

Representation of Social Values in the Structure of the *Markobar* Tradition Language in Mandailing Wedding Customs

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of social values embedded within the *Markobar* tradition language used in Mandailing wedding customs. *Markobar*, a linguistic and cultural expression, plays a significant role in the social interactions and ceremonial discourse of Mandailing weddings. The research adopts a semiotics approach by Rholand Barthes, analyzing the structural and symbolic elements of the language to identify and interpret the underlying social values. Key findings reveal that the language reflects principles such as mutual respect, kinship solidarity, and communal harmony, emphasizing the pivotal role of language as a medium for sustaining cultural identity. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how linguistic practices preserve and propagate social values in traditional cultural settings.

Keywords: Representation; Language; Semiotics; Mandailing; Tradition

Abstrak

Studi ini membahas representasi nilai-nilai sosial dalam bahasa tradisi Markobar pada adat pernikahan Mandailing. Markobar, ekspresi linguistik dan budaya, berperan penting dalam interaksi sosial pernikahan Mandailing. Penelitian mengadopsi pendekatan semiotika Rholand Barthes, menganalisis elemen struktural dan simbolis untuk mengidentifikasi nilai-nilai sosial. Temuan mengungkapkan bahasa mencerminkan prinsip saling menghormati, solidaritas kekeluargaan, dan harmoni komunitas, menekankan peran bahasa dalam mempertahankan identitas budaya. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman bagaimana praktik linguistik melestarikan nilai-nilai sosial dalam konteks budaya tradisional.

Kata Kunci: *Representasi; Bahasa; Semiotika; Mandailing; Tradisi*

Introduction

Every indigenous group uses language as a reflection of social values and cultural systems that have been passed down through the centuries, in addition to being a means of communication (Chiblow & Meighan, 2022; Padilla-Iglesias & Kramer, 2021; Phyak & De Costa, 2021; B. T. Putri et al., 2025). One of the ethnic groups of North Sumatra, the Mandailing, has a deep and significant oral heritage (R. I. F. Harahap & Ritonga, 2024; Hidayat, 2020; A. G. J. Nasution et al., 2023; Ritonga, 2019; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). *Markobar*, a storytelling parade that acts as a formal communication channel between the bride and groom's families, is one of the most important customs in their marriage rituals (Agustina Siregar et al., 2024; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). In addition to providing information, *Markobar* is a platform for counsel, traditional teachings, and manifestations of the social ideals that are ingrained in Mandailing culture.

Markobar is performed with stringent guidelines and a unique linguistic pattern as part of the bridal procession (Agustina Siregar et al., 2024; J. Nasution, 2022; M. A. Nasution et al., 2022; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). The language used by the traditional elders and family representatives is full of metaphors, symbolism, and colloquial terms that depict Mandailing society's social structure, etiquette, and idea of harmony (Agustina Siregar et al., 2024; Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024; Ernita Daulay & Mulyadi, 2022; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). *Markobar*'s language use adheres to the *daliha na tolu* principle, which is the idea of harmony in social connections supported by three primary pillars: *anak boru* (the wife's receiver), *mora* (the wife's giver), and *kahanggi* (blood relatives) (Gaol, 2024; S. M. Harahap & Hamka, 2023; Lubis, n.d.; Muda & Suharyanto, 2020; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). The manner these pillars talk and interact with one another in *Markobar* also reflects their distinct roles and positions within the customary system.

Markobar can be viewed as a system of signs with a deeper meaning than just spoken words from the standpoint of Roland Barthes' semiotics (Alfarobby & Rengganis, 2023; Jadou & Ghabra, 2021; Sui & Fan, 2015, 2015). Barthes distinguishes between two layers of meaning: connotation and denotation (Maulidiyah, 2021; Sari, 2024; Sui & Fan, 2015; Zhang Shu-ping,

2017). While connotation refers to the cultural meaning that is present in the language but is frequently unconscious to the speakers, denotation is the literal meaning of the utterances used in *Markobar* (R. I. F. Harahap & Ritonga, 2024; M. A. Nasution et al., 2022; A. F. Putri et al., 2023; Zulkarnain et al., 2021). Additionally, the idea of myth in Barthes' theory is very pertinent to analyzing how the *Markobar* tradition serves as a vehicle for reproducing societal ideals that are consistently transmitted from one generation to the next in addition to serving as a formal communication tool (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021; Legeza, 2022; Sui & Fan, 2015). *Markobar* is more than simply a typical discussion; it is a cultural construct that fosters a profound comprehension of social relationships, cultural identity, and etiquette standards (Agustina Siregar et al., 2024; A. G. J. Nasution et al., 2023; Zulkarnain et al., 2021, 2021). In *Markobar*, for instance, phrases such as "*Anakkon hi do hamoraon di ahu*" are frequently used, denotatively meaning "My child is my most valuable treasure" (Lubis, n.d.). Nonetheless, this expression's connotative connotation demonstrates that, in Mandailing culture, the family is primarily responsible for preserving the dignity and well-being of its offspring, including selecting a life partner who shares traditional values.

