



## REVITALIZATION OF THE MARHATA AS A CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE BATAK TOBA TRADITION

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**Abstract.** This research explain how to revitalize marhata (customary speech) as a cultural heritage in the Batak Toba tradition. Marhata is a core tradition in Batak Toba ceremonies, but not many people know about its implementation. Qualitative research methods with ethnographic models were used. The result is the revitalization of the marhata as a tradition to inherit, protect and develop. Consequently, this will be carried out by strengthening the collective awareness through a representation of its cultural identity. This research also recognized the revitalization efforts carried out in the marhata tradition by forming community groups and traditional leaders, managing groups, as well as socialization with the younger generation. Furthermore, a seminar related to marhata by cultural experts was held in the established indigenous community. This revitalization of cultural heritage involved passing the tradition from the Batak Toba customary leaders to the younger generation.

**Keywords:** Batak Toba marriage and death ceremonies, Batak Toba language, Marhata tradition, Revitalization

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Batak Toba people occupy the area around Toba Lake, located in North Sumatra Province. The area is divided into several regions, namely Toba District, Humbang District, Silindung District, and Samosir Island. They also constitute the sub-regional division of the entire area around Toba Lake. Furthermore, the community has a wealth of traditions, culture, and customs that fulfill every sophistication of its people's social life. (Simanjuntak, Batara Sangti. 1977).

The Batak Toba community features an oral custom called the traditional speaking *marhata*. This is carried out in almost all customary activities in the community, starting from the wedding to the traditional funeral ceremony. Specifically in giving and receiving customs. Furthermore, the aim is in line with the traditions of the Batak Toba community using the *parhataan* 'traditional speech language' of the Batak Toba. *Marhata* is conveyed by a traditional elder called raja *parhata/parhata* 'traditional spokesperson' who plays a role in regulating the intricacies of customs during ceremonies. *Marhata* also acts as an envoy to speak between the two parties who receive as well as give customs. In the Batak Toba traditional ceremony, the *marhata* activities are controlled by the king *parhata*, the 'customary spokesperson'. This spokesperson is elected either through a tiered agreement starting from the closest circle of *ahli bait* (family) or by individuals who have been promoted to the highest level in one *ompu* (the highest title of the Batak family) or one Batak Toba clan. The *parhata*, often known as *parsinabul* or *parsaut* at a traditional party also played the role of a moderator in a scientific seminar who organizes, guides, and directs seminar traffic, to ensure that it follows the rules. Likewise, the *parhata* role involves regulating, guiding, and directing the entire mechanism of the traditional party procession or *ulaon* for the delegation of rights and responsibilities for ceremonial conduct. The first criterion for being a *parhata* or 'customary spokesperson' is to be eloquent. Therefore, the king *parhata* is equated with the parable of the Batak Toba people as *panjaha di bibir, Parpustaha di tolonan* which means 'reader of the lips, owner of the library in the throat'. This parable indicates that a traditional spokesperson must have good knowledge of customs, be able to convey customary language speech and be good at parrying and explaining everything. The second criterion is that the traditional spokespersons should have good diplomatic skills. This will enable them to find solutions to problems due to the differences in customs between communities and science. Other necessary skills include understanding and proficiency in the noble values of customs and cultures that constitute local wisdom. Furthermore, they should have the skills to lead traditional ceremonies that are carried out with various socio-cultural values.



*Marhata* is a very important tradition because it is the core of every Batak Toba traditional ceremony and has local wisdom (Sibarani et al., 2020). This tradition is an implementation of the community's philosophy, namely *dalihan natolu*, *somba marhula-hula* 'respect to the giver of the wife', *elek marboru* 'persuade the *boru* 'wife receiving party', and *manat mardongan tubu* 'be careful of the family'. Furthermore, the tradition conveys advice, prayer, and contains a wealth of customary languages in form of *umpasa* 'rhymes', and *umpama* 'parables' to those who accept customs. This wealth of indigenous languages is important to be understood as certain cultural values can be implemented in real life. For example, in the following Batak Toba parable:

'Marsiamin-aminan;

*Masintungkol.*

'Rhythm like a banana leaf

Embrace each other, like taro trees in the garden'

This parable is conveyed in *marhata* of the Batak Toba marriage ceremony which means that in living this life, people have to agree with each other, have the same feelings, and support each other. Contextually, it is analogized to banana leaves that rhythmically sway left and right when blown by the wind and likened to taro trees embracing each other in one taro tree (Pardosi, 2010).

The *marhata* tradition is now very difficult to be implemented because the human resources who act as spokespersons during the event are few, compared to the number of speech communities that exist in one lineage as members of a clan, family, or group. Many Batak Toba speakers do not meet the requirements to become spokespersons at the *marhata* event in traditional ceremonies. Very few people know more and study the *marhata* tradition. Furthermore, most of them are dominated by old people, therefore it is feared that the existence of this tradition will decline in the future.

