

# LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS IN THE *BASARANG* RITUAL: A CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC STUDY OF MINANGKABAU ORAL TRADITION

**Febry Aurlani, Akbar Idaman**

Universitas Satya Terra Bhinneka, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: [febryaurlani@satyaterrabhinneka.ac.id](mailto:febryaurlani@satyaterrabhinneka.ac.id)

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## Abstract

Language serves as a vital medium in oral traditions—not only for communication but also as a vehicle for transmitting values and reinforcing collective identity. The *Basarang* ritual in Nagari Kasang, Minangkabau, is a traditional ceremony performed to commemorate the birth of *kembar sumbang* (twins of opposite sex) and to restore social and cultural harmony within the community. Despite its cultural richness, linguistic studies on *Basarang* remain scarce compared to other Minangkabau traditions. This research investigates the functions of language in the *Basarang* ritual through Roman Jakobson's (1960) model of language functions, employing a qualitative framework and an ethnography of communication approach (Spradley, 1997; Duranti, 1997). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation of ritual utterances, *mamang* (chants), *pantun* (poetic verses), and prayers. The analysis categorizes linguistic expressions according to Jakobson's six language functions—referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic—allowing systematic interpretation of their realization in ritual discourse. Findings reveal that language in *Basarang* functions not merely as a communicative tool but as a symbolic medium that legitimizes customary law, nurtures social solidarity, and transmits moral and cultural values. This study extends Jakobson's framework by embedding it within the ethnolinguistic context of Minangkabau ritual discourse, offering contributions to both linguistic theory and cultural preservation.

**Keywords:** *anthropolinguistics; Basarang; language functions; Minangkabau oral tradition; ritual discourse*

## 1. Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in human life, functioning not only as a tool of communication but also as a medium for transmitting values and reinforcing collective identity within a community (Olateju et al. 2024). Through language, knowledge systems, norms, and beliefs are transmitted across generations, fostering social cohesion and cultural continuity. In many societies, language serves as more than a vehicle for conveying messages; it operates as a symbolic resource that binds individuals and sustains social

structures. Thus, every cultural tradition can be viewed as a patterned form of communication embedded with symbolic and moral meanings (Syahbana, 2024).

In the oral tradition of the Minangkabau, language occupies a central position as the principal medium through which customary law and social values are expressed. Forms of verbal art such as *pantun* (poetic verses), *pepatah-petitih* (proverbs), *mamang* (ritual chants), prayers, and ritual speeches serve not merely as aesthetic expressions but also as instruments of moral education and cultural transmission. These oral genres function as channels for conveying customary values, reinforcing kinship solidarity, and affirming collective identity (Hasanuddin, Emidar, & Zulfadhli, 2021). Consequently, oral tradition is not simply linguistic performance but a manifestation of living cultural knowledge.

The interconnectedness between ritual practice, social symbolism, and linguistic performance is particularly evident in Minangkabau ceremonial life (Awan, Ayu, & Syamsir, 2023). Each ritual stage is infused with utterances that serve both communicative and legitimizing functions. Through ritual language, ethical principles, social norms, and spiritual values are continually reproduced and reaffirmed. As such, Minangkabau rituals constitute communicative arenas in which language fulfills a dual role: mediating interpersonal relationships and reinforcing collective norms.

One such ritual is *Basarang*, practiced in Nagari Kasang, a ceremony performed in response to the birth of *kembar sumbang*—twins of opposite sexes. Within local belief, such a birth carries symbolic implications requiring ritual purification to restore social and spiritual balance. As Karmila & Sari (2021) note, extraordinary births in Minangkabau are often accompanied by ritualized speech acts, as language is perceived to hold symbolic power capable of reestablishing equilibrium between individuals, society, and the divine.

Etymologically, *Basarang* refers to a ritual encounter between the *induk bako* (maternal relatives) and the mother's family to conduct a customary purification ceremony. The ritual involves the performance of prayers, *mamang*, *pantun*, and *pepatah-petitih*, each imbued with metaphorical meaning. These utterances not only serve ceremonial purposes but also reaffirm moral order and cultural identity. As Duranti (1997) argues, linguistic practices within oral traditions mirror the social and moral systems of the communities that produce them. Hence, *Basarang* functions simultaneously as a spiritual medium for resolving *sumbang* status and as a social mechanism that reinforces kinship solidarity and cultural cohesion.

