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Traditional Culinary Lexicon In Batak Toba: A Study Of Meaning

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the traditional culinary lexicon of the Batak Toba ethnic group in North Sumatra, Indonesia, with a particular focus on the lexical structures and semantic dimensions of traditional food names. Culinary terminology in this community reflects cultural values, indigenous knowledge, and ancestral traditions. The research aims to identify and analyze the morphological processes and semantic interpretations underlying these food names. A qualitative descriptive method was used, employing structured interviews with native Batak Toba speakers, particularly culinary informants, as well as observational techniques. Data were analyzed using lexical semantics and morphological frameworks.

*Findings reveal that Batak Toba food names are linguistically complex and culturally rich, incorporating elements such as preparation techniques, symbolic meanings, and ritual significance. Terms like *arsik*, *saksang*, and *naniura* convey not only ingredients and methods but also reflect the cosmology and beliefs of the Batak Toba people. This study contributes to the fields of ethnolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural preservation. It emphasizes the importance of documenting traditional culinary terminology amidst globalization and linguistic homogenization. Future research should broaden the scope to include multiple informants and ethnic subgroups to enhance the generalizability and depth of analysis.*

Keywords: word meaning, lexical semantics, traditional culinary Batak Toba, culinary lexicon, morphological analysis

1. Introduction

Language is essential significant role not only as a medium of communication but also as a repository of sociocultural identity and traditional knowledge. In numerous communities, particularly those with strong oral traditions, language becomes a medium through which cultural values, social norms, and ancestral practices are transmitted. One of the most tangible reflections of this interrelation between language and culture is seen in culinary terminology. Food, beyond its nutritional function, holds symbolic and ceremonial significance, especially in ethnolinguistic communities such as the Batak Toba in North Sumatra, Indonesia.

The Batak Toba ethnic group employs language as a means to encode and convey knowledge pertaining to traditional ingredients, customary cooking techniques, and the social or ritualistic contexts in which food is consumed. Culinary lexemes in the Batak Toba language extend beyond mere designations of dishes; they encapsulate historical narratives, collective identities, and indigenous epistemologies. For instance, traditional food nomenclature frequently reflects specific preparation methods, sources of ingredients, and ritual functions, thereby providing profound insights into the community's worldview and sociocultural organization.

In spite of the cultural and linguistic richness embedded in the Batak Toba culinary lexicon, academic attention to this subject remains limited. A great deal of the traditional culinary knowledge is at risk of disappearing due to the accelerating forces of globalization, modernization, and linguistic homogenization. These forces threaten to erode local languages and, with them, the cultural values they convey. As a result, there is a pressing need to document, analyze, and preserve the unique linguistic features found in Batak Toba culinary expressions.

This study originates from the urgency to protect and understand these traditional lexical patterns. It aims to investigate the morphological processes such as compounding, affixation, and reduplication that are employed in forming culinary terms in the Batak Toba language. Through linguistic analysis, this research seeks not only to describe the structure of culinary terms but also explore the cultural meanings embedded within them, thereby contributing to both linguistic scholarship and cultural preservation.

Research on the traditional culinary lexicon in North Sumatra is essential to understand how language and culture interact in people's lives. Each typical food name contains historical, geographical, and even philosophical elements that represent ethnic identity in the area, such as the Batak (Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun, Pakpak), Malay, and Nias tribes. Furthermore, as globalization and modernization continue to influence local cultures, there is a growing urgency to document and preserve these unique linguistic artifacts before they are lost to time.

However, the richness of the Batak Toba culinary lexicon, it has received little attention in systematic linguistic studies. In the face of rapid globalization and modernization, many regional languages and traditional cultural practices are experiencing erosion, including culinary expressions. Without deliberate efforts toward documentation and analysis, the unique lexical forms and cultural meanings embedded in traditional food names are at risk of being forgotten. This study emerges in response to the urgent need to document, analyze, and preserve the lexical and semantic features of Batak Toba culinary terminology, recognizing the risk of their gradual disappearance over time

This research is motivated by the author's awareness of the lack of in-depth studies focusing on the structure, formation, and meaning of the Batak Toba culinary lexicon. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the researchers will collect data directly from native speakers and knowledgeable culinary informants. The data will then be analyzed in terms of the morphological construction of each food name and interpreted for its semantic content. Through this approach, the study aims to develop a deeper understanding of how linguistic forms represent the cultural practices, beliefs, and local wisdom of the Batak Toba community. A linguistically grounded analysis is expected not only to produce valuable documentation but also to reveal the intimate connection between language and cultural identity.

