



Ritual Language Cultural Values in the Tradition of the Toba Batak Tribe in Toba Samosir: Anthropological Study

Rahel Theresia Rodame Situmorang^{1*}, Immanuel Silaban², Arjuna Junifer Siregar³, Tiffany⁴,
Robert Sibarani⁵

¹²³⁴⁵Prodi Sastra Batak, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

E-mail: raheltheresia47@gmail.com,

ABSTRACT

This research examines the form, function and meaning of ritual language in the Toba Batak community in Toba Samosir Regency through an anthropological approach. Ritual language is an important tool in traditional ceremonies which not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a medium for transmitting cultural values, social systems and ethnic identity. This research uses descriptive qualitative methods with participatory observation techniques, and analysis of traditional speech texts such as umpasa, mangupa prayers, and kinship greetings. The results of the research show that the Toba Batak ritual language reflects the dalihan natolu social system which emphasizes balanced social relations, respect for ancestors and clan solidarity. Traditional speeches such as umpasa contain moral values such as honesty, sincerity, hard work and mutual cooperation. Even though modernization has brought changes in the context of ritual language use, the Toba Batak community still maintains core values through adapting forms and media. Thus, the Toba Batak traditional language functions as a living and dynamic cultural structure, representing a close relationship between language, culture and ethnic identity.

Keywords: ritual language, cultural values, anthropological study

Nilai Budaya Bahasa Ritual dalam Tradisi Suku Batak Toba di Toba Samosir: Kajian Antropologi

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bentuk, fungsi, dan makna bahasa ritual pada masyarakat Batak Toba di Kabupaten Toba Samosir melalui pendekatan antropologi. Bahasa ritual merupakan alat penting dalam upacara adat yang tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai media transmisi nilai-nilai budaya, sistem sosial, dan identitas etnis. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik observasi partisipatif, serta analisis teks tutur tradisional seperti umpasa, doa mangupa, dan salam kekerabatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bahasa ritual Batak Toba mencerminkan sistem sosial dalihan natolu yang menekankan keseimbangan hubungan sosial, penghormatan terhadap leluhur, dan solidaritas klan. Tutur tradisional seperti umpasa mengandung nilai-nilai moral seperti kejujuran, ketulusan, kerja keras, dan gotong royong. Meskipun modernisasi telah membawa perubahan dalam konteks penggunaan bahasa ritual, masyarakat Batak Toba tetap mempertahankan nilai-nilai inti melalui adaptasi bentuk dan media. Dengan demikian, bahasa tradisional Batak Toba berfungsi sebagai struktur budaya yang hidup dan dinamis, yang mencerminkan hubungan erat antara bahasa, budaya, dan identitas etnis.

Kata kunci : nilai budaya, bahasa ritual, kajian antropologi

Submitted
18/10/2025

Accepted
24/11/2025

Published
28/11/2025

Citation	Situmorang, R. T. R., Silaban, I., Siregar, A. J., Tiffany, T., & Sibarani, R. (2025). Ritual Language Cultural Values in the Tradition of the Toba Batak Tribe in Toba Samosir: Anthropological Study. <i>Jurnal Pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra, Volume 4, Nomor 6, November 2025, 1441-1450. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55909/jpbs.v4i6.975</i>
----------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Publisher
Raja Zulkarnain Education Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the increasingly rapid dynamics of social and cultural change, studying how ritual language functions as a vehicle for expressing cultural values in indigenous communities is crucial. In the context of the Toba Batak community in Samosir Regency, the existence of ritual language is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a central means of maintaining and affirming cultural identity and its inherent value system. Through traditional ceremonies, traditional narratives, and ritual symbols, the Toba Batak community affirms relationships between individuals, families, clans, ancestors, and the environment. This research focuses on how this ritual language and cultural values reflect and support customary practices and their implications for cultural preservation.

The Toba Batak community has a distinctive and meaningful kinship system, often articulated through rituals and traditional language. One key concept is the Dalihan Na Tolu system, literally translated as “three furnaces,” and socially represents the three pillars of kinship relations: hula-hula, dongan tubu/sabutuha, and boru. This system is not only a social structure but also a symbol of cultural values, where each position has its own rights, obligations, and ritual language. As Harahap & Siahaan (1987) noted in their review of Toba Batak cultural values, “dalihan na tolu” is a metaphor depicting the balance and interconnectedness among community members. Ritual language, in this context, serves as a means of communication that is not only functional but also symbolic, marking the community’s status, relationships, hopes, and morality.

Ritual language in Toba Batak customs often appears in the form of umpasa (expressions of farewell, prayers, proverbs), parhot (introductory words to ceremonies), and speeches during traditional processions such as Saur Matua. Research by Tampubolon et al. (2024) shows that figurative language such as similes and symbols are dominant in the Saur Matua ceremony, and their

primary function is to convey hope, morals, and motivation to the bereaved family. Thus, ritual language is not merely aesthetic but also an instrument for internalizing the cultural values of the Toba Batak people.

