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Pragmatic Dynamics and Genealogical Legitimacy: An Analysis of Directive Speech Acts in the Batak Toba's *Marria Raja* Forum

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***Abstract*—As the sociolinguistic bedrock of Batak Toba society, the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT) kinship system dictates speech authority and politeness strategies. This study examines how DNT's relational structure shapes illocutionary legitimacy within the *Marria Raja* forum—a customary pre-funeral deliberation. Using an exploratory qualitative approach and an embedded case study of 236 directive utterances, the research integrates Searle and Vanderveken's speech act theory with Brown and Levinson's politeness framework. The findings reveal that illocutionary force is strictly a byproduct of genealogical position rather than individual verbal frequency. The *Dongan Tubu* group (specifically the Suhut Spokesperson) dominated directive production (56.8%) as the discursive architects of consensus. Meanwhile, the *Hulahula* exercised normative authorization through permit functions, while the Boru utilized high-mitigation strategies (beg, supplicate) to uphold the *Somba marhulahula* ethos. The prevalence of tell, permit, and ask sub-acts indicates that customary decision-making relies on information coordination and collective consensus (*Manat*) rather than imperative commands. This research contributes a "Kinship-Based Politeness Model" to cultural pragmatics, asserting that directivity in communal societies is a dynamic, relationally-situated practice defined by situational role rotation.**

***Index Terms*—directive speech acts, *Dalihan Na Tolu*, *Marria Raja*, hierarchical politeness, cultural pragmatics**

I. Introduction

As the sociolinguistic bedrock of the Batak Toba community, the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT) kinship system regulates interactional patterns through three relational pillars: *Hulahula* (wife-givers), *Dongan Tubu* (lineage mates), and *Boru* (wife-takers). Governed by the ethical benchmarks of *Somba* (veneration), *Manat* (caution), and *Elek* (persuasion), DNT functions as a pragmatic value system that determines speech legitimacy and maintains relational equilibrium (Marpaung, 2023). Beyond mere cultural identity, DNT serves as a social mechanism reinforcing moral obligations, where the choice of utterance and degree of directivity are strictly determined by the underlying genealogical configuration (Siahaan et al., 2023).

In the Batak Toba life cycle, the funeral ceremony (*ulaon na gok*) is a sacred juncture involving all DNT elements. However, its social legitimacy is forged within the *Marria Raja*—a deliberative forum where the extended family negotiates customary decisions, task allocations, and technicalities (Aini & Akmal, 2022; Habeahan & Prayitno, 2022). Interactions within *Marria Raja* are complex and argumentative, fraught with interest negotiations and potential face-threatening acts (FTAs) that demand meticulous politeness management (Sitanggang et al., 2024).

While scholarship on DNT has evolved through social and educational lenses (Defa et al., 2020; Harahap et al., 2024), linguistic research on funeral rituals remains dominated by procedural and symbolic analyses (Hutasoit & Siagian, 2025). This focus leaves a significant research gap regarding the pragmatic dynamics of the pre-ritual stage. *Marria Raja* functions as an essential argumentative arena, yet how politeness is operationalized to mitigate kinship conflicts during this stage remains under-examined.

To navigate this high-stakes environment, participants utilize figurative language—specifically *Umpasa* (ritual poetry) and *Umpama* (proverbs)—as pragmatic softening mechanisms. These metaphorical expressions transcend aesthetics, serving as instruments to negotiate directivity and bolster social legitimacy without disrupting communal harmony (Artariah et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study aims to map the distribution and typology of directive speech acts within the *Marria Raja* forum of the Sari Matua custom. It elucidates how the DNT structure shapes illocutionary legitimacy and politeness

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strategies. The novelty of this research lies in its positioning of *Marria Raja* as the primary locus of pragmatic analysis, offering a conceptual contribution through kinship-based politeness modeling in ritual communication.

II. Literature Review

A. Pragmatics and Language as Social Action in Batak Toba Customary Forums

Pragmatics situates language as a social practice where meaning is context-dependent, constructed through the interplay between participants, communicative objectives, and power dynamics (Carston, 2016; Gibbs & Van Orden, 2012; Situmorang, 2026). Within this framework, language transcends simple information delivery, serving as a primary mechanism for managing social relationships and navigating the complex solidarity dynamics of a society (Carston, 2016; Gibbs & Van Orden, 2012; Korovai, 2025).

