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Lexical and Symbolic Meanings of Dish Names in *Mandailing* Cuisine: An Ecolinguistic Study

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Abstract: Using an ecolinguistic approach, specifically the ecolexicon model, this study examines the lexical and symbolic meanings associated with naming traditional *Mandailing* dishes. However, few studies have explored the profound connection between this culinary lexicon and the broader environmental and cosmological worldview of the *Mandailing* people. The method is qualitative and uses linguistic ethnography and Spradley's analysis. The data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and a review of the literature on various dishes, including *Sambal Tuktuk*, *Alame*, and *Gule Bulung Gadung*. The results show that the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon not only includes information about ingredients and their preparation, but it also reflects social values such as mutual assistance, spirituality, environmental adaptation, and local cosmology. Dish names serve as a way to demonstrate that people and nature are in harmony with each other and to pass on cultural values. This study demonstrates the importance of preserving traditional dishes as part of a linguistic ecology that protects valuable local knowledge. These results offer a means to analyze other ethnic cuisines and help strengthen cultural identity by documenting traditional vocabulary.

Key words: ecolinguistics, ecolexicon, *Mandailing* cuisine, lexical meaning, symbolic meaning

Abstrak: Dengan menggunakan pendekatan ekolinguistik, khususnya model ecolexicon, penelitian ini mengkaji makna leksikal dan simbolis yang terkait dengan penamaan hidangan tradisional *Mandailing*. Namun, masih sedikit studi yang mengeksplorasi hubungan mendalam antara kosakata kuliner ini dengan pandangan dunia lingkungan dan kosmologis yang lebih luas dari masyarakat *Mandailing*. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan menggunakan etnografi linguistik dan analisis Spradley. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan tinjauan literatur mengenai berbagai hidangan, termasuk *Sambal Tuktuk*, *Alame*, dan *Gule Bulung Gadung*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kosakata kuliner *Mandailing* tidak hanya mencakup informasi tentang bahan-bahan dan cara penyajian, tetapi juga mencerminkan nilai-nilai sosial seperti gotong royong, spiritualitas, adaptasi lingkungan, dan kosmologi lokal. Nama-nama hidangan berfungsi sebagai cara untuk menunjukkan bahwa manusia dan alam berada dalam harmoni serta untuk meneruskan nilai-nilai budaya. Studi ini menunjukkan pentingnya melestarikan hidangan tradisional sebagai bagian dari ekologi linguistik yang melindungi pengetahuan lokal yang berharga. Hasil ini menawarkan sarana untuk menganalisis kuliner etnis lainnya dan membantu memperkuat identitas budaya melalui pendokumentasian kosakata tradisional.

Kata kunci: ekolinguistik, ecolexicon, kuliner *Mandailing*, makna leksikal, makna simbolis

INTRODUCTION

Traditional cuisine is not merely a dish to satisfy human physiological needs, but also holds linguistic richness and cultural value reflected in its naming. Each traditional dish name often contains lexical meanings related to its ingredients, processing methods, or tools used, while also carrying deep symbolic meanings tied to the philosophy of life, beliefs, and social values of the community that supports it. In this context, studies that explore the relationship between language, culture, and the environment become important. Within the broader field of linguistics, such studies are accommodated within the ecolinguistic approach (Andestend et al., 2024; Pujiono & Gapur, 2019; Yulastutik, 2024), particularly ecolinguistic lexicography. Ecollexicon studies are investigations into vocabulary formed through human interaction with nature and culture (Rahmah et al., 2023; San Martín et al., 2017, 2020).

North Sumatra is a province in Indonesia rich in ethnic diversity, one of which is the *Mandailing* ethnic group. The *Mandailing* people, who primarily inhabit the districts of *Mandailing* Natal, South Tapanuli, and Padang Lawas, have a unique culinary tradition rich in meaning (Batubara et al., 2015; Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024; Lubis & Lubis, 2024). *Sambal Tuktuk* and *Alame* (a type of *dodol*, a sweet, toffee-like sugar palm-based confection) are two examples of traditional *Mandailing* dishes that are not only tasty but also hold deep cultural meanings and values. The names of these dishes were not just made up; they were chosen based on the community's beliefs, social activities, and the environment.

