

# Cultural Imagery of Tolaki Mekongga Community of Kolaka in *Mowindahako* Ritual

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**Abstract**—This paper aims to discover and describe cultural imagery in *mowindahako* ritual utterances (custom settlement) in the Tolaki Mekongga community of Southeast Sulawesi. The approach used in this study was a qualitative approach, where the data and data sources were in the form of oral data spoken by traditional interpreters/traditional figures in traditional processions. The techniques used were observation, recording, notes, interviews and documentation techniques. Meanwhile, the theory used was the Cultural Linguistics theory. This theory examines the comparative relationship between language structure and societal culture. The results of this study indicated that in *mowindahako* ritual, various cultural imageries were found, namely: (1) imageries of beauty, (2) imageries of unity and togetherness, (3) imageries of respect/politeness, (4) imageries of deliberation, and (5) imageries of loyalty and obedience.

**Index Terms**—cultural imagery, *mowindahako* ritual, Tolaki Mekongga

## I. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic experts in their scientific studies placed language in a central and strategic position in cultural studies. The primary role of language becomes the main concern in studying the culture of an ethnicity or ethnic group. Language, as the core of culture, represents and constructs the gloom of cultural studies. The increasingly rapid development of cultural studies has broadened a person's perspective on various cultural issues, including linguistic issues.

Storey (2003) in Santoso (2012, p. 49) stated that language is a tool for generating significance and meaning. The lack of attention to language use, including grammar, will cause a problem in understanding the meaning (Anggrawan et al., 2019). A minor mistake leads to a misunderstanding because language impacts people's perceptions about everything in this world (Arafah et al., 2023). Studying a culture means exploring how meaning is produced symbolically in language as a signifying system. A signifying system, or connotation, refers to symbolic meanings linked to signs or objects (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a). Conveying emotions and thoughts to a symbol or sign has become part of language phenomena since linguistics has transmitted and interpreted various symbols into different meanings (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019; Iksora et al., 2022). It is in line with Foucault (1976, p. 101) that language and its practices produce knowledge through language, which gives meaning to material objects and social practices. Although material objects and social practices exist outside language, language gives meaning or displays them. Discourse is what can be said in specific cultural and social conditions, who can speak, when and where.

The cultural and social conditions in reality can also be shown in the storyline of a literary work (Afiah et al., 2022). Environmental, cultural, and social conditions are the integral part of a society that is commonly becoming topics for an author to write (Arafah et al., 2021). In the educational field, literary work as cultural products can be a medium to introduce the existing reality of society to the young generation (Arifin et al., 2022). Generation Z will likely engage with the internet and social media in a significant portion of their daily activities since they can connect with people worldwide (Arafah et al., 2023; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023a). Science and technology development has drastically changed many aspects of human life in good and bad ways (Suhadi et al., 2022). The arising of digital literacy allows people nowadays to improve their academic skills by reading and finding information through digital materials that are provided online (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Arafah et al., 2023). The existence of literary work that contains cultural values helps students form behavioural patterns and positive energy with high achievement motivation (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022; Arafah et al., 2020). Literature has utilized and enhanced its quality despite all the challenges in this digital era (Asriyanti et al., 2022). It presents different topics with different character's personalities, some of which are unusual, to increase the various feelings of the readers (Arafah et al., 2023; Fadillah et al., 2022). Portraying a reflection