This approach is vital for analyzing the *Marria Raja* forum—a locus for customary decision-making regarding Batak Toba funeral rituals. Utterances in this arena carry a performative dimension, functioning to propose, authorize, and affirm collective agreements (Manurung et al., 2023). Bound to the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship structure, communication in *Marria Raja* serves as a pivotal instrument for negotiating and solidifying customary legitimacy within the community (Lumbanraja et al., 2024; Napitupulu et al., 2023).

B. Directive Speech Acts as Instruments for Managing Batak Toba Customary Obligations

Pragmatically, language in customary forums functions as social action where utterances influence behavior and ratify decisions through illocutionary intent (Kyono, 2017; Jin, 2024). In *Marria Raja*, directives act as the primary mechanism for task allocation. Their illocutionary force varies from consultative requests to authoritative mandates, strictly determined by the speaker's genealogical authority within the Dalihan Na Tolu (DNT) framework (Vanderveken, 2004). Typically, negotiations transition from consultative sub-acts during consensus-building among Dongan Tubu to specific instructions during technical execution (Manurung et al., 2023).

Furthermore, DNT's asymmetrical hierarchy dictates the degree of mitigation. The Boru (wife-takers) employ highly mitigated forms (beg, pray) toward the Hulahula (wife-givers), reflecting the Somba marhulahula ethos (Taguchi, 2015). Conversely, high-pressure directives only emerge after genealogical validation, signaling the transition from negotiation to mandatory execution (Yang, 2023). Ultimately, directive sub-acts serve as structural tools that distribute customary duties while institutionalizing the relational order of Batak Toba society.

C. The Concept of Death in Batak Toba Culture

In Batak Toba philosophy, death is a sacred transition known as *Monding (Modom Onding)*, symbolizing an eternal rest rather than a mere physiological end (Sari et al., 2022; Sihotang, 2020). Customary rites are heavily dictated by the deceased's socio-cultural fulfillment. The community recognizes a strict hierarchy of death classifications, tiered from tragic premature deaths—such as *mate di bortian* (in the womb) or *mate bulung* (adolescence)—to the pinnacle of spiritual achievement: *mate saur matua mauli bulung*. This "ideal death" is celebrated as a life victory, occurring only when the deceased passes at an advanced age with all descendants having achieved customary independence (Tobing, 2020; Sihotang, 2020). This status ultimately determines the complexity of the *Marria Raja* forum and the specific directive strategies employed by the *Dalihan Na Tolu* elements.

D. Dalihan Na Tolu: The Socio-Cultural Foundation of Batak Toba Society

Dalihan Na Tolu (DNT), etymologically meaning a "three-legged hearth," provides the structural equilibrium for Batak Toba social interaction (Sihaloho, 2023). This triad defines three complementary roles: *Hulahula* (wife-givers/spiritual protectors), *Dongan Tubu* (agnates/solidarity mates), and *Boru* (wife-takers/facilitators) (Nasution & Hasibuan, 2023; Siahaan & Barus, 2024).

Interaction is governed by three sociolinguistic "golden laws": *Somba marhulahula* (veneration), *Manat mardongan tubu* (caution), and *Elek marboru* (persuasion) (Marpaung, 2023). Adherence to these laws is essential for achieving the cultural missions of *Hagabeon* (procreation), *Hamoraon* (prosperity), and *Hasangapon* (honor) (Simanjuntak et al., 2022). In the *Marria Raja* forum, this kinship triangle dictates the direction and politeness levels of all communication, ensuring that even technical facilitators (*parhobas*) maintain dignity through refined, relationally-authorized discourse (Table 1).

