



COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR PRESERVING THE ERTUTUR TRADITION IN THE KARO BATAK COMMUNITY IN KUTALIMBARU DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The ertutur tradition is an important kinship communication system in the Batak Karo culture because it serves as a marker of social identity and a guideline for interactions between relatives. However, modernization and changes in social patterns have led to a decline in the understanding and practice of ertutur, especially among the younger generation. This study aims to analyze the communication strategies used in preserving the ertutur tradition in the Batak Karo community in Kutalimbaru District. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results show that the preservation of the ertutur tradition is carried out through interpersonal communication strategies within the family, group communication in traditional activities, and participatory communication through cultural communities. The family acts as the initial agent of inheritance, traditional leaders act as the main director in the practice of ertutur at traditional events, while cultural communities strengthen the transmission of values through collective activities. This study also found that the main obstacles to preserving ertutur lie in the limited understanding of the younger generation, the weakening of traditional inheritance spaces, and the influence of modernization. The novelty of this study lies in explaining the preservation of ertutur as a multi-layered cultural communication process that occurs through families, customs, and local communities.

Keywords: communication strategy; oral tradition; Karo Batak culture; preservation of tradition

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is not only understood as a symbolic heritage, but also as a system of meaning that shapes how a society thinks, interacts, and organizes its social relationships. From an anthropological perspective, culture encompasses knowledge, beliefs, customs, laws, morals, and various habits acquired by humans as members of society (Azri, 2018). Therefore, culture is always alive through the process of social inheritance between generations. When this inheritance process weakens, not only the continuity of a tradition

is threatened, but also the structure of values and social identity that underpins community life.

In the context of the Karo Batak community, one tradition with a crucial socio-communicative function is ertutur (speaking in Indonesian). This tradition is not merely a form of introduction, but also a mechanism for kinship communication to recognize one's position within the Karo social structure, including clan relations, *beru* (family ties), *berere* (family ties), and one's position within the *rakut sitelu* system. Through ertutur, social interactions do not occur randomly, but are governed by kinship norms that determine how to greet, behave, and position oneself within social and customary relationships. Thus, ertutur serves as a marker of cultural identity and a communication guideline that maintains orderly social relations in the Karo Batak community (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Sinuraya, 2024).

However, amidst modernization, urbanization, the development of digital technology, and changes in the orientation of the younger generation, the ertutur tradition faces increasingly significant challenges. Local cultural values, previously intensively instilled through family and community, are now beginning to weaken. The younger generation tends to understand ertutur only at a basic level, while more complex dimensions such as its position in the *rakut sitelu* (traditional language), relational meaning, and customary implications are increasingly poorly understood. This situation indicates that the issue of ertutur preservation is no longer adequately understood as a matter of cultural knowledge alone, but also as a matter of intergenerational communication, changes in the social environment, and the reduction of spaces for cultural transmission in everyday life (Jamsari, 2024). Similar phenomena are also evident in the Karo Batak community in Kutalimbaru District, where the transmission of ertutur is no longer strong and sustainable.



Figure 1. Framework for Thinking about Communication Strategies for Preserving Oral Traditions

Several previous studies have shown that Karo Batak culture, including ertutur (traditional rituals), has undergone shifts in its practice and existence. Research on the existence of ertutur in the Karo Batak community in Cimahi City indicates that this

tradition remains recognized as important but faces challenges in its sustainability amidst social change (Hukum, 2022). Other research on the shift in the implementation of *rebu ngerana* also confirms that Karo traditions are undergoing transformation due to changing times and the younger generation's declining attachment to customary norms (Ezra et al., 2024). Furthermore, studies of Karo Batak students in Medan and Semarang show that *ertutur* is still practiced as an ethnic identity, but understanding tends to be limited due to weak cultural education within families and social circles (Sinuraya, 2024; Dhea Demisa Br Ginting & Turnomo Rahardjo, 2024). These findings are important, but the majority still focus on the existential aspects of tradition, kinship ethics, or the practice of *ertutur* among diaspora communities and students.

This is where the gap in this research lies. Previous studies have rarely considered *ertutur* as an object of analysis from the perspective of cultural communication strategies, particularly in the context of local communities still living in their cultural environments. However, the preservation of traditions is determined not only by whether or not they are practiced, but also by how cultural values are communicated, by whom they are conveyed, through what channels they are passed down, and in what social situations they are learned and reproduced. In other words, a crucial question that has not been adequately addressed by previous research is: how are communication strategies implemented by families, traditional leaders, and cultural communities to maintain the *ertutur* tradition amidst social change? This focus distinguishes this research from previous studies.

