

TRADITIONAL SONGS OF THE TOBELO ETHNIC GROUP IN INDONESIA AS A CULTURAL LEXICON SYSTEM: AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Mujahid Taha¹, Burhanuddin Arafah², Ikhwan M. Said³

¹Departemen of Linguistic, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia; National Research and Innovation Agency, Indonesia ^{2,3}Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University, Indonesia
jaisjais52@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Traditional Tobelo songs serve not only as an expression of oral literature, but also as a means of passing on cultural values that are codified in the language system. This study aims to analyze traditional songs as a lexical system that contains cultural values. This study focuses on three traditional songs, namely lelehe, denge, and salumbe. These songs are important representations of the relationship between language, culture, and social structure. A qualitative method with an ethnolinguistic approach was used in this study. Data was obtained directly from oral accounts by the song performers. The data were analyzed through the stages of identifying key lexicon and grouping lexicon based on function and meaning. This study shows that traditional songs form a lexical system, such as unity and collectivity, advice and social ethics, solidarity in communal relationships, courage, responsibility, and protection of interpersonal relationships. The song lelehe emphasizes the lexicon of invitation and togetherness as the basis of social harmony; denge as a space for deliberation, advice, openness, and togetherness; and salumbe contains the lexicon of travel, symbols of masculinity, and protection of relationship dynamics and cultural identity. This study emphasizes that traditional songs are not only understood as works of oral literature, but also as a culture-based language knowledge system. This study provides a theoretical contribution to ethnolinguistic studies, namely understanding lexicon as a cultural value system, as well as an empirical contribution in efforts to document and preserve the oral literature of the Tobelo tribe.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistics, culturally valuable lexicon, traditional songs, Tobelo ethnicity, oral tradition

INTRODUCTION

In anthropological linguistics, language is often understood as part of cultural practices that are inseparable from the social lives of its speakers (Duranti, 1997). Every form of speech used in a particular cultural context contains a system of knowledge that reflects how a community understands the world around it (Sapir, 1921). One example is linguistic practices in local traditions, including songs, folk tales, and traditional expressions, which can be understood as conceptual spaces where the community's social values, cultural norms, and worldviews are symbolically represented (Sharifian, 2014). Through the analysis of linguistic elements that appear in these practices, a study can trace how communities organize their social experiences and how collective identity is constructed and maintained through language (Danesi, 2021).

Language in traditional societies functions not only as a means of communication, but also as the primary medium for storing and transmitting cultural values (Dzhukaeva, et al., 2024). From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a representation of a community's worldview, value system, and collective experiences (Duranti, 1997). Lexicon, as a core element of language, reflects how a society conceptualizes its social and cultural reality. This makes the study of culturally significant lexicon important for understanding the intrinsic relationship between language and culture in the context of local communities (Octaviani & Fateah, 2025).

In the context of island communities in Indonesia, oral traditions play a very important role in maintaining the continuity of local cultural knowledge (Finnegan, 1992). Various forms of cultural expression, such as traditional songs, customary rituals, and symbolic narratives, serve not only as a means of entertainment or aesthetic expression, but also as a medium for transmitting values that are passed down from generation to generation (Hasanah, 2020). These traditions are part of a social mechanism that enables communities to maintain their cultural identity amid ongoing social change (Smith, 2018). This illustrates that the documentation and analysis of oral tradition practices are important not only from a linguistic perspective but also in efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage, which is part of the cultural wealth of local communities (Unesco, 2003).

In the context of island communities in Indonesia, oral traditions play a very important role in maintaining the continuity of local cultural knowledge (Finnegan, 1992). Various forms of cultural expression, such as traditional songs, customary rituals, and symbolic narratives, serve not only as a means of entertainment or aesthetic expression, but also as a medium for transmitting values that are passed down from generation to generation (Hasanah, 2020). These traditions are part of a social

mechanism that enables communities to maintain their cultural identity amid ongoing social change (Smith, 2018). This illustrates that the documentation and analysis of oral tradition practices are important not only from a linguistic perspective but also in efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage, which is part of the cultural wealth of local communities (Unesco, 2003).

Studies of traditional songs have thus far been dominated by the field of oral literature, which emphasizes text structure (Choi, 2024; Finnegan, 2012). Although important, this approach tends to fall short of fully revealing songs as lexical systems that represent cultural values in a structured manner (Gibson, 2025). Meanwhile, there are traditional songs among the Tobelo ethnic group that give rise to a lexicon, revealing a connection between meanings that form a unified system of cultural values. These songs include *lelehe* (invitation to unity), *denge* (advice in deliberation), and *salumbe* (journey, protection, and masculinity). Referring to the ethnolinguistic framework, lexicon is not understood merely as a semantic unit, but as a conceptual representation that reflects the cultural knowledge system of a community. Every choice of word, metaphor, or formulaic expression in traditional speech practices can contain symbolic meanings related to social structure, collective ethics, and community value orientation (Foley, 1997; Sharifian, 2017). This makes the analysis of the lexicon in traditional songs possible to trace how communities construct social meaning and articulate their cultural identity through language.

In oral traditions, linguistic structures often display patterns of repetition, parallelism, and the use of metaphors that function as rhetorical devices as well as mechanisms for reinforcing cultural meaning. These patterns not only play a role in preserving collective memory, but also serve as pedagogical tools for transmitting social values to the next generation (Ellison & Reinöhl, 2025; Finnegan, 2012). This suggests that traditional songs can be understood as a space for articulating values that combine linguistic, performative, and social dimensions in a single cultural practice. Referring to the Tobelo ethnic context, the practice of traditional singing shows a close relationship between language, social relations, and the structure of communal life. Songs such as *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe* are not only sung for entertainment or expression, but also as a medium of symbolic communication that regulates social interaction, conveys advice, and strengthens community solidarity. The existence of these songs shows that language practices in local oral traditions have a regulatory function that guides social behavior while strengthening the cultural cohesion of the community (Rahman & Letlora, 2018).