of human life, whether it is based on truth or not, the moral messages of a literary work can be used as a reference in living a life (Manugeran et al., 2023; Mutmainnah et al., 2022). It can show a human relationship with nature when the environment is starting to damage (Siwi et al., 2022), human relationship with other humans, including family situations and parenting life (Sunyoto et al., 2022), or human relationship with other creatures such as animals where presently animal cruelty is commonly happened (Yudith et al., 2023). In order to portray various kinds of topics, an author will have a signature or characteristic to differentiate his works to brand himself with other authors (Hasyim et al., 2020). Therefore, the language used has a significant role here. Using figurative language helps the authors convey their ideas aesthetically (Baa et al., 2023). At this point, it is necessary to practice language skills to develop an understanding of using a language (Kaharuddin et al., 2023). As a result, in the educational field, the language used in literary work helps students improve their communication and writing skills in line with their time and effort in studying (Kuswanti et al., 2023; Arnawa & Arafah, 2023). Besides all the benefits of technological advancement that have been mentioned, destructive points have come along. As for early career teachers, it is still an adjustment to teach and learn literature simultaneously before delivering it to the students (Sunardi et al., 2018). As for digital media, the ease of accessing the internet seems dangerous for young people since all kinds of information are easy to get, including vulgar issues (Purwaningsih et al., 2020). All kinds of issues arise in a rapid flow that is hard to control (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023b). In conclusion, culture is threatened to be eroded if the young generation slowly forgets their cultural heritage due to the advancement of technology.

With its cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, Indonesian society is also enriched by various rituals. Rituals are related to the traditions and customs a society maintains, and the ritual is part of the local wealth of Indonesian society, which is full of life values in society. The ritual representing the culture of an ethnic group is the ethnic local culture system itself.

Society constructs identity and preserves its customs or culture through rituals. In this case, they build and give meaning to their lives through traditional rituals. Bell (1992, p. 20) defines ritual as a collection of beliefs and opinions simultaneously formed, experienced and reinforced by society. Bell even emphasized that rituals are routines (habits), repetition as the basis of society life itself, and rituals occur in social community practices from one generation to another. Ritual utterances contrast with the utterances of people in general, where they can be linked to higher realm language and are used to express individual things and hopes (Fox, 1998, p. 13). In order to study tradition or ritual, one has to pay attention to the language form, its function or use, and its cultural environment (Arafah et al., 2020).

*Mowindahako* ritual is one of the traditions or customs of Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka, Southeast Sulawesi, which is still implemented and preserved today. Tolaki community is known to have traditional technological systems even if some lexicons have shifted to modern ones (Takwa et al., 2022). *Mowindahako* ritual is the traditional completion process in the ethnic marriage ceremony. The prospective bridegroom carries out a series of activities after going through the stages, from the proposal to the wedding party.

In implementing the customary application (dowry payment), the two traditional spokespersons, namely the male spokesperson (*tolea*) and the female spokesperson (*pabitara*) conduct a direct dialogue. Their utterances contain interesting expressions which reflect the local cultural specificities.

*Mowindahako* ritual is full of meaning as the cultural content is reflected in the traditional language (regional language) spoken by the traditional spokespeople. Several linguistic experts, including Edward Sapir (1921) and Wahab (2008), expressed the idea of cultural content reflected in language. Sapir stated that the content of every culture is expressed in the local language, while Wahab said that there is no language material, both content and form, that is not perceived as a symbol of the desired meaning, regardless of any attitudes shown by other cultures (Wahab, 2008, p. 17).

Kroeber (1963, p. 33) stated that cultural activities are linguistic activities formulating and transferring messages through utterances. These utterances are grouped into speech acts since they perform acts spoken by a speaker, including apologizing, complimenting, and complaining (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). There are many contradictions in anthropology regarding the relationship between the two things, language and culture or language in culture. As long as the transmission or sending of messages from one person to another exists and the mechanism for its formation is evident, language and culture are in one unit. Messages with cultural backgrounds can be interpreted differently depending on the meaning of a listener's understanding (Hasjim et al., 2020). Therefore, in a practical talk, language is a communication tool to deliver messages based on agreed logical principles from a speaker to a listener (Asri et al., 2023; Yulianti et al., 2022).

Many linguistic topics can be used as the basis for study material. One of them is cultural imagery, the study material in this paper. Cultural imagery is a way of thinking about an intention that encourages someone to say what they think to others, both from generation to generation and within the same generations. The experience of humans, including the Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka ethnic community as individuals and as a community group, is obtained in their lives. It encourages and even requires them to realize it in traditional rituals to create cultural wisdom or custom with its uniqueness.

