

## Understanding Proverbs as Moral Lessons and Character Development: Batak Toba Wedding Traditions in Indonesia

**Jerry Wilson**

Politeknik Pariwisata Medan, Indonesia  
Email: jerrywilson@poltekparmedan.ac.id

### Abstract

In Batak Toba culture, proverbs are integral to various ceremonies such as births, baptisms, housewarmings, weddings, and funerals. These proverbs not only transmit cultural values but also convey positive messages and motivation. In Batak Toba ceremonies, proverbs function like prayers and well-wishes. Understanding these proverbs requires precise linguistic analysis that considers both meaning and interpretation, achievable through the study of semantics, which examines literal and figurative meanings. In Batak wedding ceremonies, proverbs are interpreted through semantic and translation studies to convey several key messages: the inseparability of marriage by human intervention, the importance of maintaining marital integrity acknowledged by the community, and the aspiration for a harmonious and prosperous family. This analysis underscores the role of proverbs in imparting moral lessons and motivating individuals within the cultural context.

Keywords: Semantics, Translation Theory, Interpretation, Batak Toba, Wedding Culture, Proverb Analysis 40

### INTRODUCTION

The culture of Batak Toba, an indigenous ethnic group from North Sumatra, Indonesia, is deeply intertwined with the use of proverbs, or *umpasa*, which hold significant cultural and linguistic value (Ambarita, 2019). Proverbs are an integral part of the Batak Toba cultural identity, functioning as oral traditions that encapsulate the community's collective wisdom and philosophy (Chaer, 2010). They are deeply rooted in daily life and have become customary expressions used in various social and ceremonial contexts. The importance of these proverbs is highlighted in several cultural rituals and ceremonies, including births, baptisms, housewarmings, weddings, and funerals. Within these events, proverbs serve as vehicles for imparting traditional values, establishing social norms, and expressing collective beliefs.

One of the prominent functions of proverbs in Batak Toba culture is their role as transmitters of cultural values (Hussain, 2015). They contain teachings that reflect the ideals, norms, and ethics upheld by the community. Beyond merely transferring knowledge, proverbs carry deeper meanings and intentions, often addressing themes of familial ties, social harmony, respect for elders, and adherence to religious and customary law. These expressions are not merely linguistic ornaments; they serve as tools for moral education and the perpetuation of cultural values across generations. By reciting proverbs in ceremonial contexts, the speakers are not only performing a social ritual but also reaffirming their cultural heritage and social identity.

In the context of Batak Toba wedding ceremonies, proverbs play a particularly important role, acting as verbal blessings that embody prayers and well-wishes for the bride and groom. The use of

proverbs in this context is akin to a form of ritualistic communication, where the words spoken are imbued with spiritual significance and intended to invoke positive outcomes for the marriage. They function as moral guidance and provide a framework for marital values, such as mutual respect, loyalty, and commitment, all of which are central to the Batak Toba understanding of marriage. In addition, the proverbs reinforce the social bonds between families and the broader community, emphasizing the collective nature of the union.

Understanding the proverbs used in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies requires a thorough linguistic analysis that takes into account both their literal meanings and the cultural and contextual nuances that inform their figurative interpretations. These proverbs often employ metaphors, analogies, and symbolism that reflect the Batak Toba worldview, which can be challenging to fully grasp without familiarity with the cultural context. The semantics of these proverbs reveal not only the surface meaning of the words but also the deeper connotations and moral lessons embedded within them. As such, a detailed analysis of the semantics allows for a greater appreciation of the proverbs' multifaceted role in conveying cultural values and expectations.

Moreover, the translation of these proverbs into other languages presents additional challenges, as translation involves not just a linguistic transfer of words but also the conveyance of cultural meanings. Proverbs are culturally bound expressions that are often difficult to translate without losing some of their original intent and resonance. The process of translating Batak Toba proverbs requires sensitivity to their cultural and contextual significance, as well as a consideration of how the proverbs' meanings and implications may change when expressed in another language. Therefore, translation theory plays a crucial role in ensuring that the essence of these proverbs is preserved and communicated effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

This paper aims to explore the semantics of proverbs used in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies, analyzing their structure, meanings, and cultural implications. By examining the proverbs through a semantic lens, this study seeks to uncover how these expressions encapsulate the values and aspirations of the Batak Toba community. Additionally, the paper will explore the challenges and strategies involved in translating these culturally rich proverbs, providing insights into how the meanings of the proverbs are interpreted and preserved in different linguistic contexts. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the significance of proverbs in Batak Toba culture and their role in shaping and reflecting the community's worldview, particularly within the important context of wedding ceremonies.