In a broader context, studies of culturally valuable lexicon in oral traditions make an important contribution to the development of ethnolinguistic studies that emphasize the close relationship between language, culture, and social structure (Hymes, 1964). This approach allows us to explore how linguistic elements function not only as a means of communication, but also as conceptual devices that represent cultural categories within a society (Palmer, 1996). This makes the analysis of the lexicon that appears in oral tradition practices able to show how social values, collective norms, and communal moral orientations are represented, negotiated, and reproduced through language in everyday life (Underhill, 2012).

Based on this framework, this study positions the traditional songs of the Tobelo ethnic group as a lexicon system of cultural value from an ethnolinguistic perspective. The focus of the study is on how the lexicon in *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe* songs constructs a network of meanings that represent the worldview and social structure of the Tobelo ethnic community. By placing the lexicon at the center of analysis, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of ethnolinguistic studies, particularly in understanding language as a system of cultural knowledge, while also enriching the documentation of Tobelo oral traditions as part of intangible cultural heritage.

This study specifically aims to: 1) identify and describe key lexicon that appears in traditional Tobelo ethnic songs, especially in the songs *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe*, which are used in various social contexts within the community; 2) analyze the function and cultural meaning of these lexical items within an ethnolinguistic framework, especially in representing social values such as unity, deliberation, solidarity, courage, responsibility, and protection in the communal life of the Tobelo ethnic group; and 3) explaining how the lexicon of traditional songs forms a structured system of meaning that can be understood as a representation of the Tobelo community's worldview and cultural knowledge system encoded in the practice of traditional oral language.

This study offers a new perspective in ethnolinguistic studies by placing traditional songs as a lexical system that forms a structured configuration of cultural meaning. Unlike previous studies that have focused more on analyzing the oral literary, performative, or aesthetic functions of traditional songs, this study places the lexicon at the center of its analysis to explore how cultural values are represented and organized through linguistic choices in oral tradition practices. Through this approach, this study not only reveals the symbolic meaning of lexical units in the songs *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe*, but also shows

how these lexicons form a network of meaning that reflects the worldview, social structure, and cultural knowledge system of the Tobelo ethnic group. This clarifies that this study makes a theoretical contribution to expanding the understanding of the relationship between language and culture from an ethnolinguistic perspective, while also making an empirical contribution through the documentation and analysis of the Tobelo oral tradition as part of intangible cultural heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative method with an ethnolinguistic approach was used in this study. This method was used to analyze traditional Tobelo ethnic songs consisting of *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe* songs, which have a lexicon system with cultural value (Oktariza & Efendi, 2023). This method was chosen because the research is oriented towards meaning, interpretation, and understanding of the socio-cultural context that underlies the use of lexicon in speech practice (Creswell, 2014). Based on methodology, an ethnolinguistic framework is used to position language as a cultural practice that cannot be separated from the value system and social structure of the community that speaks it (Yi, 2023; Duranti, 1997). The research data consists of lexical units, phrases in traditional songs that have cultural value. The data was obtained through documentation techniques of song lyrics. This documentation technique was carried out through recordings and in-depth interviews with singers of *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe* who were competent in the field being studied (Ahearn, 2012). The informants in this study were Mr. Banari as a Tobelo traditional leader, Grandmother Pere who sang *lelehe* and *denge*, and Mr. Yortan who sang *salumbe*.

In the data collection process, this study also used participatory observation techniques to understand the performative context of traditional singing in social practices. This technique involves directly observing singing performances, interactions between singers and audiences, and the social conditions that underlie the use of these songs. Observations were made during cultural activities that featured traditional singing practices, enabling this study to gain a contextual understanding of the social function and situations in which the lexicon is used in oral traditions. This approach is in line with the tradition of ethnolinguistic research, which places language as a social practice that can only be fully understood through direct involvement in the cultural context of its speakers (Ahearn, 2012; Duranti, 1997).

In addition to observation, data collection also included elicitation techniques and lexicon meaning through semi-structured interviews with key informants. This step was taken to obtain explanations of the lexical meaning, contextual and symbolic meaning, and cultural values contained in the expressions that appeared in the songs. Informants were asked to explain the meaning of words and metaphors used in traditional song texts, while also relating them to the social practices and worldviews of the Tobelo ethnic group. This step is important in ethnolinguistic research because the meaning of a lexicon cannot be understood literally, but is often related to the cultural experiences, social norms, and local knowledge systems of the community of speakers (Foley, 1997; Sharifian, 2017).