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TABLE 1
ELEMENT OF THE BATAK TOBA *DALIHAN NA TOLU* KINSHIP SYSTEM

No.	*Dalihan Na Tolu* Category	Scope	Description
1.	*Hulahula* / Wife-Givers (Including all families belonging to the same clan as the wife-giver group)	*Tulang*	Maternal uncle (Mother's biological brother)
		Tunggane	Brother-in-law (Wife's biological brother)
		Tulang na poso	Young maternal uncle (Wife's brother's son)
		Hulahula na poso	Daughter-in-law's parents or brothers
		Hulahula na marhaha anggi	Brother-in-law's brothers
		Tulang Rorobot	Maternal granduncle (Mother's mother's brother)
		Bona Tulang	Paternal granduncle (Father's mother's brother)
		Tulang Pangabis (Bona ni ari)	Great-paternal granduncle (Three generations above father's lineage)
2	*Dongan Tubu* / Agnates (Including all relatives belonging to the same paternal clan)	*Dongan sa-ama ni suhut*	Biological brothers (Male)
		Paidua ni suhut	First male cousins (Sharing the same paternal grandparents)
		Hahanggi ni suhut	Male lineage mates (Descending from the same paternal great-grandparents)
		Dongan samarga ni suhut	Clan-mates sharing the same surname (*Marga*)
		Dongan saina ni suhut	Male relatives whose mothers are biological sisters
		Dongan sapadan ni marga	Relatives from different clans bound by an ancestral oath of brotherhood (*Padan*)
		Dongan Sahuta	Fellow villagers or members of the Mutual Aid Association (STM)
3.	Boru / Wife-Takers (Including all families that have married women from the ego's clan)	*Iboto sa-ama ni suhut*	Biological sister and her husband
		Boru tubu ni suhut	Biological daughter and son-in-law
		Namboru dan Amangboru	Paternal aunt and her husband
		Pariban	Mother's brother's daughter and wife's female lineage mates (including their husbands)
		Bere	Nephew (Sister's son)
		Ibebere	Niece's husband (Sister's daughter's husband)

E. The Marria Raja Forum and the Use of Figurative Language

Marria Raja is the requisite deliberative assembly for Batak Toba funeral rituals *(ulaon na gok*), functioning as an argumentative arena saturated with directive speech acts (Ana & Chotimah, 2020). Because directives inherently threaten an interlocutor's "negative face"—the desire for autonomy—participants utilize cultural idioms, specifically *Umpasa* (ritual poetry) and *Umpama* (proverbs), to mitigate intrusive communication (Kayode-Iyasere & Ogidan, 2023).

This figurative strategy operates as a systematic politeness mechanism within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* hierarchy. By embedding directives in metaphorical phrases, speakers articulate sensitive messages indirectly, preserving the interlocutor's honor while upholding the norms of *Somba* (veneration) and *Manat* (caution) (Hisham & Hashim, 2022).

Ultimately, *Marria Raja* exemplifies how figurative language facilitates the navigation of complex directives to ensure social harmony. This practice affirms language as a sociopragmatic tool that reinforces cultural values, ensuring negotiation remains cohesive rather than adversarial (Abuya, 2012).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a naturalistic qualitative approach, positioning the researcher as the primary instrument for interpreting communication practices within their cultural context (Creswell, 2015). An embedded multiple-case design was utilized to trace both repetitive and variant politeness patterns across several *Marria Raja* events, ensuring that the findings reflect systematic communicative tendencies rather than incidental occurrences.

The research was conducted in Medan, North Sumatra, in November 2025. Medan provides a representative urban-traditional ecosystem where the Batak Toba community maintains customary practices through institutions like the HKBP church and *Serikat Tolong Menolong* (STM) organizations. The primary subjects included the *Raja Parhata* (spokesperson) and representatives of the *Dalihan Na Tolu* elements: *Hulahula* (wife-givers), *Dongan Tubu* (agnates), and *Boru* (wife-takers).

The *Marria Raja* forum is a discursive locus characterized by a high density of directive speech acts, providing a critical environment for observing linguistic mitigation of "negative face" threats (McConalogue, 2019). Participants employ *Umpasa* and *Umpama* as relational tools to maintain DNT normative balance (Danelciuc-Colodrovschi, 2024). This study utilizes an embedded case design, focusing on the *Sari Matua* funeral rites of the late S.H.H. (Table 2), selected for the complex directive interactions inherent in this specific death status.