Based on this fact, urgent efforts are required to maintain traditions and customs as a source of knowledge today and in the future. These efforts require that the inheritance system should be studied. It is necessary to study customs as a source of knowledge and an inheritance system that shapes the Batak Toba cultural identity. Therefore, studies on the protection, preservation, and revitalization of traditions need to be explored as they constitute the positive features that have maintained the customary order of the Batak Toba indigenous people. (Sibarani, et al., 2021b, 2021a) Research on the revitalization of language or culture carried out by Warner et al. (2007) found that cultural revitalization is an important part of preserving culture. Aside from research, implementation is necessary on the part of the owner of the culture and the speakers of the language. To revitalize a tradition, cultural research should involve the speech communities. Furthermore, the preliminary research conducted by Sibarani (2018) confirmed the importance of excavation, inheritance, and revitalization of a cultural tradition that contains local wisdom, especially in the cultural traditions of the Batak Toba community. The implementation of local wisdom and cultural values is significant in building the community and the younger generation (Susanto, 2012).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Anthropolinguistics

Anthropolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field that studies the relationship between language and the intricacies of human life, including culture. This is the study of language within the framework of anthropology, cultural studies in the framework of linguistics, and the aspects of human life in both frameworks (Sibarani, 2015). How someone communicates with other people appropriately according to the cultural context, and how the language of the people follows the development of their culture (Sibarani et al., 2021; Silaban et al., 2019; Silaban & Sibarani, 2021). The specifically on performance, indexicality, and participation (Duranti, 2015; Danesi, 2015). Through the concept of performance, language is understood as a process of communicative activity and action that requires creativity (Perbawasari et al., 2019). Furthermore, the concept of indexicality distinguishes a sign into an index, a symbol, and an icon, while the concept of participation views language as a social activity that involves speakers and listeners as social actors (Sibarani, 2015). Anthropolinguistics studies of *marhata* at the Batak Toba traditional ceremony will examine the verbal and nonverbal elements which are explained through understanding the structure of the text.

Therefore, this enhances an understanding of the tradition and its performance (Silaban et al., 2019). In studying language use, anthropolinguistics applies the parameters of 1) connectedness, 2) value, and 3) sustainability. The relationship can be a vertical linear or a formal horizontal relationship. Formal relationships relate to the structure of language or text with context (a situation, culture, social, and ideology) and co-text (paralinguistics, gestures, and material elements) related to language and its processes, while linear relationships relate to flow structures such as performance (Sibarani, 2015, Perbawasari et al., 2019).

## 2.2. Revitalization

Revitalization is the process of reviving an endangered culture/language to fulfill its function for society (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). Language revitalization efforts include language protection and development as well as fostering language speakers (Aprilia et al., 2020). By following the conclusion of Grenoble & Whaley (2006) which refers to the UNESCO criteria, the level of threat and extinction of a language is described on a six scale, namely (1) safe, (2) at risk, (3) starting to be threatened, (4) severe condition, (5) endangered, and (6) extinct.

Furthermore, Grenoble & Whaley (2006) explained that the concept of cultural/language revitalization operationally includes stages 1) excavation of cultural/language conditions, 2) assessment of the potential for cultural/language development, and 3) cultural/language inheritance through various activities aimed at improving language function in various fields of communication. The stages of exploring the condition of a revitalized culture/language include assessing the potential for development and carrying out inheritance efforts by introducing, empowering, and optimizing *marhata* in Batak Toba traditional ceremonies. A language includes its lexicon and grammar, and generally some texts which exemplify both. It aims to expand the scope of language documentation by increasing the use of interactional language and gestural spoken language that is contextually bound (Rouvier, 2017). The revitalization of language not necessarily discrete entities with no intersections (Fitzgerald, 2021).

## 2.3 Marhata

*Marhata* is a formal dialogue between the bride's parents and the groom's parents which is usually preceded by a meal together. It discusses and realizes the goals of each traditional ceremony using a traditional language called *parhataan* (Pardede, T. Bertha, 1981:7). Every Batak Toba traditional ceremony begins and ends with a "*marhata*" event. The "talking custom" event is an integral part of the core ceremony. After there is an agreement between both parties, the *marhata* then begins. Participants involved consisted of elements of *dalihan na tolu* (*hula-hula*, *dongan tubu*, and *boru*). The involvement of the participants started with *hula-hula*, *dongan tubu*, and also *boru*. Furthermore, there is always *Suhut* 'having a party' both men and women, with elements of DNT, as well as *raja panise* (king of the questioner) and *raja pangalusi* (king of answering). The implementation of traditional events both at home and in the building is usually coordinated by the *parhata* (traditional spokesperson) which consists of *panise* and *pangalusi*. *Parhata* selected by the clan lineage must understand traditional law and its application, including all the ins and outs of Batak traditions in general, and the traditions that specifically apply to the clan.