The analysis was conducted in stages: first, identification of key lexicon; second, classification based on cultural value categories and social functions; and third, interpretation of contextual meaning to see the interrelationships between lexicon elements in forming a systematic network of meaning. This procedure is in line with the tradition of anthropological linguistic analysis, which emphasizes the relationship between language form, user context, and cultural meaning systems (Susianti, et al., 2024; Foley, 1997). This makes this research method possible to provide understanding through comprehensive working procedures of traditional songs as a cultural knowledge system encoded in the lexicon of these traditional songs of the Tobelo ethnic group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the traditional songs of the Tobelo ethnic group, namely *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe*, form a structured and interrelated lexical system that represents the cultural values of the community. Analysis of the lexical units of formulaic phrases and symbolic expressions in these three songs reveals patterns of repetition, distinctive diction, and metaphorical constructions that are not coincidental but function as a means of transmitting collective values. *Lelehe* shows the dominance of a lexicon of invitation and togetherness that affirms the principles of collectivity and social harmony; *denge* contains a lexicon of advice, deliberation, and wisdom that represents social ethics and the community's moral control mechanisms; while *salumbe* displays a lexicon of travel, sharing, and symbolic protection related to the construction of responsibility and courage in interpersonal relationships. Integratively, the

entire lexicon forms a network of meanings that reflects the Tobelo ethnic group's view of life regarding unity, solidarity, honor, and social responsibility. This emphasizes that traditional songs not only function as aesthetic expressions but also as a system of cultural knowledge encoded in lexical structures and actualized in social practices. The findings show that each song presents a lexical configuration that has a specific cultural function in the life of the Tobelo ethnic group. In the song *lelehe*, the repetition of lexical items such as *ni'matami*, *nia'ino*, and *horimoi* marks the opening of an inclusive social space while affirming a collective orientation in communal life. In the *denge* song, lexicon such as *tabea*, *suba*, *ni'gogerukulah*, and *ho'matekejarita* build a communication framework that places deliberation, openness, and respect as the main principles in resolving common problems. Meanwhile, in the song *salumbe*, lexicon such as *i'doku*, *nena*, *o'deru* Galela, *o'kopu*, and *piso lipa* symbolically represent relational journeys, commitment to togetherness, and protective responsibility in social relations. The variation in this lexicon shows that the language in traditional songs not only describes cultural experiences but also functions as a conceptual tool that organizes the values, norms, and behavioral orientations of the Tobelo ethnic group in their communal life.

The discussion in this study is organized into three main sections that reflect the lexical configuration in each type of traditional Tobelo ethnic song. The first section examines the lexicon of unity and solidarity in *lelehe* songs, which feature a communal invitation structure, lexical repetition, and symbols of togetherness as the foundation of social harmony in the community. The second section discusses the lexicon of advice and social ethics in *denge* songs, which show how lexical choices shape the space for dialogue, deliberation, and ethical mechanisms in resolving community issues. The third part describes the lexicon of journey, masculinity, and protection in *salumbe* songs, which combine metaphors of journey, relational symbols, and representations of protective responsibility in social dynamics. Through this analytical division, this study shows that each type of song presents a different but complementary lexical configuration in forming a structured cultural meaning system in the communal life of the Tobelo ethnic group.

Lexicon of Unity and Solidarity in the Song *Lelehe*

This song conveys a message about living in unity to build culture in the village with sincere intentions. *Lelehe* is usually performed during traditional ceremonies, harvest festivals, or building inaugurations. This song always describes relationships with fellow human beings and prayers to God. Its delivery depends on the intentions and meaning to be conveyed. In the context of Tobelo culture, the *lelehe* song not only functions as an aesthetic expression in oral tradition, but also as a symbolic medium that organizes social relations in communal life. The lexical structure used in it shows a tendency to use words of invitation, togetherness, and references to collective social spaces such as villages and shared culture. These lexical items serve as linguistic devices that emphasize the importance of collective participation and social solidarity in building community life. Through a strategy of repetition and characteristic invitational constructions, these songs create a space for interaction that positions individuals as part of a broader social unity. This makes *lelehe* understandable as a linguistic practice that not only conveys moral messages, but also reproduces the values of unity, equality, and shared responsibility that form the foundation of Tobelo ethnic social life. The following is a table of the lexicon and *lelehe* songs in the Tobelo language.

Table 1. Lexicon of Unity and Solidarity in the Song *Lelehe*

Tobelo language	Indonesia language	Cultural Function and Meaning
<i>ni'matami</i>	please sit down (inviting someone to sit)	opening of social spaces and hospitality
<i>nia'ino</i>	come in; come here (inviting someone)	participatory engagement and community inclusivity
<i>horimoi</i>	unites	principles of collectivity and social solidarity
<i>ho'higoko; moimoi toka</i>	building; together	collaboration in social action
<i>de nanga galipi</i>	and our culture	collective identity and continuity of tradition
<i>nanga hoana</i>	our village	communal social space as a basis for unity

**Picture 1.** A Performance of *Lelehe* Dance and Song Sung by Grandmother Pere.

Source: Photo taken by the researcher on November 22, 2025, at the Dabiloha studio, Gura village, Tobelo, North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province, Indonesia.

“Ni'matami, nia'ino, ni'matami. Nia'ino la horimoi, ho'higoko nanga hoana de nanga galipi. Nia'ino la ho'rimoi.”

Translation:

“Please sit down, come in, please sit down. Let us unite, together build our village and culture, let us unite.”

This song explains that the lexical structure within it does not merely form an invitation, but represents the collective value system of the Tobelo ethnic group. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a cultural practice that reflects how a community constructs its social relations and worldview (Dzhukaeva et al., 2024; Duranti, 1997). This analysis will focus on the function of the lexicon as a marker of cultural values. There are several lexical items in the *lelehe* song that are the focus of analysis. *First*, the repetition of the lexical items *ni'matami* ‘please sit down’ and *nia'ino* ‘come in or come here’ displays a formulaic repetition pattern that pragmatically functions as a strategy for opening up social space (Jaafar, 2018; Kornacki, 2019). In oral tradition, repetition is not only static but also performative because it marks the transition from the profane space to the social-communal space (Ellison & Reinöhl, 2025). The lexicon contains strong values of hospitality and social acceptance. From this analysis, it can be seen that the act of “sitting together” is not merely a physical activity, but a symbol of equality and readiness to build consensus; second, the phrase *la horimoi* ‘let us unite’, which is repeated at the beginning and end of the song structure, forms a semantic frame that affirms collectivity as a core

value. Within the framework of linguistic anthropology, the choice of prominent and repeated lexicon reflects cultural categories that are considered central by the community of speakers (Khishigsuren, et al., 2025; Foley, 1997).

