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## **An Anthro-Pragmatic Approach: Implicatures in the Sacred Mangongkal Holi Ritual of Batak Toba Tradition**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines implicatures in the sacred Mangongkal Holi rite of the Batak Toba culture, emphasize how implicational content upholds social values, hierarchy, and cultural identity. This study utilised a qualitative ethnographic design, integrating anthropological insight with pragmatic analysis using an Anthro-Pragmatic approach. The data collection for this project involved participant observation, comprehensive interviews, and the documentation of ritual texts and practices. The investigation indicates that implicatures conveyed through words, gestures, and symbolic behaviours are crucial in expressing unspoken meanings that bolster social cohesion, reverence for ancestors, and communal identity. The findings emphasise the operation of implicatures in distinct forms, including conventional, generalised conversational, and particularised conversational implicatures, each contributing uniquely to the cultural and social purposes of the ritual. This research enhances the comprehension of how implicit communication in rituals supports the preservation of cultural heritage, strengthens community cohesion, and offers critical insights into maintaining ancient practices in the face of modernisation.

**Keywords:** *Mangongkal Holi, Cultural Preservation, Implicatures, Ritual, Batak Toba Tradition*



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Anthropology and pragmatics share a deep connection in understanding human communication and social behavior. As explained by (Moganapriya Nedumaran & Ramya Suresh, 2022; Shiya R, 2023) Anthropology is the study of cultural and societal frameworks within which humans operate, such as traditions, rituals, and belief systems. Pragmatics, on the other hand, explores how language is used in context to convey both explicit and implicit meanings (Ciecierski & Grabarczyk, 2021; Holmes et al., 2020; Mao & Wang, 2022). Put together, these disciplines offer a comprehensive perspective on how communication reflects and reinforces cultural norms. The integration of these fields, now known as the Anthro-Pragmatic approach, allows for the analysis of implicit meanings such as implicatures within cultural rituals (Hoye, 2006; Monaghan, 2011). This approach has brought to light that language, when studied within its cultural context, reflects not only societal values but also serves as a tool in maintaining social cohesion and reinforcing identity (Duranti, 2004; Heim, 2011).

The role of rituals in creating implicit cognitive frameworks through their externalized forms. The cognitive interaction with ritual artifacts promotes inferential reasoning, aiding participants in understanding and internalizing abstract or symbolic knowledge (Magnani, 2018). Rituals are portrayed as fundamental human practices that serve dual purposes: they are both cognitive tools and social frames (Dwinarko et al., 2022; Koschmann & McDonald, 2015). They depend upon preordained, repetitive action, often linked to symbolic meaning, which helps individuals externalize abstract ideas into concrete forms through material artifacts, such as prayer beads or surrogate situations (Krátký, 2014; Xygalatas, 2024). Rituals hold a central place in cultures worldwide, acting as structured activities laden with symbolic meanings. They are often used to mark significant life events, affirm communal



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relationships, and reinforce societal values and hierarchies (Baele & Balzacq, 2022; Silverman et al., 2021). For the Batak Toba community, rituals like Mangongkal Holi transcend mere ceremonial functions (Nurjannah Sintya Sihotang et al., 2023). This sacred ritual of exhumation and reburial of ancestral bones expresses respect for ancestors, maintains community ties, and affirms the shared identity of the community. Such rituals not only relate the individual to their past but are also cultural means of maintaining tradition, ensuring continuity across generations.