## **METHODS**

This study utilized a combination of semantic analysis and translation theory to examine the proverbs used in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies (Siregar, 2019). The primary goal was to explore both the linguistic features and the cultural significance of these proverbs. A multifaceted approach was taken to collect and analyze the data, incorporating various qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how proverbs function within these ceremonies. Data collection involved participant observation, allowing the researcher to witness firsthand how proverbs are used and the context in which they are recited. Additionally, interviews were conducted with cultural experts, such as traditional leaders and individuals well-versed in Batak Toba customs, to gain insights into the meanings and cultural implications of the proverbs. To further supplement these

methods, documentation of proverbs was carried out by recording and transcribing those frequently used in wedding ceremonies, ensuring that the study captured a broad and representative sample of proverbs relevant to the context.

The qualitative approach to data analysis focused on two main aspects: the semantic characteristics of the proverbs and their interpretation within the cultural and ceremonial context. The semantic analysis involved an exploration of both the literal and figurative meanings of the proverbs, paying attention to metaphors, symbols, and linguistic structures that contribute to their significance. Special emphasis was placed on understanding how these proverbs function as well-wishes and blessings, effectively serving as prayers for the couple's future well-being. Additionally, the study examined how the meanings of these proverbs shift when translated from Batak Toba into other languages. Translation theory was employed to analyze the challenges of rendering the proverbs' meanings accurately, considering how cultural nuances, values, and the intended emotional impact are preserved or altered in translation. This dual focus on semantics and translation provided a nuanced understanding of how proverbs serve not only as elements of language but also as carriers of cultural heritage and spiritual intentions in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies.

## RESULTS

The semantic analysis of the proverbs used in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies unveiled several key messages that reflect the cultural values and beliefs of the Batak Toba community. A central theme is the perception of marriage as a union ordained by divine will, which is not to be altered or separated by human actions. Many proverbs emphasize the sacred and indissoluble nature of marriage, reinforcing the belief that once a couple is united, their bond is viewed as permanent and spiritually sanctioned. Another prominent message conveyed by the proverbs is the importance of upholding marital integrity and moral conduct, as recognized and valued by the community. The proverbs frequently include advice or blessings that underscore the need for loyalty, mutual respect, and communal acknowledgment of the marriage's legitimacy and honor. These messages also extend to aspirations for a harmonious and prosperous family life, with the proverbs offering well-wishes for peace, happiness, and success in the couple's future together.

The analysis also showed that the proverbs contain both literal and metaphorical layers of meaning, which are deeply embedded within the cultural and social expectations of the Batak Toba people. For instance, the proverbs often employ metaphors related to nature, agriculture, or daily life to symbolize complex ideas, such as the growth of love, the nurturing of family, or the endurance of marital bonds. These metaphorical elements are not only poetic expressions but serve as moral teachings that articulate ideals and guide the behavior of the bride, groom, and their families. By invoking images familiar to the Batak Toba community, the proverbs provide culturally resonant lessons that affirm traditional values, such as unity, cooperation, and respect for elders and ancestors. The figurative language used enhances the proverbs' role as effective communicative tools in conveying both social norms and spiritual beliefs, while their repetition in ceremonial contexts reinforces their authority and significance.

When examined through the lens of translation theory, it was evident that the proverbs present significant challenges for translation into other languages. The cultural and figurative nuances embedded within these expressions often undergo shifts in meaning when translated, potentially altering the impact and significance of the original proverbs. Some proverbs, which rely heavily on metaphor and cultural references, may lose their intended message or emotional resonance if translated literally, requiring careful interpretation to ensure that the essence is preserved. The

translation process must therefore be sensitive to the cultural and contextual underpinnings of each proverb, striving to maintain both the semantic integrity and the motivational force they hold within Batak Toba culture. This highlights the need for a nuanced approach to translation, where the focus is on conveying the proverbs' deeper meanings and cultural significance rather than merely reproducing their literal form.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study bring to light the crucial role that proverbs play as carriers of cultural norms, values, and aspirations within the context of Batak Toba wedding ceremonies. These proverbs are more than mere expressions of language; they are a reflection of the community's worldview, encapsulating key principles such as respect for familial bonds, moral integrity, and social harmony. In wedding ceremonies, these proverbs serve as verbal instruments for imparting cultural wisdom to newlyweds, offering blessings, advice, and motivations that are intended to guide them as they embark on their marital journey. The proverbs are thus situated at the intersection of linguistic expression and cultural transmission, providing a medium through which community values are articulated and reinforced during one of the most significant rites of passage in an individual's life.

The semantic structure of these proverbs reveals their function as both moral teachings and sources of encouragement. The literal meanings of the words used in the proverbs often convey straightforward advice or well-wishes for the couple. However, beneath the surface lies a layer of figurative and symbolic meanings that provide deeper moral lessons and life principles. For example, a proverb might use agricultural metaphors to symbolize the nurturing of a marriage, likening it to the careful tending of crops to yield a fruitful harvest. Such imagery is not only culturally resonant, given the agrarian background of the Batak Toba people, but also serves as a powerful analogy for the effort, patience, and cooperation required to maintain a strong marital relationship. Therefore, the proverbs act as multi-dimensional tools that not only provide guidance but also invoke positive imagery and culturally embedded wisdom to encourage a successful and harmonious marriage.