Furthermore, the cultural values of the Toba Batak in Samosir Regency serve as an important foundation for social, economic, and tourism life. Firmando (2023) in his study identified nine core values of the Toba Batak community, including kinship, religiosity, hasangapon (mutual respect), hamoraon (happiness), hamajuon (progress), law, and conflict. These values reflect how the community treats fellow members, the environment, and even externalities such as tourism or social change. The ritual language in each traditional procession serves as a verbal and symbolic medium to affirm and reproduce these values.

The focus of Samosir Regency cannot be separated from its relevance in this study. As an island in the middle of Lake Toba and the center of Toba Batak culture, Samosir boasts a wealth of traditions that are still actively practiced. For example, the implementation of cultural rituals by traditional institutions in Pardomuan I Village, Pangururan District, to welcome international events demonstrates how customs and rituals remain alive in the lives of the Samosir people. This indicates that ritual language and cultural values within these customs still have concrete expression and contemporary relevance within the Toba Batak community in Samosir.

The study of ritual language and cultural values within Toba Batak customs, specifically in Samosir, is important for several reasons. First, ritual language, as a manifestation of culture, has the potential to map how identity, social relations, and moral values are internalized and reproduced from generation to generation. Second, amidst the currents of modernization and external influences (tourism, globalization, social change), there is concern that customary practices and ritual language will be marginalized or change their



meaning. As noted by Aritonang et al. (2024) in their study of Martumba in Sianjur Mula-Mula Village, found that local values such as mutual cooperation, kinship, mutual respect, gratuity, and cultural preservation must be revitalized to prevent them from being lost over time.

Third, this research also provides a space for reflection on how ritual language can serve as an instrument of social transformation that respects cultural roots while simultaneously responding to contemporary environmental and social challenges, for example, in the human-nature relationship, which, in the ecological study of the Toba Batak in Sianjur Mula-Mula, is presented as an intersubjective relationship between humans and nature. Against this background, the research questions are: How does ritual language in Toba Batak customs in Samosir Regency function as a means of expressing and internalizing cultural values? And what cultural values are contained in this ritual language, and how are they practiced in the traditional life of the Toba Batak people in Samosir? The aims of this research are (1) to describe the forms of ritual language used in the traditional processions of the Toba Batak people in Samosir Regency, (2) to analyze the cultural values contained in this ritual language, and (3) to explore the implications of this ritual language and cultural values for the preservation of Toba Batak customs and cultural identity in Samosir.

This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of linguistic anthropology, particularly in the realm of ritual language and culture of the Toba Batak people. As found by related studies, “language and culture are interrelated and form a unity that reflects the values of a society” (Tampubolon et al., 2023). Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for traditional leaders, local governments, cultural institutions, and academics in formulating strategies for preserving local culture and language within the Toba Batak community in Samosir Regency as part of

sustainable development based on local wisdom. In the writing structure, after this introduction, a theoretical foundation is presented covering the concepts of ritual language, cultural values, and local wisdom, followed by a research method that refers to a descriptive qualitative approach with field studies in Samosir Regency. Next, the results and discussion related to the forms of ritual language found, an analysis of the cultural values contained, and a reflection on the implications for cultural preservation will be presented. Finally, the study will conclude with conclusions and suggestions relevant to traditional actors, communities, and cultural policy in the Toba Batak region. Thus, it is hoped that this research will not only be academic in nature, but will also have a real impact in maintaining and reviving ritual language practices and traditional cultural values that have long been an integral part of the lives of the Toba Batak people in Samosir Regency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Ritual Language from a Linguistic Anthropology Perspective

Ritual language is a form of cultural language used in the context of traditional ceremonies, religious ceremonies, and traditional community activities. According to Duranti (1997), ritual language has a symbolic function to strengthen social relationships and affirm the cultural values of a community. In traditional societies, ritual language serves as a means of expressing collectively held values, beliefs, and norms. Similarly, Finnegan (2012) asserts that ritual language possesses performative power—that is, speech that not only conveys messages but also “does” something in social reality.

In the context of the Toba Batak community, ritual language plays a crucial role in maintaining identity and customary legitimacy. The language used in traditional ceremonies such as mangadati, mangongkal holi, or saur matua is not merely a means of communication but also a symbol of respect and belief in ancestors. Research by

Tampubolon et al. (2024) showed that figurative language, metaphors, and slang in Toba Batak traditional ceremonies have a social function: conveying moral advice, reinforcing the value of mutual cooperation, and respecting the clan and extended family (Tampubolon, 2024).

