

Local Wisdom in the Oral Tradition of the Seven-Month Pregnancy Ritual: An Ecolinguistic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the values of local wisdom within the Mandailing community's seven-monthly oral traditions, emphasising its significance in understanding the intricate relationship between culture, language, and the environment. The primary objective is to describe these values through an ecolinguistic perspective, supported by an ethnographic study of communication. The research employs listening and note-taking methods, ethnographic conversation, and recording techniques for data collection. The analysis utilises extralingual matching and contextual analysis to identify and interpret the embedded wisdom. Our findings reveal that local wisdom manifests in tangible forms, such as rice wrapped in leaves, gala shrimp, carp, and eggs, and intangible forms, exemplified by words of advice and admonition. These manifestations collectively embody noble values deeply rooted in the Mandailing people's culture. This research contributes to ecolinguistics by highlighting how oral traditions are a repository for cultural values and environmental knowledge.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Local wisdom, a fundamental narrative and a guideline for human conduct [1], [2], is a core component of culture. It can be categorised into three forms: ideas, behavioural patterns, and cultural artefacts [3]. In terms of its manifestation, local wisdom is either tangible, found in written records like traditional texts or in objects and architecture, or intangible, which includes oral traditions such as proverbs and songs passed down through generations [4]. This duality demonstrates that local wisdom is not only a set of abstract values but also a living practice that sustains cultural continuity across generations.

Building on this general understanding of local wisdom, the seven-monthly oral tradition of the Mandailing community in Padangsidempuan is a prime example of this

intangible heritage. Referred to as 'manyonggoti,' it is a form of lyrical prose spoken by traditional elders during ceremonies like baby births and special events [5]. This tradition embodies spiritual symbolism and social function, serving as a medium through which values and cultural norms are transmitted. While previous research, such as Eviana and Dora's [6] study on the Javanese "tingkeban" tradition, has explored similar rituals, this research will focus exclusively on the local wisdom values within the oral traditions of the Mandailing community's seven-month pregnancy ritual, offering a unique perspective not typically covered by literary or anthropological frameworks.

Although earlier studies have shed light on rituals from the perspectives of literature, history, and anthropology, their focus has been largely limited to historical origins, symbolic meanings, and social functions. While these approaches are valuable, they often overlook the intricate connection between the language used in the ritual and the community's relationship with its physical, social, and cultural environment. Consequently, a gap remains in understanding how linguistic expressions within the ritual encode and sustain ecological wisdom that guides the community's worldview.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a distinct ecolinguistic perspective. Analysing the ritual's utterances as a data corpus, a deliberate shift from broader frameworks, it seeks to uncover how the language reflects the inherent wisdom and values of the Toba Batak ethnicity. This approach highlights the vital role of language as a repository of knowledge that guides the community's interactions with its surroundings, a dimension largely unexplored in prior research. In this sense, ecolinguistics is an analytical tool and a lens for understanding how culture and environment intertwine through linguistic practice.

This orientation is further supported by the observation that in the oral tradition of the seven-monthly event, not only a series of poetic words with a regular rhythm are spoken, but there are also language codes lifted from the natural reality cosmos of the Mandailing people. These codes reveal how natural elements, rivers, mountains, plants, and animals are embedded into ritual speech, signifying the interconnectedness between people and their environment. Therefore, studying the oral tradition of the seven-monthly event should not ignore the dimensions of the natural environment—physical, social, and cultural [7]. In this regard, the ecolinguistic perspective becomes indispensable for highlighting how language acts as a bridge between humans and their ecological context.

In line with this, Fill and Penz [8] describe ecolinguistics as a branch of linguistics that "investigates the role of language in the development and possible solutions of ecological and environmental problems." This implies critically analysing environmental discourses, examining vocabulary choices, idea presentation, and their impact. Such an approach is relevant to global ecological issues and local traditions, where ecological consciousness is encoded in ritual language. Fill further emphasises that ecolinguistics "investigates the role of language in the development and possible solution of ecological and environmental problems," which means it analyses environmental discourses from a critical viewpoint, focusing on how language choices influence environmental outcomes. Ecolinguistics is an ideal framework for uncovering hidden ecological wisdom in indigenous oral traditions.