The symbolic and sociocultural significance of *Basarang* is deeply embedded in its ritual language, which is rich in metaphors, proverbs, and customary symbols. These forms of expression articulate Minangkabau worldviews regarding human relationships with God, nature, and society. As Althafullayya & Akbar (2023) emphasizes, ritual speech in Minangkabau ceremonies serves as a pedagogical instrument for moral and cultural education, transmitting ethical and religious values to younger generations. Accordingly, *Basarang* operates both as a vehicle of cultural transmission and as a mechanism for maintaining social harmony.

Within the broader framework of Minangkabau customary law, *Basarang* plays an essential role in resolving the *sumbang* status. Neglecting this ritual is believed to disturb social and spiritual balance within the kinship network. Hence, *Basarang* serves as a symbolic act of customary legitimation intended to restore harmony and uphold familial honor. As Karmila & Sari (2021) assert, "Minangkabau rituals function not merely as ceremonial performances but as symbolic systems that sustain social order." This

demonstrates how Minangkabau culture integrates moral, social, and spiritual dimensions into a cohesive worldview.

While extensive studies have examined language functions in major Minangkabau rituals—such as *batagak panghulu* (chieftain installation), *malam bainai* (pre-wedding purification), and wedding ceremonies Nurmailisa et al. (2024) research specifically focusing on *Basarang* remains scarce. Scholarly documentation of this ritual, particularly its linguistic dimension encompassing *pantun*, *mamang*, prayers, and *pepatah-petitih*, is still limited. Yet these utterances are linguistically rich and symbolically profound, offering valuable insight into the communicative and semiotic dimensions of Minangkabau ritual language.

This paucity of research leaves a significant gap in the anthropolinguistic understanding of Minangkabau ritual discourse. As Duranti (1997) emphasize, linguistic practices in specific ritual contexts reveal culturally distinctive communicative functions that resist generalization. Therefore, an in-depth study of the *Basarang* ritual through the lens of Roman Jakobson's (1960) theory of language functions is crucial for elucidating how language operates as both a communicative and symbolic force in ritual life. By applying Jakobson's framework, this study seeks to demonstrate that the linguistic forms employed in *Basarang* simultaneously encode referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic functions—each contributing to the maintenance of cultural order and the preservation of Minangkabau heritage in a modernizing world.

## 2. Literature Review

The theory of language functions proposed by Jakobson (1960) provides a comprehensive foundation for analyzing human communication in both everyday and ritual contexts. Jakobson identifies six functions of language: the referential function, which conveys information about context or reality; the emotive function, which expresses the speaker's feelings or attitudes; the conative function, which is directed toward the addressee to influence or persuade; the phatic function, which serves to establish and maintain communicative channels; the metalingual function, which clarifies the meaning or use of language itself; and the poetic function, which foregrounds the aesthetic and formal aspects of speech. These six functions operate simultaneously in communicative acts, creating a multifaceted interaction between message, context, and participants. As (Yule, 2017) notes, linguistic exchanges rarely exhibit a single function in isolation, as multiple communicative purposes often overlap within one utterance.

In line with this perspective, Duranti (1997) emphasizes that language, when situated in cultural practice, functions not merely as a tool of communication but also as a symbolic system that maintains social identity, hierarchy, and collective cohesion. This aligns with Jakobson's notion that linguistic functions intertwine to perform both informational and symbolic roles, particularly in oral and ritual discourse. More recent scholarship further supports this idea (Kádár & House, 2020), in *Language & Communication*, highlight that ritual communication is characterized by performative mimesis and framing processes that sustain collective participation and shared symbolic meaning. Their findings reinforce the applicability of Jakobson's multifunctional model to ritual contexts, where language operates as both performative action and cultural signifier.