However, *Markobar's* linguistic usage also demonstrates how the Mandailing community creates and upholds societal beliefs about harmony, prestige, and links between families. These myths are not merely folktales or legends; they are also a component of the social structure that dictates how people act in the realm of custom (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021; Zhang Shu-ping, 2017). Stated differently, *Markobar* serves as a vehicle for the Mandailing society to reinforce established social norms and rules, making them appear "natural" and impregnable.

This study departs from the presumption that *Markobar* is a structured linguistic performance with semiotic significance rather than just a ceremonial oratory. The statements in *Markobar* convey profound cultural meanings that perpetuate social order, moral standards, and Mandailing-specific ideas rather than just functioning at the level of surface communication. Although the social elements of this tradition have been covered in earlier studies, little is known about how these statements function as ideological instruments and symbolically create meaning. Thus, this study contends that a semiotic examination of *Markobar* provides important

new information on how language serves as a system of signs to transmit, maintain, and validate social values.

Given this context, the goal of this study is to apply Roland Barthes' semiotic technique to examine how societal values are represented in the *Markobar* language's structure. The primary goal of this study is to demonstrate how *Markobar* language serves as a symbol of the Mandailing people's social structure and cultural values in addition to being a tool for communication. Additionally, this study will look at the denotative and connotative meanings of *Markobar* utterances and how this speech pattern reflects cultural myths. Therefore, it is anticipated that this study will further knowledge of how language shapes and maintains the Mandailing community's cultural identity while also illuminating how oral traditions can serve as a window into a larger social structure.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a semiotic analysis method based on Roland Barthes' theory (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). The research is classified as a textual analysis, specifically focused on primary linguistic texts derived from the *Markobar* utterances delivered during Mandailing traditional wedding ceremonies. The unit of analysis in this research is the utterances and expressions found in the *Markobar* tradition, representing oral discourses performed by traditional leaders (*hatobangon*) or family representatives during the ceremonial process. This study treats these utterances not only as linguistic artifacts but also as cultural signs rich with symbolic and ideological meanings. The scope of the research is limited to the analysis of spoken texts collected during actual wedding processions, especially those containing metaphor, symbolism, and expressions that reflect the values and norms of Mandailing society. This limitation is intended to focus the study on linguistic patterns and their cultural interpretations within a specific ceremonial context.

Data was obtained through direct observation of wedding ceremonies, interviews with traditional figures, and documentation and transcription of *Markobar* speeches. The data were selected based on their representativeness and clarity in expressing cultural messages. The analytical process involved identifying key utterances, interpreting their denotative and

connotative meanings, and finally decoding the cultural myths embedded in the speech acts. This methodological framework allows for an in-depth examination of how traditional utterances function as a system of signs that represent social values and reinforce cultural identity in Mandailing society.

In data collection, several techniques were employed, direct observation, interviews, as well as documentation and transcription. Direct observation was conducted by attending and observing the Mandailing traditional wedding ceremony to understand the social context and the use of speech in *Markobar*. Additionally, participants were selected purposively, focusing on traditional elders (*hatobangon*) who have experience in leading or participating in *Markobar* ceremonies. Gender and ethnicity were not restricted as long as participants were recognized figures within the Mandailing community. Age and occupation were considered by selecting individuals aged 45 years and above, typically holding positions as cultural or religious leaders. Religious orientation was not a primary factor since most participants shared the same Islamic background, typical of the Mandailing society. The instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions related to the meanings and functions of utterances in *Markobar*. The procedures involved obtaining verbal consent, conducting in-depth interviews, recording responses, and transcribing the data for analysis. Additional data were collected through documentation and transcription of conversations in *Markobar* to ensure the accuracy of the analysis.

After the data is collected, analysis is conducted through several stages. First, the identification of key utterances in *Markobar* is carried out to determine and categorize utterances that have significant cultural meanings. Second, the analysis of denotative and connotative meanings is applied using Barthes' semiotic theory, where the denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning of the utterance, while the connotative meaning describes the hidden cultural values within it. The final stage is the interpretation of the cultural myths contained in *Markobar's* utterances, which aims to reveal how these utterances represent the sign system in Mandailing society.