The concept of “unity” in this context does not stand alone, but is expanded through the phrase *ho'higoko nanga hoana de nanga galipi* ‘building our village and culture together’, which connects social relations and cultural identity in a single meaning (Ibrahim, et al., 2023; Bustan et al., 2021). This shows that the use of this lexicon constructs a worldview based on collectivity, participation, and shared responsibility; and third, the overall structure of the song text forms a pattern of invitation, elaboration of collective goals, and reaffirmation of the invitation. This pattern explains that the *lelehe* song is part of a cultural knowledge system that regulates relationships between individuals and communities simultaneously (Maulana, & Wardiah, 2023; Erben et al., 2021). Overall, the *lelehe* song represents the values of unity, equality, and collective responsibility through repetitive lexical strategies and communal exhortations. This song shows that language functions as a medium for forming social solidarity as well as for instructing the reproduction of cultural values in the Tobelo ethnic group (Daloma et al., 2024).

Lexicon of Advice and Social Ethics in the Song *Denge*

Denge songs generally represent an oral tradition that functions as a forum for deliberation and the imparting of advice among the Tobelo ethnic group. These songs emphasize the importance of dialogue, openness, and togetherness as the foundation for meeting common needs. Through its persuasive structure and use of cultural symbols, *denge* builds a collective awareness that every community issue must be discussed within a framework of unity and cooperation. These songs reflect a value system that places social solidarity and communal responsibility as the main principles of community life. The following is a lexicon and song of *denge* in the Tobelo language. The song *denge* shows that the choice of lexicon used not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a representation of the ethical norms and social values of the Tobelo ethnic group. Lexicons such as *tabea* and *suba* reflect the practices of politeness and respect that form the basis of social interaction, while the use of lexicons such as *ni'gogerukulah* and *ho'matekejarita* emphasizes the importance of dialogue as a deliberative process in resolving common problems. The structure of the speech, which is built through invitations, the expression of opinions, and the reinforcement of the value of unity, shows that *denge* functions as a cultural mechanism for regulating social relations and maintaining community harmony. This makes this song not only a medium for conveying advice, but also a symbolic device that constructs and reproduces the social ethics and communal life of the Tobelo ethnic group.

Table 2. Cultural Lexicon in *Denge* Songs

Tobelo Language	Indonesia Language	Cultural Function and Meaning
<i>tabea</i>	expression (respectful greeting; asking permission)	ethics of respect in social interactions
<i>nia'ino</i>	come here	openness to dialogue and participation
<i>suba</i>	expression (showing respect; please sit down)	equality in deliberation
<i>ni'gogerukulah</i>	negotiate	mechanism of communal deliberation
<i>ho'matekejarita</i>	tell a story	transparency of communication
<i>perelu; ororahi</i>	needs	focus on common interests
<i>matikoki</i>	to express	responsibility to convey aspirations
<i>horimoi</i>	unity; to unite	the moral basis of social solidarity
<i>goraka</i>	lift; work	commitment to collective work
<i>manarama; moimoi toka</i>	together	integration of actions in togetherness
<i>de ha'goraka tongone nanga manarama</i>	like a whole nutmeg with flowers (metaphor)	symbol of integrity and social harmony



Picture 2. A performance of *Denge* Dance and Song Performed by Grandmother Pere

Source: Photo taken by the researcher on November 22, 2025, at the Dabiloha studio, Gura village, Tobelo, North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province, Indonesia.

“Tabea, nia-ino. Suba jooo. Nia’ino laah ni’gogerukulah ho’matekejarita Okia’naga nia perelu, nangkadau nihiade-ade la ngomi mi’hioriki la, ho’rimoi ha goraka tongone nanga manarama. Okianaga yang nanga rimoi mahidogoronaka, ga ha’goraka ma’tero-tero hokao pala de’mabungaka la horimoi. Supaya mahidogoronaka okia yang i’madadi, okia yang ho’mau ho’diai genanga mata-mata hakunu ho’diai de hagoraka. Nako magoronaka nanga rimoi koiwa, okianaga dika ho’mau ho’diai, imadadi ua selain naga horimoi de o’giama ho’mateke so ino, de ha’goraka tongone nanga manarama. Okia ma’huha ma ka idadi.”

Translation:

‘*Tabea*’ (‘expression of respect’), come here, *suba jooo* (‘paying respects’). Come here, please sit down, let’s talk about whatever you need. Tell us here so that we know, so that in our unity we can lift up what is our common work, like a whole nutmeg with its flower, so too our unity can happen in what we want to do’.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, *denge* songs show that the lexicon used not only conveys communicative messages, but also represents the Tobelo community’s system of advice and social ethics. The lexicon *tabea* ‘expression of respect’ contains values of politeness and recognition of the dignity of the interlocutor, which form the basis of social interaction ethics. The lexicon *nia’ino* ‘come here, come closer’ and *suba* ‘paying respects, inviting someone to sit’ reflect a participatory invitation that signifies openness to dialogue and equality in communal gatherings. Furthermore, *ni’gogerukulah* ‘to discuss (negotiate)’ and *ho’matekejarita* ‘to tell a story (convey views)’ show that the practice of deliberation is an ethical mechanism for resolving common needs (Mahmud & Tamalene, 2025; Utami & Rosa, 2022; Boriri, 2021). In recent anthropological linguistic studies, linguistic forms such as these are understood as social practices that not only represent norms but also activate them as social interactions (Ahearn, 2012; Duranti, 1997).