Studies on ecollexicons in the context of traditional cuisine have developed in various regions of Indonesia. For example, Nurhasanah's (2024) research reveals that traditional Batak Toba cuisine is not merely a means of nutritional fulfillment but also a vehicle for preserving cultural and ecological values, as reflected in terms such as *arsik* and *saksang*. A study by Nasution et al. (2024) demonstrates how ecollexicon units in the Malay language used by fishing communities in the coastal areas of North Sumatra reveal their connection to the surrounding water. Another study by Paino et al. (2024) also reveals the ideological, sociological, and biological dimensions in the naming of Malay Deli cuisine, which serves as a representation of the community's identity and cultural environment. These studies suggest that an ecolinguistic approach to traditional cuisine can reveal the intricate connection between language, culture, and the environment. There have been very few studies on the *Mandailing* community's culinary ecollexicon, in any case. Tambusai and Nasution (2024) demonstrate that the oral traditions in *Mandailing* folk songs still retain many words that reflect the richness of the local ecology. Unfortunately, these studies have not yet specifically examined the culinary field. Thus, there is a gap in research that explicitly examines how the naming and lexicon of traditional *Mandailing* dishes reflect ecological relationships and local cultural values. This gap is important to fill in order to enrich the field of ecolinguistic studies in Indonesia, particularly in the context of North Sumatra, which has high ethnolinguistic diversity.

The importance of this study lies in several aspects. Amid globalization and modernization, which threaten the preservation of traditional cuisine and the linguistic knowledge behind it, many young *Mandailing* people no longer know the origins of the names and symbolic meanings of their ancestors' dishes. Furthermore, there is still very little systematic documentation of the *Mandailing* culinary ecological lexicon, which could erase important linguistic and cultural traces. This study can also be used to help build culture-based gastronomic tourism, where a deep understanding of what a dish means can help protect and promote local dishes.

This study investigates the lexical and symbolic meanings of dish names in *Mandailing* cuisine through an ecolinguistic lens. Specifically, it aims to uncover the hidden layers of meaning behind traditional culinary terminology, emphasizing that cuisine serves not only as a sensory experience but also as a vital medium for the transmission of ecological knowledge and noble social values. By analyzing these naming practices, this study contributes to the preservation of *Mandailing* culinary culture and enriches the field of cultural linguistics in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics is a field of linguistics that examines the evolving relationship between language, people, and the environment, encompassing both natural and social aspects (Ivanov, 2020; Wu, 2018). This way of thinking emphasizes that language is more than just a means of communication; it also reveals how societies interact with their ecosystems (Mammadova, 2024; Rasheed, 2023). Ecolinguistics is reflected in culinary practices through the formation of an ecollexicon, which stems from how cultures adapt to and interpret their natural resources. In this vein, previous studies have highlighted that dish names frequently encapsulate the community's environmental interaction and sensory perception of food processing (Paino et al., 2024; Tambusai & Nasution, 2024). This indicates that the culinary lexicon functions as an ecological marker, bridging the gap between physical environment and cultural conceptualization. Haugen's (Haugen, 1972; Umiyati et al., 2025) theory of language ecology posits that language evolves in a manner that reflects and adapts to its environment. This study aligns with Haugen's ecological perspective by analyzing how the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon acts as a repository of environmental wisdom, where naming practices—such as those for processing toxic plants or utilizing forest resources—demonstrate a linguistic evolution that promotes sustainable subsistence and cultural survival.

Most previous ecolinguistic studies have predominantly focused on farming or coastal communities, where the lexicon is often viewed as a direct reflection of human survival strategies (Rahmah et al., 2023). These studies have provided valuable insights into how environmental terminology denotes agricultural cycles or maritime navigation, characterizing the language as an extension of the physical ecosystem. However, these works often treat lexical units as static, denotative labels.

While the integration of semiotic elements is not entirely new to the broader linguistic field, its application as a 'multisemiotic' analytical lens within ecolinguistics remains underexplored. Previous research has yet to fully integrate the complex interplay of phonesthetics (sound symbolism), structural morphology, and social-cultural ritualization in the context of food naming. By addressing this multisemiotic dimension, this study shifts the focus from mere denotation to a dynamic interplay where dish names act as semiotic nodes—connecting the auditory experience of preparation (e.g., onomatopoeia), the morphological construction of terms, and the cultural-cosmological value system inherent in *Mandailing* society. This study fills this gap by critically exploring the *Mandailing* culinary ecollexicon through two strengths: First, this study not only identifies lexical meanings (e.g., *Alame* from *ale* 'sweet' + *me* 'thick'), but also links them to specific socio-cultural practices, such as the function of *Rondang Bolut* in traditional ceremonies. Second, this study reveals the intertextuality between linguistics and ecology—for example, the lexeme *Gule Bulung Gadung* reflects the wisdom of processing poisonous plants, as a

response to the limitations of previous studies that tended to separate language analysis from its ecological context. Thus, this study not only adds to the Indonesian ecollexicon but also offers an integrative analytical model for ecolinguistic studies in the culinary field.