Expanding this notion, the concept of 'environment' can be understood in physical (biological) and metaphorical senses, namely the social and cultural environment [9]. In the notes of Rahardi [10], this is referred to as "the natural estuary of various linguistic interdisciplinarity," which are tasked with exploring problems in cultural, social, political, and even legal environments [11]. Thus, ecolinguistics deals with the biophysical domain and how language shapes and reflects broader ecological systems of human life. By broadening the understanding of the environment, researchers can better grasp how linguistic codes act as carriers of ecological awareness and cultural resilience.

With this conceptual foundation, the current study aims to reveal and interpret the language codes of the seven-monthly event's oral tradition by reintroducing the Mandailing people's cultural context as an interpretative frame that enriches every data point. The cultural context here is limited to a value system and norms that represent the beliefs and ideologies of the Mandailing community. On this basis, four basic ecolinguistic frameworks are employed: 'language exists in natural ecology,' 'language exists in symbolic ecology,' 'language exists in sociocultural ecology,' and 'language exists in cognitive ecology' [12]. In the analysis and interpretation of data, these four frameworks are integrated as a single, inseparable conceptual unity [13], [14]. Such integration ensures that the study captures the linguistic dimension and its ecological, symbolic, and cultural grounding.

In light of the above discussion, this study seeks to answer the central research question: What local wisdom values are contained within the oral tradition of the seven-monthly event from an ecolinguistic perspective? The primary objective is to describe these values by analysing the language codes embedded in the ritual's utterances. By applying an integrative ecolinguistic framework, the study aims to reveal how this oral tradition reflects the beliefs, norms, and relationships of the Mandailing community with its natural, social, and cultural environment. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a source of learning regional language and literature in elementary and secondary schools through theoretical exposure and textual materials from the seven-monthly oral tradition. The findings can provide academic input to further develop oral tradition studies within Mandailing language and literature lectures in language, culture, and education programs at the university level. Furthermore, for the wider community, the study's outcomes can function as eco-literacy that contributes positively to community economic empowerment, tourism management, and the development and preservation of local languages and customary law, thereby reinforcing the relevance of oral traditions in contemporary society.

2. METHOD

This study is classified as qualitative research with ethnographic characteristics. According to Creswell [15], qualitative research is characterised by: (1) a natural setting as the research context, (2) the researcher as a key instrument, (3) inductive data analysis, and (4) an interpretive approach to meaning-making. In line with these characteristics, this research explores the oral tradition of a seven-monthly ritual event conveyed by traditional Mandailing community actors in Padangsidimpuan. The choice of ethnography ensures

that the research process is firmly anchored in lived realities, allowing the researcher to capture not only the spoken texts but also the symbolic meanings and cultural nuances surrounding the ritual.

The use of a qualitative ethnographic approach is justified by the nature of the research object, namely, oral tradition embedded in cultural practices, which can only be fully understood within the community's social and cultural context. Ethnography allows for in-depth exploration of lived experiences, beliefs, and values as expressed through language and ritual, making it the most appropriate approach for interpreting local wisdom encoded in the oral tradition. This methodological decision also provides space to highlight the community members' perspective, thereby avoiding an outsider's reductionist view and maintaining authenticity in interpretation.

Data Sources and Participants

The primary data source is the oral tradition of the seven-monthly event (martutu aek, etc.), specifically the segments that contain local wisdom values. These data are derived from traditional actors, defined as elders, ritual leaders, and other community members recognised for preserving and performing the oral tradition. By focusing on these custodians of knowledge, the study aims to capture narratives transmitted across generations, embodying both linguistic artistry and cultural continuity.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure depth and relevance of cultural knowledge. A total of [insert number] traditional actors participated in this research, meeting the following criteria:

- Identified by the community as custodians or performers of the tradition
- Actively involved in the ritual events.
- Willing to participate in interviews and recordings.