Meanwhile, the lexicon *perelu* or *ororahi* ‘necessity or need’ and *mi’hioriki* ‘to convey or express’ represent the values of responsibility and transparency and convey community issues. The lexicon *horimoi*, “to unite, to live in unity,” which appears repeatedly, affirms collectivity as a central value category in the social structure of the Tobelo ethnic group. The expression *goraka tongone nanga manarama*, “to take up what is our common work,” contains a collective meaning based on moral understanding. Meanwhile, the metaphor about the wholeness of the nutmeg fruit with its flower in the expression *imadadi ua selain naga horimoi de o’giama ho’mateke so ino, de ha’goraka tongone nanga manarama* ‘like a whole nutmeg fruit with its flower, so too is our unity’ symbolizes the integrity and harmony of the elements of the community (Kaunang, 2023; Taha & Febriningish, 2022; Fasya & Prahikmahtin, 2017). From an anthropological linguistic perspective, this kind of metaphor reflects the conceptualization of social values through ecological experiences that are close to the lives of the community (Sharifian, 2017). The entire lexicon in the *denge* song forms a network of meanings that

affirms the ethics of deliberation, solidarity, and social integrity as the foundation of Tobelo ethnic communal life.

Lexicon of Travel, Masculinity, and Protection in the *Salumbe* Song

The *salumbe* song represents a narrative of travel that is rich in symbols of relationships, identity, and social responsibility. These songs describe the movement from one village to another through the metaphor of sailing, which in the context of maritime culture signifies not only physical mobility, but also social transition and the formation of new bonds. These songs contain symbols of togetherness, commitment, and the formation of a shared history as part of the relational process. On the other hand, this song also presents a dimension of protection and steadfastness that affirms the role of men as protective figures in social dynamics. The entire *salumbe* song combines the themes of journey, relationships, and protection in a narrative structure that reflects the values of courage, commitment, and responsibility in the communal life of the Tobelo ethnic group.

The lexical structure in the *salumbe* song shows how the experience of travel in maritime culture is conceptualized as a metaphor for the formation of social relations and cultural identity. Lexicon such as *i'doku nena* and *magogoru* mark a process of collective and careful migration, while the Galela symbol *o'deru* constructs an image of a shared space that unites individuals in a common journey. On another level, the presence of the symbol *o'kupa*, which is divided into two, illustrates relational commitment and equality in building a shared history, which is then affirmed through the expression *i'dadi sejara* as the formation of collective memory. The dimensions of masculinity and protection are manifested through the lexicon *piso lipa*, which functions as a symbol of courage and preparedness, as well as moral responsibility in maintaining social relations. Thus, the song *salumbe* not only represents a journey, but also presents a construction of values of courage, commitment, and protection that are integrated into the cultural meaning system of the Tobelo ethnic group. The following is the lexicon and oral narration of the *salumbe* song in the Tobelo language.

Table 3. Cultural Lexicon in *Salumbe* Songs

Tobelo Language	Indonesia Language	Cultural Function and Meaning
<i>i'doku nena</i>	we are leaving	social transition and relational shift
<i>ma'gogoru; mote gogoru</i>	row slowly	adaptive and cautious process
<i>o'deru Galela</i>	Galela boat	symbol of collective space and maritime identity
<i>o'kupa</i>	<i>ketupat</i> (a type of rice cake)	commitment and relational sharing
<i>i'dadi sejara</i>	become history	formation of collective memory
<i>pisolipa</i>	folding knife	symbol of masculinity and protection
<i>jaga-jaga</i>	be on guard; be alert	vigilance and moral responsibility



Picture 3. A Performance of *Salumbe* Singing by Mr. Yortan

Source: Photo taken by the researcher on November 22, 2025, at the Dabiloha studio, Gura Village, Tobelo, North Halmahera Regency, North Maluku Province, Indonesia.

"I'doku nena e ma'gogoru naro-naro to tide unaika. Omao e. Idola-dolaa. To'sidopa ma'limau magamuka rame-rame. Ho maleko o'kupa eeh. O'kupa ma'leta i'dadi sejara. ngone po majobo ngone po pane o'deru galela."

translation:

"We departed from my village to his village, rowing slowly, I raised the mast and sail on the boat. We shared one ketupat, split in two. From one cice cake split in two, history was made. We set sail using a Galela boat."

"O'dunia hotumule. Pisolipa tabarengkengkawa, o'buisawa detaborontontawa. Jaga-jaga de ma piso lipa, ma pisolipa yato matebarengkengkawa. Pisolipa tabarengkengkawa o buisou de garama de tabobiasaka. Eeeh ta'bobiasaka oguisa de tagarama de tabobiasaka. eee ma ta'bobiasaka, iti i'dadi layato ngona de dengohi eeh. Ceheheheee."

translation:

"In this world, don't show arrogance because everyone has a pocket knife. I'm not afraid of pocket knives because I'm used to going to jail. I'm used to carrying pocket knives, and they protect me on our travels."