B. Lexical Meaning

Lexical meaning is the basic meaning of a word or lexeme, no matter what context it is used in (Cruse, 1986). Lexical meaning is the foundation for understanding how a language community perceives and categorizes the world around it through its words in linguistic studies. This concept is fundamental when studying traditional dishes, as their names often describe their physical characteristics, ingredients, or cooking methods. In linguistic studies, lexical meaning serves as the foundation for understanding how a language community perceives and categorizes the world. As established by Cruse (1986), the denotative layer of a lexeme provides the essential link between a linguistic sign and its referent in reality. This is particularly evident in culinary terminology, where dish names often encode physical properties, sensory attributes, or processing methods, thereby acting as a linguistic map of a community's interaction with its material environment.

Many experts have looked into the lexical meaning of dish names. Lexical meaning encompasses not only the literal meaning of a word but also its cultural value (Gorbatovsky, 2021; Pustejovsky, 2006). This aligns with broader research findings regarding the relationship between culinary naming and cultural perception. Abdina et al. (2022) demonstrated that the lexical structure of food terms in the Khakass language serves as a cognitive model for categorizing environmental resources, while Juniarti (2021) highlighted that traditional dish names among the Pasmah ethnic group are not merely labels, but cultural markers that encode indigenous values, social hierarchy, and ecological adaptation. These studies reinforce the notion that the culinary lexicon is a repository of a society's worldview, shaped by its specific historical and ecological context. Research on the meanings of words and the semantics of idioms in English has provided us with a sound theoretical framework. While these studies establish a theoretical foundation, the application of such semantic frameworks remains sparse within the Indonesian culinary context. Specifically, the *Mandailing* culinary landscape has yet to be systematically documented through this semantic lens. Addressing this gap is essential, as the unique *Mandailing* linguistic structure—characterized by distinct morphological processes and onomatopoeic foundations—offers a specialized case study that can significantly expand current lexicographical understandings of regional Indonesian cuisines.

By employing the semantic frameworks previously discussed, this study offers a robust analytical approach to the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon. This approach allows for a granular examination of how linguistic mechanisms—specifically onomatopoeia and derivational morphology—intertwine with broader ecological and cultural systems. Consequently, this study not only broadens the scope of lexical semantics but also provides a replicable, integrative model for analyzing the socio-ecological dimensions of food-related vocabulary across diverse ethnic groups in North Sumatra.

C. Symbolic Meaning

The names of traditional dishes often carry symbolic meanings that extend beyond their literal meanings. These meanings reflect the cultural values, beliefs, and philosophical views of a society (Huppatz, 2011). In cooking, a dish is not just a means to meet biological needs; it is also a symbol that reveals who you are and how you relate to others. For example, Ohnuki-Tierney's

(1994) study on rice in Japanese culture demonstrates how a dish can serve as a sacred symbol representing the connection between humans, nature, and spirituality.

Previous research has uncovered various symbolic dimensions in traditional cuisine. Levi-Strauss, in his structural analysis of “the culinary triangle,” emphasizes that the way a dish is prepared (raw, cooked, or fermented) reflects binary oppositions in culture, such as nature versus culture or sacred versus profane (Vilgis, 2013). Geertz’s (2010) study of dish symbolism in Javanese *slametan* ceremonies and Hoskins’ (1994) study of the Ritual meaning of buffalo meat in Sumba provide a way to think about how dishes work as a cultural text in Indonesia. There are few specialized studies on Mandailing culinary symbolism, despite the Mandailing community attributing significant meaning to its cooking traditions.

Building upon the structuralist perspectives of Levi-Strauss (2013) and the ritual-focused studies of Geertz (2010), this study adopts a multidisciplinary approach that bridges linguistic structure with cultural symbolism. By integrating lexical-semantic analysis with ethnographic interpretation, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how Mandailing culinary symbols—ranging from everyday dishes to ritual offerings—articulate the community’s philosophy of harmony, fertility, and social cohesion. This methodological synthesis not only deepens the insight into Mandailing culinary culture but also offers a scalable framework for examining the symbolic dimensions of traditional cuisines within the broader context of Nusantara gastronomy.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative linguistic ethnographic approach, utilizing Spradley’s (J. P. Spradley, 2006, 2016) analytical model to uncover the lexical and symbolic meanings in the Mandailing culinary lexicon. Data collection was primarily conducted through in-depth interviews with a key informant, Bakhsan Parinduri, a 62-year-old Mandailing cultural expert and holder of the *Jasinaloan* customary title (*gelar adat*). As a prominent Mandailing cultural figure and author of the book *Adat Budaya Mandailing*, his extensive expertise in local culinary traditions and ancestral philosophy provided the deep, specialized knowledge required for this ethnographic study. To ensure the robustness and validity of the data, this primary perspective was rigorously cross-validated through a comprehensive review of relevant literature and participatory observation, as well as member checking with local culinary practitioners to verify the findings. This was supplemented by a literature review and participatory observation (J. Spradley, 1980). The research process took place from July 2 to 10, 2025, in Medan and Mandailing Natal, focusing on documenting the preparation of traditional dishes, along with the technical terms associated with them. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information about the history of the culinary lexicon, dish processing methods, and the ritual context and symbolic value. Audio-visual recordings were also used to capture nonverbal aspects of culinary communication.