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The primary objectives of this research are to identify and classify the lexical items used in naming traditional Batak Toba dishes, analyze their morphological structures and semantic meanings, and interpret how these linguistic elements reflect the cultural, historical, and philosophical dimensions of the Batak Toba community. Consequently, the study also aims to contribute to the preservation of regional language and cultural heritage through scientific documentation.

Theoretically, this study is based on lexical semantics and morphological analysis. Lexical semantics explores how words convey meaning, while morphology studies the structure and formation of words. Goddard (2011) emphasizes that meaning in language is deeply embedded in culture and requires careful analysis to uncover the layers of interpretation within a language community. Previous studies by Cristy (2024) and Simanjuntak (2024) also provide relevant foundations, examining word formation and semantic processes in traditional culinary contexts. These studies demonstrate that food names often encode information about preparation methods, key ingredients, cultural rituals, and symbolic meanings unique to a specific community.

The expected outcomes of this research include a comprehensive classification of traditional Batak Toba food names, an analysis of their morphological and semantic structures, and a deeper understanding of the cultural meanings embedded within them. This research is anticipated to make a significant contribution to linguistic studies, cultural preservation efforts, and the development of educational materials that raise awareness of Batak Toba heritage. Furthermore, the resulting documentation may serve as an important reference for future researchers in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, ethnolinguistics, and culinary studies, both within Indonesia and internationally.

This study will explore the lexical and word meanings of various traditional culinary names in North Sumatra, including how morphological and semantic elements play a role in the formation and interpretation of these names. In addition, this study also aims to preserve and document traditional culinary heritages so that they remain known by future generations.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at exploring the lexical and semantic meanings embedded in traditional Batak Toba food names. The primary method of data collection was through interviews, complemented by listening and recording techniques to ensure accuracy and richness of linguistic data. The selected informant was Arisa Dolok Saribu, a native from Porsea and a student at HKBP Nommensen University, who was considered knowledgeable in the traditional culinary practices and terminology of the Batak Toba community.

During the interviews, the informant provided a list of traditional dishes along with explanations of their names, ingredients, preparation methods, and cultural significance. These food names were documented and then analyzed lexically and semantically. Lexical

analysis focused on the morphological structure of the words, while semantic analysis aimed to interpret the underlying meanings both literal and cultural of each culinary term.

The data were organized and presented in tabular form to facilitate classification, comparison, and interpretation. This method allowed the researchers to identify consistent patterns in word formation, cultural symbolism, and potential lexical shifts within the traditional culinary lexicon of the Batak Toba. Through this qualitative method, the study provides a descriptive and interpretive account of how language, food, and culture are interrelated in the naming practices of an ethnic community. Data were analyzed by studying lexical meaning in semantics. Each food name is interpreted per word (lexical). This research uses a qualitative descriptive method that describes the results by showing lexical and meaning in the form of a description of each lexical name of typical food of the Toba Batak region. With the results of the data obtained in accordance with the results presented in tabular form for classification and description form for exposure to lexical meaning.

Data were collected through audio recordings and field notes, then analyzed through two complementary approaches:

1. Lexical (morphological) analysis examined how food terms are constructed through word formation processes such as compounding, affixation (prefixes, suffixes, infixes, confixes), and reduplication. Special attention was given to how these formations encode information about ingredients, preparation methods, or symbolic functions.
2. Semantic analysis explored the meanings and cultural associations of each term, revealing underlying belief systems, historical references, and social roles tied to food traditions.

The data were organized into categories using tabular forms, which facilitated comparison across different lexical patterns. This organization allowed the identification of recurring linguistic structures and cultural patterns. By synthesizing the findings from both lexical and semantic dimensions, the study presents a holistic portrayal of how food-related language reflects and reinforces the cultural worldview of the Batak Toba people.

This method was particularly effective in documenting traditional culinary knowledge, offering not only linguistic insight but also contributing to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage in the face of globalization and linguistic erosion.

5. Result and Discussion

The Batak Toba culinary lexicon reflects a rich diversity of word formation patterns that are deeply intertwined with cultural practices and local identity. The primary

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morphological strategies found in this lexicon include compounding, affixation, and reduplication. These linguistic processes not only serve to generate new lexical items but also encode valuable information about ingredients, cooking techniques, food texture, and even the social or ceremonial functions of a dish. Through these patterns, the language becomes a tool for preserving culinary heritage and expressing cultural meanings embedded in food.