In pragmatics, implicatures are meanings that are not said but can be gathered from context and shared understanding (Bilmes, 2022). In addition, (Robot et al., 2023) explain that one of the important studies in pragmatics study is conversational implicature. Conversational implicature is a process of interpreting meaning based on both situation and context. These are implicit meanings that play an important role in rituals, where actions, gestures, and speech are often symbolic and layered with unspoken significance (Barbulet, 2013; Katsos et al., 2023; Musa & Mohammed, 2022). In the Mangongkal Holi ritual, implicatures show up in the language and practices that convey respect for ancestors, adherence to social hierarchy, and reinforcement of communal values (Charles David M. Silalahi, Robert Sibarani, 2021; Prayoga & Situmorang, 2023) . For example, certain lines or actions in the ritual might carry implicatures of respect or submission to tradition, which would not be directly stated but merely implied. These implicatures are crucial for ensuring the ritual's effectiveness in fostering unity and preserving tradition, the respect of tradition, and the perpetuation of Batak Toba culture. This ritual of exhumation and reburial of the remains of ancestors is not only a moment of family reverence but also a collective identity and social hierarchy (Aritonang et al., 2023; Elan et al., 2024; Hutagaol & P. Prayitno, 2020). The subliminal messages of the Mangongkal Holi ritual are very important for the continuity



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of communal relations and the preservation of traditional values, but they often go unnoticed in scholarship (Gultom & Marbun, 2024).

Understanding such a ritual's layer of meaning does call for an interdisciplinary approach that bridges gaps between pragmatic and anthropological perspectives (Tavárez, 2014). Though there are studies focusing on the socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions of Batak Toba traditions, the pragmatic aspects, particularly implicature's role in communicating unsaid meanings and in maintaining social norms has received limited attention. For instance, (Aritonang et al., 2023) applied a semiotic approach to the interpretation of mythological meaning within the Mangongkal Holi ritual using the theory proposed by Roland Barthes. It looks into symbolic and mythical representations such as rituals and symbols, not touching upon the pragmatic linguistic issues of unsaid meaning determining communication and social dynamics. (Gultom & Marbun, 2024) use a contextual theological approach to research on Rogate, with an emphasis on reconciliation between cultural traditions and the doctrine of Christianity. This employs the "kernel and husk" theory, by which core values are identified from external practices. Such an approach examines the integration of the ritual both form theological and cultural perspectives. It touches on social values but does not address the role of language implicatures in structuring social cohesion. Also, the research in (Elan et al., 2024). The research is dedicated to the cultural and identity-affirming role of the Mangongkal Holi ritual and examines how this tradition serves as a unifying element in maintaining the identity of the Batak Toba people against globalization. It points out symbolic practices and social cohesion, but there is no consideration of the pragmatic linguistic dimension in ritual communication. Investigating how implicit communication forms and maintains sociality This gap in the literature points to the importance of understanding the interplay between language and cultural practice within this sacred ritual. This paper's novelty lies in its embedding the Anthro-Pragmatic



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approach, combining an anthropological perspective with pragmatic analysis for a holistic grasp of the Mangongkal Holi ritual. None of the previous research into this topic has elaborated on the mechanisms of implicature: how the unsaid is structured and interpreted within the cultural framework. This innovative approach not only adds to knowledge concerning the Batak Toba traditions but also contributes to ritual communication as a field in its own right.

The urgency of this research underlies the documentation and analysis of traditional practices that are gradually being overshadowed by modernization and globalization. As newer generations become increasingly disconnected from these cultural rituals, the need to preserve and understand such practices for their cultural and historical importance is dire. This paper addresses the issue of highlighting the communicative and symbolic functions of the Mangongkal Holi ritual.

This paper intends to investigate how implicatures are at work in the Mangongkal Holi ritual to articulate social values, hierarchy, and communal identity. Following an Anthro-Pragmatic approach, the present study combines anthropological insights into pragmatic analysis with a view to unearthing implicit messages hidden in ritual language. The objectives of this study are two-fold: first, to explain the ways in which implicature works within the ritual; and second, to identify its role in maintaining social cohesion and respect for the ancestors. In so doing, this work contributes to a broader understanding of how ritual communication shapes and reflects cultural practices, offering new insights into the intersection of language, culture, and identity.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic design adopts an Anthro-Pragmatic Approach (Arivan Mahendra, Muhammad Wahyu Ilhami, Wiyanda Vera Nurfaejriani, Rusdy