The topic of imagery in the language is not only applied to narrative and figurative language but also in word semantics, grammatical construction and discourse, even in the phonological manifestation of sounds. Palmer (1996, p. 54) emphasizes that linguistic sign is not only a thing and name but also a concept and imagery. The concept and

imagery of sound are not only material sounds or physical objects but rather the psychological signs of sound and the impression it makes on the human senses. Therefore, the impression created by the sound of language is called imagery.

Based on the background described above, the question of this study is: What is the cultural imagery of Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka people in *mowindahako* ritual utterances? The answer to this question is the primary concern of this article, namely to discover and describe the cultural imagery of Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka people in *mowindahako* ritual utterances.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. It is descriptive research that describes the analytical data narratively. The process and meaning (subject perspective) are more emphasized in qualitative research. The theoretical basis is used to guide the research following the facts in the field. Meanwhile, a theoretical basis is also helpful in providing a general overview of the research background and as material for discussing research results. The data and data sources are oral data spoken by traditional interpreters/traditional figures in traditional processions. The techniques used are observation, recording, notes, interviews and documentation techniques.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part of the discussion explains theories related to ritual utterances. Through the cultural-linguistic theory, we can learn about the cultural imagery contained in the *mowindahako* ritual speech in the Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka community. The aim is to study the imagery role of native language speakers, which is implicit in the play of verbal symbols or language expressions, language grammar, and language style.

Several cultural and literary linguistic references describe the characteristics of lingual forms by utilizing the narrative context. In connection with the study of ritual speech, Fox (1986, p. 102) said that ritual language is typically different from everyday language. Furthermore, according to Fox, ritual language derives most of its poetic characteristics from systematic deviations from everyday language. Apart from that, synonyms, synthesis and antithesis are also used. In addition, Foley (1997, p. 336) stated that parallelism characterizes ritual language.

The use of language in social life, as in other socio-cultural contexts, is not only to express the thoughts and feelings of the speakers but also has a specific purpose according to the context of the background situation. Alisjahbana (1997, p. 117) explains that if the interaction of language and culture is examined, language manifests a person's thoughts and feelings, reflecting his character. Because language is a manifestation of the human mind, language is not only a grammatical structure containing aspects of sounds, words and sentences, but language reflects culture. The use of language as a cultural event involves several components; the most important are the participants (actors/people), specific cultural settings or backgrounds, locations, channels, language norms, gender, speech purposes, and, of course, an institution where the speech works (Bouman & Sherze, 1974) in Alisjahbana (1997, p. 68). The embodiment of language forms in *mowindahako* ritual speech indicates a building rich in aesthetics. The aesthetics of ritual speech are parallelism, metaphor and symbolism. Parallelism is one genre of language. Bakhtin (Foley, 1997, p. 355) stated that gender consists of a relatively stable and historically derived framework for creating discourse. This language gender is firmly conventionalized and rooted in the practices of production and language understanding of the people in a community, remaining flexible and open to creative manipulation or imitation by its practitioners. Pararealism is a poetic function realized in various language and gender, which provide speakers and listeners with several suitable verbal art performance formats.

In *mowindahako* ritual speech, sound configuration or harmonization pattern is sound parallelism in the form of assonance and alliteration. Phonological parallelism in the form of alliteration causes the meaning content to be more pronounced and makes an impression on the minds of speakers of the Tolaki Mekongga language, especially *mowindahako* ritual speech, as shown by the following example:

*Pangga ikandoro ronga pangga ikambo*  
Position in the office with position in the village  
'Both the positions in the office and in the village'

*Pangga sara ronga pangga agama*  
Position custom with position religion  
'Traditional leaders and religious leaders'

The word *pangga* (position) has a consonant alliteration with the word religion. Likewise, in the following example:

*Mbera inia mbangga ronga inia anakia*  
Very who rank of functionary with who king  
'Female functionaries and noble wives'

The word *mbangga* 'rank of functionary' has a consonant alliteration with the word *anakia* 'king' in example (2) of the third clause. The word *inia* 'who' has a consonant alliteration with the word *mbangga* 'rank of functionary'. The alliteration in the example above occurs in the double consonant sounds /mb, and /k/.