The ethnolinguistic perspective on the *salumbe* song represents a lexical system that integrates the meanings of journey, construction of masculinity, and symbols of protection in the social relations of the Tobelo community. The lexicon in the songs "*I'doku nena e ma'gogoru naro-naro to tide unaika...*" 'We leave my village for his village' and "...*O'mao e. Idola-dola...*" 'rowing slowly' marks the dimension of travel as a metaphor for social transition, especially in the context of relationships with others. This journey is not merely physical mobility, but a symbol of a change in status and responsibility. The lexicon "...*o'deru galela*" 'Galela boat' reinforces collective symbolism because boats in maritime culture are often conceptualized as shared spaces that unite individuals in a common purpose. The song "...*O'kupa ma'leta i'dadi sejara...*" 'We share one ketupat split in two' presents a symbol of sharing and commitment, culturally representing equality and relational bonds. The act of sharing contains the meaning of forming a shared history "...*i'dadi sejara...*" 'becoming history', which is the confirmation of relationships in collective memory (Wulandari, 2023; Raming et al., 2023; Ririmasse, 2016).

In the dimension of masculinity and protection, this is manifested through the lexicon "...*piso lipa*" 'folding knife', which serves as a symbol of courage and preparedness. This lexicon does not merely refer to a material object, but represents a strong male identity that is ready to protect. The line in the song "...*Jaga-jaga de ma piso lipa...*" 'I am not afraid of folding knives' affirms the construction of masculinity based on courage and experience, which is legitimized through narratives of self-resilience. Through the framework of linguistic anthropology, traditional weapon symbols often function as conceptualizations of protection and social honor (Dari et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2023; Sharifian, 2017). This explains that "*piso lipa*" operates as a metaphor for protection in relational journeys, both physically and symbolically. These various lexical elements indicate that the lexicon in the *salumbe* song forms a system of meaning that connects the journey as a social transition, masculinity as a resilient identity, and protection as a moral responsibility in maintaining relationships and honor. The language in these songs not only describes experiences but also reproduces the values of courage, commitment, and protection in Tobelo ethnic culture (Sirait et al., 2025; Ahearn, 2012; Duranti, 1997).

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes that traditional Tobelo ethnic songs display a systematically organized lexicon configuration and function as a medium for articulating the social values that exist within the community of speakers. Analysis of the songs *lelehe*, *denge*, and *salumbe* shows that the choice and distribution of lexicon in each song forms interconnected conceptual patterns that represent a social order based on togetherness, deliberation, honor, and relational responsibility. The linguistic structure in the songs does not stand as a rhetorical ornament, but rather as a conceptual device that organizes social experiences and directs collective behavioral orientation. This shows that in the Tobelo tradition of singing, language plays a role as a mechanism for constructing social meaning as well as binding the community structure. Theoretically, this study broadens the understanding of the position of lexicon in ethnolinguistic studies by showing that linguistic units in oral traditions can be read as configurations of institutionalized cultural knowledge. Traditional Tobelo songs show that cultural values are not only represented through symbols,

but are also systematically embedded in a lexicon network that is used repeatedly in specific social contexts. The implications of these findings are not only conceptual for the development of linguistic studies, but also relevant in the context of preserving intangible cultural heritage, particularly in documenting the meaning systems that live on in the speech practices of local communities. By placing lexicon as the entry point for analysis, this study provides a basis for further exploration of the relationship between language, social structure, and the sustainability of the cultural identity of traditional communities.

In addition, the findings of this study show that each type of song presents a lexical configuration that is distinct yet complementary in forming the cultural value system of the Tobelo ethnic group. The *lelehe* song affirms a collective orientation through a lexicon of invitation and togetherness that constructs a communal social space; *denge* represents the ethics of deliberation through a lexicon of respect, dialogue, and openness; while *salumbe* presents symbols of journey, masculinity, and protection related to relational responsibilities in social life. The diversity of these lexical configurations shows that language in traditional songs functions as a conceptual device to integrate social experiences, moral values, and cultural identity into a systemic network of meaning. This indicates that traditional Tobelo songs can be understood as a linguistic practice that not only represents culture but also constructs and maintains the value system of communal life.

This finding also shows that the oral tradition of singing among the Tobelo ethnic group has an epistemological function as a medium for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Through the use of repetitive lexicon, symbolic metaphors, and formulaic speech structures, values such as unity, solidarity, deliberation, courage, and responsibility continue to be reproduced in community speech practices. Referring to the ethnolinguistic view, this condition shows that language not only acts as a means of communication, but also as a system of cultural representation that organizes social experiences and maintains the sustainability of the collective identity of the community.

This makes the study of lexicon in oral traditions such as traditional Tobelo songs significantly important, not only for the development of linguistic and linguistic anthropology theories but also for efforts to preserve local cultural knowledge as intangible cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the participation of informants and assistant informants in this study.

Declaration

Conflicting Interest

There is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

Ethics Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from participants and/or their legal guardians, and participant confidentiality was strictly maintained.

Data Availability

The data generated and analyzed during this study are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and the protection of participants' confidentiality but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Generative AI

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-assisted technologies were used solely to improve language and readability. All research processes, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are entirely the responsibility of the authors.

Author Contributions

Mujahid contributed to the conceptualization of the study, the design of the methodology, formal analysis, supervision, and the preparation of the original draft of the manuscript. Burhanuddin contributed to the research methodology, investigation process, project administration, and was responsible for validation and provided critical review and editing of the manuscript. Ikhwan contributed to data collection, investigation, and data curation, and assisted in preparing research materials. All authors discussed the results, reviewed the manuscript, and approved the final version of the article.