Based on this description, this research is novel in its attempt to position *ertutur* not merely as a symbol of cultural identity, but as a cultural communication practice passed down through interpersonal, group, and participatory strategies within the local Karo Batak community. This research also demonstrates that the preservation of tradition depends not only on the existence of custom as a norm, but also on the capacity of social actors to create communication spaces that enable the younger generation to understand, internalize, and practice *ertutur* sustainably. By focusing on the Karo Batak community in Kutalimbaru District, this research offers a more contextual perspective on the relationship between culture, communication, and the inheritance of tradition in the local environment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because it sought to deeply understand the process of preserving the *ertutur* tradition as a cultural communication practice that lives within the social experiences of the Karo Batak people in Kutalimbaru District. Qualitative research allows researchers to interpret meanings, actions, and patterns of social interaction from the perspective of informants within a natural context, making it suitable for examining how families, traditional leaders, and cultural communities communicate *ertutur* values to the younger generation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through a qualitative descriptive design, this study was not directed at testing hypotheses, but rather at systematically describing the forms of communication strategies, the circumstances of cultural inheritance, and the obstacles faced in preserving the *ertutur* tradition.

The location of this research is Kutalimbaru District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. The location was selected purposively, considering that this area is a

predominantly Karo Batak area where the majority of the population still practices various traditional activities in their daily lives. Furthermore, Kutalimbaru District was chosen because the practice of ertutur (traditional speech) is still found in this area, but at the same time, there are also signs of a decline in the younger generation's understanding of this tradition. Therefore, this location is considered relevant for empirically examining how cultural communication strategies are implemented in the context of local communities facing social change.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to obtain data on informants' understanding of the ertutur tradition, the communication strategies used in cultural inheritance, the actors involved in the preservation process, and the obstacles faced in maintaining the tradition. Interviews were semi-structured to provide a guide for the researchers, while still allowing informants to freely and in-depthly explain their experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted interactively, referring to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). In the data condensation stage, researchers select, focus, and simplify data from interviews, observations, and documentation by grouping information according to research themes, such as community understanding of oracles, preservation materials, delivery times and situations, communication patterns, and preservation barriers. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of a thematic narrative description so that the relationships between findings can be seen systematically. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is carried out in stages from the beginning of data collection, then verified again through rereading the data, comparing between sources, and checking the consistency between the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Communication Strategies for Preserving the Ertutur Tradition in the Karo Batak Community

Research results indicate that the preservation of the ertutur tradition in the Karo Batak community in Kutalimbaru District does not occur spontaneously, but rather through structured communication strategies within three main domains: family, traditional institutions, and cultural communities. These strategies serve as a mechanism for transmitting kinship values, enabling the younger generation to maintain their social position within the rakut sitelu system. These findings indicate that ertutur is not simply a cultural practice, but a symbolic communication system learned through repeated and contextualized social interactions. From a cultural communication perspective, this suggests that the continuity of traditions is largely determined by the effectiveness of intergenerational communication processes within the social environment (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

At the family level, the dominant communication strategy is interpersonal communication, which is direct, contextual, and based on everyday experiences. Parents serve as the primary communicators in introducing the basic concepts of ertutur to

children. This is evident in the informant's statement: *"When a guest comes, I immediately explain to my child who they are, our relationship, and how he should address them"* (Rosmita Br Tarigan, 50 years old). This strategy demonstrates that the process of cultural inheritance occurs through direct practice (learning by doing), not just through theoretical explanations. Within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, this pattern reflects the mechanism of observational learning, where individuals learn through observing the behavior of others, particularly figures of authority in their social environment (Bandura, 1986).

The research also shows that the effectiveness of family communication in preserving oral traditions is greatly influenced by the intensity of interaction and the consistency of cultural practices. Younger generations who frequently engage in oral traditions tend to have a better understanding than those who are less exposed. However, limited time for interaction in modern families is a limiting factor. As a young informant expressed it: *"I only know the basics, like impal or turang, but when it comes to more in-depth stories like binuang or rakut sitelu, I'm still confused"* (May Roshan Br Surbakti, 17 years old). These findings indicate that the process of internalizing cultural values is not sufficient through initial exposure alone but requires continuous reinforcement through intensive social interaction (Bandura, 1986; Wibowo, 2022).