Such criteria were established to ensure that the participants had experiential familiarity with the rituals and possessed legitimacy in the eyes of the community, which strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using the listening method supported by audio and video recording techniques [16]. These recordings ensured accuracy in capturing linguistic expressions, intonations, and ritual dynamics. To enhance contextual understanding, the ethnographic conversation method was employed during interactions with participants, also recorded for analysis [17], [18]. This conversational approach encouraged natural dialogue, allowing the researcher to uncover implicit meanings and cultural codes that might not surface in formal interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis in this study employed a contextual and extra-lingual approach as outlined by Mahsun [19] and Rahardi [20]. This approach emphasises the textual content and the broader cultural and social context in which the data is embedded. By situating

utterances within their cultural frames, the researcher revealed the embedded wisdom, symbolic values, and worldview of the Mandailing community. The analytical process unfolded through seven interrelated stages, each contributing to a deeper understanding of the oral tradition and the local wisdom it conveys:

1. Transcription

The first step involved transcribing all recorded material into a coherent written corpus. This transcription process required careful listening and attention to linguistic detail to ensure that the spoken nuances of the Mandailing language were accurately represented in written form. The researcher also paid attention to paralinguistic features, such as pauses and emphases, which often carry interpretive significance.

2. Gloss Translation

Once transcribed, the data were translated into Indonesian through two complementary layers:

- a. Meticulous Gloss: A literal, word-for-word translation closely tied to the original Mandailing expressions. This version retains the linguistic texture of the source language and is presented in the appendix.
- b. Fluent Gloss: A more natural, context-sensitive translation aimed at conveying meaning smoothly in Indonesian. This version appears in the main body of the research report and supports interpretive clarity.

This dual translation ensured fidelity to the source and readability for a broader audience, striking a balance between precision and accessibility.

3. Identification

In this phase, the researcher combed through the corpus to identify segments containing elements of local wisdom. This required interpretive sensitivity and a close reading of the text, guided by the study's objectives. Attention was given to explicit messages and implicit cultural references that reveal layers of meaning.

4. Classification

The identified data were then organised into thematic categories relevant to the research focus. This step involved the development of a coding system, enabling a structured and systematic approach to analysing patterns and relationships within the data. The classification process created an analytical framework allowing cross-comparison of themes across different ritual contexts.

5. Contextual Description

Each data segment was then situated within its cultural context—the beliefs, rituals, values, and practices of the Mandailing community that give the utterances their full meaning. This stage was crucial in bridging the textual with the cultural, allowing the researcher to grasp what was said, why, and how it was said. This way, the oral tradition is treated as a linguistic artefact and cultural performance.

6. Interpretation of Meaning

At the heart of the analysis, this stage involved interpreting the data holistically by connecting language with lived experience. Using insights from ecolinguistics and ethnography of communication, the researcher explored the underlying values, worldviews, and cultural logic reflected in the oral tradition. Such interpretation illuminated how oral narratives reinforce collective identity, moral values, and social cohesion within the community.

7. Triangulation and Reflection

Finally, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher engaged in triangulation—cross-referencing interpretations with other sources and perspectives. This was followed by confirmation through expert feedback or discussions with community members. The process concluded with a phase of critical reflection, where the researcher evaluated their role, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the study, as suggested by Aminuddin [21]. This reflective stance strengthened the overall reliability of the study while acknowledging the interpretive nature of ethnographic inquiry.

The stages and analysis of the research must be explained in detail and drawn into a diagram.

