriched through the recurring motif of prayer, especially in the line “*I always accompany it with a small prayer.*” Whereas prayer initially originates from “them,” it later becomes the speaker’s own response, thereby establishing a reciprocal spiritual relationship between those who hope and the one entrusted with those hopes. The closing line, “*May I never disappoint such a great love,*” adds a dimension of moral and emotional responsibility, transforming love from a mere feeling into a commitment that must be honored.

The fourth poem constructs meaning through the repeated symbol of the “backpack” and the progressive expansion of its significance across stanzas. At the beginning, the backpack is introduced as a container of stories and dreams. Subsequent stanzas enrich its meaning by presenting it as a symbol of determination and commitment. Through repeated references, the backpack gradually evolves from a travel-related metaphor into the central symbol of the poem. This symbolic development reaches its culmination in the closing line, “*becoming a source of strength throughout a long and difficult journey.*” As a result, the poem expands the meaning of travel from physical movement to an ongoing process of personal growth and self-formation.

The fifth poem develops meaning through a movement from darkness toward hope. The opening stanza portrays vulnerability and exhaustion, while subsequent stanzas gradually introduce resilience through the belief that every storm will eventually pass. Recurrent references

to fragility, pauses, and endurance add layers of meaning that redefine weakness as an integral part of personal growth. This idea is particularly evident in the line “*Days when I am not always strong are not signs that my soul has been defeated.*” Here, vulnerability is interpreted not as failure but as a valuable learning experience. The closing line, “*until tomorrow arrives with hope,*” further extends the meaning of time as a space for healing, renewal, and new possibilities. Consequently, the poem moves beyond suffering and concludes with a sense of optimism and perseverance.

Overall, creation of meaning in the students’ poems is primarily achieved through repetition, thematic progression, and the interconnected development of ideas across stanzas. Unlike displacement and distortion of meaning, which rely heavily on symbols and figurative expressions, creation of meaning emerges from the structural organization of the poems themselves. This process allows meanings to evolve gradually, leading readers from emotional conflict toward reflection, resilience, and hope. The findings suggest that students are capable of constructing coherent poetic narratives in which meaning develops progressively rather than remaining static throughout the text.

The primary data of this study consisted of 20 poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan. All poems were analyzed using Michael Riffaterre’s semiotic framework through heuristic and hermeneutic readings to identify forms of indirect expression, namely displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning.

The findings indicate that most students demonstrated an emerging ability to employ poetic language through the use of symbols, metaphors, personification, and imagery to express emotional experiences. The most frequently occurring symbols included the sky, stars, light, prayers, backpacks, roads, storms, tears, and hope. These symbols generally

represented life struggles, longing for family, optimism, perseverance, responsibility, and aspirations for a better future. The predominance of such universal symbols suggests that the students' poetic creativity was largely rooted in personal and emotional experiences rather than collective social experiences.

Among the three forms of indirect expression, displacement of meaning emerged as the most dominant pattern. Students frequently relied on symbols and metaphors to transform abstract emotions into poetic representations. Distortion of meaning appeared through personification, semantic ambiguity, and unconventional expressions that expanded interpretive possibilities, whereas creation of meaning was achieved through repetition, stanzaic development, and the interrelationship of poetic elements. These findings indicate that the students possessed a foundational ability to construct poetic meaning, although the complexity of their figurative language varied considerably.

Furthermore, several poems reflected elements of North Kalimantan's local wisdom, particularly values related to hard work, educational migration, family attachment, environmental awareness, and aspects of coastal community life. Nevertheless, these cultural representations generally appeared implicitly and did not constitute the dominant thematic focus of most poems. Overall, the students' works were more strongly characterized by personal reflection than by explicit representations of local cultural identity.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the construction of poetic meaning in students' poems is predominantly achieved through the mechanism of indirect expression, as proposed in Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory. Meanings are not conveyed explicitly; rather, they are mediated through symbols, metaphors, and

interrelated signs that require deeper interpretation. This pattern was consistently observed across the poems analyzed, particularly through the use of displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning as the primary strategies for expressing inner experiences.

The findings further demonstrate that students have begun to employ figurative language intuitively to represent emotional struggles, including longing, exhaustion, hope, and moral responsibility. Displacement of meaning was primarily realized through symbols closely associated with everyday experiences, such as light, storms, journeys, backpacks, prayers, and tears. These symbols no longer functioned in their literal sense but were transformed into representations of the lyrical speaker's psychological and spiritual conditions. This pattern suggests that students' poetic expressions were largely rooted in personal experiences that were subsequently transformed into symbolic language.