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A. Sirodj, 2024; Ramanadhan et al., 2021; Reeves et al., 2013), combining both anthropological insights and pragmatic analysis in studying the implicatures of the Mangongkal Holi ritual. It was conducted for two months in order to comprehend how language in rituals shows social values, hierarchy, and collective identity among the Batak Toba people. The methodology is in line with the timing of the rituals, which ensures that data collection is contextually accurate and culturally set. Data collection was done through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis. The observations were made during the Mangongkal Holi rituals to record practices, gestures, and ritual language, supported by detailed field notes. Interviews with cultural performers, community elders, and participants provided insights into the symbolic and social dimensions of the rituals. Documentation of ritual texts and oral traditions further enriched the contextual understanding of implicatures. The tools developed included structured interview guides and observation checklists that were reviewed by experts and pilot-tested for reliability and validity. Data analysis combined thematic and pragmatic approaches. Thematic analysis identified implicatures, speech acts, and cultural symbolism as the major themes; pragmatic analysis has looked at how such elements function to reinforce social cohesion and ancestor reverential fear. Triangulation of data sources ensured credibility.

## **DISCUSSION**

This section delineates the study's conclusions, obtained through an examination of the Mangongkal Holi ritual employing thematic and pragmatic methodologies. The investigation reveals the key importance of implicatures in conveying hidden meanings and their contribution to maintaining social structures, cultural identity, and communal harmony in the Batak Toba community. The thematic method highlighted essential themes including reverence for ancestors, social unity, cultural preservation, and contemporary adaptations,



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whereas the pragmatic approach elucidated the implicit messages hidden within ritual activities, gestures, and symbolic aspects. The findings underscore the complex relevance of the Mangongkal Holi ritual in conserving Batak Toba traditions while adjusting to current difficulties.

### **Analysis of Toba Batak Implicatures in Mangongkal Holi Ritual**

**Table 1.** Analysis of Toba Batak Implicatures in Mangongkal Holi Ritual

| <b>Utterance</b>  | <b>Bahasa</b>  | <b>English</b>   | <b>Implicature Types</b>                  | <b>Function</b>  |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <i>Horas, mauliate godang tu ompung!</i>                    | Horat, terima kasih banyak kepada leluhur!           | Respect, thank you greatly to the ancestors!                     | Conventional Implicature                  | Expresses gratitude and reverence for ancestors, strengthening familial bonds.         |
| <i>Ulos na marsahala, ma pasupas ni ompung.</i>             | Menari tortor diiringi gondang sabangunan.           | Performing the <i>tortor</i> dance accompanied by gondang music. | Generalized Conversational Implicature    | Symbolizes unity and ancestral blessings, fostering social cohesion.                   |
| <i>Gondang sabangunan dipasu-pasu tondi mardongan tubu.</i> | Memindahkan tulang ke tambak keluarga.               | First, move the bones to the family monument.                    | Generalized Conversational Implicature    | Reflects familial responsibility and cultural continuity through spiritual transition. |
| <i>Somba marhula-hula, dame marboru.</i>                    | Ulos yang diberkati, ini adalah berkah dari leluhur. | The blessed ulos, this is the blessing of the ancestors.         | Conventional Implicature                  | Represents protection and blessings, reinforcing spiritual connections.                |
| <i>Tambak na pir do pamatang ni hasangapon.</i>             | Jiwa dan kehormatan leluhur bersatu.                 | The spirit and honor of the ancestors are united.                | Particularized Conversational Implicature | Emphasizes unity of spirit and honor, promoting cultural pride and identity.           |
| <i>Iba ompung na marsahala.</i>                             | Horat kepada hula-hula, damai kepada boru.           | Respect the hula-hula, peace to the boru.                        | Generalized Conversational Implicature    | Reinforces social hierarchy and respect for societal roles, ensuring familial harmony. |