2. Toba Batak Cultural Values

Every Toba Batak traditional utterance embodies cultural values passed down through generations. Sihombing (1989) stated that the Toba Batak people adhere to three main values: hagabeon (many descendants), hamoraon (wealth), and hasangapon (honor). These values serve as moral and social guidelines for every societal action. Tambunan (2008) added that the Toba Batak value system is heavily influenced by the Dalihan Na Tolu system, a three-pillar social structure consisting of hula-hula, dongan sabutuha, and boru, which forms the basis of community ethics and behavior.

Firmando's (2023) research identified nine Toba Batak cultural values: kinship, religiosity, hasangapon, hamoraon, hagabeon, law, conflict, hamajuon (progress), and mutual cooperation. These values are still reflected in the lives of the Samosir people through traditional practices such as the mangalahat horbo feast or the saur matua ceremony (Firmando, 2023). These cultural values are expressed through ritual language in the form of umpasa, umpama, and petuah, which have profound meaning and guide community behavior in social and spiritual contexts.

3. Ritual Language and Cultural Values in Toba Batak Custom

The relationship between ritual language and cultural values is very close, as language is the primary verbal medium for conveying these values. In his research on cultural linguistics, Sapir (1921) argued that language is a "symbolic map of culture" that reflects a society's way of thinking and value system. A local study by Hutapea (2019)

confirmed that the Toba Batak traditional language serves as a means of maintaining moral order within society, particularly in the context of kinship and inter-clan relations (Hutapea, 2019). In the mangadati (traditional wedding) ceremony, each traditional utterance, such as pasahat tumpak, pamasu-masuon, and umpasa hula-hula, has symbolic meaning that emphasizes social and religious relationships. Research by Simanjuntak (2020) states that the use of umpasa in traditional ceremonies demonstrates the social function of language, namely strengthening social cohesion and preserving local wisdom (Simanjuntak, 2020). Meanwhile, in the saur matua ceremony, the use of ritual language serves to honor the deceased's parents with honor. According to Situmorang (2021), the traditional narrative in saur matua reflects the values of hasangapon and gratitude for life (Situmorang, 2021).

4. Socio-Cultural Context in Samosir Regency

Samosir Regency, as the center of Toba Batak culture, is an important location for research into ritual and customary language. According to Sihite (2015), Samosir is not only the geographical center but also the "heart of Toba Batak culture" because it still maintains traditional ritual practices in the community's daily lives (Sihite, 2015). In cultural activities such as the Gotilon Festival, Mangalahat Horbo, and Manurung, the customary language is used as a central part of each ritual. Research by Aritonang et al. (2024) in Sianjur Mula-Mula Village, Samosir Regency, showed that the traditional Martumba ritual uses customary language rich in spiritual and social meaning. Local values such as kinship, gratitude, and environmental preservation are integrated into every ritual utterance (Aritonang, 2024). Meanwhile, a study by Hutabarat (2022) highlighted the importance of preserving the Toba Batak language in Samosir as an effort to maintain local identity amidst globalization and tourism (Hutabarat, 2022).



5. Challenges and Preservation of Ritual Language

Modernization and tourism development in Samosir pose challenges to the preservation of ritual language. As the use of the Batak language in daily life declines, ritual language in traditional ceremonies is also beginning to be marginalized. As explained by Nababan (1991), language shift often occurs when a local language loses its social function and is replaced by a dominant language (Nababan, 1991). This threatens the existence of the Toba Batak ritual language, which is rich in cultural significance. However, recent research by Sihombing (2023) suggests that revitalizing traditional languages can be achieved through training the younger generation and documenting ritual language in traditional activities. Preservation programs such as teaching umpasa in traditional schools and digital documentation of traditional speech in Samosir have shown a positive impact on maintaining the sustainability of the Toba Batak ritual language (Sihombing, 2023).

6. Study Synthesis

From the various studies above, it can be concluded that ritual language and cultural values in Toba Batak customs have a reciprocal relationship: ritual language serves as a means of conveying cultural values, while cultural values provide meaning and legitimacy for the use of that language. In the context of Samosir Regency, this relationship is evident in traditional ceremonies that are still practiced by the community today. As emphasized by Harahap (2020), the Toba Batak traditional language is not only a means of communication but also a representation of the community's social, moral, and religious value system (Harahap, 2020).

Therefore, preserving ritual language also means maintaining the continuity of Toba Batak cultural values that constitute the identity of the people of Samosir and the surrounding area.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. This qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to understand the meaning, function, and cultural values contained in the ritual language of the Toba Batak people in Samosir Regency in depth and contextually. According to Moleong, qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions holistically and through descriptions in words and language, within a natural context (Moleong, 2017). Descriptive methods were used to describe the forms of ritual language, discourse structures, and cultural values contained within them without manipulating the data (Sugiyono, 2019). This study did not intend to test hypotheses but rather to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of the objects under study.

