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An Ethnopragmatic Analysis of Speech Meaning and Cultural Values in the *Nduna Bakula* Tradition of Nusak Lole, Rote Ndao Regency

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ABSTRACT

The *Nduna Bakula* tradition is a customary ceremony in Nusak Lole, Rote Ndao Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, involving ritual speeches that convey social relationships, cultural knowledge, and communal values. However, the declining familiarity of younger generations with archaic vocabulary and metaphorical expressions threatens the intergenerational transmission of this tradition. This study aims to examine the ethnopragmatic meanings of *Nduna Bakula* utterances and identify the cultural values embedded within them. Employing a qualitative descriptive-phenomenological design, data were collected through participant observation, audio recordings, field notes, and in-depth interviews with three traditional leaders (Maneleo). Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, integrating Speech Act Theory, conversational implicature, ethnopragmatics, and cultural-value frameworks. The findings reveal three dimensions of ritual meaning: locutionary meanings expressed through poetic parallelism and agrarian metaphors; illocutionary forces manifested through assertive, commissive, and directive acts; and conversational implicatures conveying consolation, social-debt settlement, and peaceful passage to the afterlife. Furthermore, three fundamental cultural values were identified: solidarity and kinship, responsibility and protective leadership, and social balance and reconciliation. These values reflect the community's customary norms and are associated with Fox's local Rote cultural domains, Schwartz's value theory, Gelfand's Cultural Tightness–Looseness Theory, and Henrich's Cultural Brain Hypothesis.

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1. Introduction

Language is an essential component of culture that reflects collective identity, preserves traditional knowledge, and transmits social values across generations (Duranti, 1997; Wierzbicka, 1991). However, the increasing dominance of national and global languages has contributed to the declining vitality of regional languages, particularly among younger generations (Bromham, 2023; Da Costa, 2023; Meighan, 2024). In Indonesia, language shift has increasingly affected family and educational domains, weakening intergenerational transmission and threatening the cultural knowledge embedded in traditional expressions (Pramuniati et al., 2026; Mukhamdanah et al., 2025).

The relationship between language and cultural context can be examined through ethnopragmatics, which investigates how linguistic meanings are shaped by culturally specific norms, values, and assumptions (Goddard, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1991). Previous studies demonstrate that customary expressions, greetings, forms of address, and ritual discourse can only be adequately interpreted by considering the cultural knowledge shared by their speakers (Habib, 2022). Ritual language consequently functions not only as communication but also as a medium for preserving cultural identity, social relationships, and collective knowledge (Bani & Ndun, 2021; McKenzie, 2022).

In Rote Ndao Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, traditional oral expressions characterized by parallelism, metaphors, and culturally specific vocabulary constitute important elements of local identity. Previous research has documented the meanings and social functions of customary utterances in Rote communities (Bani & Ndun, 2021; Fallo & Boimau, 2023). Research on the Dengka dialect also demonstrates that lexical meanings are closely connected to local cultural practices (Putri & Loe, 2026). These findings highlight the importance of documenting regional languages together with their cultural and pragmatic dimensions.

One significant cultural practice in Nusak Lole is the Nduna Bakula tradition, a customary ceremony involving the symbolic presentation of a large basket containing agricultural products and other traditional objects. The ceremony represents thanksgiving, social reconciliation, and communal farewell. Its stages are accompanied by customary speeches delivered by Maneleo (traditional leaders), whose utterances carry social, cultural, and spiritual significance. Similar studies of indigenous ritual discourse in Indonesia demonstrate that traditional expressions preserve community identity, beliefs, moral principles, and collective values (Bani & Ndun, 2021; Fallo & Boimau, 2023; The cultural attitudes of a funeral ritual discourse, 2022).

Nevertheless, the continuity of this tradition faces challenges associated with language shift and declining familiarity with archaic vocabulary and metaphorical expressions among younger generations (Pramuniati et al., 2026; Mukhamdanah et al., 2025; Kaban, 2024). This situation threatens their understanding of culturally embedded knowledge and ritual practices. Language revitalization therefore requires more than documenting linguistic structures; it also involves preserving the cultural meanings, identities, and traditional knowledge transmitted through language (Bromham, 2023; McKenzie, 2022; Ting, 2024). Documentation of indigenous folklore and oral traditions

further contributes to language revitalization and the preservation of cultural knowledge (Bocheńska & Ghaderi, 2023; Meighan, 2024).