One of the key findings of this study is the complex relationship between the semantics of the proverbs and the cultural expectations they reflect. The proverbs emphasize values such as loyalty, mutual respect, familial duty, and the importance of community acknowledgment in marital life. In reciting these proverbs during wedding ceremonies, speakers effectively communicate the roles and responsibilities expected of the couple, framing their union as not only a personal bond but a socially and culturally significant event. This alignment between language and cultural norms means that the proverbs do not simply describe or instruct but actively shape the understanding and enactment of marriage within the Batak Toba community. The proverbs' semantic features, including their use of metaphor, repetition, and rhythm, further enhance their ability to resonate emotionally and intellectually with listeners, embedding these values deeply in the minds of participants.

The study also underscores the challenges involved in translating these culturally embedded proverbs into other languages while preserving their intended meanings and effects. Proverbs are inherently tied to the cultural context in which they are used, and their meanings are often contingent upon shared cultural knowledge and experience. When translated, these proverbs may lose the nuances of their original language, such as metaphorical connotations, cultural references, and emotional resonance. For instance, a proverb that uses a Batak Toba-specific natural element or

social practice as a metaphor might be difficult to understand in a different cultural context, leading to a loss of the proverb's intended impact. This challenge is compounded by the fact that proverbs often rely on wordplay, rhythm, and rhyme, which may not be easily replicated in another language without altering the message.

Translation theory plays a pivotal role in addressing these challenges and ensuring that the proverbs' cultural richness is preserved in cross-cultural contexts. Theories of equivalence and cultural translation suggest that a successful translation must go beyond literal word-for-word substitution to capture the essence and function of the original proverb. This may involve finding culturally analogous expressions in the target language or providing explanatory notes to convey the deeper meanings embedded in the original. The translator's task is to balance fidelity to the original text with the need to make the proverbs understandable and impactful in the new cultural and linguistic context. By employing strategies such as adaptation, contextualization, and dynamic equivalence, the translator can help bridge the cultural gap and retain the proverbs' intended significance and motivational force.

Ultimately, the discussion highlights the intricate role that proverbs play in both linguistic and cultural terms, serving as bridges between language, tradition, and community life. Their function as conveyors of moral teachings, social norms, and aspirations within Batak Toba wedding ceremonies illustrates how language operates as a vehicle for cultural transmission. Proverbs are not merely ornamental speech but active participants in shaping the social and moral landscape of the community. This study's focus on the semantic and translational dimensions of these proverbs contributes to a deeper understanding of how language reflects and perpetuates cultural values, as well as how these values are negotiated and interpreted in the process of cross-cultural translation. Further research in this area could explore the reception of translated proverbs in different cultural contexts or examine the role of proverbs in other ceremonial practices within Batak Toba culture.

## CONCLUSION

The study reveals that proverbs in Batak Toba wedding ceremonies are fundamental to the transmission of cultural values, moral teachings, and communal aspirations directed toward newlyweds. These proverbs serve as a cultural bridge, linking generations and fostering the continuity of traditional norms and social expectations. They not only provide guidance for the newlyweds on their roles and responsibilities within marriage but also encapsulate the broader community's ideals regarding family, social relationships, and spiritual beliefs. Through their use of both literal and figurative language, the proverbs convey complex ideas in a manner that is easily understood and culturally resonant. This reinforces the significance of proverbs as tools of moral education, effectively embedding the principles of harmony, loyalty, and integrity within the marital bond. The ceremonial recitation of these proverbs thus plays an essential role in maintaining and perpetuating the integrity of cultural traditions, ensuring that the community's collective wisdom is both preserved and imparted to future generations.

The semantic and translational analysis conducted in this study underscores the complexity and depth of meaning within Batak Toba proverbs. A close examination of their linguistic features reveals how proverbs operate on multiple levels—conveying straightforward advice, embedding deeper moral lessons, and employing metaphorical language that resonates with the cultural context of the Batak Toba people. The analysis also brings to light the challenges of translating these culturally rich expressions into other languages, as the proverbs' meanings are often bound to their

original context and may lose their intended impact when rendered in a different linguistic framework. These findings highlight the need for sensitive and culturally informed translation strategies to effectively convey the proverbs' nuanced meanings and ensure their motivational and educational force is preserved. Future research may expand on this work by comparing proverbs across various Batak Toba ceremonies or by exploring the effectiveness of different translation approaches in retaining the cultural nuances and significance of the proverbs, contributing further to the understanding of language as a carrier of culture.

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