Within the Minangkabau cultural setting, the relevance of this theoretical framework becomes evident. Oral traditions such as *pepatah-petitih* (proverbs), *pantun* (poetic verses),

*mamang* (ritual chants), prayers, and ritual speeches not only convey messages but also encode customary values and moral teachings. Sibarani (2012) asserts that oral tradition serves as an effective means of transmitting cultural knowledge across generations, while Santana et al., (2025) identifies it as a vital component of the customary system that maintains social equilibrium. Similarly, Karmila & Sari (2021) show that ritual utterances in the *Malam Bainai* ceremony embody communicative, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions that reinforce collective identity.

By applying Jakobson's framework, the present study examines how the six language functions are realized in the *Basarang* ritual, a traditional Minangkabau ceremony addressing the birth of kembar sumbang (twins of opposite sexes). This theoretical model enables a systematic analysis of how language operates not only as a communicative medium but also as a cultural mechanism that legitimizes custom, strengthens kinship solidarity, and transmits moral and spiritual values within Minangkabau society.

### 3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a linguistic ethnographic perspective, as the focus of analysis lies in understanding language use within its cultural and ritual context. According to Spradley (1979) ethnographic research aims to uncover the meanings of behavior, language, and interaction as understood by members of a specific cultural community. In a similar vein, Duranti (1997) emphasizes that linguistic ethnography positions language as the primary gateway to comprehending the social and symbolic structures of a community.

The research was conducted between January and June 2025 in Nagari Kasang, Pariaman Regency, West Sumatra, a region where the *Basarang* ritual is still actively performed to maintain customary balance (*keseimbangan adat*). The primary data consisted of ritual utterances in the form of pantun (poetic verses), *mamang* (ritual chants), prayers, and pepatah-petitih (proverbs) performed during the *Basarang* ceremony. The secondary data included ethnographic field notes, audio recordings, photographs, and written documentation from local customary archives.

The study involved ten informants who were selected purposively based on their active participation and cultural knowledge of the ritual. These participants included two traditional leaders (*tua adat*), two *ninik mamak* (clan leaders), two *induk bako* (maternal relatives), and four community members who regularly engage in the *Basarang* ceremony. Data collection employed several complementary qualitative techniques. Participant observation allowed the researcher to attend the *Basarang* ceremony directly and record speech events in their natural contexts Spradley (1979). n-depth interviews were conducted with key cultural figures to explore the symbolic and pragmatic meanings underlying ritual language use. Meanwhile, audio recordings and verbatim transcriptions ensured accurate documentation of the linguistic forms and interactional sequences within the ceremony. Data saturation was reached when no new linguistic or thematic patterns emerged from additional observations and interviews.

Data were analyzed using Jakobson's (1960) model of language functions, which includes referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic functions. The analytical process consisted of three sequential stages: identification of ritual utterances and classification into linguistic units such as clauses, lines, and stanzas; coding of each utterance according to Jakobson's six functions using a coding matrix, in which multiple coders were

involved to ensure inter-coder reliability that reached an agreement level above 85%; and interpretation of each function's cultural meaning within the socio-ritual framework of Minangkabau society, supported by contextual ethnographic data.

To ensure credibility and dependability, the study applied both data triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing observations, interviews, and recordings from different occasions and perspectives Moleong (2002). Confirmability was enhanced through peer debriefing and coder validation, ensuring analytical transparency. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process, with informed consent obtained from all participants, and cultural sensitivity maintained by consulting local customary authorities before conducting documentation and dissemination.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The *Basarang* tradition of the Minangkabau community, particularly in Nagari Kasang, represents a culturally embedded communicative system in which language functions as both a symbolic and social medium. The ritual is characterized by a rich use of adat utterances, pantun (poetic verses), mamang (ritual chants), and prayers that collectively construct a coherent ritual discourse. Based on the data collected, all six of Jakobson's language functions were identified, each interacting dynamically to create meaning within the ritual. These functions (referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and poetic) do not appear in isolation but overlap in performance, reflecting the multilayered nature of ritual communication (Duranti, 1997).

### 4.1 Referential Function

According to Jakobson (1960), the referential function centers on the delivery of factual or descriptive information. In *Basarang*, this function emerges in utterances that introduce identities, clarify intentions, or explain the ritual's background.