From a pragmatic perspective, ritual utterances communicate meanings beyond their literal linguistic forms. Speech Act Theory explains how utterances perform communicative and social actions through locutionary and illocutionary dimensions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). In customary ceremonies, expressions may simultaneously convey literal meanings, perform social actions, and communicate implicit cultural messages. These dimensions require interpretation through the cultural expectations and shared knowledge of the community (Goddard, 2006; Habib, 2022). Research on ritual discourse also demonstrates that traditional expressions preserve moral, spiritual, social, and ecological knowledge (Baan et al., 2022)

Despite previous research on Rote oral traditions and ritual language, the ethnopragmatic meanings of Nduna Bakula utterances and their relationship with broader cultural values remain insufficiently documented. An integrated analysis is necessary to explain how literal meanings, illocutionary forces, and conversational implicatures represent the community's cultural knowledge and social expectations.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) describe and explain the ethnopragmatic meanings of Nduna Bakula utterances, particularly their locutionary meanings, illocutionary meaning, and conversational implicatures; and (2) identify the fundamental cultural values represented in these ritual expressions. The study contributes to the documentation of Rote oral traditions by demonstrating how ritual language preserves cultural identity, social relationships, and the collective worldview of the Nusak Lole community.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ethnopragmatics and Cultural Scripts

Ethnopragmatics examines language use through culturally specific norms, values, assumptions, and social practices. Unlike approaches that assume universal pragmatic interpretations, ethnopragmatics emphasizes the cultural knowledge underlying speakers' intentions and listeners' interpretations (Goddard, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1991). Terkourafi (2021) explains that pragmatic interpretation involves linguistic expressions, contextual information, speaker intentions, and culturally regulated expectations. Similarly, Habib (2022) demonstrates how the Cultural Scripts Approach explains culturally specific communication while minimizing ethnocentric interpretations.

Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) provides an additional perspective for examining culturally embedded meanings. Previous studies have applied NSM to investigate lexical and pragmatic meanings, including Indonesian and Japanese verbs (Budiman et al., 2023) and English speech-act verbs (Ardiantari, 2023). Bułat Silva (2024) further emphasizes the importance of understanding linguistic meanings from the perspective of ordinary speakers and their cultural experiences. These perspectives are relevant to Nduna Bakula because its ritual expressions encode local understandings of kinship, respect, reciprocity, obligation, hierarchy, and social harmony.

2.2 Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory explains how linguistic expressions perform actions through locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions. Originally developed by Austin (1962) and subsequently elaborated by Searle (1969), the theory provides a foundation for identifying the communicative and social functions of utterances. Sbisà (2022) discusses the continuing relevance of these distinctions, particularly in understanding the relationship between speaker intention and interpretation.

Empirical studies demonstrate the applicability of Speech Act Theory to different communicative contexts. Demuyakor (2021) examines speech acts in a presidential inaugural address, while Putri et al. (2024) apply Searle's five illocutionary categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. House and Kádár (2023) further emphasize that speech-act interpretation should consider interactional contexts rather than linguistic forms alone. Accordingly, this study employs Speech Act Theory to examine how Maneleo utterances communicate meanings and perform customary actions during Nduna Bakula.

2.3 Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle explains how conversational participants communicate meanings through the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Conversational implicature occurs when listeners infer meanings beyond explicitly expressed linguistic content. Terkourafi (2021) emphasizes the importance of contextual and cultural information in pragmatic interpretation, while Hall and Mazzarella (2023) distinguish between explicitly communicated content and additional meanings derived through pragmatic inference. Elder (2021) similarly demonstrates that implicit meanings require consideration of contextual and interpersonal relationships.

