



Representamen, Object, and Interpretant: A Peircean Approach to Traffic Signs in Pondok Indah

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Abstract

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This research aims to analyze the semiotic meaning of traffic signs in Pondok Indah, Jakarta, using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of representamen, object, and interpretant. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method with data collected through observation, photographs, and Google Maps. A total of 21 traffic signs were examined. The findings reveal that each sign reflects Peirce's semiotic elements and most function as legisigns regulated by Indonesian traffic law, while their interpretation depends on visual conventions and public awareness.

Keyword: *Semiotics, Peirce, Traffic Signs, Pondok Indah*

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INTRODUCTION

Traffic signs represent one of the most important forms of nonverbal communication in public spaces. They are designed not only to deliver technical information to road users, but also to function as symbolic systems that convey meaning, regulate behavior, and ensure safety. As visual markers, traffic signs carry messages that must be interpreted correctly to prevent miscommunication on the road. Setiawan (2019) emphasizes that traffic signs can be regarded as a visual language of the road, enabling drivers and pedestrians to share a common understanding of rules and warnings. Without proper interpretation, however, the intended function of these signs cannot be achieved.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of traffic signs is governed by the Ministry of Transportation through Regulation No. PM 13 of 2014. This regulation standardizes the placement, design, and classification of traffic signs to ensure uniformity across the country. Despite such strict regulations, violations and misinterpretations remain a persistent issue. Reports by Korlantas Polri (2022) highlight that a significant proportion of road accidents are caused by drivers' failure to recognize or obey traffic signs. This indicates that the effectiveness of traffic signs depends not only on their legal authority but also on how they are semiotically understood and socially practiced by road users.

Semiotics, as the study of signs and meaning-making, provides a suitable theoretical framework to analyze how traffic signs function as communicative symbols. Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of representamen, object, and interpretant has been widely applied to explore the process of signification beyond the surface level of symbols. Unlike Saussure's dyadic model, which focuses on the relation between the signifier and the signified, Peirce's framework highlights

the interpretative process that occurs between the sign and its interpreter (Chandler, 2017). Recent studies have shown the relevance of Peircean semiotics in analyzing visual communication, including safety symbols, public signs, and urban semiotic landscapes (Yuliana, 2021; Putri, 2020). These studies demonstrate that signs can simultaneously function as icons, indices, and symbols, depending on the interpretative context.

The selection of Pondok Indah, South Jakarta, as the research site is based on its status as a commercial and residential hub with heavy traffic density. The area attracts a diverse group of road users, including private vehicle owners, motorcyclists, public transportation drivers, and pedestrians. This heterogeneity increases the likelihood of multiple interpretations of traffic signs. Previous research (e.g., Yuliana, 2021) suggests that social background, driving habits, and cultural factors influence how drivers interpret traffic symbols. Therefore, examining the semiotic dimension of traffic signs in Pondok Indah provides valuable insight into the intersection of law, communication, and social practice.

The objective of this study is to analyze the meaning of traffic signs in Pondok Indah using Peirce's semiotic framework. Specifically, it aims to identify how traffic signs function as representamen, object, and interpretant, and to determine their classification as legisigns, icons, indices, or symbols. By doing so, the study contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it extends the application of Peirce's semiotics to traffic communication, a field that remains underexplored. Practically, it offers insights for traffic policymakers and educators to enhance public awareness of traffic signs and improve compliance with traffic regulations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the semiotic meaning of traffic signs in Pondok Indah, South Jakarta. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the research was not to measure variables statistically but to explore the interpretative processes involved in reading traffic symbols. As Creswell and Poth (2018) argue, qualitative research is effective when the objective is to understand how individuals or communities construct meaning from signs and cultural artifacts. Within this framework, Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model representamen, object, and interpretant was applied as the main analytical tool to interpret the data. The data of this study consisted of visual documentation of traffic signs located along Jalan Raya Metro Pondok Indah, a site selected due to its high traffic intensity and the diversity of its road users. A total of 21 signs were identified as the unit of analysis, covering several categories such as regulatory, warning, and guidance signs. These visual data were complemented by secondary sources, including the Ministry of Transportation Regulation No. PM 13 of 2014 as the legal framework, as well as relevant scholarly literature. Data were collected primarily through direct field observation and photographic documentation, which enabled the researcher to capture the physical form, location, and condition of each sign.