In addition, phonological parallelism in the form of assonance is the use of the same vowel sound in adjacent words followed by various consonant sounds, as in the following example:

*Peowaino toono nggapa wonua*  
task people many village

*Iramoo iwaindo laa tudu madatu*  
In front of us there is descen calmly

'As the ruler of the people of Mekongga country, we come to worship at this feast'.

In the first clause in the example above, the word *peowaino* (task) has a final vowel resonance with the word *toono* (people), and the word *nggapa* (many) has a final vowel resonance with the word *wonua* (village). Meanwhile, the second clause in the word *iramoo* (in front of) has a vowel resonance with the word *iwaindo* (us), and the word *tudu* (descent) has a final vowel resonance with *madatu* (calmly).

The embodiment of language forms in *mowindahako* ritual speech with speech aesthetics in the form of metaphors includes human metaphors, place metaphors, object metaphors, energy metaphors, and being metaphors (Takwa, 2022). It can be seen in the following example:

*Tusa tongano lipu peutumbuno wonua*  
Pole central country endorser village

'The central pole is the main endorser of the country'

The word *tusa tongano* (central pole) contains a metaphor. A pole is a source of strength, livelihood, or a long pole usually made of bamboo, iron or wood. Pole use is to support roofs, bridges, and houses. However, in this article, the pole is an expression containing a figurative meaning that a customary matter must be known by the customary authorities or authorities in that area. In the culture of Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka society, as reflected in marriage customs, the position of regional authorities, such as the District Head and Village Head, plays a significant role. They have a role in determining mutually agreed decision-making. Therefore, the presence of this regional apparatus is significant and required; apart from having the power as a ruler or king who regulates the population and becomes a cantilever in community life, it is also interpreted as the central pole in the community to complete the implementation of customs if something goes wrong/ incompatibility. The invited government can take over the problem if no agreement is made.

Using language symbolizing cultural realities is also found in Tolaki Mekongga ethnic culture through the *mowindahako* traditional ritual. The symbols used can be observed through the following speech excerpt:

*Nomaa mbowalawai niwindahako kulaandoleu ropai*  
Saya kasih turun adat itu di antara kita datang  
*I let down the customs come between us*  
*Modunggu mokondekapai*  
arrive finish

'We handed over several traditional pieces as completeness.'

*Aso nggasu okasa, aso ndumbu reno, aso bato karambau*  
*One piece of cloth, one piece of gold jewellery, one buffalo*

*aso law tawa-tawa*  
One gong

'Consisting of one piece of white cloth, one piece of gold jewellery, one buffalo and one gong'.

This expression describes the dowry equipment to be handed over to the prospective bride. The word *ndumbu reno* (a gold jewellery necklace) symbolically means to bind the future wife's life to her future husband. The necklace in question is a symbol of bond for the prospective bride. Since then, she has been bound by custom and is ready to be married as a wife by the prospective groom. Several other symbolic expressions include *la tawa-tawa*, *nggo nilanggu ndundu* 'this is the fruit of the gong, a buzzing tool'. It is intended as a symbol to convey to all relatives that the man has made a traditional bond with his future wife.

From the results of the identification, description and analysis of *mowindahako* ritual speech, several imageries are found:

#### 1. Imagery of Beauty

The verbal symbols of parallelism and metaphor that form the speech discourse of the *mowindahako* ritual strongly affect speakers and listeners. For the Mekongga people, ritual utterance is a medium to accommodate the aesthetics

through figurative language, with the aesthetic meaning contained in the utterance. The imagery of beauty prioritizes art or aesthetics. The aesthetic-poetic sounds are distributed as assonance, alliteration, rhyme, and irregular sounds.

