



## Politeness in the Toba Batak Ethnic Panaekkon Saring-Saring Ceremony: Normative Study

Murni Simarmata<sup>1</sup>, Flansius Tampubolon<sup>2</sup>, Yustina Jindi Lusmيران Simamora<sup>3</sup>,  
Hod Burju Pakpahan<sup>4</sup>, Dion Nardi Pangaribuan<sup>5</sup>

<sup>12345</sup>Prodi Sastra Batak, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

E-mail: [murnisimarmata@students.usu.ac.id](mailto:murnisimarmata@students.usu.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

The Panaekkon Saring-saring ceremony in the Toba Batak community is part of a diverse and unique set of traditional ceremonies. This study aims to uncover and explore in detail the values of politeness embodied in the Panaekkon Sapada ceremony performed by the Toba Batak community, using a normative study approach. The Panaekkon Saring-saring ceremony is a ritual for moving and re-placing the bones of saur matua, revered ancestors. This study employed a literature review method, examining various literature, including books, scientific articles, and previous research related to norms of politeness, traditional communication, and social ethics in the Toba Batak community. The normative approach was used to examine how traditional values serve as the basis for expected behavior in social interactions and traditional communication that occur during the ceremony. The results show that politeness and courtesy in the Panaekkon Saring-saring ceremony have profound meaning, reflected not only in speech but also in attitudes, actions, and the use of traditional symbols. From a linguistic perspective, politeness is evident in the use of formal, orderly, and respectful traditional language for the structure of family relationships (partuturon). Meanwhile, politeness is also reflected in the solemn attitude of the Tor-tor, as well as the ability to control emotions and maintain respect for the sanctity of ancestral graves. Thus, politeness and courtesy in the Panaekkon Saring-Saring Ceremony are not only elements of cultural aesthetics but also constitute the cultural aesthetic.

*Keywords: politeness, Toba Batak etnik, Panaekkon Saring-Saring, normative study*

## Kesopansantunan dalam Upacara Panaekkon Saring-Saring Etnik Batak Toba: Kajian Normatif

### ABSTRAK

Upacara Panaekkon Saring-Saring dalam Kematian Batak Toba adalah bagian dari berbagai prosesi adat yang sangat berbeda dan unik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membuka dan mengeksplorasi secara rinci nilai-nilai sopan santun yang terkandung dalam Upacara Panaekkon Saring-saring yang dilakukan oleh masyarakat Batak Toba yang menggunakan pendekatan kajian normatif. Upacara Panaekkon Saring saring adalah ritual untuk memindahkan dan menempatkan kembali tulang belulang leluhur saur matua, yaitu nenek moyang yang dihormati. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan mempelajari berbagai literatur seperti buku, artikel ilmiah, dan hasil penelitian sebelumnya yang berkaitan dengan norma kesopanan, komunikasi adat, dan etika sosial masyarakat Batak Toba. Pendekatan normatif digunakan untuk melihat nilai-nilai adat berperan sebagai dasar perilaku yang diharapkan dalam interaksi sosial dan komunikasi adat yang terjadi selama upacara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sikap sopan dan santun dalam upacara Panaekkon Saring-Saring memiliki arti yang sangat dalam, tidak hanya terlihat dari cara berbicara, tetapi juga dari sikap, tindakan, serta simbol-simbol adat yang digunakan. Dari sudut pandang linguistik, kesopanan terlihat dari penggunaan bahasa adat yang resmi, teratur, dan penuh rasa hormat terhadap struktur hubungan keluarga (partuturon). SemenPenatar itu, kesantunan juga tergambar dalam sikap khidmat Tor-tor, serta kemampuan mengendalikan emosi dan menjaga rasa hormat terhadap kekudusan makam leluhur. Dengan demikian, kesopanan dan santunan dalam Upacara Panaekkon Saring-Saring tidak hanya menjadi unsur estetika budaya, tetapi juga menjadi unsur estetika budaya.