The research location was chosen in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra Province, an area dominated by the Toba Batak people and where traditional ritual practices are still active. The research subjects were traditional figures, traditional leaders (*raja parhata*), and community members actively involved in traditional ritual ceremonies such as *mangulosi*, *mangokal holi*, *martonggo raja*, and other rituals. The subject selection technique used purposive sampling based on their involvement in traditional ritual practices and their ability to convey ritual meaning. This selection of locations and subjects aligns with the characteristics of qualitative research, which emphasizes selecting subjects who can provide rich and relevant data (Creswell, 2014).

The data sources in this study consisted of:
Primary data: ritual discourse (the language used in traditional ceremonies), in-depth observations with traditional figures and ritual participants.

Secondary data: written documents (traditional manuscripts, Batak traditional books, anthropological literature), audio or video

recordings of traditional ceremonies, field notes, photographs of ritual activities.

In qualitative research, data is in the form of words and images, not numbers, and the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and interpreting data (AlFath, 2021). This research is qualitative because the issues are related to human and cultural experiences.

The data collection techniques used include:

Participatory observation: the researcher directly participated in/witnessed the implementation of traditional rituals of the Toba Batak people, recording the use of ritual language, symbolism, and social interactions during the ceremony.

The main instruments in this research are:

Researcher as instrument (human instrument): in qualitative research, the researcher functions as a tool for collecting, processing, and interpreting data (Sugiyono, 2019:18) — this aligns with the nature of research using a descriptive qualitative approach.

Text analysis instrument: because this research focuses on ritual language and the cultural values contained in ritual speech, text analysis is used to examine the structure, meaning, and function of the ritual discourse. Text analysis requires an understanding of the text and context—texts are not always written but can include speech, ritual actions, or symbols expressed orally (Ibnu Hamad in Gora, 2014). The text and context components are fundamental elements in discourse analysis. Instruments for text analysis include: transcripts of ritual speeches, observational notes on ritual language use, traditional manuscript documents, photographs/videos for contextualization, and codes/categories developed to identify themes of cultural values and the function of ritual language. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model as proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

- 1) Data reduction: the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing data relevant to ritual language and cultural values.
- 2) Data display: compiling data in the form of narratives, ritual speech excerpts, and thematic tables, illustrating the functions and cultural values of ritual language.
- 3) Conclusion drawing and verification: interpreting the linguistic meaning and cultural values of ritual language based on an anthropolinguistic framework (Duranti, 1997)

In qualitative descriptive research, data results are presented in the form of verbal descriptions, illustrations, and data quotations (Al Fath, 2021) — the research report will contain data quotations to provide a snapshot of the field conditions.

RESULTS

Samosir Regency is one of the regions in North Sumatra Province that strongly maintains the traditions and customs of the Toba Batak people. Traditional ceremonies such as mangulosi (the giving of ulos cloth as a symbol of blessing and love), martonggo raja (traditional deliberation), and mangokal holi (the exhumation and relocation of ancestral bones) are tangible manifestations of the Toba Batak people's value system and beliefs, which persist to this day. Every traditional ceremony is always accompanied by the use of ritual language, a form of speech that is sacred and full of symbolism. This ritual language is not only used to convey messages but also serves to symbolically “execute” traditional actions. Thus, language in rituals has a performative function and is an integral part of the cultural system (Duranti, 1997; Austin, 1962).

1. Use of Ritual Language in Traditional Ceremonies

Research results show that ritual language is still used consistently in various Toba Batak



traditional ceremonies, such as martonggo raja, mangulosi, mangupa, ulaon unjuk, and saur matua. The variety of ritual language found includes hata somba, hata pangalap, hata andung, and hata poda. The dominant speakers are the raja parhata, hula-hula, and the oldest traditional leaders. The younger generation tends to be passive listeners, but remains engaged in understanding the social context of the utterances.

2. Linguistic Characteristics of Ritual Language

Speech analysis reveals distinctive linguistic characteristics in the form of sacred lexemes such as tondi, sahala, tudos, and pasu-pasu. Expressive formulas such as “Sai horas ma hita” and “Tondi madingin, sahala manompu” recur throughout every traditional ceremony. The intonation of the speech is slow, firm, and rhythmic, creating a sacred atmosphere. The use of natural metaphors such as bagas ni tondi reinforces spiritual and cultural nuances.

3. Social Functions of Ritual Language

Ritual language has four main social functions:

1. a sacred function as a medium for requesting blessings and connecting with ancestors (tondi),
2. an identity function that reinforces the identity of the Toba Batak,
3. an educational function through conveying advice about Dalihan Na Tolu, and
4. a function of customary legitimacy because decisions are only valid if pronounced in the ritual language by an authorized figure.

4. Cultural Values Reflected in Ritual Language

Research has found that ritual language reveals core values of Toba Batak culture, namely somba marhula-hula, Dalihan Na Tolu, the value of pasu-pasu (blessings), solidarity, and loyalty to ancestral traditions. Ritual discourse always

prioritizes respect for hula-hula and the affirmation of customary social hierarchy.