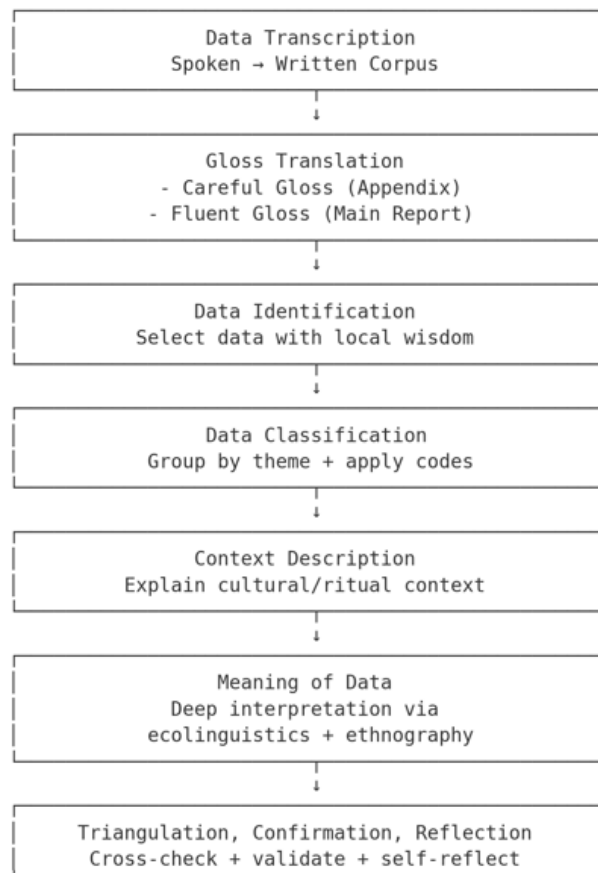


Figure 1. The stages and analysis of the research

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Based on the data analysis of oral traditions from the seven-monthly event (Indahan horas-horas) in the Mandailing community, two main categories of local wisdom were identified:

3.1.1 Tangible Local Wisdom

Tangible local wisdom refers to the physical and visible cultural elements during the seven-month (Mitoni) ceremony. These elements play a role in the ritual process and embody deeper cultural meanings and collective hopes passed down through generations. In this sense, the visible practices of the community act as vessels of inherited wisdom, reminding participants that culture is sustained not only through belief but also through material expression.

Among the most meaningful components of the ceremony are the ritual foods served and presented with care. Each item is chosen not just for its taste or appearance, but for the symbolic values it carries—rooted in ancestral knowledge and community beliefs:

a. Shrimp, eggs, and golfish

These items are rich in symbolism. Shrimp and goldfish are often seen as signs of abundance and good fortune, reflecting the community’s hope for a smooth and prosperous pregnancy. With their delicate shell and hidden lives inside, eggs represent fertility, protection, and the miracle of new beginnings. Together, these foods express prayers for a healthy pregnancy and a thriving baby.

b. Rice wrapped in leaves

Rice, a staple of daily life, becomes sacred in this context. Wrapped in natural leaves, it signifies stability, nourishment, and the harmonious balance of life. Wrapping rice in leaves also reflects a desire to protect and nurture, like the womb shelters the growing child. It is a gesture of gratitude and hope—wishing the mother and baby strength, safety, and abundance.

3.1.2 Intangible Local Wisdom

These constitute non-physical expressions that embody cultural values, typically conveyed in verbal or symbolic forms. The study identified five principal manifestations of intangible local wisdom, as outlined below:

Table 1. Manifestations of Intangible Local Wisdom

Form of Intangible Wisdom	Example Medium
Thimble (petuah)	Oral maxims
Parables	Short analogical stories
Admonitions	Practical advice and proverbs
Verses	Ritual poetic expressions

Among these, admonitions (nasihat) emerged as the most prominent form, encapsulating the community’s values and articulating its expectations toward the pregnant woman and her family. Such verbal guidance functions as advice and a cultural

transmission mechanism, reinforcing ethical norms and collective responsibilities across generations.

3.1.3 Key Noble Values Extracted from Admonitions

From seven frequently cited admonitions in the oral tradition, the following core values were identified:

Table 2. Admonition Themes and Reflected Noble Values

Admonition Theme	Noble Value Reflected
Experience and Past Wisdom	Learning from accumulated knowledge
Self-Care and Personal Well-being	Emphasis on holistic maternal health
Prudence and Cultural Respect	Practice of thrift and adherence to cultural norms
Resilience and Fortitude	Strength and perseverance in adversity
Family Honour and Reputation	Commitment to upholding family dignity
Caution and Safety	Avoidance of risk and potential endangerment
Ancestry and Cultural Heritage	Respect for ancestral roots and intergenerational legacy

Summary of Findings

1. The seven-monthly ritual embodies both tangible and intangible forms of local wisdom.
2. Tangible elements include ritual foods and traditional clothing, each carrying symbolic cultural meanings.
3. Intangible elements, particularly admonitions, reveal seven core noble values central to Mandailing philosophy.
4. These values collectively span personal well-being, family relationships, cultural preservation, and ecological harmony.