## 3. METHOD

This qualitative research aims to explore, discover, uncover, and explain the revitalization model of the *marhata* at the Batak Toba traditional ceremony. This form of anthropology research applied the emic approach, as the value of meaning is obtained through the views of people in the cultural community. In general, anthropology research uses an emic approach with the principle that those who are most familiar with the culture of an ethnic group are the tribe itself. This emic approach is then used to draw opinions in the field to ascertain certain patterns and concepts. This research used an ethnographic model developed by Spradley. This model uses twelve (12) steps forward, both for the observation and interview method, starting from data collection, analysis, the discovery of cultural themes, and ethnographic writing. (*Spradley\_The Ethnographic Interview.Pdf*, n.d.)

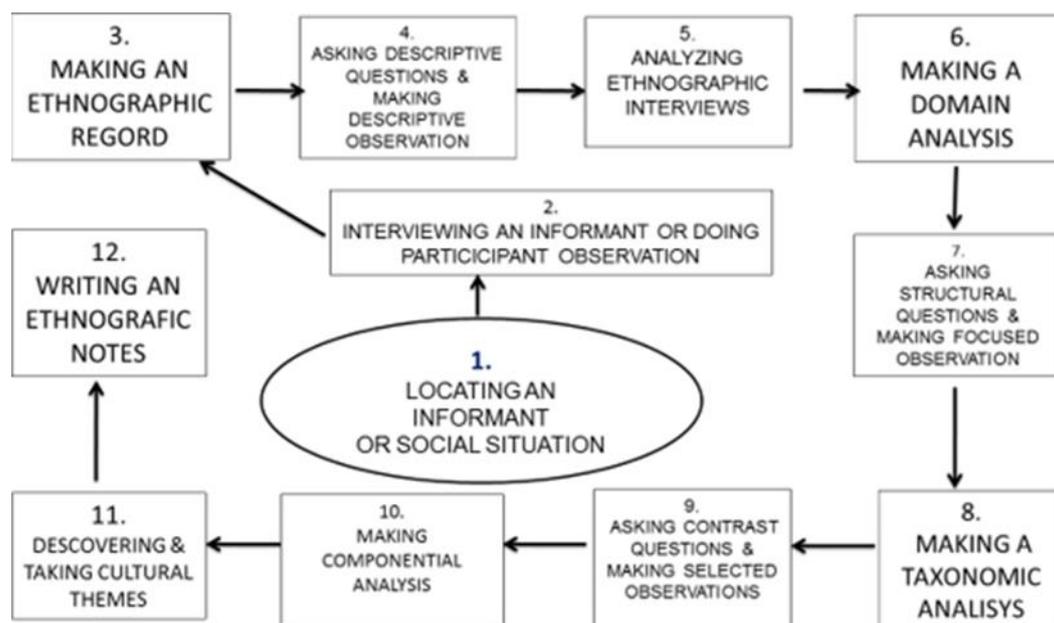


Figure 1. Steps of an Ethnographic Model in Qualitative Research

#### 4. Result and Discussion

##### 4.1 Revitalization of the *Marhata* Batak Tradition

Language revitalization does not only involve reviving dead or endangered languages, but also maintaining language as a valuable asset or heritage. This is because it can be a threatening condition due to the influence of globalization, technology, society, and politics. Sibarani (2015) stated that revitalization consists of four stages, namely triggering, activating, utilizing, and inheriting. This research followed these stages with the aim that *marhata* can be maintained and inherited because it contains meaning, values, and norms. This tradition is still known by the community and has begun to be famous again since its presence. (Sibarani, et al., 2021) (Sibarani, et al., 2021). Reviving, re-activating, utilizing, and passing the *marhata* tradition on to the next generation is a valuable heritage due to its cultural values that can be taken and practiced in life. The oral expressions during communication and interaction contain local values based on *Dalihan natolu* which regulate the traditional order of the Batak Toba. The process of revitalizing this tradition is certainly expected to be carried out in an organized manner by individuals, cultural actors, and traditional community groups together with the government who have an awareness of the preservation of cultural heritage (Nasution et al, 2021). The revitalization is carried out as follows:

##### a. Forming a cultural studio

This effort starts with educating the candidate for the *Parhata* (Prospective guide in *marhata*) as the successor. This education is carried out orally in the cultural studio by cultural practitioners and *parhata* actors. The studio serves as a medium for training and simulating the practice of *marhata* in Batak Toba traditional ceremonies.