5. Dynamics of Ritual Language Use

Despite modernization, ritual language persists with a number of adjustments. The younger generation shows a declining understanding of certain terms, so traditional leaders now often add explanations in Indonesian after delivering ritual speeches. However, the basic structure and formula of ritual expressions are still maintained by the Raja Parhata, the guardian of tradition.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of text analysis, the ritual language of the Toba Batak people of Samosir has the following linguistic characteristics:

1. Parallelism and repetition – to reinforce the meaning and sacredness of speech.
2. Use of metaphors and cultural symbols – each word has a connotative meaning related to spiritual and moral values.
3. Triadic communication patterns (Dalihan Na Tolu) – speech demonstrates the social hierarchy within the traditional kinship system (hula-hula, dongan tubu, boru).
4. Performative function – language not only depicts reality but also creates customary actions such as giving blessings, or ratifying decisions.

According to Halliday (1994), language in a sociocultural context has three metafunctions: ideational (conveying meaning), interpersonal (affirming social relationships), and textual (forming communication structures). In the Toba Batak context, these three functions synergize harmoniously within traditional rituals.

The following table contains the results of an analysis of several main ritual contexts of the Toba Batak people in Samosir, examples of ritual speech, linguistic meanings, and the cultural values contained.

Table 1
Analysis of the Toba Batak Language in Samosir Regency

Ritual Context	Example Ritual Speech/Language	Linguistics Meaning	Contained Cultural Values
MartonggoRaja (Traditional Deliberation)	"marhite tonggo do hita sude, soadong hata na so jadi".	The use of the declarative- performative mode: this sentence serves to establish a collective decision. The word "tonggo" (prayer) gives a spiritual dimension to the deliberation.	The values of deliberation, togetherness and social justice.
Mangkokal Holi (Transfer of Ancestral Bones)	"Pasu-pasu ma angka tulang ni amanta, tarsongon di bagasan tano on"	The word "pasu-pasu" (blessing) indicates a request for blessing from the ancestral spirits. The use of the subtle imperative aspect shows linguistic politeness towards the spirits.	The values of respect for ancestors, religiosity, continuity between the living and spirit worlds.
Pamasu-masu (Traditional Wedding)	"Sai tarlobi ma angka roha, tabo ma jala tudos"	Elliptic and repetitive structures; sentences are not grammatically complete but are culturally meaningful.	The value of love, prayers for a harmonious family, and prosperity
Ulos Giving Ceremony (Mangulosi)	"Sai horas maho, gabe ma tondi madingin, pir tondi matogu"	Parallel structure: three layers of prayer ('horas', 'madingin', 'matogu') indicate the balance of body, soul, and spirit. There is a spiritual metaphor "tondi madingin" (a cool soul).	Life balance, spiritual health, and ancestral blessings. The values of harmony and religiosity.
Mangalahat Horbo	"Sai marpangido ma hita tu Debata, tu ompung dohot napitu pitung"	The speech is formulaic, mentioning the seven ancestors (napitu pitung) as a symbol of spiritual perfection.	Religious values, symbols of sacrifice, respect for divine power and ancestors.

The table shows that each form of ritual language has a semiotic and moral function that cannot be separated from its social context. Ritual language is not merely a means of communication, but also a means of transmitting cultural values and a mechanism of social control. In

anthropolinguistic studies, ritual texts are interpreted not only through their linguistic structure, but also through their accompanying social functions and cultural values (Duranti, 1997; Sibarani, 2012).



Linguistic Meaning and Structure of Ritual Discourse

Based on the results of the transcription and text analysis, several dominant linguistic patterns are identified:

1. Phonological and Lexical Repetition

For example: “tabo ma, tudos ma, horas ma” – this repetition emphasizes the intensity of prayer and the performative power of language. According to Halliday (1994), repetition in ritual discourse serves to reinforce themes and bind the text’s structure cohesively.

2. Use of Archaic Diction

Words such as “tondi,” “pasu-pasu,” “ombus,” and “ompung” are still preserved, although they are not common in everyday conversation. This archaic diction serves to signify sacredness and historical continuity. From Duranti’s (1997) perspective, linguistic forms like these serve as “markers of cultural identity.”

3. Cultural Metaphor

Expressions such as “tano on marhite darah ni ompung” (this land is based on the blood of our ancestors) demonstrate a collective metaphor connecting humans, nature, and ancestors as a cosmic whole. The use of cultural metaphors is a distinctive characteristic of traditional anthropolinguistic societies (Kridalaksana, 2008).

4. Customary Greeting Systems and Social Relations

In every ritual, there are different greetings according to social status, for example, “Hula-hula na so tarbalik” (the wife’s family), “Boru” (the recipient of the ulos), and “Dongan tubu” (a group from the same clan). This greeting structure represents the Dalihan Na Tolu social system which is the basis of the communication ethics of the

Toba Batak (Sibarani, 2012). The use of language in this social structure strengthens the solidarity and harmony of society.