The data analysis followed Spradley’s ethnographic model, which systematically progresses from broad domains to specific cultural components. This analytical process is visualized in Figure 1, which outlines the three-stage transition from Domain, to Taxonomy, and finally to Component Analysis.

- a. **Domain Analysis:** Identifying broad semantic categories within the Mandailing culinary landscape (e.g., categorizing traditional sambals).

- b. **Taxonomic Analysis:** Mapping the hierarchical relationships and sub-components within those domains (e.g., the constituent ingredients of a specific dish).
- c. **Component Analysis:** Uncovering the latent cultural meanings and contrastive values (e.g., the symbolic significance of ingredients like *andaliman* versus chili peppers).

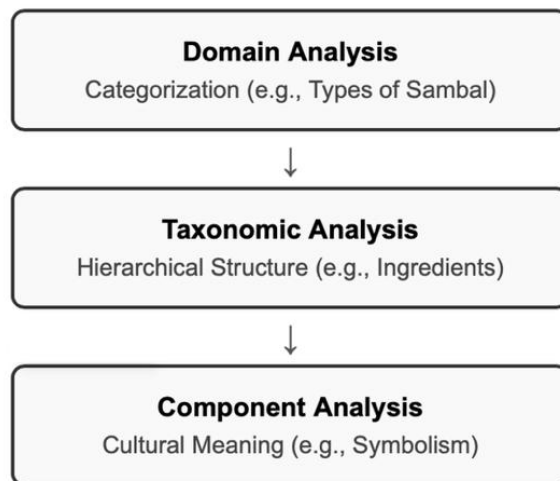


Figure 1:
Spradley's Ethnographic Analysis Framework

To ensure the rigor of our findings, we applied source triangulation (combining interviews, field observations, and literature), conducted member checks with our key informant, and performed inter-rater reviews with experts in cultural linguistics.

This study adheres to rigorous ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, the confidentiality of sensitive cultural information, and the exclusive use of data for academic purposes. Regarding the methodology, the use of Spradley's ethnographic approach provides significant analytical strength, enabling an in-depth examination of the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon through contextual data provided by cultural practitioners.

However, we acknowledge several limitations inherent in this study. First, the reliance on a key informant, while necessary for specialized ethnographic depth, presents potential challenges regarding subjective bias; this was mitigated through source triangulation and inter-rater reviews. Second, the temporal constraints of the field research limited the scope of observation, which suggests a need for longitudinal studies in future research. Despite these constraints, this study establishes a robust and replicable framework for documenting traditional culinary lexicons, providing a vital archive for *Mandailing* culture while offering a model applicable to other ethnic cuisines in Indonesia and contributing to the development of culture-based gastronomic tourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Research Findings

This study analyzed the lexical and symbolic meanings of *Mandailing* cuisine through Spradley's analysis stages. This section will visually explain how the data was classified into three

layers: (1) Domain Analysis, which identifies general categories, (2) Taxonomic Analysis, and (3) Component Analysis, which reveals cultural meanings and values. The study's results are presented in the following charts and tables.