One of the most dominant strategies observed is compounding, where new culinary terms are created by combining nouns, adjectives, and verbs. This process allows speakers to form expressions that carry detailed and nuanced descriptions of a dish. For instance, the phrase “dekke mas nanigoreng koring” (fried dried carp) is composed of the noun *dekke mas* (carp), the verb *nanigoreng* (fried), and the adjective *koring* (dried). This compounding process effectively encapsulates the main ingredient as well as the preparation method, creating a term that is semantically rich and culturally specific. Such compounds are more than just labels; they serve as concise descriptions of a dish’s essential elements, offering insight into traditional cooking practices and local dietary customs.

Affixation is also essential role in the formation of culinary vocabulary. The Batak Toba language makes use of various morphological affixes, including prefixes like *na-*, *ni-*, and *mar-*, suffixes such as *-i* and *-an*, infixes like *-in-*, and combinations in the form of confixes such as *mar-...-an*. Each affix carries specific grammatical and semantic functions, including marking voice, aspect, transitivity, or the use of particular ingredients. For example, the prefix *ni-* often indicates a passive or perfective aspect, turning verbs into past participles as seen in ‘*nigoreng*’ (fried). The confix *mar-...-an* may indicate habitual actions or communal processes, emphasizing the cultural significance of collective food preparation. These affixes enable the creation of terms that are not only morphologically complex but also rich in meaning, providing depth and precision in culinary expression.

Reduplication is another productive process in the Batak Toba culinary lexicon. It is frequently used to indicate repetition, intensity, or plurality. For example, reduplication may reflect the repetitive nature of a cooking technique, such as stirring or frying in stages, or it might serve to intensify a particular flavor or texture. Additionally, it may also express affectionate or diminutive forms, revealing the speaker’s personal or emotional attitude toward the food. This morphological process adds expressive power to the language, allowing speakers to convey subtleties that go beyond the literal components of a dish.

In general, the various word formation strategies employed in Batak Toba culinary terms reveal not only the linguistic creativity of the speakers but also their deep cultural knowledge and lived experience with food. Each term functions as a capsule of cultural memory, capturing traditional knowledge about ingredients, preparation methods, and the social contexts in which food is consumed. The integration of morphological features in culinary vocabulary reflects a dynamic interplay between language and culture, indicating how speakers linguistically navigate their culinary environment. As new dishes emerge and food practices evolve, the language adapts through the productive application of these morphological rules, ensuring that the lexicon remains relevant and responsive to change. In this way, the Batak Toba culinary lexicon demonstrates how language functions as a living repository of cultural heritage, particularly in the rich and symbolic domain of gastronomy.

CLASSIFICATION OF TRADITIONAL FOOD DISHES TYPICAL OF THE BATAK TOBA REGION

Traditional Food Dishes Of Batak Toba			
No	Food	Literal Meaning / Etymology	Lexical Meaning
1	Arsik	arsik: dry-cook	Symbol of prosperity and life; served at weddings and ceremonies
2	Saksang	saksang: minced	Ritual dish for weddings; symbolizes unity and sacrifice
3	Natinombur	tombur: pour over	Symbolizes blessing and abundance
4	Napinadar	pinadar: seasoned with blood	Served at rituals; signifies strength and vitality
5	Dali Ni Horbo	dali: cheese, horbo: buffalo	Symbolizes purity and fertility; used in traditional medicine
6	Ikan Na Tinombur	ikan: fish, tinombur: poured over	Everyday and ceremonial dish
7	Naniura	niura: seasoned raw	Symbol of freshness and purity; served at important events
8	Lomok-Lomok	onomatopoeic : lomok = soft, mushy	Represents togetherness and communal eating

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9	Lappet	lappet: wrap in banana leaves.	Symbolizes unity and protection
10	Itak gurgur	itak: rice flour, gurgur: sprinkle	Associated with celebration and gratitude
11	Ombus-Ombus	ombus: blow	Symbolizes warmth of family and hospitality
12	Kacang Sihobuk	kacang: peanut, Sihobuk: village name	Represents local pride and entrepreneurship
13	Tipa-Tipa	onomatopoeic : tipa-tipa = crunchy	Everyday snack; symbolizes simplicity
14	Sasagun	sasagun: roasted flour	Symbolizes gratitude and sharing
15	Pohul-Pohul	pohul: clench or shape	Represents unity and the act of giving
16	Hare	hare: ferment	Symbolizes transformation and patience
17	Mie Gopak	mie: noodle, gopak: mix by hand	Everyday and ceremonial food; symbolizes togetherness