To strengthen the accuracy of the documentation, Google Maps Street View was also used as a complementary source to verify visibility and spatial placement. As Flick (2018) highlights, combining multiple sources and methods enhances the credibility of qualitative research by reducing the possibility of bias that may result from relying on a single approach. The process of data analysis followed Peirce's semiotic framework in which every sign was interpreted based on its representamen (the physical form such as color, shape, and symbol), its object (the concept or instruction it refers to), and its interpretant (the meaning understood by the road user). Through this triadic analysis, the researcher categorized the signs according to whether they functioned primarily as icons, indices, or symbols. The analytic process also followed the stages suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In this study, data reduction was achieved by focusing only on signs relevant to the research objectives, data display was organized through descriptive notes and visual documentation, and conclusion drawing involved interpreting the relationship between representamen, object, and

interpretant in each sign.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was pursued by cross-checking data from observation, photographs, and online sources, thereby ensuring that the findings reflected the actual conditions of the site. Dependability was addressed by consistently documenting research procedures to ensure that the study could be replicated in similar contexts. Confirmability was achieved through transparent presentation of data and analysis, minimizing the researcher's subjective influence. These measures are consistent with the standards of qualitative rigor discussed by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), who argue that methodological transparency is essential in establishing the validity of qualitative inquiry. By applying these procedures, the methodology of this study ensured that the findings could be considered trustworthy, systematic, and academically reliable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Peirce's semiotic theory provides the main framework for analyzing the traffic signs identified in Pondok Indah. A sign, according to Peirce, consists of a triadic relationship between the **representamen** (the form of the sign), the **object** (what the sign refers to), and the **interpretant** (the meaning constructed by the observer). Meaning, therefore, is not inherent in the sign itself but emerges through interpretation within a particular social and cultural context (Chandler, 2017; Danesi, 2018). In addition to the triadic model, Peirce classified signs into **icon**, **index**, and **symbol**. Traffic signs generally operate as **symbols**, since their meanings are determined by social convention and legal authority rather than by resemblance or causal connection. Peirce also introduced the category of **Legisigns**, which refers to conventional signs established by law. In the case of traffic management, all traffic signs in Indonesia qualify as legisigns because they are legitimized by the Ministry of Transportation and carry binding legal consequences for non-compliance (Liu & Li, 2019; Rahardjo & Dewi, 2021).

This theoretical foundation is crucial for examining how traffic signs in Pondok Indah communicate rules and guidance to road users. By applying Peirce's framework, the analysis emphasizes not only the visual elements of the signs but also the way these elements are interpreted and acted upon in everyday road practices. The field research identified **21 traffic signs** along Jalan Metro Pondok Indah, South Jakarta. Referring to the Regulation of the Minister of Transportation No. PM 13 of 2014, these signs can be grouped into five categories: six prohibition signs, four warning signs, three mandatory signs, six informational signs, and two additional boards. The semiotic analysis revealed that all of these signs function as legisigns, while their interpretants predominantly operate as **arguments**, logically guiding drivers toward appropriate traffic behavior. The classification is presented in the following table.

Table 1

Table. Classification of Traffic Signs in Pondok Indah Area

Category	Data Found	Examples
Prohibition Signs	6	No Parking, No U-turn
Warning Signs	4	Pedestrian Crossing, Clearance Height
Mandatory Signs	3	Following Roundabout, Follow the left
Directional Signs	6	Hospital Location, The Preliminary Direct for the Intended Direction
Additional Bords	2	Specific Directional Explanations

(Source: Field Observation, 2024; Ministry of Transportation, 2014)

The prevalence of prohibition signs in Pondok Indah highlights their critical role in

regulating traffic behavior within densely populated urban areas. Common examples, such as No Parking and No U-turn signs, are strategically placed to prevent congestion and maintain orderly movement. In terms of Peirce's semiotic model, the representamen of these signs—the red circular board with a diagonal line—represents the object, which is the prohibited action, while the interpretant is manifested as drivers' cognitive recognition that the action is not permitted (Chandler, 2017). Studies have consistently indicated that prohibition signs are essential tools for controlling vehicular behavior, enhancing compliance, and reducing the risk of accidents in busy traffic environments (Nugroho & Santosa, 2020; Widyastuti, 2022).