In a cultural linguistics context, ritual utterances rich in aesthetic-poetic sounds are seen as the result of cultural imagery prioritizing sound's beauty. Based on data, observations and experience, a general picture is found that the language (words, sentences) used in ritual language is slightly different from everyday language. For example, the expression *tabea inggomiu* (Oh, the exalted lord) is rarely used in the daily social interactions of the Mekongga Kolaka community. This reality is related to the imagery of respect for people who have positions or hold positions both in government and non-government, namely differentiating the language chosen when dealing with people who are different in social status.

Furthermore, diction in ritual utterance is more concerned with the beauty of the sound. Several words have equivalents or synonyms but are not used because they do not produce an aesthetic-poetic sound, such as *sorume* (land of orchids). The word *sorume* is rarely used in everyday interactions. It is synonymous with the word *ikambo*, *wonua* (village). However, due to the poetic sounds being prioritized, the word *sorume* is chosen, which is the name of a typical plant in Kolaka region, a type of forest orchid flower that is now extinct and can only be found in a few places in that area, including Mount Mekongga, Southeast Sulawesi.

## 2. Imagery of Unity/Togetherness

The connection between social relations and kinship is reflected in the implementation of traditional settlement processions. The natural human instinct to live together reflects the social fabric being built. The imagery of unity depicts unity and togetherness in the speech discourse of the *mowindahako* ritual, which contains metaphors and parallelism, which means unity/togetherness. An example is the expression *laa teposua teporambu anomotuo toono meohai* (we meet and gather with parents and extended family). Likewise, the phrase *iramoo iwaindo laa tudu madatu* (we come to worship at this party).

Traditional attributes are presented at the venue of the party. Those attributes mean that the coming of the prospective groom representative is to convey the aims and objectives per the previously fulfilled agreement to discuss the customary settlement process with the prospective bride's family.

In the cultural linguistics context, unity is based on specific imagery, namely unity/togetherness. For example, the habit of Tolaki Mekongga people is doing something in togetherness. Both parties have built a bond of togetherness to achieve a goal through the wedding ceremony. An example in everyday life is the culture of *mosehe* (purification). *Mosehe* is a tradition of Tolaki ethnic carried out on a large scale and is followed by the entire community. *Mosehe* comes from two words, namely *Mo* and *Sehe*, which mean doing something holy, so this tradition aims to purify the area and ward off disasters and will be implemented if there is an event that befalls the country or a natural phenomenon that is detrimental to humans, for example, a natural disaster, failure. Harvest, the emergence of disease outbreaks, and commotion between residents cause hostility and chaos.

*Mosehe* culture is also a form of conflict resolution in society. *Mosehe*, with traditional rituals, is intended to solve problems in life together, to reflect consensus deliberation and prioritizing unity and helping each other who are experiencing difficulties.

## 3. Imagery of Respect/Politeness

The Tolaki Mekongga ethnic group continues to adhere firmly to the customs or traditions of their ancestors. The imagery of reverence is related to respect, especially respect for God and ancestors. Respect is one of the essential ideas in *mowindahako* ritual speech. One of the things that illustrate respect is giving respect and permission before carrying out customary processes.

In the cultural linguistics context, specific imageries are reflected in the implementation of rituals, namely imageries of respect, as in the expressions of *ronga inepabitara mburaha tolea mbualika* (with permission from the spokesperson for the house owner) and *hende mokuaringgo mombosara inepamarenda* (now asking for customary permission from the government). These expressions indicate that before the dialogue, the two traditional spokesmen expressed their respect and asked for permission from the country's traditional leaders and the woman's parents. Before placing the traditional handover, which is a complete requirement in completing a marriage, they always uphold the applicable rules as a guide in discussing the aims and objectives that will be discussed. Apart from that, one aspect that reflects respect is the atmosphere of silence and solemnity during the implementation of the ritual. This atmosphere means that the *mowindahako* ritual speech contains sacredness and magical value that needs to be respected.