Fig. 1. Example of Batak Toba dishes

6. Conclusion

This study explores the traditional culinary lexicon of the Batak Toba ethnic group and reveals that the naming of traditional dishes is not arbitrary, however instead follows specific linguistic patterns rooted in the community's cultural practices, beliefs, and ancestral knowledge. The findings demonstrate that each food name carries semantic depth and morphological structure that reflect cooking methods, ingredients, cultural values, and even spiritual symbolism. The research contributes significantly to the field of applied linguistics and cultural anthropology by documenting and analyzing indigenous culinary terminology, thereby aiding in the preservation of local languages and intangible cultural heritage. These contributions are particularly relevant in the context of increasing globalization, which threatens to erode traditional knowledge and language use. The implications of this research extend to educational and cultural initiatives, encouraging the incorporation of local cultural content into curricula and linguistic studies to foster cultural pride and identity. However, the study is limited by the narrow scope of data collection, relying on a single informant and focusing solely on the Batak Toba subgroup, which may not fully capture the diversity and nuances of other regional culinary terms. Therefore, future research is encouraged to include a broader range of informants from multiple generations and ethnic backgrounds across North Sumatra or other regions of Indonesia. Such studies could offer a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of the relationship between language, food, and culture in Indonesia's diverse ethnolinguistic landscapes.

This study explores the traditional culinary lexicon of the Batak Toba ethnic group and reveals that the naming of traditional dishes is not arbitrary, but instead follows distinct linguistic patterns rooted in the community's cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and ancestral knowledge. Through a combination of morphological and semantic analysis, the findings demonstrate that each culinary term carries not only lexical meaning but also

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semantic depth, encoding information related to ingredients, cooking techniques, preparation methods, and symbolic cultural values. These linguistic structures act as cultural signifiers, serving as vessels that preserve and transmit traditional knowledge across generations.

The research provides valuable insights into how language is used as a medium to encode and preserve indigenous culinary knowledge. Each traditional food name reflects the sociocultural identity of the Batak Toba people, making food not just a matter of sustenance but also a form of intangible cultural heritage. The analysis reveals the existence of productive word formation processes in the Batak Toba culinary lexicon, such as compounding, affixation (prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and confixes), and reduplication. These processes are not only linguistically interesting but also meaningful in terms of the information they convey whether describing the preparation method (e.g., fried, dried), the key ingredient (e.g., carp, chicken), or the ritual function (e.g., offerings, feasts).

By documenting and interpreting these culinary terms, the study makes a significant contribution to the fields of descriptive linguistics, semantic analysis, cultural anthropology, and ethnolinguistics. It highlights the urgent need to record, protect, and revitalize local languages and traditions that are increasingly under threat from modernization and cultural homogenization. The relevance of this study is magnified in the current global era where traditional linguistic expressions are at risk of being lost, especially in oral cultures with limited written documentation.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating local cultural content into formal education and academic discourse. Language, especially in its traditional forms, plays a crucial role in shaping cultural identity and reinforcing a community's connection to its heritage. Therefore, incorporating indigenous culinary lexicons into language and culture curricula could promote cultural pride and foster intergenerational knowledge transfer.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the current study. The research primarily relied on a single informant from the Batak Toba subgroup, which may not fully capture the linguistic richness and variation that exists across other Batak sub-ethnic groups or broader regional culinary expressions. Consequently, future research should aim to involve a more diverse pool of informants from different generations, geographical areas, and ethnic backgrounds throughout North Sumatra. Expanding the scope of data collection would not only enhance the generalizability of the findings but also provide a deeper, more comparative understanding of how food, language, and culture are intertwined in Indonesia's diverse ethnolinguistic landscape.

In conclusion, the traditional culinary lexicon of the Batak Toba people is a rich linguistic and cultural resource. It encapsulates layers of meaning that go beyond the surface of food names and offers a window into the worldview, values, and identity of the community. As such, its study is essential for both academic knowledge and cultural preservation, reminding us that in language especially in the words we use to describe our food reside the stories, symbols, and soul of a people.

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