In ritual discourse, metaphor, parallelism, and indirect expressions may communicate meanings that cannot be understood through literal translation alone. Therefore, this study integrates conversational implicature with ethnopragmatics to explain how Nduna Bakula utterances convey culturally shared meanings through indirect communication.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive-phenomenological design to examine the ethnopragmatic meanings and cultural values of the Nduna Bakula tradition in Nusak Lole, Rote Ndao Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Data were collected through participant observation, audio recordings, field notes, and in-depth interviews with three Maneleo selected purposively: Ruben Balukh, Petrus A. Ndun, and Melkat Mbado. Observation involved Observation-Engaged Conversation (OEC) and Observation-Free Conversation (OFC) to document ritual utterances and their contexts. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model through transcription, translation, and pragmatic analysis of locutionary meanings, illocutionary forces, and conversational implicatures. Cultural values were subsequently identified through Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969), Cultural Scripts (Goddard, 2006), and Cultural Tightness–Looseness

Theory (Gelfand, 2018), complemented by contemporary cultural-value frameworks and Fox's local Rote cultural domains. Data credibility was ensured through source and theoretical triangulation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Linguistic Analysis of Ritual Speech Transcripts

The linguistic analysis of traditional speeches (Hadak) was conducted using Bound Translation (BT) and Free Translation (FT) to examine the lexical meanings, figurative expressions, and culturally embedded meanings of the utterances. Bound Translation provides a word-for-word rendering of the original expressions, whereas Free Translation conveys their contextual and communicative meanings in a more natural form. The English translations (ET) further interpret the expressions by considering their metaphorical significance and cultural implications within the Nduna Bakula tradition. The analysis is organized into three thematic categories: (1) metaphors of identity and consolation, (2) metaphors of kinship and memory, and (3) metaphors of death and impermanence. The following tables present selected speech fragments and their corresponding translations and interpretations.

Table 1. Data 1 – Metaphors of Identity and Consolation

Sentence +Bound Translation (BT)	**Free Translation (FT)**	**English Translation (ET)**
Taka (cangkul) no*(dengan)* dedenan *(sebaya)* ma *(dan)* fela *(parang)* no *(dengan)* baba'un *(besarnya)* Cangkul dengan tingginya dan parang dengan besarnya	Cangkul dengan tingginya dan parang dengan besarnya	Close friends who are vital coworkers of equal status, sharing life's workload.
Solangga*(topi)* la *(tutup)* ledo *(matahari)* ma *(dan)* lesu *(sapu tangan*) hali *(seka)* mbuse *(keringat)*	Topi pelindung kepala dan sapu tangan seka keringat	A symbol of consolation and protection, urging the friend not to drown in sorrow.
Ia *(ini)* lesu *(sapu tangan)* hali *(seka)* lu *(air mata)* boe *(juga)* ma *(dan)* solangga *(topi)* la *(tutup)* ledo *(matahari)*	Ini adalah sapu tangan untuk seka air mata dan topi pelindung kepala	A pragmatic provision for the friend to withstand harsh life after the loss.

Table 2. Data 2 – Metaphors of Kinship and Memory

Sentence +Bound Translation (BT)	**Free Translation (FT)**	**English Translation (ET)**
Lau -lu'a *(sepiring)* neu *(untuk*) esa*(satu)* ma *(dan)* Hai- fati *(segelas)* neu *(untuk)* esa *(satu*) no*(dengan)* tialai *(teman)* ma *(dan)* dedenan *(sebaya)*	Pada satu tempat dengan teman setara saya. Makan di satu tempat dan sama-sama minum di satu tempat minum dengan teman yang sepadan Makan sepiring dan minum segelas	The intimate habit of eating and drinking together, signifying very deep emotional closeness and unity. Signifying very deep emotional closeness and unity.

Masanenedak *(ingat)* ma *(dan)* mafandele *(kenamg)* boso *(jangan)* lili *(lupa)* ma *(dan)* baba *(tutup*) heni *(akan*) au *(saya)*	Tetap ingat dan kenangkan akan saya dan jangan lupa dan abaikan akan saya	A final plea: though the physical body is gone, keep the memory of our friendship alive and honored.