At the customary institution level, communication strategies are implemented through group communication within the context of customary activities such as weddings, funerals, and other traditional rituals. Customary leaders act as opinion leaders, managing communication and ensuring that ertutur practices are carried out in accordance with cultural norms. This is evident in the statement of a customary leader: *"At customary events, I arrange their seating based on the results of the ertutur, so that everything conforms to the rakut sitelu rules"* (Bonet Surbakti, 64). From the perspective of Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the role of these customary leaders is crucial because they function as diffusion agents with high credibility in conveying cultural values to the community (Rogers, 2003).

The process of diffusion of ertutur values in customary activities demonstrates a direct and contextual communication pattern, where the community not only receives information but also engages in concrete practices. This strengthens the process of adopting cultural values because individuals directly experience the social function of ertutur. In this context, traditional activities become an effective communication medium for transmitting cultural values collectively. This finding aligns with the concept of diffusion, which emphasizes that the adoption of a value or practice is strongly influenced by direct experience and social interaction within a community system (Rogers, 2003; Hidayat, 2023).

At the cultural community level, communication strategies are participatory and collaborative. Communities such as the Pemuda Marga Silima (Silima Youth) play a crucial role in revitalizing cultural practices through arts activities, performances, and social events. One informant stated, *"We often hold music, dance, and gatherings to attract young people, and then we remind them of the importance of ertutur"* (Egita Moses Tarigan, 25). This strategy demonstrates that cultural preservation is not solely achieved through a normative approach, but also through creative approaches tailored to the interests of the younger generation.

From a communication perspective, this participatory strategy demonstrates a shift from one-way communication to two-way communication that actively engages the audience. This is important because the younger generation tends to be more responsive to interactive and contextual approaches than to instructional ones. Thus, cultural communities function as alternative social spaces capable of bridging the gap between traditional values and the dynamics of modernity. This finding reinforces the view that cultural preservation requires innovation in communication strategies to remain relevant to social change (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that communication strategies for preserving traditional speech are multidimensional and involve various social actors. Successful preservation is largely determined by the synergy between interpersonal communication within families, group communication within traditional institutions, and participatory communication within cultural communities. Within the framework of Diffusion of Innovation Theory, traditional speech preservation can be understood as a process of cultural value diffusion that requires change agents, communication channels, and a supportive social context. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, successful preservation is strongly influenced by social learning processes through observation, imitation, and direct experience. Thus, the preservation of the ertutur tradition depends not only on the existence of cultural values themselves, but also on effective communication strategies that connect older and younger generations within a sustainable social system.

Therefore, the communication carried out by ertutur tradition preservers within the Karo Batak community in Kutalimbaru District can be summarized in the following table:

Strategy	Interpersonal	Community
Material on conveying the values of preserving traditional oral speech to the community	Basics of Oral Communication and Rules of Oral Communication	Arranging positions according to kinship relationships
Time and situation	Family and Friends Gatherings	Traditional rituals and entertainment events
Communication Patterns	-In-Person or Face-to-Face	-Direct

Table 1. Strategy for preserving the tradition of telling stories to individuals and groups

This research identified obstacles to preserving the ertutur tradition, particularly the young generation's lack of understanding of the complex Batak Karo kinship system. Technological developments and lifestyle changes have also impacted cultural learning methods, as previously face-to-face social interactions now largely take place through digital media, limiting opportunities for learning about traditions. This situation highlights the need for adaptive communication strategies that combine traditional practices with engaging approaches for the younger generation. The involvement of families, traditional leaders, and cultural communities is a crucial factor in maintaining the continuity of the ertutur tradition amidst social change.