*Kata kunci: kesopansantunan, Penaekkon Saring-Saring, etnik Batak Toba, kajian normatif*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Toba Batak people are renowned as one of Indonesia's ethnic groups that consistently upholds its traditions and culture (Naully et al., 2022). Their social life, family relationships, and daily interactions are heavily influenced by the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy, a sacred and inseparable social system. This philosophy regulates the roles and reciprocal relationships between three main pillars: Hula-Hula (those who give wives), Dongan Tubu (those from the same clan), and Boru (those who receive wives) (in Dalihan Na Tolu Culture as a Bridge between Theology and Culture\*, Zulkarnain et al., 2023). Adherence to this system is crucial for achieving social harmony, as even the slightest violation can disrupt the balance within the community. In this regard, traditional ceremonies serve not only as rituals but also as a means to reinforce this order, making them a subject rich in values and norms worthy of study.

One of the most important and significant ceremonies in Toba Batak culture is the Panaekkon Saring-Saring Ceremony, often referred to as Panangkokhon Saring-Saring tu Batu Na Pir, or a fundamental part of Mangongkal Holi (Putri Dinda et al., 2023). This event is a sacred ritual involving the transfer and re-entry of the bones (saring-saring) of deceased ancestors into a magnificent family tomb structure, such as a monument or pond. Fundamentally, this ritual represents the highest form of respect from the living generation to ancestors who have attained the status of saur matua, that is, having died after seeing grandchildren, both sons and daughters, and serves as a symbol of prestige, success, and unity for the entire clan (Santa Jojo Banjarnahor et al., 2024). This massive event requires the presence of family members, mobilizes extraordinary resources, and involves the management of highly complex social relationships.

Considering the complexity of the interactions and the numerous parties involved, the success of the Panaekkon Saring Saring Ceremony depends heavily on the ability of each individual and group

to adhere to established communication norms. In the context of Toba Batak culture, these norms are embodied in the principles of politeness and expression governed by the partuturon (kinship system) (Sitanggang et al., 2025). Politeness is not merely etiquette, but rather a shared ethic that governs how a person speaks (word choice, intonation, and language type), behaves, and acts toward the Hula-hula, Boru, or Dongan Tubu (Mislikhah, 2014). Adherence to these principles of politeness ensures that the objectives of the ritual can be achieved humorously by attending to disputes or tarhirim (hurt feelings) that can damage long-established family relationships.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the historical background, music, or sociological role of Toba Batak traditional rituals, few have delved deeply into the normative aspects of politeness that integrate verbal and social interactions (Yodi et al., n.d.). Most studies tend to focus on describing rituals or their structural functions. This gap ignores the fact that the core of traditional parsoaran (social interaction) lies in how ethical values are transformed into communication guidelines that govern participants. Therefore, comprehensive research is needed to uncover the framework of rules or ethical principles that form the basis for politeness practices during the crucial moments of the Panaekkon Saring-saring Ceremony.

This research uses a normative approach as its methodological basis (Sri Maryati et al., 2024). This approach is highly appropriate because it allows researchers to examine a phenomenon in this context: politeness in interactions based on norms, rules, and ideal values (das sollen), rather than solely focusing on what actually happens (das sein). The normative study will investigate how the customs embedded in the Toba Batak partuturon and podah (advice) serve as a reference for communication behavior considered ethical, particularly in situations of customary negotiation, giving honorific greetings, or distributing customary inheritance (jambar) that occur during ceremonies.



Based on the problem context described, this study aims to: (1) identify and explain in detail the various types of politeness and verbal and non-verbal behaviors regulated in the Upacra Panaekkon Saring-saring. (2) Analyze the role and function of existing norms in maintaining harmony, dignity, and the smooth running of traditional ceremonies; and (3) Describe the impact of adherence to and violation of norms of politeness within the framework of the social ethics of the Toba Batak people.

Theoretically, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the field of cultural pragmatics and social ethics, particularly in understanding the relationship between rigid kinship structures and the flexibility of ethical oral communication (Hidayah, 2024). Practically, the results of this research can serve as an important reference for the younger generation of Toba Batak and traditional leaders in preserving norms of politeness, ensuring that the essence of the noble values inherited from their ancestors remains alive and relevant in contemporary traditional practices. Thus, the Panaekkon Saring-Saring Ceremony can continue to be the highest expression of a civilized and orderly culture.