Table 3. Data 3 – Metaphors of Death and Impermanence

Sentence + Bound Translation (BT)	Free Translation (FT)	English Translation (ET)
Fai *(hari)* no *(dengan)* babi *(babi)* nggelan *(pisah)* ma *(dan)* ledo *(matahari)* neu *(untuk)* soko *(miring)* dupe	Waktu di mana babi berpisah dan matahari miring seperti pohon dupe	A metaphor for late afternoon/dusk, poetically signifying the end of a human's life journey.
Sala *(salah)* man *(yang)* hene *(naik)* hatuk *(gelap)* ma *(dan)* singgok *(dosa)* man *(yang)* tingga (*jinjit)* neok *(tiba-tiba)* man *(yang*) mopo *(hilang)* man *(yang*) mates *(mati* la'e *(menimpa)* nai *(di)* ita *(kita)*	Kemalangan datang tengah malam dan kedukaan hadir bagaikan mimpi yang dimana kedukaan dan kehilangan menimpa kita.	Like something that arrives without warning in the dark. That is death, which is already within us.

The findings indicate that Hadak employs metaphorical expressions to convey cultural values of friendship, solidarity, consolation, memory, and mortality. These metaphors emphasize reciprocal relationships, emotional attachment, social bonds, and the impermanence of human life. Thus, Hadak serves not only as a traditional form of speech but also as a cultural medium for expressing and transmitting the values and worldview of the Rote community.

4.2 Ethnopragmatic Analysis of Meanings

a. Locutionary Meaning

At the locutionary level, the utterances in the *Nduna Bakula* tradition employ lexical expressions that literally refer to nature, agriculture, and everyday activities. For instance, *fai no babi nggelan* (the day the pigs separate) refers literally to the separation of livestock at dusk, while *taka no dedenan* (hoe of equal height) describes two agricultural tools of comparable dimensions. The Lole dialect frequently employs poetic parallelism, which, as Fox (1988) observes, reflects not merely stylistic ornamentation but also a cultural worldview in which social relationships are conceptualized through agrarian and natural imagery.

b. Illocutionary Meaning

Three types of illocutionary acts are identified in the *Nduna Bakula* speeches. Assertive acts, represented by *sambu matan ma lalo idun* (close the eyes and lose the nose), communicate and acknowledge the reality of death. Commissive acts, expressed through *na ei harus tao nduna bakulak* (he/she must perform Nduna Bakula), establish a customary obligation for the heirs to fulfill the deceased's final wishes (hehelu). This obligation reflects Schwartz's (2017) Conservation values, particularly Tradition and

Conformity. Directive acts, illustrated by *ia lesu halli lu ... solangga la ledo*, encourage the recipient to accept symbolic objects as expressions of consolation, protection, and enduring brotherhood.

c. Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicature in *Nduna Bakula* is conveyed through indirect and metaphorical expressions that communicate meanings beyond their literal interpretations. The *Maneleo* uses the lesu (handkerchief) to imply consolation and emotional relief, while the *solangga* (hat) symbolizes protection against the hardships of life following the loss of a close friend. Similarly, the expression *nggadi ana mate na ana lao ela nolin* (elephant tusks ...) conveys the implication that influential and wise individuals remain remembered through their moral legacy even after death. Such indirect communication reflects culturally established norms governing emotional expression. As Gelfand (2018) suggests, cultural norms shape how individuals communicate and regulate their emotions. Consequently, grief and vulnerability in *Nduna Bakula* are expressed through culturally meaningful metaphors rather than explicit emotional statements.

4.3 Identification and Classification of Cultural Values

The analysis identified three core cultural values embedded in the *Nduna Bakula* tradition: (1) solidarity and kinship, (2) responsibility and protective leadership, and (3) social balance and reconciliation. These values were examined through the theoretical perspectives of Gelfand (2018), Schwartz (2017), and Henrich (2016), and interpreted within Fox's (2006) local cultural domains of Rote society.