Obstacles Faced in Preserving the Ertutur Tradition

The research findings indicate that preserving the ertutur tradition among the Batak Karo community in Kutalimbaru District faces various structural, cultural, and communicative obstacles. These obstacles are not only related to the decline in knowledge among the younger generation but also to changing patterns of social interaction and the weakening of spaces for cultural transmission. These findings indicate that the sustainability of ertutur is strongly influenced by the dynamics of communication in a society undergoing transformation due to modernization. From a cultural communication perspective, rapid social change often disrupts the process of transmitting traditional values, preventing culture from being optimally transmitted between generations (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

One major obstacle identified is the younger generation's limited understanding of ertutur (traditional speech). Young people generally only understand basic aspects, such as simple kinship relationships, without being able to explain more complex structures like rakut sitelu (traditional speech). This was expressed by one informant: "I know ertutur is for getting to know each other, but when it comes to more in-depth details like binuang (traditional speech) or positions within rakut sitelu, I'm still confused" (May Roshan Br Surbakti, 17). This situation indicates a cultural knowledge gap caused by insufficient learning intensity and limited practical experience. Within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, this can be explained as a weak observational learning process, where individuals lack sufficient behavioral models to observe and emulate in everyday life (Bandura, 1986).

Furthermore, this study also found that changes in family structure and communication patterns within modern families also pose significant obstacles. Increasingly limited interaction between parents and children results in a less intensive process of cultural value inheritance. As expressed by a parent informant: "Nowadays, children are more busy with gadgets, so there is rarely time to sit together and learn about customs like before" (Bintara Tarigan, 52 years old). This condition shows that the family as the primary agent of cultural transmission is starting to lose its optimal role. From an interpersonal communication perspective, the effectiveness of conveying values is highly dependent on the quality of interaction and relational closeness between communicator and communicant (Devito, 2016). When this interaction weakens, the process of internalizing cultural values also becomes less than optimal.

Another obstacle relates to the decline of traditional social spaces that previously served as a medium for cultural learning, such as mahpah activities or youth gatherings. One informant stated, "There used to be youth gatherings after the harvest, where we learned a lot about ertutur, but now they're gone." The loss of these social spaces has deprived the younger generation of a collective platform for directly practicing ertutur. From the perspective of Diffusion of Innovation Theory, this condition indicates a weakening of social communication channels that function as a medium for the dissemination of cultural values. Rogers emphasized that the success of diffusion is largely determined by the existence of social networks that enable intensive interaction between community members (Rogers, 2003).

Furthermore, the influence of modernization and globalization is also a significant inhibiting factor. The younger generation tends to be more interested in popular culture and digital communication than in traditional cultural practices. This has led to a shift in

value orientation, resulting in a low interest in ertutur. One informant stated, "young people now prefer to follow trends on social media rather than learn about their own culture." This phenomenon demonstrates the competition between local and global cultures in modern communication spaces. In cultural communication studies, globalization often leads to cultural homogenization, threatening the diversity of local traditions (Tomlinson, 1999). As a result, cultural traditions such as ertutur (traditional speech) become less relevant in the perceptions of the younger generation.

In addition to these factors, this study also found changes in the application of customary norms, resulting in a weakening of cultural authority. Some practices previously considered unconstitutional are now being tolerated, such as marriage within the same clan. As one traditional leader expressed, "Now, some people marry within the same clan and still do it, whereas previously it was prohibited and there were sanctions" (Bonet Surbakti, 64). This change indicates a shift in values within the Karo Batak social system. From the perspective of diffusion theory, this can be understood as a process of reinterpretation of cultural norms that occurs when society begins to adapt traditional values to new social conditions (Rogers, 2003; Hidayat, 2023).

Overall, the obstacles to preserving the ertutur tradition cannot be understood as a single problem, but rather as the result of the interaction of various interrelated factors, ranging from individuals and families to broader social structures. Within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, weak learning through direct observation and practice is a major factor hindering the internalization of cultural values. Meanwhile, from the perspective of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, the reduction in communication channels and the weakening role of cultural agents cause the process of disseminating ertutur values to be suboptimal. Therefore, preserving the ertutur tradition requires a communication strategy that not only maintains cultural values but also adapts the method of delivery to the social dynamics of contemporary society.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the preservation of the ertutur tradition in the Batak Karo community in Kutalimbaru District is highly dependent on the synergy between families, traditional figures, and the wider community. Although various communication strategies such as the use of traditional events, direct communication, and community activities have been implemented to maintain the sustainability of this tradition, major challenges remain such as the low in-depth understanding of the Rakut Sitelu system among the younger generation, the influence of digital technology, and modernization that shifts traditional values. Therefore, innovation is needed in communication strategies that combine traditional and modern approaches, as well as increasing the active participation of the younger generation and the role of parents in instilling traditional values from an early age. Thus, the preservation of ertutur can be more effective and sustainable amidst the changing times.

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