### **1. Forms of Politeness and Courtesy in the Panaekkon Saring-saring Ceremony**

The Panaekkon Saring-saring ceremony demonstrates politeness and courtesy not only through the words used, but also through the structure, tone of voice, traditional symbols, and the manner in which criticism or sarcasm is delivered while maintaining the honor of others. In general, the types of politeness and courtesy used in this ceremony can be categorized into one of the following.

#### **1.1 Politeness During the Panakkok Saring-saring (Bone-bone) Ceremony**

Politeness during the Panangkok Saring-saring/Mangokkal Holi (raising the bones) ceremony is the highest form of respect for ancestors and must be performed solemnly and orderly. The

primary interaction is maintaining silence and purity in the grave area. The Boru (daughters-in-law and their descendants) play a key role in politely cleaning the bones without showing disgust, as a symbol of devotion and loyalty. Apart from that, the family is expected to control excessive wailing (andung), follow the directions of religious leaders so that the procession remains focused on prayer, the blessing of the Hula-hula (wife-giving family), and gratitude for the dignity (Hasangapon) that has been achieved by the ancestors.

#### **1.2 The Harmony of Language Choice and Custom-Bound Speech Style During the Panaekkon Saring-saring Ceremony**

The language and speech style chosen during the Panaekkon Saring-saring/Mangokkal Holi ceremony are closely tied to Toba Batak customary norms and demonstrate the sacredness of the event. All interactions use formal and structured Toba Batak language, eschewing everyday language. The speech style is characterized by the use of mandatory kinship terms (such as Tulang, Nantulang, Amangboru, Boru, Haha-Anggi), as well as sentences filled with customary expressions (Hata Adat) and requests for blessings (Pasu-pasu). The delivery must be polite and orderly (tipak) in accordance with protocol. The Hula-hula is always given priority to deliver prayers and blessings in a nurturing tone, while the Hasuhuton (host) speaks with a humble and respectful intonation (Somba), reflecting absolute adherence to the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy.

#### **3. Modesty in Dance (Tor-tor) during the Panaekkon Saring-saring Ceremony**

The decorum in the Tor-tor Dance during the Panangkok Saring-saring/Mangokkal Holi ceremony is a visual manifestation of the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy. This dance must be performed solemnly, slowly, and gracefully, avoiding vulgar or excessively energetic movements, as its purpose is to convey prayer and gratitude. The hand positions during the dance reflect the highest level of

decorum: the Hula-hula dance with their palms facing down, symbolizing the bestowal of blessings (pasu-pasu) upon their descendants; the Hasuhuton and Boru dance with their palms facing up, symbolizing the request and acceptance of blessings; meanwhile, when dancing with the Dongan Tubu, their hands are held parallel as a symbol of unity and equality (manat mardongan tubu), ensuring that every Tor-tor movement affirms the hierarchy and harmony of kinship.

## 2. The Function of Politeness and Courtesy in the Panaekkon Saring-saring Ceremony

The function of politeness and courtesy in the Panangkok Saring-saring/Mangokkal Holi ceremony is to serve as a foundation for social and spiritual ethics to uphold customary order. Politeness, manifested through respect (Somba) for the Hula-hula, caution (Manat) for the Dongan Tubu, and nurturing (Elek) for the Boru, ensures that each party carries out their role without conflict, thus achieving harmony (Hasadaon). Furthermore, this politeness is an absolute prerequisite for descendants to be worthy of receiving blessings (Pasu-pasu)—in the form of wealth (Hamoraon) and descendants (Hagabeon)—and affirms the dignity (Hasangapon) of the ancestors whose remains are elevated to a more noble place.

## METHOD

This research uses a literature review method to analyze politeness norms in Batak society (Simarmata & Pasaribu, n.d.). A literature study was chosen because it provided the researcher with the opportunity to utilize a variety of relevant literature sources, such as books, journal articles, and previous research examining norms of politeness and social ethics in Batak culture (Azzahra et al., 2025). Data collected consisted of information from written sources, particularly from literature published after 2020, to ensure the timeliness and relevance of the analysis.