Table 3. Tangible versus Intangible Local Wisdom in the Seven-Monthly Ritual

Aspect	Tangible Local Wisdom	Intangible Local Wisdom
Definition	Physical, visible, or material aspects of the tradition	Non-material, verbal, symbolic, or conceptual expressions
Examples	Ritual foods (shrimp, eggs, goldfish, rice in leaves); traditional clothing	Admonitions (nasihat); parables; thimble (petuah); ritual verses
Functions	Symbolic offerings; markers of cultural identity; decorative and ritual aesthetics	Transmission of values; behavioural guidance; spiritual and moral teaching
Noble Values Represented	Fertility and growth; prosperity and luck; protection and harmony	Experience and wisdom; self-care; cultural respect; resilience; and others (seven in total)
Cultural Role	Reinforces cultural heritage through visible practices	Preserves oral tradition, social norms, and collective memory
Variation	Types of food and clothing may differ by family or sub-region	Admonitions and symbolic language may vary by speaker or locality

Cultural context

In the Mandailing seven-month pregnancy event, the advice given to expectant mothers, part of the oral tradition, carries significant meaning. These admonitions primarily embody prayers and hope for a healthy pregnancy, smooth delivery, and the

well-being of both mother and baby. They reflect the profound support from family and community for a successful outcome. Additionally, these admonitions are rich with cultural values and customs, reminding pregnant women to uphold traditions, foster family togetherness, and respect community norms. While the specific advice may vary, each piece holds a unique context and meaning, serving as a cherished hereditary cultural heritage.

Ultimately, these traditional teachings reveal noble values such as *marhonisan* (a concept of harmonious living), nature conservation (ecology), and cultural preservation. This aligns with the concept of Ecosophy, as defined by Stibbe [22] and Nesi [23], [24]. Ecosophy, in this context, represents a philosophy of ecological harmony where humans actively design wisdom and norms to address the ecological crisis impacting language, nature, and culture amidst modernisation. This suggests that the wisdom embedded in these oral traditions inherently promotes a balanced relationship with the physical and cultural environment.

3.2. Discussion

The seven-monthly ritual in the Mandailing community is more than a celebration of pregnancy; it is a way for people to express their relationship with nature, culture, and life. This ritual creates a symbolic space where, through food, clothing, and words passed down from ancestors, the community creates a meaningful experience that helps them connect to the world around them.

This is where ecolinguistics becomes important, because it helps us understand how language reflects how humans live with their environment. In the Mandailing tradition, we see this clearly:

- a. The natural items used, shrimp, eggs, goldfish, and rice, are not just food. They represent life, health, and abundance. Choosing these items shows that the community values nature to be respected and celebrated.
- b. The symbolic meanings behind the clothing and offerings show how culture uses everyday objects to express deeper hopes for health, protection, togetherness, and a safe birth.
- c. The oral advice and admonitions, spoken by elders or respected figures, show how values like patience, resilience, and honour are passed down, not through books, but through spoken language, memory, and community rituals. Thus, the tradition becomes a celebration and a vehicle of value transmission that binds ecology, culture, and language together.

These cultural values are not just interesting traditions; they help people live better lives. When a pregnant woman hears advice like “protect your beauty” or “take care of your eyes,” she is not being told to look nice. She is reminded that she is important and that her physical and emotional health matters to her family and community. In this sense, what seems like a simple message carries a profound reminder of dignity and well-being.

Other messages, like “uphold the family’s name” or “respect tradition,” remind people that their actions affect others, and that community is more important than individualism. In modern times, where so much is fast and individual-focused, this wisdom

brings us back to the value of togetherness, patience, and care. In other words, ancestral advice provides balance against the pressures of modernisation that often emphasise personal ego over collective harmony.

These values are not unique to Mandailing alone. All across Indonesia, from Java to Bali, similar traditions exist. In Java, the "Tedhak Siten" ceremony celebrates a baby's first steps on earth, using rice, fruit, and prayers to wish for a healthy future [25]. Rituals like "Tirta Yatra" in Bali combine offerings, water, and prayer to bring peace and balance [26]. Both examples illustrate the continuity of cultural values across regions, where human life is harmonious with nature and spirituality.