"Kami datang dari pihak bako, ka manjapuik batino nan malaian anak kamba."

*We come as the maternal relatives, to bring the mother who has given birth to twins.*

This statement from the *induak bako* (maternal relatives) establishes identity and purpose, grounding the interaction in social context. Another utterance extends this function by embedding cultural meaning:

"Anak nan duo, ciek kilaki ciek padusi... Kalahiran sumbang, kaba nan sampai, kaba nan barasiah."

*Two children, one male and one female... A taboo birth, yet the news delivered purified news.*

Here, language conveys not only factual information but also the symbolic reinterpretation of *kembar sumbang* (mixed-gender twins), transforming what is culturally taboo into an event of restored harmony. Thus, the referential function in *Basarang* acts as an ethnolinguistic mechanism for transmitting socio-cultural knowledge and legitimizing communal understanding Karmila & Sari (2021).

#### 4.2 Emotive Function

The emotive function emphasizes the speaker's attitudes, feelings, and emotional stance. In *Basarang*, emotive utterances establish sincerity, solidarity, and moral legitimacy. For instance:

"Kami tibo mambaok doa, mambaok harapan, mambaok raso jo hati nan ikhlas."

*We arrive bearing prayers, hopes, and a sincerity of heart and feeling.*

Through repetition (*mambaok* / bringing), the utterance conveys both rhetorical emphasis and emotional sincerity. Another example illustrates receptivity and respect:

"Kami terimo ka nia nan suci, ka maksud nan basilang kayu. Ka siriah kami sambut, ka batino kami tampuang. *Basarang*lah awak kini, manantang marwah, mamulihkan nan barumuih. Anak nan duo, alah jadi anak nagari, anak mamak, anak bako, dipangku adat, ditarimo Allah."

*We receive this sacred intention, with purposes intertwined like crossing wood. With betel leaves we extend our welcome, with our daughters we offer acceptance. Now the Basarang ritual begins, affirming honor and restoring what has been stained. These two children are henceforth acknowledged as children of the nagari, of the maternal uncles, and of the maternal lineage, embraced by adat and accepted by God.*

This emotionally charged expression highlights the ritual's role in reestablishing moral order and communal empathy, embodying the Minangkabau ideal of *budi nan luhur* (noble character). As Althafullayya & Akbar (2023) argues, the emotive function personalizes symbolic acts, enabling participants to internalize the spiritual and social significance of the event.

#### 4.3 Conative Function

The conative function focuses on influencing the addressee's behavior through requests, invitations, or permissions. In *Basarang*, this function is expressed in polite and respectful language. For example:

"Sila, urang tuo, ka dalam."

Please, elders, come inside.

This invitation reflects social deference, while another utterance displays closure etiquette:

"Kami minta izin, manuju ka rumah, mambaliak badantiang."

*We request permission to return home, to turn back to our place.*

Such utterances perform both pragmatic and cultural work, ensuring interaction aligns with *tata krama* (customary decorum). This resonates with Minangkabau communicative ethics, where linguistic politeness signifies social Karmila & Sari (2021)

#### 4.4 Phatic Function

The phatic function maintains or reaffirms the communicative channel. In *Basarang*, greetings, responses, and closing *pantun* are crucial in sustaining harmony:

“Assalamu’alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.”

“Wa’alaikum salam warahmatullah.”

This exchange signals the formal opening of interaction. At the conclusion, a *pantun* serves as both farewell and apology:

“Kalau adoh padi nan indak basabuik... Kami pulang basamo angin, ka kampuang nan kami datang.”

*If there is rice not mentioned, if words have caused offense... We return with the wind, to the village from which we came.*

Closing serves as both apology and reaffirmation of social bonds. In anthropolinguistic terms, the phatic function reinforces group cohesion and prevents communicative rupture Karmila & Sari (2021).

#### 4.5 Metalingual Function

The metalingual function clarifies concepts or terminologies, ensuring mutual understanding. In *Basarang*, it appears when cultural concepts require explanation:

“Pado urang awak sumbang, pado Allah awak elok.”