Despite their visibility and standardized design, prohibition signs are sometimes disregarded by drivers, revealing a cultural or behavioral gap between formal regulations and actual compliance. From a Peircean perspective, this demonstrates that while the interpretant is logically inferred from the representamen and object, it does not always translate into intended action unless reinforced through social, legal, or contextual mechanisms (Danesi, 2018). Therefore, the effectiveness of prohibition signs depends not only on their physical design but also on enforcement, public awareness, and the broader semiotic environment in which road users interpret these visual directives. This dynamic underscores the importance of integrating legal, cognitive, and social dimensions in traffic management strategies.



Figure 1

Prohibition sign: No Parking in Pondok Indah area.

Source: Ministry of Transportation Republic of Indonesia, PM 13/2014.

Warning signs serve a critical preventive function by alerting drivers to potential hazards on the road, allowing them to anticipate risks and adjust their behavior accordingly. Common examples include the Pedestrian Crossing, Traffic Light Ahead, and Sharp Turn signs, which are typically presented as yellow diamond-shaped markers to capture attention quickly. From a Peircean semiotic perspective, the representamen of these signs—the visual features such as color, shape, and pictogram directly signifies the object, which is the specific road hazard. The interpretant emerges as the driver's cognitive and behavioral response, often manifesting as heightened alertness, reduced speed, or increased caution (Chandler, 2017). Studies have demonstrated that the proper deployment and comprehension of warning signs significantly contribute to reducing traffic accidents, particularly in high-risk locations such as intersections and areas with heavy pedestrian activity (Rahardjo & Dewi, 2021; Kusuma & Hidayat, 2019).

In the context of Pondok Indah, the strategic placement of pedestrian crossing signs near schools, shopping centers, and recreational facilities exemplifies how traffic signs function not merely as regulatory markers but as socially communicative tools. By signaling potential dangers to drivers and facilitating the safe passage of vulnerable road users, these signs perform an essential role in public safety (Setiawan, 2019). The semiotic interaction between the representamen, object, and interpretant emphasizes that the effectiveness of warning signs depends on both their visual design and the social and cognitive context of the observer (Yuliana, 2021). This dual function practical and symbolic reinforces the notion that traffic signs operate within a broader communicative ecosystem, bridging technical information with socially mediated behavioral

expectations (Putri, 2020).



Figure 2
Warning sign: Pedestrian Crossing

Source: Ministry of Transportation Republic of Indonesia, PM 13/2014.

Mandatory signs serve to instruct drivers to perform specific actions, such as Turn Left, Go Straight, or maintain a Minimum Speed, thereby ensuring compliance with traffic regulations. These signs are typically presented as blue circular markers with white pictograms, symbolizing commands rather than prohibitions. From a Peircean semiotic perspective, the representamen consists of the circular board and pictogram, which signifies the object, namely the required action. The interpretant is the driver's cognitive recognition that adherence to the indicated directive is mandatory (Chandler, 2017). Such signs are especially critical at intersections and high-traffic zones, where following designated paths is necessary to maintain orderly movement and prevent traffic conflicts. Previous research highlights that although mandatory signs are sometimes overlooked by drivers, they play a central role in regulating traffic flow and minimizing the risk of accidents resulting from irregular maneuvers (Pradana, 2019; Sari, 2020).

In Pondok Indah, the strategic placement of mandatory signs ensures that drivers follow predetermined routes, contributing to a stable and predictable traffic environment even amidst high congestion. The semiotic interaction between representamen, object, and interpretant emphasizes that the effectiveness of these signs relies not only on their legal and regulatory status but also on drivers' perceptual and interpretative processes. By interpreting mandatory signs correctly, drivers are able to coordinate their movements with others, which fosters safety and efficiency in urban traffic systems. This dual dimension—practical enforcement and semiotic communication underscores the importance of integrating cognitive and social perspectives in traffic management (Setiawan, 2019; Yuliana, 2021).



Figure 3
Mandatory sign: Turn Left at intersection in Pondok Indah area.

Source: Ministry of Transportation Republic of Indonesia, PM 13/2014.

Informational signs play a supportive role in assisting drivers to navigate and orient themselves within urban environments. Common examples include the Hospital, U-turn Allowed,

and Parking Area signs, which are typically displayed as blue rectangular boards with white pictograms. In Peirce's semiotic framework, the representamen comprises the visual features of the sign, while the object represents the specific facility, service, or permitted action being indicated. The interpretant arises as the driver's cognitive understanding and awareness of available services or navigational options (Chandler, 2017). By providing clear and accessible information, these signs help reduce hesitation, uncertainty, and errors in route choice, contributing to smoother traffic flow and enhanced safety (Rahardjo & Dewi, 2021; Hidayati, 2018).