This shows that people have long understood the importance of living in harmony with nature, family, and ancestors across the Nusantara archipelago. Their language and stories are not just cultural but ecological wisdom passed through generations. As such, Nusantara traditions act as a bridge between the past, the present, and the future.

The values matter for:

1. Education

Local traditions like this should be part of what children learn. Not just as history, but as living knowledge, full of meaning, values, and care for others. Teaching these stories helps young people grow with respect for nature, culture, and themselves. In this way, tradition-based education enriches knowledge while also shaping character.

2. Culture

In an age of globalisation and digital distraction, oral traditions like this risk being forgotten. However, preserving them means preserving the community's soul, the wisdom, language, and stories that hold people together. Without such efforts, collective identity may slowly fade.

3. Tourism and Economy

If done respectfully, rituals like the seven-monthly event could be part of eco-cultural tourism, where visitors learn about local traditions in a way that honours the culture and supports the local community. This opens opportunities for sustainable livelihood without sacrificing cultural integrity.

Ecolinguistics and Human Wisdom

At its heart, this study shows how language is more than communication; it is a tool for survival, care, and meaning. The Mandailing community does not need scientific terms to teach ecology. Their stories, foods, clothes, and sayings already do this, in a deeply human way. This is what ecolinguistics invites us to see: that when people tell stories, offer advice, or perform rituals, they are also teaching how to live well with the earth, with each other, and with the past. In other words, local wisdom becomes a living embodiment of ecolinguistics in everyday practice.

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the seven-monthly tradition in the Mandailing community holds rich local wisdom in what people do (like preparing symbolic foods and wearing traditional clothes) and in what they say (through verses, songs, and advice). These elements reflect important values such as harmony with nature, respect for culture, love, unity, and care for others. Using an ecolinguistic perspective, the study highlights how language and tradition work together to teach people how to live well with the environment and others within their cultural roots. In this way, the tradition becomes a bridge between daily practices and deeper ecological and cultural values.

This tradition keeps cultural identity alive and offers valuable lessons for education, cultural preservation, and tourism development. It shows that local wisdom helps build strong character and a balanced way of life when passed down through generations. However, this research focused only on one community and used a qualitative approach, so future studies can explore other regions or use different methods to enrich the findings. There is also great potential to apply these values in school education, meaningfully helping young people connect with their heritage. Thus, the tradition proves relevant for cultural continuity and broader social and educational contexts.

The whole description above can be summed up as follows. *First, the manifestation of tangible local wisdom in the oral tradition of the seven-monthly event consists of rice wrapped in leaves, goldfish, gala shrimp, and traditional clothes, which are used.* In the form of *tangible* local wisdom, noble values are manifested in the form of harmony, nature conservation (ecology), cultural preservation, respect for human dignity and dignity, respect for plurality, representation of ecological iconicity that illustrates human closeness to nature, brotherhood, solidarity, familiarity, and cohesion. *Second, the manifestation of intangible local wisdom in the oral tradition of the seven-monthly event consists of verses, songs, and admonitions.* These tangible and intangible expressions complement each other, forming a holistic picture of the Mandailing worldview.

In intangible local wisdom, noble values are manifested in unity, familiarity, brotherhood, love (solidarity), politeness, authority, obedience, loyalty, mutual respect, and *compassion*. Both the noble values contained in *tangible* local wisdom and those contained in *intangible local wisdom* can reflect the collective cultural appreciation of the Mandailing community. This integration demonstrates how rituals preserve not only practices but also shared ethical foundations that shape collective identity.

This research is a study from an Eco linguistic perspective by combining linguistic methods with ethnography. Much can still be glimpsed from the oral tradition of the *seven-monthly event* in general, and the values of local wisdom in particular, with the opening up of many possible perspectives and methods. One possibility is the pedagogical implications of local wisdom values in the oral tradition of the *seven-monthly event* for character education in schools, or its integration with language and literature learning, both at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. In conclusion, the seven-monthly ritual provides cultural continuity and opportunities for academic exploration and practical applications in education.

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