*Considered taboo by people, but good in the sight of God.*

This utterance clarifies a core cultural paradox: while *kembar sumbang* may be socially stigmatized, it holds spiritual neutrality. Metalingual explanations like this prevent misunderstanding and serve as tools for cultural reinterpretation, transferring indigenous wisdom to younger generations (Althafullayya & Akbar, 2023)

#### 4.6 Poetic Function

Finally, the poetic function highlights the aesthetic qualities of language. In *Basarang*, this function manifests in metaphor, rhythm, and parallelism:

“Angin pai ka barek, angin baliak ka timua, Akaik indak ka babungo, janji indak ka bali.”

*The wind goes west, the wind returns east, a branch will not blossom, a promise will not be broken.*

This poetic device strengthens memorability and softens the articulation of sensitive themes such as *kembar sumbang*. As Wierzbicka (2019) notes, aesthetic language in ritual contexts encapsulates emotion and identity simultaneously, serving as a linguistic embodiment of shared morality.

#### 4.7 Interaction of Functions and Anthropolinguistic Implications

Across the *Basarang* ritual, the six functions operate interactively rather than independently. Referential utterances often merge with poetic or emotive elements, while conative and phatic expressions reinforce hierarchical respect and kinship ties. This multifunctionality aligns with Jakobson’s (1960) claim that communicative acts are never monofunctional.

From an anthropolinguistic perspective, these overlapping functions demonstrate how *Basarang* language performs both communicative and cosmological roles—it maintains the social fabric while reaffirming moral and spiritual order. When compared to *Malam Bainai* Karmila & Sari (2021) or *Batagak Panghulu* Althafullayya & Akbar (2023) *Basarang* displays a more reconciliatory linguistic tone, aimed at restoring balance rather than asserting authority.

Consequently, this study expands Jakobson's model into the ritual-communicative domain, illustrating how language in Minangkabau oral traditions functions as a living system of ethics, emotion, and identity preservation.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that language occupies a central and multifunctional role within the *Basarang* tradition of Nagari Kasang, Minangkabau. Ritual utterances articulated through *pantun* (poetic verses), *mamang* (ritual chants), proverbs, prayers, and ceremonial dialogues function not merely as communicative media but as instruments for transmitting values, reinforcing collective identity, and sustaining social cohesion. Thus, language in the *Basarang* ritual extends beyond the linguistic domain to encompass broader socio-cultural and spiritual dimensions of Minangkabau life.

Drawing upon Roman Jakobson's (1960) theory of language functions, the analysis reveals the simultaneous presence of all six functions within *Basarang* discourse. The referential function conveys information on the meaning and procedures of the ceremony; the emotive function expresses feelings, prayers, and hopes; the conative function manifests through exhortations and instructions; the phatic function maintains social connection among participants; the metalingual function clarifies symbolic terms and concepts for mutual understanding; and the poetic function enriches the aesthetic and mnemonic quality of the ritual language. Collectively, these functions illustrate that *Basarang* is not merely a purification rite for *kembar sumbang* (taboo twins), but a symbolic and linguistic system that embodies the worldview of Minangkabau culture.

Through these interrelated functions, the *Basarang* ritual demonstrates how language acts as a mechanism of customary legitimization, moral instruction, and intergenerational value transmission. The utterances within the ritual perform not only communicative but also sociocultural and ideological roles, preserving harmony, honoring kinship, and reaffirming communal identity.

In addition, this study underscores an academic gap in the limited documentation and analysis of *Basarang* compared with other Minangkabau rituals such as *batagak panghulu* or *malam bainai*. Therefore, this research contributes to the preservation of oral traditions and offers valuable insights for future studies in anthropological linguistics. Future research could explore comparative analyses across regions or investigate intergenerational transmission of ritual language to understand its continuity amid social change.

Practically, the findings may inform cultural preservation and educational initiatives that integrate local oral traditions into learning contexts, supporting cultural sustainability and identity reinforcement among younger generations.

Theoretically, this study suggests that Jakobson's model of language functions can be recontextualized within ritual discourse analysis, not merely as a linguistic framework, but as an interpretive tool that illuminates how communicative acts operate simultaneously as cultural, moral, and symbolic systems in traditional societies.

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