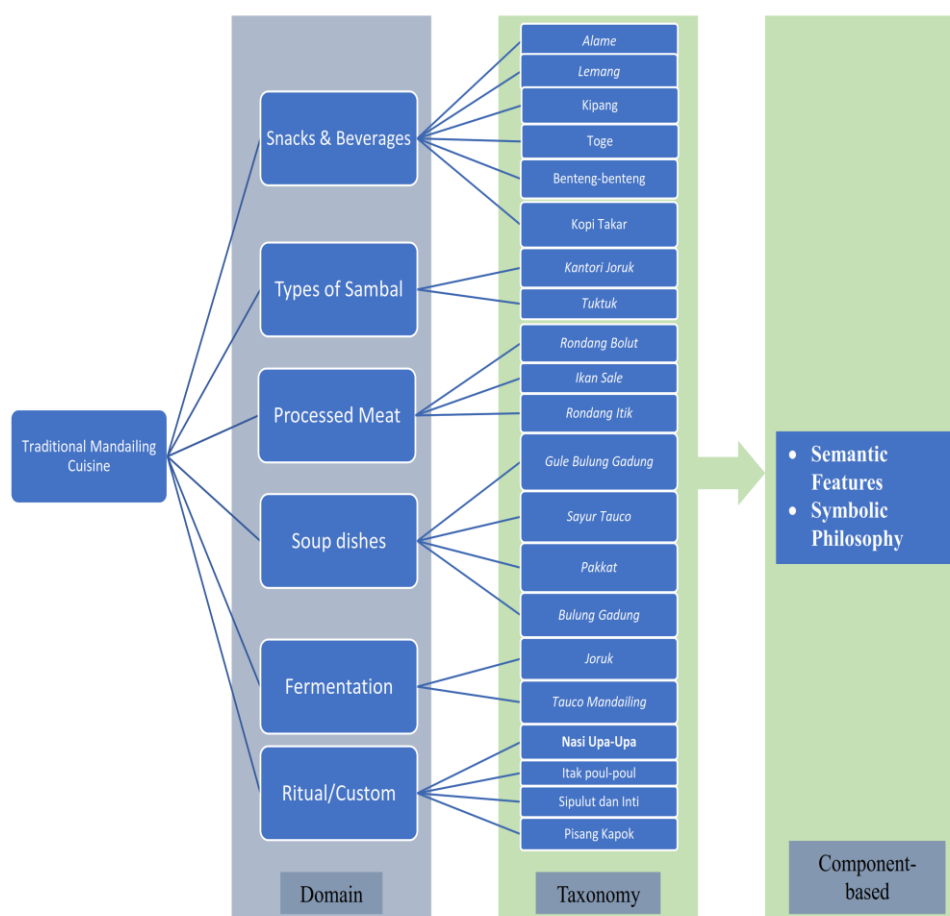


Figure 2:
Spradley's Ethnographic Analysis Model (Domain, Taxonomy, and Component Analysis) in the naming of dishes

As illustrated in the ethnographic model above (Figure 2), the data were systematically narrowed down to their core cultural elements through componential analysis. This final stage bridges the physical attributes of *Mandailing* cuisine with its deeper symbolic meanings. Table 1 below presents the detailed results of this analysis, outlining the specific lexicons, their semantic features, and the underlying cultural values they represent.

Table 1:
Detailed analysis of components

Lexicon	Semantic Features	Symbolic Value
<i>Alame</i>	Sticky texture, sweet taste, glutinous rice ingredients	Patience, social harmony
<i>Lomang</i>	Cooked in bamboo, glutinous rice ingredients	Unity, patience in the process

Lexicon	Semantic Features	Symbolic Value
<i>Kopi Takar</i>	Coffee served with coconut shell, palm sugar, and spices	Simplicity and closeness to nature,
<i>Kipang</i>	Crispy, made from rice/glutinous rice	Creativity, diversification of staple foods
<i>Toge</i>	Sweet drink mixed with coconut milk, brown sugar, cendol, and others	Simplicity and coolness
<i>Benteng-benteng</i>	Fried, circular shape	Protection, community strength
<i>Kantori Joruk</i>	Spicy, sour, fermented durian	Ecological adaptation, food security
<i>Sambal Tuktuk</i>	Spicy, fresh, onomatopoeia 'tuk-tuk'	Mutual assistance, cooperation
<i>Rondang Bolut</i>	Wild duck, dry spices	Social status, prosperity
<i>Ikan Sale</i>	Dried fish, preserved	Readiness to face difficult times
<i>Rondang Itik</i>	Domestic duck, special spices	Fertility, domestic life
<i>Gule Bulung Gadung</i>	Gadung leaves, coconut milk sauce	Local wisdom (processing toxic materials)
<i>Sayur Tauco</i>	Fermented soybeans, sauce	Cultural acculturation, food resilience
<i>Pakkat (pada holat)</i>	Rattan shoots, chewy texture	Resilience, utilization of natural resources
<i>Bulung Gadung</i>	Poisonous leaves, requiring special processing	Traditional knowledge, caution
<i>Joruk</i>	Fermented durian, strong aroma	Natural cycles, natural preservation
<i>Tauco Mandailing</i>	Fermented soybeans, savory	Generational culinary heritage
<i>Nasi Upa-Upa</i>	Rice balls, round shape	Offerings, reverence for ancestors

Lexicon	Semantic Features	Symbolic Value
<i>Itak Poul-poul</i>	Glutinous rice, small round shape	Fertility, new hope
<i>Sipulut dan Inti</i>	White glutinous rice, sticky texture Combined with a core of grated coconut mixed with palm sugar (gula aren)	Purity, unity of humanity and nature
<i>Pisang Kapok</i> (<i>Gulai Pisang</i>)	Young bananas	Simplicity, sincerity of offerings

1. Lexical meaning in Mandailing dish names

A lexical analysis reveals that Mandailing dish names are deeply embedded in the community's ecological knowledge and resource management. For instance, the term *Bulung Gadung* (lit. 'gadung leaf') is not merely a botanical label; linguistically, it acts as a mnemonic for the complex detoxification process of *Dioscorea hispida*. The naming practice here functions as a cultural warning and a technical reminder; the explicit mention of the plant part (*bulung + gadung*) preserves the traditional knowledge that the leaf/tuber is hazardous if not processed with specific culinary techniques. A similar pattern is observed in *Pakkat* (rattan shoots), which refers to the specific edible part of the rattan plant. Here, the name itself signifies the community's expertise in identifying non-toxic, sustainable forest resources amidst the broader rattan species. In both cases, the linguistic economy of the dish names—by foregrounding the key ingredient—serves to codify and transmit indigenous technical knowledge regarding safety, edibility, and ecological sustainability.