In Pondok Indah, the placement of informational signs is particularly strategic, reflecting the area's dense and multifaceted urban landscape where residential, commercial, and public service zones intersect. For instance, hospital signs enable drivers and pedestrians to locate nearby healthcare facilities quickly in case of emergencies, demonstrating the critical social function of traffic signs beyond mere regulation. The semiotic interaction among representamen, object, and interpretant highlights that the effectiveness of informational signs depends on both visual clarity and the user's ability to interpret the message accurately within a complex traffic and social context (Yuliana, 2021; Putri, 2020). Consequently, informational signs not only guide vehicular movement but also serve as communicative tools that integrate infrastructure with the social needs of road users.



Figure 4

Figure 4. Informational sign: *Hospital indicator on Jalan Metro Pondok Indah.*

Source: Ministry of Transportation Republic of Indonesia, PM 13/2014.

Additional boards function as supplementary elements that enhance or clarify the meaning of the main traffic sign. Typical examples include the Towing sign and the Hospital Direction Arrow, which are usually rectangular and placed directly beneath the primary sign. Within Peirce's semiotic framework, these boards serve as secondary representamen, elaborating on the object of the primary sign and producing a more precise interpretant in the driver's mind (Chandler, 2017). For instance, a towing board reinforces the no-parking regulation by signaling potential punitive consequences, while a hospital arrow provides clear directional guidance to nearby healthcare facilities. These auxiliary boards therefore play a crucial role in reducing ambiguity and ensuring that the intended message of the primary sign is accurately conveyed (Setiawan, 2020).

In Pondok Indah, the strategic deployment of additional boards reflects the government's effort to integrate clarity and precision into traffic communication. By specifying or emphasizing the main sign's meaning, these boards improve driver comprehension and contribute to safer traffic behavior. The semiotic interaction between primary and secondary representamen illustrates how traffic signs operate as a layered communicative system, where meaning is co-constructed through visual cues, contextual understanding, and social conventions. Consequently, additional boards are not merely informational; they are essential tools for minimizing misinterpretation and maintaining the effectiveness of urban traffic management (Yuliana, 2021; Putri, 2020).



Figure 5.
Additional board: Towing sign placed below a prohibition sign.

Source: Freepik via Yahoo Image Search (accessed Aug 23, 2025)

Overall, the findings suggest that traffic signs in Pondok Indah are not merely regulatory tools but semiotic systems that balance restriction, prevention, obligation, guidance, and clarification. The prevalence of prohibition and informational signs reflects a dual emphasis on enforcing compliance and facilitating mobility. Warning and mandatory signs, though fewer in number, perform critical roles in prevention and direction, while additional boards ensure precision of meaning. These results are consistent with previous research highlighting that traffic signs in Indonesia function both as instruments of law and as communicative devices embedded in cultural contexts (Chandler, 2017; Liu & Li, 2019). By applying Peirce's triadic model, this study demonstrates that traffic signs operate as cultural codes that mediate the relationship between legal authority and road users' everyday practices.

CONCLUSION

This research analyzed 21 traffic signs found along Jalan Metro Pondok Indah, South Jakarta, through the lens of Peirce's semiotic theory. The signs were classified into five categories based on the Regulation of the Minister of Transportation No. PM 13 of 2014: six prohibition signs, four warning signs, three mandatory signs, six informational signs, and two additional boards. The semiotic analysis indicated that all signs function as legisigns, reflecting their legal authority, and their interpretants primarily take the form of arguments, which logically guide drivers toward expected traffic behavior.

The results show that prohibition signs are the most dominant, highlighting the importance of traffic regulation in managing urban congestion. Informational signs also play a crucial role in providing direction and access to public services, while warning and mandatory signs ensure preventive safety and regulated movement. Additional boards, though few, enhance clarity and strengthen the communicative function of the main signs.

Overall, this study confirms that traffic signs in Indonesia operate not merely as physical markers but as semiotic systems that mediate between government regulation and road users' social practices. The application of Peirce's framework demonstrates how visual communication, when reinforced by legal authority, shapes driver interpretation and behavior. This finding underlines the need for both effective design and consistent enforcement to improve traffic safety and compliance in urban contexts.

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