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TABLE 2
RESEARCH OBJECT DATA: *MARRIA RAJA* FORUM IN THE SARI MATUA FUNERAL CUSTOM

Variable	Research Data Description
Name of Deceased	S.H.H (Ompu ni Si Dapa Doli)
Life Span	1964–2025 (61 Years Old)
Type of Death Status	*Sari Matua (4 Children; 3 married, 1 unmarried)*
Residence / Address	Jl. Bunga Rampai IV, Gg. Kenanga, Simalingkar B, Medan Tuntungan
Data Collection Details	Recorded on Wednesday, March 26, 2025 / Duration: 01:26:45

To ensure a comprehensive representation of the speech hierarchy, participants were selected from all Dalihan Na Tolu (DNT) elements involved in the Sari Matua deliberations (Table 3). This cross-sectional involvement allows for a granular analysis of illocutionary force across diverse genealogical positions.

TABLE 3
CONFIGURATION OF PARTICIPANTS BASED ON *DALIHAN NA TOLU* RELATIONS

No.	*Dalihan Na Tolu* Category	Participant	Description
1.	*Dongan Tubu* (Agnates)		
	a. *Suhut* (JBS) b. *Dongan Sahuta* (DSH) 1) STM 2) STM *hombar balok*	a. Hutagalung b. Local Residents *1)STM Dame* *2)STM Martabe, Dostahi, Oikumene, Kasih, PAS, Horas*	a. Host / Event Owner (Main Spokesperson) b. Local community members 1) Community mutual aid organization 2) Adjoining neighborhood organizations (attending as local witnesses and supporters)
2.	*Hulahula* (Wife-Givers)		
	a. *Hulahula* (HH) b. *Tulang* (Tlng) c. *Bona Tulang* (BT) d. *Bona Ni Ari* (BNA) e. *Tulang Rorobot* (TR) f. *Hulahula Na Marhaha Anggi* (HNA) g. *Hulahula Na Poso* (HNP)	a. Sitanggang b. Sitompul c. Sitompul d. Pandiangan e. Pakpahan f. Sitompul g. None	a. Wife's biological brother b. Maternal uncle (Mother's brother) c. Father's maternal uncle (Grand-uncle) d. Grandfather's maternal uncle (Great-grand-uncle) e. Mother's maternal uncle f. Brother-in-law of elder or younger brother g. Daughter-in-law's parents
3	Boru (Wife-Takers)	Sidabutar, Sidauruk, Sitorus, Pakpahan	Sister's side / Son-in-law's group

To provide a more specific overview of the key informants in this study, the detailed profiles of the participants who contributed to the production of directive speech act data are presented in the table below:

TABLE 4
PROFILE OF KEY INFORMANTS AND PRIMARY PARTICIPANTS

No	Source Code	Role / Explanation	Gender	Occupation / Expertise	Interview Date
1.	JBS	Host's Main Spokesperson	Male	*Raja Adat* (Customary Expert)	March 26, 2025
2.	DTS	Lineage Mate	Male	Advisor	March 26, 2025
3.	DSH	Local Resident	Male	*Raja Huta* (Community Leader)	March 26, 2025
4.	HH	Brother-in-law (Wife's Brother)	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
5.	Tlng	Maternal Uncle	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
6.	BT	Paternal Granduncle	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
7.	BNA	Great-Paternal Granduncle	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
8.	TR	Maternal Granduncle (Mother's Side)	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
9.	HNA	Brother-in-law of Siblings	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025
10.	HNP	Daughter-in-law's Father	-	-	-
11.	*Boru*	Son-in-law	Male	*Raja Hata* (Customary Orator)	March 26, 2025

Participants function as sociolinguistic instruments, where their genealogical mandates—*Hulahula* (authorizing), *Dongan Tubu* (managing), and *Boru* (implementing)—construct a negotiation space saturated with directive speech acts. Primary lingual data, comprising Batak Toba and Indonesian utterances, were gathered through four synchronized techniques: (1) passive participant observation to capture naturalistic communication; (2) in-depth interviews to extract cultural motives; (3) orthographically transcribed audio-visual documentation; and (4) Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with academics and Batak cultural experts to validate the pedagogical integration of the findings.

Data validity was secured through dual triangulation. Source triangulation involved cross-referencing data from customary leaders, cultural experts, and field observations. Theoretical triangulation applied a dual analytical framework: Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and Searle and Vanderveken's (1985) directive speech act theory. This integrative perspective ensures a comprehensive interpretation of the sociopragmatic dynamics within the DNT framework.

Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, encompassing three iterative stages. Data reduction involved classifying utterances based on directive types and politeness strategies. Data display utilized

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thematic grouping to map relational patterns among the DNT elements. Finally, conclusion drawing was performed incrementally through an iterative verification process to ensure the stability and cultural accuracy of the findings.

IV. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are derived from the analysis of directive utterances produced within the *Marria Raja* forum during the *Sari Matua* funeral rites of the Batak Toba community in Medan. The analysis was conducted on utterances generated by the three primary elements of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, involving diverse genealogical participants. These participants include the *Suhut* Spokesperson (JBS), the *Suhut* Lineage Mates (DTS), the Local Residents/Mutual Aid Association (DSH/STM), the *Hulahula* (HH), the Maternal Uncle (*Tulang*), the Paternal Granduncle (*Bona Tulang*), the Great-Paternal Granduncle (*Bona ni Ari*), the Maternal Granduncle (*Tulang Rorobot*), the Wife's Brother's Lineage Mates (HNA), the Young Maternal Uncle (HNP), as well as the *Boru*, *Bere* (nephews), and *Simatua Boru* (son-in-law's parents).

The comprehensive data set yielded 236 directive utterances, the distribution of which is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5
Distribution of *Dalihan Na Tolu* Directive Strategies in the *Marria Raja Forum* (*Sari Matua*)

DNT Element	Participant	Number of Utterances	Percentage (%)
Agnates *(Dongan Tubu)*	JBS	134	56,8
	DTS	2	0,8
	DSH/STM	42	17,8
	Subtotal	**178**	**75,4**
Hulahula (Wife-Givers)	HH	16	6,8
	Tlng	18	7,6
	BT	1	0,4
	TR	5	2,1
	HNA	8	3,4
	HNP	1	0,4
	Subtotal	**49**	**20,8**
Boru	*Boru*	5	2,1
	Bere	3	1,3
	Simatua Boru	1	0,4
	Subtotal	**9**	**3,8**
TOTAL		**236**	**100**

The distribution of utterances in Table 5 reveals the dominance of the *Suhut* Spokesperson (56.8%) compared to other elements. This imbalance indicates that discursive authority within the *Marria Raja* forum is centralized in the representation of the *Hasuhutan* as the host. Within the framework of speech acts, the legitimacy to produce directives is determined not only by linguistic form but also by the speaker's social position (Dunin-Kęplicz et al., 2015; Eisenchlas, 2011). This position provides the genealogical legitimacy required to regulate the flow of conversation, formulate consensus, and coordinate intergroup relations (Putra & Tressyalina, 2024; Wisesa, 2018). Consequently, the intensity of directive production is directly correlated with the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship structure rather than mere verbal participation frequency.

The contribution of the *Dongan Sahuta/STM* (17.8%) demonstrates their pivotal role in ensuring the customary process, primarily through directive utterances that regulate technical coordination and the distribution of labor for the event. From a speech act perspective, this high intensity is linked to the social legitimacy to provide guidance for the smooth execution of customary rituals (Dunin-Kęplicz et al., 2015; Eisenchlas, 2011). The position of the STM within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* structure provides a genealogical basis for such authority (Sahrul et al., 2024). Conversely, the low frequency of the Suhut Lineage Mates (Dongan Tubu Suhut) (0.8%) does not imply weak solidarity; rather, it suggests that their support is manifested through structural roles rather than verbal quantity, as explained in studies of customary kinship governance (Daar & Jemadi, 2023). Thus, the number of directives in a customary forum is determined more by role function and legitimacy than by the mere act of speaking.

Within the *Hulahula* group, the maternal uncles (*Tulang*) and core *Hulahula* appear to play an essential role in ensuring that the ritual adheres to customary rules. The directive utterances they deliver function to direct and correct the execution of the ceremony, preventing deviations from kinship norms. In speech act theory, this authority arises from the genealogical position they hold, not from the volume of their speech (Dunin-Kęplicz et al., 2015; Villarroel Ordenes et al., 2019). Similarly, the low frequency of the *Boru* (3.8%) does not indicate marginalization. Instead, it reflects the strong internalization of politeness principles within *Dalihan Na Tolu*. The Boru tend to utilize more refined and respectful speech forms, aligning with the concept of face management in hierarchical relations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, in the *Marria Raja* forum, such politeness is not merely a strategic choice but an integral part of deep-seated kinship regulations (Daar & Jemadi, 2023; Sahrul et al., 2024). Thus, the disparity in utterance quantity reflects the division of labor and customary legitimacy rather than mere talkativeness.