## 4. Imagery of Deliberative

To maintain communication relationships between the two parties in the *mowindahako* ritual, everyone present at the meeting has the right to speak and convey opinions or arguments. In this case, not only the spokesperson may speak. In this way, a sense of empathy and solidarity is built during deliberation. The imagery of deliberation is related to the planning method of doing something. It is closely related to the imagery of unity because deliberation indicates that all families of the prospective groom and bride, including relatives, friends, and village residents, gather in the celebration.

Tolaki Mekongga people uphold the values of deliberation so that in the marriage process, the stages that begin it are known. These stages are: (1) the *metiro* stage is the beginning of the prospective groom's parents reviewing the prospective bride, (2) *mondotudu* stage is the preliminary proposal stage, (3) *meloso'ako* stage is the proposal stage, (4) *mondongo niwule* stage is the betel nut delivery stage, and (5) *mowindahako* stage is the customary completion stage,

the final stage, in which *Popolo* (dowry), customary items and other required equipment are handled over to the prospective bridegroom (Tarimana, 1993, pp. 141-151).

This series of processes is intended to negotiate together to reach a mutual decision. Deliberation is the right step to find solutions, formulate plans, and exchange ideas about implementation plans. In the *mowindahako* ritual speech, deliberation is necessary to implement a plan that has been mutually agreed upon. In the expression *kutarimaikomuito sara nimindahako opuitoo sara ronga tekapotto kenolambohae nggo pinoko lakomui pokolahoito* (representing the bridegroom's family and those present who have all accepted the father's traditional handover), something that is produced in deliberation activities whose manifestation can be in the form of a decision, agreement is called consensus, where all persons who participate express agreement. It is reflected in the Mekongga ethnic culture in the *mowindahako* ritual that the traditional handover submitted by the groom as a completeness requirement after being deemed sufficient and complete, then the bride, through their spokesperson, stated that they accepted it as well as proof that they (both parties) have agreed.

#### 5. Imagery of Loyalty or Obedience

In carrying out his duties, the spokesperson must act fairly and honestly and pray for the bride and groom's families to live in harmony, peace, happiness, health, knowledge and faith until the end of their lives. The imagery of loyalty is related to obedience, submissiveness, and fidelity to what other people ask for. In the linguistic concept of culture, loyalty, obedience and submission are based on specific imagery, namely the imagery of loyalty. In the *mowindahako* ritual speech, the imagery of loyalty is seen in the expressions of *molali mabadoa kuanggoto umaleika* (to ask for protection from Allah SWT) and *takiongo teisiakoronga motipua kota kianggo* (hopefully the two of us the traditional spokespeople will not be sinful and disobedient). This expression illustrates that they (the traditional spokespersons) always comply with the customary rules implemented in the ritual; if they do not comply with the provisions, then the spokespersons will suffer disaster, as in the expression *onggo kumokono komami kepayenggo remuurungguhi kami* (we will not be affected by the impact or sanctions from customs and even get sick).

In Tolaki Mekongga culture, the inheritance from the ancestors is in the form of teachings, usually in the form of ritual prayers as *mohue kalosara* (confirmation/affirmation of custom). The goal is for parents and community leaders to sit together before or after traditional attributes. May everyone live a calm and healthy life. The phrase describes and emphasizes aspects of loyalty, obedience, and submission.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the problem formulation and the results of data analysis, the conclusion is drawn that *mowindahako* ritual speech is one of the traditional rituals of Tolaki Mekongga Kolaka ethnic group, Southeast Sulawesi, which is still used as a means of verbal communication in interaction with the supporting community and in human manifestation with the creator (Allah SWT). This ritual has a beautiful structure because it is supported by forms such as parallelism and metaphor. The imagery discourse of Tolaki Mekongga people in the *mowindahako* ritual speech is identical to the values crystallized in the interrelation between linguistics and human culture. In cultural linguistics, imageries are constructed and communicated through verbal symbols, namely language. Some of the imageries found are Imagery of beauty, Imagery of unity/togetherness, Imagery of respect/politeness, Imagery of deliberation, and Imagery of loyalty and obedience.

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