Morphological processes, such as reduplication and compounding, often encode cultural activities within Mandailing dish names. In the case of *Sambal Tuktuk*, the name originates from the onomatopoeic root *tuk*, representing the rhythmic sound of pounding ingredients in a *lesung* (mortar). The process of doubling the root (*tuk + tuk*) functions not only to form a noun but also to emphasize the repetitive, collective physical effort required in the preparation. This linguistic structure mirrors the *marsialapari* (mutual assistance) tradition, as the rhythmic pounding—which the name captures—is traditionally performed by multiple community members, thereby transforming a simple cooking task into an act of communal cooperation.

A different pattern is observed in *Kantori Joruk*, which utilizes a compounding process (combining *Kantori* and *Joruk*). This composition reflects a different socio-ecological strategy: the integration of two distinct ecosystems. By compounding a marine resource (anchovy) with a terrestrial fermented product (durian), the name linguistically encodes the community's adaptive subsistence strategy of combining diverse local resources.

Idiomatic aspects in the Mandailing culinary lexicon are evident in names that incorporate cultural metaphors. *Nasi Upa-Upa* (round rice balls) serves as an idiomatic expression of gratitude (*rasa syukur*) and divine guidance (*nasihat*). In ritual settings, this dish is symbolic precisely because of its circular form; the round shape represents the cyclical nature of life, acting as a medium to reconnect the living with the spiritual world and ancestors.

A similar symbolic complexity is found in the pairing of *Sipulut* (white sticky rice) and *Inti* (grated coconut mixed with palm sugar). The *Sipulut*, characterized by its white color and adhesive texture, represents purity and social cohesion—the 'stickiness' signifies the binding together of family members. Conversely, the *Inti* introduces a dualistic contrast: the brown color and intense sweetness of the palm sugar represent earthly grounding, warmth, and prosperity. Together, this pair—*Sipulut* and *Inti*—functions as a manifestation of cosmological dualism, balancing the ethereal (purity) with the material (earthly sweetness) to achieve harmony in traditional ceremonies."

The triadic relationship between language, nature, and culture is evident in how the culinary lexicon adapts to socio-ecological contexts. For instance, the distinction between *Rondang Bolut* (eel rendang) and *Rondang Itik* (duck rendang) illustrates the community's precise ecological categorization of food sources. While the culinary method (*Rondang*) remains constant, the variation in the head noun reflects the specific environmental niche of the ingredient. The perception of 'superiority' associated with certain dishes—such as those featuring wild-caught eels versus domestic ducks—is not inherent in the names themselves, but is rather an indexical meaning derived from the relative accessibility and the perceived difficulty of procuring these ingredients within the local ecological landscape. Furthermore, terms like *Joruk* (fermented durian) and *Tauco Mandailing* (fermented soybeans) demonstrate how the *Mandailing* community linguistically encodes their adaptation to the humid tropical climate, where fermentation functions as both a preservation strategy and a taste preference. Collectively, these lexical structures indicate that the culinary language serves as a 'semiotic archive.' It acts as a gateway to local knowledge that can only be fully decoded by situating the language within the broader, integrative framework of an ecolinguistic approach.

2. The symbolic meaning in Mandailing cuisine: cultural values and philosophy of life

The naming of traditional Mandailing dishes serves not only as a marker of culinary identity but also as a symbolic system that reflects the philosophy of life and cultural values of its people. An analysis of this culinary lexicon reveals how dishes act as a medium for conveying the noble values passed down through generations.

The *Mandailing* culinary nomenclature acts as a cultural mnemonic that encodes complex environmental wisdom. While the names *Gule Bulung Gadung* and *Pakkat* appear to be simple ingredient labels, they function as linguistic markers of specific traditional protocols. In the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon, the inclusion of the plant name serves as a 'procedural index'—it signifies that the ingredient is not merely gathered, but must be subjected to a specialized, rigorous preparation process (*pangalangan*) to neutralize its inherent toxicity. Thus, the name does not just denote the plant; it linguistically encapsulates the community's 'mastery of nature.' By naming the dish after the raw plant, the *Mandailing* people preserve the traditional knowledge that the ingredient is inherently risky. This nomenclature reflects a philosophy of active adaptation: recognizing the environment's dangers while simultaneously holding the technical wisdom to convert them into life-sustaining nourishment. In this sense, the name functions as a cultural safeguard, ensuring that the knowledge of how to handle these risky resources is passed down alongside the culinary tradition itself.