Results and Discussion

Results

Here is table 1 containing words, phrases, or sentences from the *Markobar* text that have denotative and connotative meanings:

Table 1. Table of Denotative and Connotative Meaning in *Markobar* Text

No.	Kata/Frasa/Kalimat	Makna Denotatif	Makna Konotatif
1	<i>Na tumbur suang atutumbur ni robung</i>	Growing like bamboo	Life that develops sequentially within the family
2	<i>Mandokon ata bou pasae lidung</i>	Saying kind words	Seeking blessings and permission according to tradition
3	<i>Doli-doli na mardalan megal-egal nipaoban-oban simanjojakna</i>	The man who walks back and forth	a man who is looking for a partner
4	<i>Ia tutu i ma nauli bulung gadis ni mora</i>	a girl of good character	a woman who deserves to be married because of her character
5	<i>Ia rupani adong do boru ni mora na alu roana mida doli-doli</i>	There was a mora's daughter who received a young man.	A girl receives love from a man.
6	<i>Boti na toruk parpanaili</i>	Those who are gentle	The character of a polite and civilized woman
7	<i>Na sumale tarup dongan maradat</i>	Taking shelter in a traditional tent	Conducting a wedding according to traditional customs
8	<i>Mangalus boru ni mora sumambut lidung</i>	The mora's daughter responds to the proposal	A girl gave an answer regarding her application.
9	<i>Bulat air di pembuluh, bulat kata di mufakat</i>	Water remains round in its place.	The mutual agreement that has been established
10	<i>Gadis ni moranta on on ma donganku saparkancitan</i>	The mora's daughter is my companion on the journey.	Marriage is a journey of life together.

Here is a table 2 containing sentences that include myths in the *Markobar* text, along with the types of myths:

Table 2. Table of Myths in *Markobar* Text

No.	Kalimat dalam Teks	Jenis Mitos	Penjelasan
1	<i>Antong pambae ni Tuhanta na markuaso i, rumbuk tahi ni na dua simanujung on, mardandan ata – humata, mardomu ruas dohot buhu.</i>	Religion Myth	Marriage is considered a destiny from God, affirming that all events in human life have been predetermined by divine power.
2	<i>Bulat air di pembuluh, bulat kata di mufakat untuk seia sekata membangun mahligai rumah tangga.</i>	Moral/social myth	An authorized marriage is a sacred institution that must not be broken, as evidenced by the idea that customary agreements must be followed exactly.
3	<i>Sanga nipajolo dongan na leban ningna di pangkilalaanna, bo na bulus apuan ma nilojongkonsa gadis ni mora tu aratak nami.</i>	The Fortune Myth	The belief that if a man is lucky and has good intentions, he will find a good match without obstacles.
4	<i>Muda suada abat na mangangkala, gadis ni moranta on on ma donganku saparkancitan, dalan-dalan ni simanyilam maripul, na sumale tarup dongan maradat sapanjang marangin sipurpuron.</i>	Fate Myths	The concept that soulmates are predetermined from the beginning by forces beyond human control.
5	<i>Ia bo on nauli bulung. Nisungkun sapai simatobang daganak na dua simanujung on, na langka tu dia do alai on; na langka marjalang-jalang sanga na langka martandang?</i>	Life Journey Myth	The belief that someone who has found their life partner will embark on a new life journey and must follow traditional customs.

Discussion

A. Language Structure in *Markobar*

The language used in *Markobar* has distinctive characteristics that showcase traditional communication patterns. Some main features found in the text:

1. Formal and flowery language

The use of metaphors and figurative terms to more artistically and discreetly convey message. One of sentences in *Markobar* text is:

"Parjolo do iba mandokon ata mauiliate di Tuhanta na gumorga langit na tinompa situmandok tano sijongjongan"

"First of all, I give thanks to the Almighty God, who has created the exalted heavens and the inhabited earth".

From text above, we found that, **denotation** is about thanksgiving to God. **Connotation**: One of the main Mandailing traditional values is belief in God. This phrase also highlights how important faith in God is to Mandailing customs. Prayer and a request for God's favor are thought to be the first steps in all the traditional procedures, including marriage rituals. Thus, the sanctity of customs and the values of religion are contained in this statement. This religious value demonstrates how Mandailing practices focus a great deal of attention and importance on God in all facets of life. In the meantime, the importance of sacredness in traditions at every stage of marriage is regarded as a spiritually significant event in addition to being a family occasion.