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These findings affirm that the distribution of directives follows a hierarchy of social legitimacy. The higher the kinship position, the greater the illocutionary mandate possessed. This pattern demonstrates that in *Marria Raja*, directivity is a relationally authorized social practice rather than a mere individual linguistic act.

The distribution of discourse strategies in directive speech acts cannot be understood solely through participant frequency but must also be examined through the genealogical relations underlying the production of utterances. Every directive form is produced within the framework of *Dalihan Na Tolu* positions; thus, the level of directivity, the choice of speech sub-acts, and the illocutionary force are influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. To map this configuration, the data is classified into three primary relations: *Dongan Tubu to Dongan Tubu/ Dongan Sahuta/Pariban; Hulahula* to *Boru;* and *Boru* to *Hulahula*. The complete distribution is presented in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6
DIRECTIVE STRATEGIES BASED ON *DALIHAN NA TOLU* RELATIONS IN THE *MARRIA RAJA FORUM* (*SARI MATUA*)

No	Directive Speech Sub-acts	*Dongan Tubu → Dongan Tubu / STM / Pariban*	*Hulahula → Boru*	*Boru → Hulahula*	*Total*
1.	Direct	3	6	-	9
2.	Request	3	1	3	7
3.	Ask	15	5	11	31
4.	Urge	-	-	-	-
5.	Tell	27	27	22	76
6.	Require / Demand	10	2	1	13
7.	Command / Order	1	1	-	2
8.	Forbid / Prohibit	3	1	-	4
9.	Enjoin	3	1	-	4
10.	Permit	8	11	23	42
11.	Suggest	6	1	-	7
12.	Insist	1	-	-	1
13.	Warn	1	2	1	4
14.	Advise	4	3	-	7
15.	Recommend	-	-	-	-
16.	Beg	5	-	3	8
17.	Supplicate	2	-	4	6
18.	Entreat / Beseech / Implore	5	1	5	11
19.	Pray	9	2	6	17
TOTAL		105	63	79	247

Table 6 presents 247 directive sub-acts, the distribution of which follows the structure of genealogical legitimacy within *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT), rather than mere linguistic variation. In this system, the right to provide direction is determined by kinship position; thus, the form of the directive is directly correlated with the speaker's social status penutur (Jufri & Wargadinata, 2022; Septi & Nurhayati, 2020). The *Dongan Tubu → Dongan Tubu/STM/Pariban* relation (105 utterances) emerged as the most frequent and diverse, encompassing require/demand (10), suggest (6), advise (4), and pray (9). This indicates that the horizontal space functions as a stage for internal formulation and coordination before decisions are elevated to more hierarchical domains. This finding aligns with pragmatic studies stating that egalitarian relations allow for a wider variation of directives, both direct and indirect (Mawadah & Jazeri, 2024; Widodo et al., 2022). The diversity of functions—ranging from firm instructions to prayers—demonstrates that directives in this forum do not only regulate actions but also carry social and religious dimensions. Thus, the dominance of the Dongan Tubu relation reflects a kinship-based coordinative role in structuring actions before obtaining hierarchical legitimacy (Prayogi et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2023).

The *Hulahula → Boru* relation (63 utterances) exhibits a strong normative function in customary management. Forms such as direct (6), require (2), warn (2), and forbid (1) are employed to maintain the accuracy of ritual procedures, particularly when deviations occur. However, the most dominant forms are tell (27) and permit (11), affirming the *Hulahula*'s role as the provider of authorization and customary legitimacy. This pattern is consistent with findings that in Indonesian culture, established authorities tend to use concise yet illocutionarily effective speech forms (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Septi E.R & Nurhayati, 2020; Widodo et al., 2022). The low frequency of command/order (1) indicates that the Hulahula's power does not rely on harsh commands but on the customary legitimacy inherent in their position. In hierarchical kinship relations, illocutionary force often originates from social norms rather than verbal pressure (Jufri & Wargadinata, 2022; Rudi & Widodo, 2021). Thus, authority is exercised through normative authorization and guidance rather than discursive dominance.