Cultural Values in Ritual Language

Semantic and contextual analysis reveals four main values internalized in the ritual language of the Toba Batak:

1. Religious Values and Sacredness

Utterances such as “Sai pasu-pasu ma hita sude tu Debata Mulajadi Nabolon” (May we all be blessed by God Almighty) emphasize the relationship between humans and the Creator. Language serves as a sacred medium connecting the human world and the spiritual world. Koentjaraningrat (2009) asserts that the religious system is a universal element of culture that provides moral legitimacy to social actions.

2. Values of Solidarity and Mutual Cooperation (Dalihan Na Tolu)

The Dalihan Na Tolu system regulates interactions between social groups within customs. Ritual language maintains values of solidarity by emphasizing respect for the hula- hula and familiarity with the dongan tubu. For example, the utterance “Somba marhula-hula, manat mardongan tubu, elek marboru” contains social ethical teachings that maintain balanced social relations.

3. Moral Values and Traditional Education

Many ritual utterances contain ethical advice, such as the importance of respecting parents, maintaining honesty, and living peacefully. In this context, ritual language functions as “traditional moral education.” According to Sibarani (2012), the primary function of local wisdom is to transmit moral and ethical values through language and cultural practices.

4. Identity Values and Cultural Preservation

The use of the Toba Batak language in

rituals maintains the existence of ethnic identity amidst modernization. Ritual language serves as a symbol of resistance to cultural homogenization. Halliday (1994) describes the textual function of language as a constructor of social identity and a carrier of tradition.

Anthropolinguistic Study

Based on anthropolinguistic theory (Duranti, 1997), the ritual language of the Toba Batak can be explained through three main dimensions:

a. Linguistic Dimension

Ritual language exhibits distinctive structures, such as repetition, parallelism, and the use of archaic diction. This form demonstrates the aesthetic and spiritual functions of language. Linguistically, repetitive patterns emphasize the intensity of meaning and create prosodic effects in ceremonies.

b. Social Dimension

Every utterance is governed by the social roles of the traditional actors. Language represents a social hierarchy: who gives ulos, who receives it, and who gives blessings. In the structure of Dalihan Na Tolu, ritual language reflects an egalitarian yet hierarchical social system—there is respect for the hula-hula, balance with the dongan tubu, and love for the boru. This phenomenon aligns with Hymes' (1972) view of “communicative competence,” which states that language cannot be understood without considering who is speaking, to whom, when, where, and in what context.

c. Cultural Dimension

Ritual language is a manifestation of Toba Batak cultural values: faith, solidarity, morality, and identity. Language serves as an instrument for preserving these values. According to Duranti (1997), the relationship between language and culture

is reciprocal: culture provides the context for language use, while language articulates and preserves culture.

In the Samosir context, ritual language is not only a medium of communication but also a tool for preserving ancestral values. When someone recites a traditional prayer or conveys a blessing through ritual speech, they are “reviving” the cultural heritage passed down from previous generations.

Contributions and Socio-Cultural Implications

The results of this study indicate that the ritual language of the Toba Batak in Samosir Regency plays a significant role in maintaining ethnic identity and the community's value system. In the era of modernization, many Toba Batak people have begun using Indonesian in traditional ceremonies. However, the decline in the use of ritual language can result in the loss of its symbolic meaning and cultural values.

This research has two important implications:

1. Academic: enriching anthropolinguistic studies with empirical data from the local context of the Toba Batak people, where it is still active.
2. Cultural: providing a basis for preserving linguistic traditions through documentation, learning, and revitalizing ritual languages in local communities.

Sibarani (2012) states that the preservation of oral traditions and ritual languages must be carried out through cultural education so that the younger generation does not lose its roots in identity.

The ritual language of the Toba Batak people of Samosir Regency has been shown to function as a means of symbolic communication that combines linguistic, social, and cultural aspects. Using an anthropolinguistic approach, this study reveals that each ritual utterance contains spiritual and moral meanings that reflect the value system of the Toba Batak people. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of building, passing on, and maintaining cultural



identity. Ritual languages in customs, such as mangulosi, martonggo raja, and mangokal holi, play a crucial role in conveying blessings and norms, as well as marking the existence of Toba Batak culture amidst changing times.

These traditional utterances function not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for transmitting values and affirming cultural identity. Ritual language is considered sacred because it is believed to have the power to connect humans with their ancestors and maintain the balance between nature, spirits, and humans.

“Hata ni raja do i, ndang na so mar honored. Ai hata i do na mandok numbers partuturon, manghoni hula-hula, marujung dohot tu ompu.” From field observations, each traditional event has a distinctive speech pattern: an opening (poda pambuka), the main message (poda tonga-tonga), and a closing (poda panutup). This speech structure reflects the social order and values that exist within the community.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that ritual language in Toba Batak customs is not simply a medium of communication, but rather a symbolic system that represents the social structure, cultural values, and outlook of the Toba Batak people. Through anthropological analysis, it was discovered that ritual language such as umpasa, pasu-pasu, and tutur marga (marga speech) contain profound meanings that reflect the concepts of dalihan na tolu (love and respect for one’s family), kinship relations, respect for ancestors, and values of solidarity and social harmony.