The names of traditional dishes reflect the shared values of *Mandailing* society on a social level. *Sambal Tuktuk*, which comes from the sound of a collision (tuk-tuk), represents the spirit of *marsialapari* (cooperation) in community life. The fact that many people are involved in making

it shows the idea of togetherness. *Alame* (*Mandailing dodol*), which is sticky, is another example of a strong family bond. These dishes remind people in the *Mandailing* culture of the importance of being together.

The names of ritual dishes, such as *Nasi Upa-Upa* and *Itak Poul-poul*, reveal the complexity of the *Mandailing* people's spiritual cosmology. The round shape of *Nasi Upa-Upa* stands for the unbroken cycle of life between people and their ancestors (*sombaon*). The small, round glutinous rice balls, *Itak Poul-poul*, symbolize the hope that descendants will continue to live. During *horja* (feasts), these dishes are used to communicate with the divine.

Fermented dishes like *Jorok* and *Tauco Mandailing* are interesting because they represent the idea of patience and learning through gradual processes. The long fermentation process is like life, which you have to live with patience and determination.

Through this analysis, it is clear that every element of naming in *Mandailing* cuisine, from lexical selection and lexical structure to meaning, is an expression of living culture. A dish is more than just a means to meet physical needs; it also carries the *Mandailing* community's culture, which includes their knowledge system, social values, and worldview. This discovery strengthens the idea that traditional dishes are one of the most important ways to keep cultural identity alive in the face of modernization.

B. Discussion

1. The convergence of language, nature, and culture in the *Mandailing* culinary ecolexicon

The findings of this study reveal a complex triadic relationship between language, nature, and culture in the *Mandailing* culinary ecolexicon, a pattern that is also observed in various Indonesian cultural contexts but with unique characteristics. Unlike the flora-fauna lexicon in Kutai song lyrics (Rahman et al., 2024) or Karo proverbs (Tarigan et al., 2020), which tend to be descriptive, the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon reveals deeper layers of meaning through the integration of linguistic, ecological, and philosophical elements. For example, while Nasution et al.'s (2024) research on the Malay Batu Bara fishing lexicon focuses on monomorphemic forms, our analysis of terms such as *Gule Bulung Gadung* reveals a complex morphological process (composition of *bulung* + *gadung*) that simultaneously encodes ecological knowledge about the processing of poisonous plants.

A comparison with Nurhasanah's (Nurhasanah, 2024) research on Batak Toba cuisine shows similarities in the use of the dish as a medium for cultural values, but with fundamental differences in ecological orientation. While Batak Toba *arsik* emphasizes harmony with nature through the use of *andaliman* (Batak Pepper), *Sambal Tuktuk Mandailing* highlights the social dimension through the onomatopoeia *tuk-tuk*, which records collective activities. These findings reinforce Paino et al.'s (2024) argument about the cultural identity function of Deli Malay cuisine, but with a stronger emphasis on the phonological aspects of dish naming.

A review of Kamilia et al.'s (2024) study on Madurese cuisine reveals that our results are similar, particularly in terms of how fermentation techniques benefit the environment (*Jorok*, *Tauco*). The *Mandailing* dish, on the other hand, has a spiritual meaning that was not identified in that study. For example, *Nasi Upa-Upa* is a means of communicating with the divine. This is similar to what Suardiana et al. (2025) found about Bali's *Lontar Usada* in terms of its combination of material and spiritual elements.

The unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on the morphological processes—specifically onomatopoeia, compounding, and reduplication—as the primary mechanisms for encoding ecological knowledge. Rather than treating these mechanisms as mere linguistic variations, we demonstrate how they function as cognitive nodes that bridge language, nature, and cultural values. For instance, onomatopoeic structures capture the auditory reality of collective food preparation, while compounding techniques allow for the integration of diverse ecological niches into a single culinary label. These morphological processes are not isolated linguistic phenomena; they are intrinsically linked to *Mandailing* subsistence strategies and communal ethics. Furthermore, our analysis of lexical variation, such as the distinction between *Rondang Bolut* (eel) and *Rondang Itik* (duck), reveals how the *Mandailing* lexicon categorizes food sources based on their relative ecological status. This differentiation reflects the community's socio-ecological valuation, where the linguistic foregrounding of specific wild-harvested ingredients highlights their elevated cultural significance compared to domestic alternatives. By positioning these morphological and lexical patterns at the center of the ecolinguistic inquiry, this study provides a more integrative model than previous research, which often treated the ecolexicon as a static inventory.