The *Boru → Hulahula* relation (79 utterances) is predominantly filled by "soft" forms, such as permit (23), ask (11), entreat (5), beg (3), supplicate (4), and pray (6). These data show that the *Boru* remain active in conveying customary interests but do so in a manner that respects the *Hulahula*'s status. This implies that participation is not diminished; rather, the mode of delivery is adapted to the relational structure. This aligns with the concept of facework, which views politeness as an effort to maintain social relationships in hierarchical situations rather than merely avoiding conflict (Ali

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& Salih, 2020; Dudley & Cortina, 2008; Ho, 2017). In this kinship system, requesting permission, entreating, and praying serve as acknowledgments of the *Hulahula*'s authority while ensuring the *Boru* remain involved in decision-making. Studies indicate that in tiered relations, subordinate groups tend to utilize indirect strategies to maintain harmony (Daly & Sætre, 2023; Yafi & Maris, 2025). Thus, mitigation in this relation is not merely a linguistic style but an integral part of the etiquette embedded within the DNT structure.

Overall, tell (76) emerged as the most frequently used form. In the *Marria Raja* forum, tell does not merely convey information; it also functions to direct actions subtly without the impression of commanding. This finding resonates with pragmatic research showing that in deliberative forums, directions are often conveyed through more neutral and cooperative forms rather than direct orders (Ananta, 2023; Indarti, 2022). The frequency of permit (42) and ask (31) further emphasizes the consultative nature of the forum. Customary decisions are built through permissions and inquiries leading to collective agreement rather than unilateral pressure. Institutional discourse research also suggests that permissive and interrogative strategies effectively maintain legitimacy while preserving social bonds (Lestari & Mutiaraningrum, 2023; Bom & Mills, 2015).

Conversely, more assertive forms such as command/order (2), forbid (4), and enjoin (4) are rare, while urge and recommend were absent. This pattern indicates that communication in *Marria Raja* prioritizes mutual understanding and harmony over forceful commands. In social contexts emphasizing togetherness, legitimacy is more robustly constructed through consensus than through verbal dominance (Donaghue, 2022; Sönmez & Akbas, 2023).

The discrepancy between the totals in Table 5 (236) and Table 6 (247) is not an error but stems from the situational nature of roles within Dalihan Na Tolu. In the *Marria Raja* forum, an individual may speak as a hulahula when providing direction, and later transition to the Boru position when seeking approval. Because positions shift based on context, a single utterance may be recorded in more than one relation. Furthermore, some utterances involve collective addressing, where a single speech act may have multiple illocutionary targets (Ananta, 2023; Indarti, 2022). These findings confirm that the force of an utterance in *Marria Raja* depends not only on sentence structure but on the kinship position active during the Sari Matua ritual. Pragmatic studies confirm that illocutionary force is heavily influenced by the speaker's social legitimacy (Donaghue, 2022; Ho, 2017). Therefore, directivity in this forum is dynamic and relational, following the active kinship structure.

This study confirms that the distribution of directive speech acts within the *Marria Raja* forum is entirely determined by the *Dalihan Na Tolu* kinship structure. Out of 236 utterances, the *Dongan Tubu*, particularly the *Suhu*t Spokesperson, emerged as the primary producer of directives due to the genealogical legitimacy required to manage deliberations, formulate agreements, and coordinate inter-kinship relations. This finding aligns with kinship anthropology studies suggesting that genealogical position governs speech rights and ritual authority (Bloch, 2010; Liu et al., 2010). However, this research provides concrete empirical evidence of how such legitimacy is realized through measurable and quantitatively distributed directive forms within a specific customary forum.

The role of the *Hulahula*, while not dominant in frequency, remains normatively powerful, consistent with literature that positions senior groups or wife-givers as guardians of ritual validity (Guindi, 2010; Jones, 2010). Distinctively, this study demonstrates that such authority is not always exercised through direct commands but through functions of authorization and procedural correction. Thus, ritual power appears more symbolic and legitimative than coercive. Meanwhile, the low frequency of Boru participation does not imply marginalization. These results enrich previous findings showing that in hierarchical kinship systems, the participation of subordinate groups remains significant even when expressed through mitigative and respectful forms (Daly & Sætre, 2023; Ho, 2017). This study asserts that speech frequency is not always proportional to social influence; rather, relational ethics and position are the primary determinants of illocutionary force.