Every utterance in a ritual context, whether at births, weddings, funerals, or traditional celebrations, has a clear pragmatic function, such as seeking blessings, affirming social position, regulating kinship relations, and reinforcing the sacredness of traditional ceremonies.

Thus, ritual language serves as a support for cultural identity and a tool for preserving ancestral heritage.

Furthermore, this research confirms that language practices in Toba Batak customs have undergone adaptation without abandoning core cultural values. Changes in form and medium of communication (for example, the use of Indonesian as an accompanying language) occur due to social dynamics, education, and globalization, yet cultural meanings and values remain intact. The results of this study confirm that ritual language is a pillar that maintains the continuity of tradition and strengthens the identity of the Toba Batak ethnic group amidst changing times.

Theoretical Implications. These findings enrich anthropological studies in Indonesia, particularly regarding the relationship between language and culture in traditional societies. This research confirms that ritual language analysis can reveal social structures and cultural values more deeply than formal linguistic analysis alone.

Practical Implications. The research results can be utilized by traditional institutions, local governments, and cultural communities to design programs for the preservation of the Toba Batak language and traditions. Documentation and mapping of ritual language can serve as references in local content education, cultural festivals, or training for the younger generation.

Socio-Cultural Implications. Ritual language has been shown to play a significant role in maintaining social cohesion among the Toba Batak people. Therefore, the preservation of ritual language also contributes to the preservation of moral values, ethics, and kinship-based social structures that constitute the Toba Batak ethnic identity.

Policy Implications. Local governments can use the results of this research as a basis for formulating policies for the protection of intangible cultural heritage by strengthening regional language programs, digitizing ritual manuscripts, and integrating local culture into the school curriculum.

Finally, suggestions are presented from various perspectives.. First, suggestions for further

research. Future research could expand the data coverage by including a wider variety of traditional ceremonies or comparing ritual languages across other Batak sub-ethnic groups (Karo, Simalungun, Mandailing, Pakpak). Multimodal studies such as analysis of gestures, intonation, and ritual artifacts also need to be developed.

Second, suggestions for communities and traditional Institutions. Collective efforts are needed to maintain the authenticity of ritual languages by documenting traditional speech, regenerating parhata/na poso bulung, and providing training for the younger generation to understand the meaning—not just the form—of ritual language in traditional ceremonies.

Third, suggestions for the regional government. The Toba Samosir Regency Government is expected to increase support for cultural preservation programs by publishing ritual language textbooks, creating a digital database of traditional languages and ceremonies, and organizing community-based education cultural festivals.

Fourth, recommendations for education. The ritual language of the Toba Batak can be integrated into local content curricula or arts and culture subjects to strengthen students' cultural literacy while instilling moral values, kinship, and customs that are part of the identity of the Toba Batak people.

REFERENCES

- Fide, R. S. (2021). *Penerapan Speech to Speech Translator Bahasa Batak Toba-Indonesia* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Sumatera Utara). <https://repositori.usu.ac.id/handle/123456789/46650>
- Firmando, H. B., & Agama, S. (2021). Kearifan Lokal Sistem Kekerabatan Dalihan Na Tolu dalam Merajut Harmoni Sosial di kawasan Danau Toba. *Aceh Anthropological Journal*, 5(1), 16-36. <https://scholar.goo>
- Harahap, A. S., Mulyono, H., Nuzul, A. N. A., Milhan, M., & Siregar, T. (2023). Dalihan Na Tolu as a Model for Resolving Religious Conflicts in North Sumatera: An Anthropological and Sociological Perspective. *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam*, 7(3), 1943-1970. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v7i3.13091>. gls.com/scholar?hl=id&as.
- Hernawaty, H., & Purba, N. A. (2019). Etnografi Komunikasi pada Masyarakat Batak Toba di Kabupaten Samosir Provinsi Sumatera Utara Mengenai Analisis Tindak Tutur dalam Upacara Kematian Saurmatua. *Jurnal Darma Agung*, 27(3), 1159-1172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46930/ojsuda.v27i3.376>. [/doi.org/10.36277/kompetensi.v15i2.74](https://doi.org/10.36277/kompetensi.v15i2.74)
- Hutasoit, K. D., & Tampubolon, F. (2021). Tarombo Marga Sihombing Si Opat Ama, di Desa Tipang Kecamatan Bakti Raja, Kabupaten Humbang Hasundutan: Kajian Antropolinguistik. *Kompetensi*, 14(2), 105-112. <https://doi.org/10.36277/kompetensi.v14i2.52>.
- Isra, M., Agustira, N. W., Harahap, A. A., Sibarani, Z. H., Gultom, M. N. S., & Tanjung, A. A. (2025). Diversitas Budaya Suku Batak di Sumatera Utara: Analisis Literatur Sistematis terhadap Bahasa, Tradisi, dan Sistem Sosial. *Jurnal Riset Rumpun Ilmu Bahasa*, 4(2), 430-445. <https://doi.org/10.55606/jurribah.v4i2.5883>
- Lubis, D. L. A., Nissa, L. C., Sitinjak, A. W., Napitupulu, G. N., & Siallaan, L. (2025). Peran Bahasa Batak Toba dalam Pelestarian Pengetahuan Tradisional. *PESHUM: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Humaniora*, 4(4), 5459-5465. <https://doi.org/10.56799/peshum.v4i4.9205>.
- Monica, M., Hudyono, Y., & Hanum, I. S. (2020). Tradisi Lisan Upacara Adat