Based on the theoretical implications of these findings, we need to adopt a more holistic ecolinguistic approach to study the traditional dish. As Ain et al. (2023) note regarding erasure in ads, ignoring the linguistic, cultural, and ecological aspects of a place can conceal the wealth of local knowledge. This study not only confirms the findings of Beratha et al. (Beratha et al., 2020) regarding the role of ecolexicons in Balinese manuscripts, but it also proposes a novel approach that can be applied in other parts of Indonesia.

2. Cultural metaphors in lexical structure: From gotong royong to cosmological unification

The *Mandailing* culinary lexicon functions as a sophisticated system of cultural metaphors, where language transcends descriptive representation to become a vehicle for social and cosmological conceptualization. While previous studies often categorized metaphors as purely representational (Rahman et al., 2024) or denotative (Nasution et al., 2024), our findings suggest that *Mandailing* culinary metaphors operate as active signifying systems. For instance, the onomatopoeic 'tuk-tuk' in *Sambal Tuktuk* transcends simple sound mimicry—a pattern also noted in folk songs by Tambusai & Nasution (2024)—to become a metaphor for collective labor (*marsialapari*), a social value similarly observed in Batak Toba culture (Nurhasanah, 2024).

At the cosmological level, the *Sipulut-Inti* pairing mirrors the dualistic structures found in the Makassar ecolexicon (Umiyati et al., 2025) and Balinese ritual systems (Suardiana et al., 2025), yet it specifically anchors the *habonaron do bona* philosophy. Furthermore, the semantic evolution of terms like *Rondang Bolut*, which has shifted from a mere cooking method to a symbol of social status, highlights unique dynamic shifts that distinguish *Mandailing* culture from the patterns observed in Maduran cuisine (Kamilia et al., 2024) or Karo proverbs (Tarigan et al., 2020). By integrating these perspectives, our study supports the notion of the 'imaginative function' of the ecolexicon (Beratha et al., 2020) while cautioning, as Ain et al. (2023) suggested, that failing to analyze the active signifying capacity of these metaphors may obscure the deeper cultural and moral layers embedded within traditional food naming.

3. Ecological wisdom in the lexicon of risky ingredient processing

The *Mandailing* culinary lexicon functions as a repository of ecological risk management, where naming practices serve as linguistic protocols for processing hazardous materials. Unlike

previous studies that treat the ecolexicon primarily as a descriptive inventory of flora, fauna, or fishing terms (Rahman et al., 2024; Tarigan et al., 2020; Nasution et al., 2024), our analysis reveals that *Mandailing* naming conventions actively encode technical wisdom for neutralizing risks—such as toxicity in *Bulung Gadung* or microbiological factors in *Joruk* and *Tauco*.

While recent research on Batak Toba (Nurhasanah, 2024), Deli Malay (Paino et al., 2024), and Madurese cuisine (Kamilia et al., 2024) successfully highlights the cultural significance of food, our study provides a more critical dimension by focusing on risk mitigation as a form of ecological adaptation. This aligns with broader findings on traditional medicine (Suardiana et al., 2025) and cultural heritage preservation (Asridayani & Fhitri, 2024; Tambusai & Nasution, 2024; Umiyati et al., 2025). By positioning these lexicons as 'living archives,' we echo the concerns of Ain et al. (2023) regarding the erasure of traditional ecological knowledge. Thus, this study expands the ecolinguistic framework to incorporate 'ecological risk management' as a critical analytical lens, demonstrating that culinary language is not merely a reflection of resources, but an essential adaptive strategy for sustainable survival.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the *Mandailing* culinary lexicon functions as a 'living archive,' intricately weaving ecological, social, and spiritual knowledge into naming practices. By integrating an ecolinguistic framework with Spradley's ethnographic model, we have demonstrated that dish names are not mere labels but semiotic nodes that encode complex traditional wisdom—ranging from the neutralization of hazardous materials in *Gule Bulung Gadung* to the communal ethics embedded in *Sambal Tuktuk*.

The study offers a novel, integrative methodology for cultural linguistics by bridging linguistic structure with ethnographic observation. Ultimately, these findings underscore that traditional cuisine is a vital component of linguistic ecology; documenting its lexicon is essential not only for cultural identity preservation in the face of modernization but also for recognizing food as a sophisticated medium through which societies negotiate their survival, social harmony, and cosmological worldview.

We suggest that future research should extend this ecolinguistic framework to other ethnic cuisines across the archipelago, particularly those experiencing rapid linguistic and cultural shifts due to globalization. By creating a comprehensive database of culinary ecolexicons, stakeholders and policymakers can better integrate local linguistic wisdom into culture-based gastronomic tourism and educational curricula, ensuring that these vital pieces of intangible heritage are protected and celebrated for generations to come.

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