Value 1: Solidarity and Kinship

This value is reflected in the expression *la'o lu'a neu esa* (eating from one plate) and Ruben Balukh's statement emphasizing the importance of preserving brotherhood. From Gelfand's (2018) Tightness-Looseness (TL) perspective, shared meals represent an established social norm that reinforces group belonging and solidarity. In Schwartz's (2017) framework, this value corresponds to Benevolence-Dependability within the Conservation-related orientation, emphasizing the maintenance of supportive relationships with in-group members. Henrich's (2016) Cultural Brain Hypothesis further explains how such practices transmit social knowledge and reinforce kinship obligations across generations. Within Fox's (2006) framework, this value corresponds to Kinship and Commensality, highlighting the importance of shared experiences and enduring social relationships.

Value 2: Responsibility and Protective Leadership

Responsibility and protective leadership are expressed through the symbolic objects *lesu* (handkerchief) and *solangga* (hat), as well as *Melkat Mbado's* statement concerning the elephant leaving its tusks. From Gelfand's (2018) perspective, these expressions reflect normative expectations that individuals assume social responsibilities by providing

emotional support and protection to others. In Schwartz's (2017) framework, this value is associated with Self-Direction-Action, particularly the capacity to exercise individual initiative and responsibility. Henrich's (2016) perspective helps explain how the elephant-tusk metaphor transmits cultural knowledge about leadership, moral authority, and the significance of legacy. In Fox's (2006) framework, this value corresponds to Hierarchy and Protection, emphasizing the relationship between social responsibility, status, and the obligation to protect others.

Value 3: Social Balance and Reconciliation

Social balance and reconciliation are reflected in the expression *au mate na au ta uni sala* (I die and carry no faults) and the implication that death may occur unexpectedly, making interpersonal reconciliation essential. From Gelfand's (2018) Tightness-Looseness perspective, ritual practices provide mechanisms for resolving interpersonal tensions and restoring normative social order. In Schwartz's (2017) framework, this value corresponds to Security-Societal, which emphasizes social stability, harmony, and collective security. Henrich's (2016) Cultural Brain Hypothesis explains how ritualized reconciliation can be transmitted across generations as an adaptive practice for maintaining social cohesion. Within Fox's (2006) framework, this value corresponds to Reciprocity and Social Debt Settlement, emphasizing the resolution of interpersonal obligations so that the deceased can depart peacefully toward *tasi dean* (the afterlife), while the living community restores social harmony.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Nduna Bakula tradition represents an important form of cultural knowledge expressed and transmitted through ritual language. The ethnopragmatic analysis identifies three dimensions of meaning in its customary utterances. At the locutionary level, poetic parallelism and agrarian metaphors construct culturally meaningful representations of social relationships and human experiences. At the illocutionary level, assertive, commissive, and directive acts perform important ceremonial and social functions. Meanwhile, conversational implicatures communicate indirect meanings associated with consolation, social-debt settlement, and the peaceful transition of the deceased to the afterlife *(tasi dean)*.

The study also identifies three fundamental cultural values embedded in the tradition: (1) solidarity and kinship, reflecting the importance of communal relationships and shared belonging; (2) responsibility and protective leadership, emphasizing social obligations and the responsibility to care for others; and (3) social balance and reconciliation, highlighting the importance of resolving interpersonal conflicts and maintaining communal harmony. These values correspond to Fox's local Rote cultural domains and can be interpreted through Gelfand's (2018) Cultural Tightness–Looseness Theory, Schwartz's (2017) Refined Theory of Basic Values, and Henrich's (2016) Cultural Brain Hypothesis.

The findings establish Nduna Bakula as a living cultural system in which linguistic

artistry, social obligations, and cultural ethics converge. Its significance extends beyond ceremonial communication because it preserves the collective identity, traditional knowledge, and social values of the Nusak Lole community. However, declining familiarity with the Lole dialect and its metaphorical expressions highlights the need for deliberate preservation. This study recommends strengthening intergenerational knowledge transmission through the active involvement of Maneleo, conducting comparative ethnopragmatic research across different Nusak communities in Rote Ndao, and incorporating local cultural knowledge into regional school curricula as part of broader language and cultural revitalization efforts.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Rezna Revita Zacharias: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, data curation, and writing – original draft.
Yanrini Martha Anabokay: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.
Deby Marisa Malelak: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.

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