- Saur Matua Suku Batak Toba: Tinjauan Antropolinguistik. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni dan Budaya*, 4(3), 422-429. <https://www.academia.edu/download/92578721/2937-11290-1-PB.pdf>.
- Pardede, H. (2011). *The Structure of the Toba Batak Conversations* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Sumatera Utara). <http://repositori.usu.ac.id/handle/123456789/43797>.
- Purba, A., Saragih, R., Saragih, D. A., Sitompul, Y. S., & Hutagalung, A. (2025). Ragam Bahasa dan Identitas Pada Masyarakat Tutar di Etnik Batak Toba: Analisis Sosiolinguistik. *Kopula: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pendidikan*, 7(1), 269-278. <https://doi.org/10.29303/kopula.v7i1.6422>.
- Purba, N. A. Etnografi Komunikasi Pada Masyarakat Batak Toba di Kabupaten Samosir Provinsi Sumatera Utara Mengenai Analisis Tindak Tutar dalam Upacara Kematian Saurmatua. <http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article>.
- Purba, R., & Solihati, N. (2024). Umpasa dan Umpama dalam Prosesi Adat Pernikahan Suku Batak Toba: Kajian Antropolinguistik. *Silampari Bisa: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia, Daerah, dan Asing*, 7(2), 103-115. <https://doi.org/10.31540/silamparibisa.v7i2.3211>.
- Saragih, I. A., & Tampubolon, F. (2022). Analisis Tradisi Pangurason pada Masyarakat Batak Toba: Kajian Semiotik. *Jurnal Basataka (JBT)*, 5(1), 148-154. <https://doi.org/10.36277/basataka.v5i1.154>.
- Sihombing, M. M. (2020). Sistem Kekerabatan Suku Batak Toba. *Jurnal Sains dan Teknologi ISTP*, 13(1), 106-103. <http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article>.
- Silaban, I., & Sibarani, R. (2021). The tradition of Mambosuri Toba Batak Traditional Ceremony for a Pregnant Woman with Seven Months Gestational Age for Women's Physical and Mental Health. *Gaceta Sanitaria*, 35, S558-S560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gaceta.2021.07.033>.
- Silaban, I., Sibarani, R., & Fachry, M. E. (2020). Indahan Siporhis "the very Best Boiled Rice Mixed with Herbs and Species" for the Women's Mental and Physical Health in Ritual of Traditional Agricultural Farming. *Enfermeria clinica*, 30, 354-356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enfcli.2019.11.002>.
- Silaban, I., Sibarani, R., Situmorang, H., & Widayati, D. (2019). Performance of Marhata Unjuk in Batak T o b a Wedding. *KnE SocialSciences*, 970-979. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i19.4921>.
- Simbolon, N. C., Herlina, & Sinulingga, J. (2025). Struktur Tanda dan Makna dalam Jabu Bolon Ompung Gumata Sidabalok: Telaah Semiotika Budaya. *Future Academia: The Journal of Multidisciplinary Research on Scientific and Advanced*, 3(3), 1407-1432. <https://doi.org/10.61579/future.v3i3.595>.
- Silalahi, R. (2005). Makna dan Konteks dalam Bahasa Batak Toba. <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Roswita-Silalahi/publication/42362135>.
- Siregar, J., Aritonang, F. R., Sitorus, N. D., Sitorus, N. D., Nainggolan, R. V., & Manurung, M. P. (2025). Analisis Semanti "Horas" Sebagai Simbol Identitas Budaya Batak Toba. *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, 10(03), 277-286. <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v10i03.34030>.



Sitanggang, R. C., Simarmata, T., & Nurjannah, N. (2020). Tradisi Mameakhon Sipanganon dalam Etnis Batak Toba di Desa Rianiate Kecamatan Pangururan Kabupaten Samosir. *Buddayah: Jurnal Pendidikan Antropologi*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Juni 2020, 48 - 52