REFERENCES

- Ahearn, Laura. (2012). *Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Antropology*. United Kongdom: Wiley Blackwell. Retrieved February 8, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/d2e7f95969f1645cefaea07450832ad2>.
- Ahearn, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Retrieved February 12, 2026, from: <https://repositorio.ciem.ucr.ac.cr/server/api/core/bitstreams/d8d686ad-2826-4647-ab39-105aece0fafa/content>.
- Boriri, A. (2021). Implikatur bermakna budaya sosial pada nyanyian rakyat denge suku tobelo di desa wooi kec. obi timur [Cultural and social implications in the folk songs of the Tobelo tribe in Wooi Village, East Obi District]. *Titian*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.22437/titian.v5i2.15643>.
- Brek, Y., Rumate, C. J., Bokko, L. S., Retor, E. A., & Mumeek, I. J. (2024). Efektivitas Nyanyian Tradisional: Ma'kaaruyen Sebagai Refleksi Makna Hidup Rakat Minahasa [The Effectiveness of Traditional Songs: Ma'kaaruyen as a Reflection of the Meaning of Life for the Minahasa People]. 1(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.70420/j7ve3340>.
- Bustan, F., Gana, F., Sarong, Y. S., & Jehane, H. (2021). *Social Cohesion Metaphor in Manggarai Language (A Cultural Linguistic Analysis)*. <https://doi.org/10.35508/haumeni.v1i1.4576>.
- Choi, W. (2024). An Experimental Review of the Knowledge System of Oral Literature Texts. <https://doi.org/10.22274/koralit.2024.72.001>.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. Retrieved February 12, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/5866be4088947c4a09ed41d621f8f33b>.
- Daloma, D., Wantasen, I. L., Kaunang, I. R. B., & Palar, D. C. (2024). The Meaning of Mekakauhe Language in the Marriage Customs of the Sangihe Tribe. *Santhet: Jurnal Sejarah, Pendidikan, Dan Humaniora*, 8(2), 2098–2101. <https://doi.org/10.36526/santhet.v8i2.4526>.
- Danesi, M. (2021). *Linguistic Relativity Today: Language, Mind, Society, and the Foundations of Linguistic Anthropology*. Routledge. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781000318043_A40251785/preview-9781000318043_A40251785.pdf.
- Dari, M. W., Syahrani, A., & Asfar, D. A. (2024). Collocations of Pria, Lelaki, and Jantan as Representations of Masculinity in Indonesia. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 24(4), 214–239. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2024-2404-12>.
- Duncan, C. R. (2009). Reconciliation and Revitalization: The Resurgence of Tradition in Postconflict Tobelo, North Maluku, eastern Indonesia. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 68(4), 1077–1104. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002191180999074x>.
- Duranti A. (1997). *Linguistik Antropologi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved January 9, 2026, from: https://staibabussalamsula.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/LINGUISTIC-ANTHROPOLOGY-staibabussalamsula.ac_id_.pdf.
- Dzhukaeva, M. A., Abueva, N. N., & Мамедова, Г. Б. (2024). Language as a tool of communication: How it reveals cultural reality and forms our spirit. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 195, 02006–02006. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202419502006>.
- Ellison, T. M., & Reinöhl, U. (2025). *Repetition in Language and Recurrence Mapping*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/ma5js>.
- Erben, D., Privalova, Y., Yakovlev, A., Ovcharenko, V., & Nechepurenko, M. (2021). Textual unification in a community of Native American storytelling voices. 273, 11007. <https://doi.org/10.1051/E3SCONF/202127311007>.
- Fasya, M., & Prahikmahtin, S. N. (2017). An Anthropolinguistic Study on Local Wisdom Embodied in Lexicons of Community System in Kampung Adat Urug. <https://doi.org/10.5220/0007172506440648>.
- Finnegan, R. (1992). *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*. Routledge. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/50c8e43bf2857dec72a03984aaae78b3>.
- Finnegan, R. (2012). *Oral literature in Africa*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. Retrieved February 11, 2026, from: <https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0025.pdf>.
- Foley, W. A. (1997). *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. Retrieved February 26, 2026, from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342198842_Anthropological_Linguistics#fullTextFileContent.