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|   |  |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <i>Jolo manopot holi tu tambak ni harajaon.</i> | Memberikan ulos kepada jiwa yang diberkati.                      | Present the ulos to the blessed spirit.                       | Conventional Implicature                  | Strengthens familial bonds and connects the living with ancestral blessings.                   |
| <i>Manortor margondang sabangunan.</i>          | Monumen keluarga adalah puncak kehormatan.                       | The family monument is the peak of honor.                     | Particularized Conversational Implicature | Embodies familial pride and unity, preserving cultural identity and intergenerational respect. |
| <i>Mangulosi margelleng.</i>                    | <i>tondi</i> Kita menghormati leluhur yang diberkati.            | We honor the blessed ancestors.                               | Conventional Implicature                  | Reinforces respect and communal pride in shared ancestral heritage.                            |
| <i>Jolo manopot holi tu tambak ni harajaon.</i> | Gondang sabangunan memberkati jiwa kerabat satu garis keturunan. | Gondang sabangunan blesses the spirits of kin in one lineage. | Generalized Conversational Implicature    | Strengthens lineage unity and social cohesion through communal blessings.                      |

From the table above, the examination of Toba Batak utterances in the Mangongkal Holi rite demonstrates that implicatures play a vital role in expressing cultural, social, and spiritual meaning. Conventional Implicatures, Generalized Conversational Implicatures, and Particularized Conversational Implicatures are the main kinds observed in the data analyzed. Conventional implicatures have connotations naturally associated to them, not highly reliant on the context, which includes respect, blessings, and oneness, such as in utterances like "Horas, mauliate godang tu ompung!" and "Ulos na marsahala, ma pasupas ni ompung." These sayings promote thankfulness, respect for ancestors, and the spiritual linking of generations. Generalized conversational implicatures are present in statements whose meanings are underpinned by shared cultural understanding. Phrases such as "Manortor margondang sabangunan" and "Somba marhula-hula, dame marboru" reveal implicit comprehension of the place of every member of society, the value of rituals, and the solidarity created in communal activities. Such implicatures are vital in maintaining respect for the social structure and harmony within the Batak Toba society.





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Particularized conversational implicatures are based on context and bring out deeper cultural and spiritual connotations. Utterances like "Tambak na pir do pamatang ni hasangapon" and "Tondi dohot hasangapon ni ompung marsirang" express the symbolic family monument and the oneness of spirit and honor. These statements provide a point that provides latent messages of family pride, intergenerational respect, and spiritual continuity with reference to ancestral links. These implicatures progressively encourage respect for ancestors, preserve cultural customs, and maintain social cohesion. They also stress the value of language in identifying identity, creating togetherness, and perpetuating spiritual and cultural traditions. Combining pragmatic views with anthropological perspectives, this investigation highlights the richness of communication inherent in the Mangongkal Holi rite and shows how language, culture, and identity intersect.

### **Thematic and Pragmatic Analysis of Implicatures in the Mangongkal Holi Ritual**

The ceremony of Mangongkal Holi is the most meaningful custom in the culture of Batak Toba, which is full of symbolic meanings and communicative aspects. This ceremony not only reflects the cultural values, social structures, and ancestral reverence of the Batak Toba community but also serves as a conduit for implicit communication through language, actions, and symbols. This analysis, through a theme and pragmatic method, illustrates how implicatures in the ritual convey hidden messages that reinforce social cohesion and preserve cultural identity.

The table above presents a methodical study of the implicit messages intrinsic to the language and actions of the ceremony. It presents the data under major topics that show how implicatures work inside the ritual to define values, social hierarchies, and communal identities. Furthermore, the pragmatic approach exposes how such implicit messages aid in sustaining reverence for ancestors, establishing family relationships, and protecting the continuance of Batak Toba traditions against modernization.



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The following table analysis seeks to bridge the gap between pragmatics and anthropology by showing how language and cultural practices combine in the transmission of deeper meanings. The table takes an in-depth look at the role implicatures play in sustaining the social and spiritual components of the Mangongkal Holi ritual, therefore being essential both a cultural artifact and a living tradition. Through this, it helps to the greater knowledge of ritual communication and its relevance in cultural preservation and the harmony of social life.