Overall, the dominance of tell, followed by permit and ask, indicates that customary decisions are built through information coordination, permission requests, and negotiation rather than direct orders. This pattern aligns with kinship and ritual studies emphasizing that decision-making in kinship-based forums relies on consensus and collective legitimacy (Bloch, 2010; Guindi, 2010; Jones, 2010). In this framework, conveying information and seeking approval are the primary mechanisms for building mutual understanding before a decision is ratified.

The findings are also consistent with the view that kinship systems shape communication practices and the distribution of speech authority (Hogeweg et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2010). The choice of directive forms does not stand alone grammatically but follows the active social relation configuration. Unlike modern organizational contexts that frame consensus within formal procedural structures, in *Marria Raja*, the mechanism is rooted in genealogical legitimacy and ritual roles within the *Dalihan Na Tolu* structure. Consequently, consensus is not merely a communication strategy but a consequence of a kinship order that regulates who is authorized to direct, validate, and approve customary actions.

Theoretically, these findings assert that illocutionary force in customary forums is not primarily determined by linguistic form but by genealogical position. Therefore, speech act analysis in kinship-based societies must integrate social anthropology as a determining variable for speech authority distribution. This study also shows that ritual authority is often realized through symbolic legitimacy and normative authorization rather than explicit commands. Consequently, power in ritual communication should be understood as relational and institutionalized rather than solely

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coercive. Practically, these findings provide a conceptual basis for preserving Batak Toba customary practices, particularly in understanding language as an instrument for coordination and ritual legitimacy.

This study has several limitations. The data is derived from a single *Sari Matua* event in one location; thus, the findings cannot yet be generalized to all *Marria Raja* practices or Batak Toba customary variations in other regions. The analysis is limited to transcribed verbal utterances, without examining paralinguistic elements such as intonation, gestures, seating positions, and ritual symbols that may influence illocutionary force. Furthermore, the study focuses on the classification and distribution of directive sub-acts without examining perlocutionary impacts, such as participant responses or the effectiveness of directives in shaping decisions.

Future research could be developed through comparative studies across different rituals and regions to test the stability of these patterns in diverse social contexts. A multimodal approach is essential to include non-verbal aspects accompanying speech. Studies on participant responses and consensus-building processes should also be expanded to understand the concrete impact of directives in customary forums. Integrating pragmatics, anthropology, and traditional communication studies will enrich the analysis, particularly in observing kinship role dynamics amidst social changes like modernization and digitalization.

V. Conslusion

This research confirms that communication within the *Marria Raja* forum is a pragmatic practice strictly governed by the *Dalihan Na Tolu* (DNT) structure, where illocutionary force originates from genealogical legitimacy rather than individual rhetoric. Analysis of 236 directive utterances reveals that discursive control resides primarily with the *Dongan Tubu* (56.8%) as the architects of consensus. Conversely, the *Hulahula* exercise "symbolic power" through normative authorization (permit), while the *Boru* group employs high-mitigation strategies as a manifestation of the *Somba marhulahula* value.

Theoretically, this study proposes a Kinship-Based Politeness Model, asserting that in hierarchical-communal societies, linguistic mitigation is a genealogical moral obligation rather than a mere face-saving tactic. The prevalence of tell, permit, and ask sub-acts proves that Batak Toba conflict resolution prioritizes information synchronization and socio-cultural harmony (Manat) over coercive instructions. Practically, the *Marria Raja* model demonstrates how figurative language (*Umpasa and Umpama*) can bridge conflicting interests while maintaining social cohesion.

While this study is limited to an urban *Sari Matua* event, future research should adopt a multimodal lens—analyzing paralinguistics, kinetics, and proxemics—and conduct comparative rural-urban studies to track the evolution of Batak Toba directivity amidst digital transformation.

Declaration of the Use of AI

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT (version 4o) solely for the purpose of translation from Indonesian to English and checking basic language elements (grammar, spelling, and punctuation). In accordance with the journal's AI policy, the author(s) confirm that thorough human checking and editing were performed after the use of this tool. The author(s) take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

Furthermore, the author(s) confirm that no AI tools were used in reviewing the literature, generating research hypotheses, collecting or analysing data, generating figures or charts, writing discussions, or generating references.

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