From the perspective of Riffaterre's theory, distortion of meaning functions as an important device for enhancing poetic effects. Expressions that appear logically unconventional, such as prayers that "walk," loneliness that "becomes a teacher," or tears that serve as "seeds," create broader interpretive possibilities for readers. These semantic deviations should not be viewed as linguistic deficiencies; rather, they signify the students' engagement with literary language, where departures from ordinary linguistic conventions become meaningful strategies for poetic expression. This finding supports Riffaterre's argument that linguistic deviation constitutes one of the defining characteristics of poetic discourse as a semiotic system.

Creation of meaning was observed through the repetition of lines, the progressive development of ideas across stanzas, and reflective closing sections. Poetic meanings did

not remain fixed within a single event or emotion but evolved gradually toward deeper levels of understanding. This pattern suggests that students have developed an emerging awareness of poetic structure by organizing their poems around emotional conflicts that ultimately lead to acceptance, hope, or conviction. Consequently, poetry functions not only as a medium of emotional expression but also as a space for self-reflection and personal growth.

Compared with previous studies that have characterized students' poetry as predominantly descriptive and direct, the present findings indicate a more advanced tendency toward symbolic and implicit meaning construction. The students' poems were not entirely narrative or literal in nature; rather, they incorporated symbolic representations and layers of meaning that required interpretation. Nevertheless, the symbols employed remained largely universal and generalized, limiting their capacity to represent specific socio-cultural contexts. This finding suggests that personal experiences exert a stronger influence on students' poetic creativity than collective cultural experiences.

Several poems also reflected elements of North Kalimantan's local wisdom, particularly values associated with perseverance, educational aspirations, family attachment, environmental awareness, and aspects of coastal community life. However, these cultural elements generally appeared in implicit forms and did not emerge as dominant themes throughout the poems. The limited representation of local wisdom indicates that students tend to draw more heavily on personal emotional experiences than on cultural narratives in the construction of poetic meaning.

Based on these findings, it can be argued that poetry-writing instruction has successfully encouraged students to develop reflective and symbolic thinking. However, considerable opportunities remain for strengthening the integration of local cultural contexts and environmental experiences as sources of poetic

inspiration. The application of Riffaterre's semiotic framework has demonstrated its effectiveness in uncovering deeper layers of meaning within students' poems while providing a robust theoretical foundation for the development of literary learning in schools. Furthermore, integrating local wisdom into poetry instruction may contribute not only to students' literary competence but also to the preservation and transmission of regional cultural values through creative expression.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of 20 poems written by eighth-grade students of Madrasah Hurrasul Aqidah Tarakan using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, it can be concluded that poetic meaning is primarily constructed through indirect expression in the forms of displacement of meaning, distortion of meaning, and creation of meaning. These three mechanisms constitute a consistent pattern of meaning-making within the students' poems, demonstrating that poetic messages are conveyed not through direct statements but through symbols, metaphors, personification, and interconnected signs that represent emotional experiences such as struggle, longing, loneliness, exhaustion, responsibility, and hope.

Among the three forms of indirect expression, displacement of meaning emerged as the most dominant. Students frequently employed universal symbols, including light, prayers, stars, the sky, journeys, storms, backpacks, and tears, to represent abstract concepts such as perseverance, aspiration, responsibility, and personal growth. Distortion of meaning was reflected in the use of semantically unconventional expressions that enhanced poetic effects and broadened interpretive possibilities, whereas creation of meaning was achieved through repetition, thematic progression, and the structural development of ideas across stanzas. These findings indicate that the students had developed

an initial capacity to construct poetic meanings through figurative language and symbolic representation.

The study also revealed that the poems were predominantly rooted in personal experiences rather than in specific socio-cultural representations. Although elements of North Kalimantan's local wisdom appeared through themes of hard work, educational aspiration, family attachment, and environmental awareness, such cultural values were generally expressed implicitly and did not constitute the dominant focus of the poems. This finding suggests that students tend to draw more heavily on personal emotional experiences than on collective cultural narratives when constructing poetic meaning.

Theoretically, the findings confirm the relevance of Riffaterre's semiotic framework for examining meaning construction in students' poetry. Practically, the study highlights the importance of strengthening poetry-writing instruction by encouraging students to integrate local cultural contexts and regional wisdom into their creative works. Such an approach may contribute not only to the development of literary competence but also to the preservation and transmission of local cultural values through poetic expression. Future studies are encouraged to explore broader cultural representations in students' literary works and to investigate instructional strategies that promote the integration of local wisdom into creative writing practices.

## 5. REFERENCE

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