**Table 2.** Thematic and Pragmatic Analysis of Implicatures in the Mangongkal Holi Ritual

| No. | Theme/Aspects                                   | Description   | Pragmatic Function   | Examples  |
|-----|---|---|--|---|
| 1.  | <i>Respect for Ancestors</i>                    | Actions such as retrieving, cleansing, and relocating bones emphasize reverence for lineage and dignity.  | Conveys reverence and ancestral honor implicitly through actions.                      | Cleansing bones with lime water symbolizes purification; prayer rituals honor ancestors' dignity.               |
| 2.  | <i>Social Cohesion and Hierarchy</i>            | Roles of traditional leaders, elders, and specific clan members reflect respect and social hierarchy within the community.                                    | Communicates authority and hierarchy without verbal articulation.                      | Traditional leaders lead the procession; ulos bearers and musicians play roles signifying social hierarchy.     |
| 3.  | <i>Cultural Identity and Preservation</i>       | Mangongkal Holi strengthens Batak Toba identity, ensuring cultural traditions are passed across generations.  | Reaffirms communal identity through implicit actions and symbols.                      | Placement of bones in monuments represents lineage preservation; rituals involve all generations.               |
| 4.  | <i>Modern Challenges and Adaptations</i>        | Economic constraints, urban migration, and modern lifestyles challenge the ritual's preservation but adaptations such as video documentation help sustain it. | Balances tradition with modernity while retaining implicit meanings in core practices. | Use of video documentation allows distant relatives to participate; modern clothing and tools are incorporated. |
| 5.  | <i>Implicit Communication in Ritual Actions</i> | Non-verbal actions like cleansing bones or tortor dances imply reverence,   | Reinforces social and spiritual values through symbolic actions.                       | Respectful gestures during bone relocation imply reverence; tortor  |



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|    |  |   |   |  |
|----|--|---|---|--|
|    |  | gratitude, and solidarity without explicit statements.  |   | dance conveys family solidarity.   |
| 6. | <i>Social Roles and Implicatures</i>           | Leadership roles and actions during the ritual reflect societal respect and authority, communicated implicitly.       | Implicitly highlights the social hierarchy and respect for cultural roles.  | Elders' careful handling of bones reflects respect for their societal role; non-verbal cues signify hierarchy. |
| 7. | <i>Communal Values through Non-Verbal Cues</i> | Gestures such as presenting ulos and laying bones in monuments symbolize unity and heritage.                          | Strengthens communal bonds and cultural identity through symbolic gestures. | Presentation of ulos to descendants signifies blessings; communal meals symbolize unity.                       |
| 8. | <i>Ritual as a Medium for Social Messages</i>  | The ritual conveys intergenerational continuity, lineage respect, and communal solidarity through symbolic practices. | Acts as a vehicle for conveying shared values and collective identity.      | Gondang sabangunan music fosters togetherness; bone placement rituals symbolize intergenerational bonds.       |

The Mangongkal Holi ritual, as conducted in Batak Toba culture, exhibits important cultural, social, and pragmatic components that are crucial for maintaining communal identity and ancestral reverence. The following insights describe the analysis:

### 1. Respect for Ancestors

The ritual emphasizes strong veneration for ancestors through gestures such as recovering and washing bones. For instance, cleaning bones with lime water not only indicates physical purity but also represents spiritual reverence. This veneration is maintained by prayers and other ceremonial activities that commemorate the lineage and its contributions.

### 2. Social Cohesion and Hierarchy

Social structures within the Batak Toba group are visible in the responsibilities allotted during the rite. Traditional leaders, singers, and ulos holders execute actions that symbolise their societal rank. For example, the cautious treatment of bones by elders indicates their



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valued status within the family hierarchy, indirectly teaching the younger generation the significance of conforming to social duties.