2. Hierarchical structure

With regard to the Mora and Anak Boru, the *Markobar* language demonstrates a tiered social relationship. The first sentences that have hierarchical structure:

"Sapulu, sapulu noli marsantabi tu barisan ni mora marangka maranggi, songon i muse di anak boruna"

"First and foremost, we apologize to our family and our children on numerous occasions"

From the text above, the **denotation** is request for permission and respect to the mora party. **Connotation** it shows the importance of politeness and family relationships in Mandailing customs. Indirectly, this expression also implies that in Mandailing customs, social relationships within the family have a clear hierarchy. Where the mora (giver of the wife) holds a higher position compared to the anak boru (receiver of the wife) in every customary event, thus they must be given special respect.

Dalihan Na Tolu, the central tenet of the Mandailing social structure, is the customary value that separates it into three sections: *Mora* (the wife's provider), *kahanggi* (blood relatives), and

anak boru (the wife's receiver). Additionally, there are customary ethics and politeness principles that dictate that all participants in the usual procession must talk politely in order to honor the other person based on their social standing.

B. Denotative and Connotative in *Markobar*

1. Metaphor of Life's Journey

"Ia tutu, sinuan tutas nami on madung godang boti ginjang pamatangna, na tumbur suang atutumbur ni robung"

"Which seems to indicate that our son has reached adulthood and maturity."

From that text, the denotation talks about someone who already grows up. But, connotation from that text is one must "leave behind singlehood" and step into family life when they get married, which is seen as a significant life transition. According to Mandailing norms, marriage is a significant life milestone at which a man must show that he is mature and prepared to assume responsibility for his own family.

This term embodies the virtue of independence, which is exhibited by a guy who is willing and able to establish a family and live on his own after marriage. Another value is the value of responsibility, which highlights that marriage is a duty that must be fulfilled with complete accountability to the spouse and the wider family, in addition to being an emotional connection.

2. Poetry Dialogue in *Markobar*

"Iabo ale sidulang-dulang, Na tubu dumonokkon tandiang"

(Oh, sidulang-dulang, that grows near the ferns.)

In this text, denotation meaning is about a man and a woman had a lyrical conversation. But, in connotation is about the portrayal of the Mandailing community's custom of using *pantun*, which has great meaning, to foster contact between two families. The use of symbolic language, such as *pantun* or other metaphorical words, and a sophisticated approach to communication are also evident in this exchange between the two families.

This expression's cultural values highlight the importance of harmony, indicating that effective communication between partners and families should be the cornerstone of any marriage. Additionally, the importance of being courteous in conversation is implicit as well; it shows that a person is mature and honorable when they use elegant language and talk indirectly.

C. Cultural Myths in the *Markobar* Text

1. Myth about the Obligation of Men to Fetch Their Match

The male character is portrayed in the text as having to "wander" in order to find a mate.

Meaning: Expresses the idea that men are in charge of finding a mate and starting a family.

2. Myth regarding Family Blessings' Sacredness

Before accepting a proposal in *Markobar*, the female party always makes reference to parental consent. Meaning: Explaining how, according to Mandailing norms, the family, not only the couple getting married, makes the ultimate decision about marriage.

Conclusion

The *Markobar* tradition is not only a part of Mandailing customs, particularly in Mandailing marriages; it is a reflection of the community's social values and goes beyond simple marriage rites or formalities. The *Markobar* tradition's linguistic pattern has profound connotations pertaining to interpersonal relationships and cultural standards. In this situation, language is used to maintain cultural identity and foster camaraderie among community members in addition to being a tool for communication within the group. Educational and symbolic qualities are also reflected in this tradition. In this tradition, each phrase serves a particular purpose, such as offering guidance, reminding people of moral principles, or reaffirming accepted customs. As a result, the *Markobar* tradition acts as a conduit for cultural transmission from one generation to the next while also fortifying social ties. This *Markobar* text's linguistic structure also includes formal, flowery language, a hierarchical structure, metaphors of life's journey, pantun conversations, and myths about men's duty to find a mate and the value of familial blessings.

This study, however, is restricted to the examination of oral histories gathered from ritualistic activities in a particular Mandailing cultural context. It doesn't examine the impact of modernization on the *Markobar* tradition or more general sociolinguistic variances among other Mandailing regions. By comparing this study to other Batak sub-ethnic traditions, investigating gender dynamics in ceremonial speech, or looking at how younger generations modify or reinterpret *Markobar* utterances in modern settings, future research could build on this work. This suggests that the *Markobar* tradition is still a topic of interest and development, providing

abundant chances for additional interdisciplinary study in the domains of sociology, linguistics, and culture.

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