The purpose of this study is to examine the values of politeness and courtesy in the Panaekkon Saring-saring traditional ceremony, which elevates

the dignity of deceased ancestors of the Toba Batak ethnic group. A normative approach was chosen because the primary focus of the research is to understand the system of values and customary norms that frame social practices and communication within the ceremony (Anas & Aziz, n.d.).

## RESULT

Politeness in Toba Batak traditional ceremonies is normatively based on social value systems, customs, and the concept of kinship (Daliha Na Tolu), and is not merely a matter of polite behavior. Politeness is not merely etiquette, but rather a shared etiquette that governs how one speaks. Traditional ceremonies are not merely rituals, but also a way to reinforce existing values and norms, making them worthy of study due to their profound meaning and significance. Politeness is measured by the extent to which each person fulfills their role according to their customs, demonstrating respect and gratitude.

The norms of politeness in the Panaekkon Saring-Saring Ceremony are as follows:

### 1) During Martonggo Raja (Family Deliberation)

**Speaking Turn:** The elder or designated spokesperson (Raja Parhata) must be given the opportunity to speak first, as a sign of respect for the Elder. Interrupting someone who is speaking violates the norms of politeness.

**Language Style:** Use formal, traditional language rich in implied meaning (figurative meaning), and avoid overly casual language (vulgar language).

### 2) When Digging Bones (Graves)

**Respectful Attitude:** Families conducting the digging are required to wear appropriate attire and act respectfully. Careless behavior or neglect of cleanliness is considered disrespectful to the ancestors.

**Religious Attitude:** Because this ceremony is integrated with religion (Christianity/Catholicism), politeness is demonstrated through respect for the worship led by re-



ligious figures, which replaces the old animist rituals.

3. During the Panaekkon Saring-Saring (Raising the Saring-Saring to the Monument/Batu Na Pir)

High Symbolism: Raising the saring-saring to a high and sturdy place (Batu Na Pir) is the most important part of the show of respect. Rules of politeness require everyone involved to behave calmly and orderly.

Purpose: The politeness in this ceremony demonstrates that the ancestors have been perfected (Saur Matua), so the ceremony is performed with joy (not sadness) as a form of gratitude.

Panakkok Saring-Saring is an event where the high norms of the Toba Batak, such as Hagabeon, Hasangapon, and Hamoraon, are displayed. These customs serve to facilitate social relationships between relatives, ensuring that complex interactions run smoothly. These customs also ensure that respect for spiritual ancestors is consistent with respect for others socially.

## DISCUSSION

Politeness and courtesy in the Panakkok Saring-Saring ceremony demonstrate that these values are not optional, but rather ethical obligations that determine the validity of the traditional ceremony. Politeness and courtesy serve as functional implementations of the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship ideology, which is divided into three main focuses: linguistic (speech), non-verbal (attitude and gestures), and distributive (the distribution of roles and sustenance).

### 1. Politeness as an Upholder of Kinship Hierarchy

Politeness in verbal communication (linguistic protocol) is the most striking result. This is reflected in the use of strict kinship terms such as Tulang, Nantulang, Boru, and Raja ni Dongan Tubu.

- a) Implementation of Somba marhula-hula: The hasuhuton (organizer) family is traditionally required to use a humble and begging manner of speaking. Consequently, the hula-hula (wife-giving family) always grants the right to speak (hata adat) and the authority to grant blessings (pasupasu). This polite attitude serves to ensure the hula-hula are viewed as a source of greatness and blessings.
- b) Implementation of Elek Marboru: Politeness toward the boru (husband and female descendants) is expressed through polite verbal appreciation (Elek) for all their service and efforts (including the sacred task of cleaning bones). Thus, the boru receive honorary recognition and a portion of customary (jambar) in return for their dedication.

### 2. Courtesy in Sacred Attitudes and Actions

Courtesy is also manifested through non-verbal protocols and physical actions in areas considered sacred, particularly graves (Udean) and monuments (Batu Na Pir).