### 3. Cultural Identity and Preservation

The ritual plays a key role in preserving Batak Toba cultural identity by incorporating numerous generations in symbolic rituals such as the depositing of bones in family monuments. This ritual not only honors ancestors but also ensures the continuance of cultural heritage, linking families over time and distance.

### 4. Modern Challenges and Adaptations

While modernization and urban living offer challenges to ancient behaviours, the ritual has adapted in unique ways. For example, video footage enables distant family members to virtually participate, while modern attire and tools are effortlessly blended into the ritual while keeping its basic symbolic features.

### 5. Implicit Communication in Ritual Actions

Non-verbal gestures are crucial to conveying unstated ideas during the ceremony. Respectful actions during bone translocation, mixed with tortor dances, transmit ideas of reverence, unity, and thankfulness without verbal explanation. These behaviours powerfully reverberate inside the cultural framework of the community.

### 6. Social Roles and Implicatures

Leadership responsibilities during the ceremony implicitly reinforce cultural ideals. The participation of traditional leaders and elders conveys authority and hierarchy, while their deliberate and symbolic actions communicate respect and the solemnity of the ceremony.

### 7. Communal Values via Non-Verbal Cues

Gestures such as delivering ulos to descendants or eating meals after the ritual signify family unity and blessings. These non-verbal clues stress the common identity and interdependence of the Batak Toba people.



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## 8. Ritual as a Medium for Social Messages

The Mangongkal Holi ritual works as a cultural conduit, imparting intergenerational respect, communal cohesion, and the significance of lineage through symbolic rituals such as gondang sabangunan music and family monuments.

## CONCLUSION

The paper analyses the role of implicatures in the Mangongkal Holi rite of the Batak Toba culture and aims to address the research gap with concerning to how implicit communication serves to convey cultural, social, and spiritual values. The results, gained through theme and pragmatic analyses, demonstrate that implicatures, which are entrenched in language, gestures, and symbolic actions, are a key mechanism in maintaining social cohesion, reinforcing hierarchy, and conserving cultural identity. The primary topics of the ritual will now be presented: respect of the ancestors, societal cohesion and hierarchy, preservation of tradition and identity, current difficulties and changes, and finally, the communing value via non-verbal gestures. For example, behaviours like recovering and purifying ancestral bones are symbolic of veneration and continuity of lineage, but ulos presentations and rituals and tortor dances provide full emphasis on blessings, unity, and thanksgiving. Such themes just highlight how much richness the Mangongkal Holi festival contains to help in sustaining cultures.

Pragmatic study in the ritual demonstrates that there are three basic forms of implicatures: conventional implicature, generalized conversational implicature, and particularized conversational implicature. Examples of conventional implicatures include "Horas, mauliate godang tu ompung!" and "Ulos na marsahala, ma pasupasus ni ompung," which have inherently expressed thanks, respect, and blessings. The generalized conversational implicatures in examples like "Manortor margondang sabangunan" and



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"Somba marhula-hula, dame marboru" presuppose shared cultural awareness, with a focus on societal roles and unity. Particularized conversational implicatures, for instance, "Tambak na pir do pamatang ni hasangapon," are contextual in stressing familial pride and spiritual continuity. The study further connects pragmatic and anthropological concepts in illustrating how the implicatures of the ritual language and action symbolise the communal identity and spiritual beliefs of the Batak Toba group. Implicatures are vehicles of unstated meanings that maintain familial relationships, respect for elders, and communal harmony. The findings underline the durability of the ritual in reconciling tradition with modernity, as demonstrated by the use of video filming for participants who are far away. By concentrating on the implicit parts of communication, this research will assist explain how the Mangongkal Holi ritual functions as both a cultural artifact and a living tradition. The work will add to the broader subject of ritual communication by revealing how language, culture, and identity interrelate in maintaining social institutions and cultural heritage. The necessity for rapid documentation and examination of such practices is clear since modernization gravely threatens their continuance. This work not only enriches the understanding of Batak Toba customs but also highlights the crucial function of implicatures in upholding communal values and cultural cohesiveness.

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