##### b. Documentation

Complete documentation is carried out in form of audio-video, therefore it can be observed with sight and sound. This makes the documentation more interesting to attract the interest of students. Individuals or groups with an interest in *marhata*, including its speakers, will be able to see, listen to, and practice the tradition.

##### c. Text transcription

Oral texts delivered by *parhata* 'traditional speakers' in traditional ceremonies were transcribed into written text, making it easier for students to fully understand. Furthermore, the text can be translated into Indonesian to enable students to understand the meaning, although the tradition will be carried out in the Toba Batak language.



d. Seminars and simulations

The simulation helps students to better understand the practice and implementation of *marhata* tradition directly. Revitalization can be carried out through simulation performances to preserve cultural heritage. The seminar, attended by professional *parhata*, is expected to enhance the process of learning and development to become a real *parhata*.

Simply, the revitalization of the *marhata* tradition is shown in the figure below:

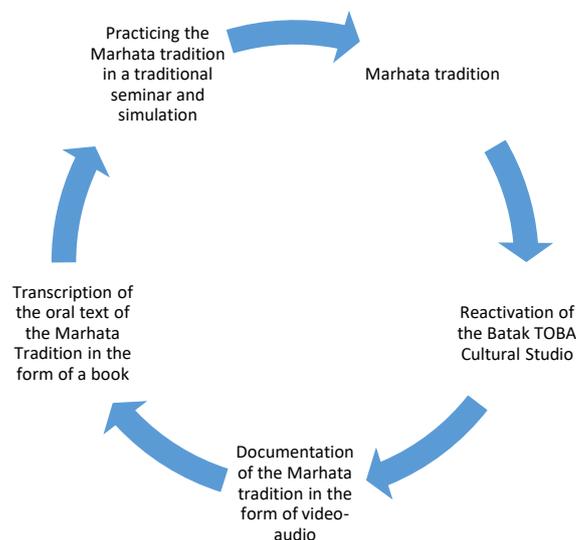


Figure 2. The revitalization model of *marhata* tradition

3.2 The content of *marhata* text

a. *Umpasa* or Rhymes

1) *Bulu ma antong turak*, Bamboo as a loom  
*andalu panangkotan ni bonang*, Pestle becomes a place to hang the yarn,  
*tu dia pe hamu antong mangalangka*, Wherever you go  
*tu si ma hamu dapotan pangomoan*, May always get a blessing/ advantage

2) *Ruma ijuk*, Palm fiber house  
*paadopadop ruma gorga*; facing the Gorga's house  
*tubuan anak na bisuk*, Born a smart child  
*dohot boru na marroha*, and a wise daughter

b. Metaphor

May it be a blessing to the body, make the heart happy, give growth, and become a strength for the bones.

*Asa tu dolok hamu dapotan mual na tio, tu toruan dapotan jampalan na lomak*

To the hill there is a spring, to the valley, there is thick grass

c. *Umpama* or parable

*Gokhon do sipaimaon, jou-jou sialusan; ai nunga martanda on songon adian, marpatudu songon dalan; nunga di dolok Parbuluan, di toruan partanggalan;*

*nunga dapot antong na niluluan, jumpang antong na jinalahan.* 'The awaited invitation, the answer to the summoned, has been marked like a gathering place, like a guided path, already on a hill where bamboo stands, in a valley'. Well, our king, it's true what you say, good things always meet good too. At this time, good things are told, such as friends when sitting, and friends when walking.

*'Marsiamin-aminan songon lampak ni gaol;*

*Masintungkol-tongkolan songon suhat di robean.*

'Rhythm like banana leaves



‘Embrace each other, like a taro tree in the garden’

The *marhata* tradition which contains rhymes and parables of *umpasa* and *umpama* as cultural wealth owned by the Batak Toba people in North Sumatra needs to be empowered as part of traditional ceremonies that accompany the cycle of human life. Therefore, empowering this tradition means saving it from the onslaught of cultural globalization that tries to paralyze and destroy various traditions. The empowerment of *marhata* by its supporting community aims to preserve and fight for the language and cultural heritage of the Batak Toba people. One form of empowerment is to train prospective *parhata* ‘customary spokespersons’ in traditional ceremonies of the Batak Toba people.

## 5. CONCLUSION

From these results, it was found that the *Marhata* Revitalization Model is based on Batak Toba traditional wedding ceremonies in North Sumatra. This revitalization is an effort to revive and pass it on to the younger generation of Batak Toba people who no longer understand the *marhata* tradition. Furthermore, revitalization can be conducted orally while maintaining this tradition in form of interactions in the community.

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