- a) Solemnity at the Grave: Norms of courtesy require all participants to maintain order and complete silence during the excavation and removal of the saring-saring. This is to respect the sahala (spiritual power) of the ancestors being touched.
- b) Emotional Control: Normatively, modern courtesies (especially those influenced by Church teachings) emphasize the prohibition of hysterical andung (wailing). This is done to protect the procession from excessive animist elements and direct the focus of the ceremony to prayers of thanksgiving and the renewal of the ancestors' dignity in the eyes of God and society.
- c) Tor-tor Gestures: The slow, structured movements of the Tor-tor are a result of non-verbal courtesies. The absence of wild movements demonstrates recognition of

the purpose of the ceremony, which is to convey prayer, not mere entertainment.

### 3. The Function of Politeness as a Means of Achieving Life's Goals

Normally, the politeness in this ceremony has a very important instrumental function:

- a) Proving Hasangapon (Dignity): The host family's willingness to expend substantial funds and perform all customary politeness protocols (hosting the entire Dalihan Na Tolu) serves as valid proof that they have achieved the status of saur matua (dying at an advanced age and having grandchildren) and are capable of upholding the dignity of their ancestors (Hasangapon). Without perfect politeness, this dignity will not be fully recognized.
- b) Preserving Social Balance: Politeness in the distribution of Jambar and the Manat Mardongan Tubu protocol serve as conflict resolution mechanisms. Adherence to these norms ensures that clan unity (Hasadaon) is not fractured by jealousy or injustice in the distribution of ceremonial proceeds.
- c) Passing on Identity: This ceremony effectively uses politeness protocols as a pedagogical method. The younger generation (especially Bere and Pahompu) witnessed and were directly involved in the Somba, Manat, and Elek protocols, so that the values of kinship were inherited and internalized as a timeless Toba Batak ethnic identity.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion described above, it can be concluded that politeness and kindness in the Panaekkon Saring-Saring ceremony play a crucial role in strengthening the philosophy of Dalihan Na Tolu. This philosophy consists of three main aspects: Somba marhulahula (respecting the one who gives a wife), Manat mardongan tubu (being careful with one's family), and Elek marboru (being gentle with the one who

receives a wife). These three values reflect harmony in social interactions.

In the context of speech and language use, politeness is evident in the use of customary language that is orderly, formal, and respectful. Each sentence in this ceremony has rules and social functions determined by the kinship structure (partuturon). Greetings, such as using Tulang or Nandan Dongan Tubu, are not merely casual terms of address but also indicate each party's social position and moral responsibility.

From a non-verbal and ritual perspective, politeness is manifested in gestures and attitudes that have special meaning. For example, controlling emotions when falling in love, the process of transmitting bones (saring-saring), the slow and graceful movements in the Tor-tor dance, and the kshala ceremony reflect respect. Sociologically and normatively, the values of politeness and kindness serve as tools to maintain social hierarchy and strengthen a sense of brotherhood among community members.

Through the practice of politeness in the Panaekkon Saring-Saring ceremony, a balance is created between respect for parents, brotherhood between families, and affection for the family of the person accepting the wife. Thus, this politeness underpins unity and harmony within society. Furthermore, the practice of politeness and kindness has important spiritual and educational functions.

Spiritually, polite and kind attitudes affirm the vertical relationship between humans and their ancestors and God Almighty. This ceremony is considered a form of respect and gratitude for the life that has passed. Educationally, the practice of politeness serves as a way to introduce noble values to the younger generation of the Toba Batak people. Children and their descendants, through direct experience in traditional ceremonies, learn to respect others, be mindful of their speech, show compassion, and value social order in community life.

Thus, it can be concluded that politeness and kindness in the Panaekkon Saring-Saring Cer-



emony are a form of implementation of the entire system of values, norms, and social ethics adopted by the Batak Toba people. These values not only regulate behavior during the ceremony, but also serve as the basis for character formation, a tool for cultural preservation, and a means to maintain the identity of the Batak Toba ethnic group amidst the process of modernization. Through the consistent application of the principles of Dalihan Na Tolu, the Batak Toba people have succeeded in maintaining the social integrity and spiritual harmony that are their hallmark. Therefore, preserving the values of politeness and kindness in traditional ceremonies is not only a form of celebration of the past, but also a strategic step to ensure the survival of a culture that remains firmly rooted in ethics, dignity, and humanity.

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