- Gibson, A. (2025). *Singing as a Dimension of Linguistic Variation*. 529–554. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197533499.003.0029>.
- Hasanah, L. U., & Andari, N. (2020). The social and cultural values transmission of an oral tradition. *Indonesian Journal of Social Research*. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: <https://www.academia.edu/download/75906156/52.pdf>.
- Hymes, D. (1964). Directions in ethnolinguistic theory. *American Anthropologist*, 66(3). Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/aa.1964.66.3.02a00820>.
- Ibrahim, A., Bau, S. O., & Safi, J. (2023). Mari moi ngone futuru sebagai identitas kultural: makna dan imlementasinya dalam kehidupan masyarakat maluku utara [*Mari moi ngone futuru* as a cultural identity: its meaning and implementation in the lives of the people of North Maluku]. *Waskita*, 7(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.waskita.2023.007.01.6>.
- Jaafar, M. F. (2018). Lexical patterns in customary sayings. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 226–234. <https://doi.org/10.17509/IJAL.V8I1.11461>.
- Jama, K. B., & Menggo, S. (2024). Language and cultural values exploration of traditional songs in Malakan Ethnic, Eastern Indonesia. *Lite*, 20(2), 105–118. <https://doi.org/10.33633/lite.v20i2.10859>.
- Kartomi, M. J. (1994). Is Maluku Still Musicological terra incognita? An Overview of the Music-Cultures of the Province of Maluku. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 25(01), 141–171. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400006718>.
- Kaunang, I. R. B. (2023). Leksikon dan Fungsi Budaya dalam Gara'i di Provinsi Gorontalo [Lexicon and Cultural Functions in Gara'i in Gorontalo Province]. *Ideas: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Budaya*, 9(2), 433–433. <https://doi.org/10.32884/ideas.v9i2.1338>.
- Khishigsuren, T., Mollica, F., Vylomova, E., & Kemp, C. (2025). *Usage frequency predicts lexicalization across languages*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/fqdjv_v1.
- Kornacki, P. (2019). A Look at Tok Pisin save: A Lexical Verb and an Aspectual Marker in a Cultural Context. *Anglica. An International Journal of English Studies*, 79–93. <https://doi.org/10.7311/10.7311/0860-5734.28.2.05>.
- Mahmud, A. F., & Tamalene, M. N. (2025). Language and identity of vulnerable group: tracing the origins of the tobelo dalam tribe from a linguistic perspective. *Lire Journal*, 9(2), 326–341. <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.455>.
- Maulana, S., & Wardiah, D. (2023). Antropologi sastra tradisi lisan nenggun di masyarakat Mengkenang Kabupaten Lahat [Anthropology of oral tradition literature in the community of Mengkenang, Lahat Regency]. *Pembahsi: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 13(2). <https://journal.univpgri-palembang.ac.id/index.php/pembahsi/article/view/12933>.
- Octaviani, N. I., & Fateah, N. (2025). Exploring the semantic significance of lexicon in ebeg traditional art of kebumen regency. *Lire Journal*, 9(3), 445–462. <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.466>.
- Oktariza, D., & Efendi, D. S. (2023). Cultural Values in Idiomatic Expression of Jambi Malay Language Bungo Malay Dialect: Antropholinguistics Perspective. *Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole*. <https://doi.org/10.36057/jilp.v7i1.625>.
- Palmer, G. B. (1996). *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*. University of Texas Press. Retrieved February 8, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/462ab84888d777f3b9475e8be709907b>.
- Rahman, F., & Letlora, P. S. (2018). Cultural Preservation: Rediscovering the Endangered Oral Tradition of Maluku (A Case Study on Kapata of Central Maluku). *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(2), 91–97. <https://doi.org/10.7575/AIAC.ALLS.V.9N.2P.91>.
- Rahmat, W., Putra, L. D., & Fitriyah, R. (2023). How do the ethnicity minangkabau male express their masculinity in language: A identity point of view. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067x231201389>.
- Rambling, C. C., Warouw, M. P., & Kaunang, I. R. B. (2023). Physiological Motivational Meanings of Farmer's Chant "Amang Kasuruan" During the Cap Tikus Production (Semiotic Analysis, Ethnolinguistic Approach). *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 7(2), 5100–5110. <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v7i2.7121>.
- Ririmasse, M. N. (2016). Boat symbolism and social identity in the southeast mollucas. 4(2), 245–256. <https://doi.org/10.24832/NW.V4I2.35>.
- Rumapea, M. E. M. (2025). Cultural value of Tangiang Ni Dainang's song lyrics on the ethnic Batak Toba. *South Florida Journal of Development*, 6(7), e5562–e5562. <https://doi.org/10.46932/sfjdv6n7-023>.

- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. Harcourt, Brace & Company. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: https://biblio.wdfiles.com/local--files/sapir-1921-language/sapir_1921_language.pdf.
- Sharifian, F. (2017). *Cultural linguistics: Cultural conceptualisations and language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. Retrieved February 26, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/7e3c110c705244b92424615c2377a241>.
- Sharifian, F. (2014). Language and culture. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture*. Routledge. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781317743187_A24448840/preview-9781317743187_A24448840. Pdf.
- Sirait, L., Putri, A. B., & Panjaitan, V. R. B. (2025). The MEANINGS AND VALUES OF THE AQUATIC LEXICONS FOUND IN BATAK TOBA “UMPASA”: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL LINGUISTIC STUDY. *Dialektika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Bahasa*, 12(1), 54–65. <https://doi.org/10.33541/dia.v12i1.7014>.
- Smith, L., & Akagawa, N. (2018). *Safeguarding Intangible Heritage*. Routledge. Retrieved February 7, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/3cb1d13311db5d468761f5fb569911d8>.
- Susianti, H. W., Moon, Y. J., & Budi, I. S. (2024). The Relationship Between Culture and Language: An Anthropological Linguistics Study. *Journal of Language and Cultural Tourism*, 3(2), 74–83. <https://doi.org/10.52352/lacultour.v3i2.1611>.
- Taha, M. & Febriningish, Fida. (2022). *Haogumi lexicon: local wisdom of the community of galogalo village, morotai island regency, north maluku a ethnolinguistics studies*. 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.22202/jg.2022.v8i2.5847>.
- Underhill, J. W. (2012). *Ethnolinguistics and Cultural Concepts: Truth, Love, Hate and War*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved February 8, 2026, from: <https://welib.st/md5/8cf838a2631260d45ed2044be0b1b098>.
- UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*. UNESCO. Retrieved January 22, 2026, from: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.
- Utami, N., & Rosa, R. N. (2022). An Analysis of Ecolexicons Found in Selected Petatah Petitih in Nagari Gunuang. *English Language and Literature*, 11(3), 376–376. <https://doi.org/10.24036/ell.v11i3.118752>.
- Wulandari, K. R. (2023). Leksikon dalam tradisi perkawinan morumbandole pada suku tolaki di kecamatan wua-wua kota kendari (kajian etnolinguistik) [Lexicon in the Morumbandole marriage tradition of the Tolaki tribe in Wua-Wua sub-district, Kendari city (ethnolinguistic study)]. *Seshiski*, 3(1), 46–61. <https://doi.org/10.53922/seshiski.v5i7.35>.
- Yi, G. Y. (2023). *Language Ideologies*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.996>.