



## Ethnolinguistic Encoding of Cosmology and Social Hierarchy in Sundanese Life-Cycle Ritual Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** This study aims to describe and analyze the linguistic forms, ritual lexicons, and cultural meanings embedded in Sundanese life-cycle ceremonies using an ethnolinguistic approach to reveal how language reflects cultural concepts, belief systems, and social structures.

**Methodology:** This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with an ethnolinguistic framework. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation study, audio recording, and field notes. Purposive sampling was applied. Data were analyzed using lexical classification, semantic analysis, pragmatic analysis, cultural interpretation, and triangulation techniques.

**Main Findings:** The findings reveal that Sundanese life-cycle rituals contain structured ritual lexicons across pregnancy, birth, childhood, marriage, and death phases. These lexicons function as symbolic-cultural representations encoding cosmology, agrarian metaphors, religious syncretism, and social hierarchy through *undak usuk basa*. Ritual language operates as a semiotic system preserving collective memory and worldview.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** This study offers a comprehensive ethnolinguistic mapping of Sundanese life-cycle ritual lexicons by integrating semantic, pragmatic, and cultural analyses in one framework. It advances knowledge by demonstrating how ritual language systematically encodes cosmology, social hierarchy, and ecological cognition within contemporary cultural contexts.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are inseparable entities in human life. Language does not merely function as a tool of communication, but also as a medium for transmitting values, belief systems, and collective identity within a community [1]-[3]. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a representation of how a society conceptualizes and interprets the world, since linguistic expressions reflect patterns of thought, symbolic systems, and cultural frameworks embedded within its speakers [4], [5]. Therefore, examining cultural practices through a linguistic lens is essential to uncover the deeper meanings encoded in the symbolic language used in traditional rituals.

One of the cultural practices rich in linguistic expressions is the life-cycle ritual tradition of the Sundanese community [6], [7]. In Sundanese society, each stage of human life from pregnancy, birth, childhood, marriage, to death is marked by specific traditional ceremonies containing distinctive lexical items and expressions. Terms such as *tingkeban*, *puput puseur*, *nincak endog*, *huap lingkung*, and *nyusur taneuh* are not merely labels for ceremonial events; they embody cultural concepts, prayers, expectations, and inherited social values passed down through generations [8], [9], [10]. From an ethnolinguistic viewpoint, these ritual lexicons function as cultural symbols that reveal the intimate relationship between language, collective cognition, and the belief system of the Sundanese people [11].

Anthropologically, life-cycle rituals represent cultural responses to transitional phases in human existence that are considered sacred and vulnerable [12]-[14]. Each transition is perceived as a critical moment requiring social and spiritual validation through ceremonial practices. However, ethnolinguistic inquiry extends beyond the ritual activities themselves and focuses on the linguistic forms used within these ceremonies such as specialized vocabulary, ritual utterances, prayers, and the application of speech levels reflecting social hierarchy [15]. The Sundanese speech level system (*undak usuk basa*) demonstrates how respect, social stratification, and cultural norms are linguistically encoded, particularly in ritual contexts where appropriate language choice carries significant symbolic weight.

The uniqueness of the Sundanese language as a marker of cultural identity highlights its function as a symbolic instrument for maintaining tradition and continuity. Within ritual performances, language serves to transmit politeness norms, religiosity, and philosophical views of life. Ritual terminology cannot be separated from the social and cosmological context that shapes it [16], [17]. Consequently, analyzing the forms and meanings of life-cycle ritual lexicons not only contributes to semantic understanding but also uncovers the conceptual system that structures the Sundanese worldview regarding life, safety, divine power, and ancestral reverence [18].

In the era of globalization and modernization, where practical considerations increasingly influence social practices, traditional rituals face gradual transformation and possible lexical erosion. Some ritual terms risk semantic narrowing or even disappearance as younger generations become less familiar with their cultural significance [19]. Therefore, an ethnolinguistic study of Sundanese life-cycle rituals becomes highly relevant. This research aims to describe and analyze the linguistic forms and cultural meanings embedded in life-cycle ritual lexicons within Sundanese society through an ethnolinguistic approach [20], [21]. By doing so, this study contributes not only to linguistic and anthropological scholarship but also to cultural documentation and preservation efforts. Based on the ethnolinguistic framework, this study seeks to investigate how linguistic forms and ritual lexicons in Sundanese life-cycle ceremonies reflect the cultural concepts, belief systems, and social structures of the community [22], [23]. Specifically, the research addresses how the classification of ritual lexicons, their semantic meanings, and their pragmatic usage in ceremonial contexts represent the Sundanese worldview regarding life transitions, spirituality, and social hierarchy. Furthermore, this study examines the extent to which language functions as a cultural symbol that encodes collective memory and maintains the continuity of traditional values within contemporary Sundanese society.

Based on previous research, it appears that previous studies tend to focus on the descriptive aspects of culture or on linguistic structures in isolation, without comprehensively integrating the relationship between linguistic forms, cosmological systems, and the reproduction of social hierarchies in the discourse of Sundanese life cycle rituals. The first article [24] emphasizes the symbolic dimensions and cultural meanings in ritual practices, but has not systematically explained how lexical choices, morphological processes, and speech structures represent the cosmological constructions underlying these practices. The second article [25] discusses the linguistic aspects of rituals structurally, but does not place them within an anthropological framework that highlights power relations and social stratification manifested through the level of speech and the distribution of roles of ritual participants. Meanwhile, the third article [26] examines social values and oral traditions, but has not explicitly connected them to ethnolinguistic encoding mechanisms that frame life cycle transitions as representations of cosmic order and social structure. Thus, there is a conceptual and methodological gap in the form of the absence of research that integratively combines morphological analysis, symbolic semantics, and ritual discourse practices within an ethnolinguistic framework to reveal how cosmology and social hierarchy are encoded, negotiated, and reproduced in the Sundanese life-cycle ritual discourse this gap is the basis for the urgency and novelty of the research.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative ethnolinguistic framework that systematically bridges linguistic form, cosmological worldview, and social hierarchy within the specific context of Sundanese life-cycle ritual discourse. Unlike prior studies that predominantly examine cosmological lexicons at a general mythological level or describe ritual traditions from cultural and religious perspectives, this research advances the field by analyzing how cosmology and social stratification are simultaneously encoded through morphological processes (such as affixation patterns), symbolic lexical structures, metaphorical conceptualization, and hierarchical speech-level systems in actual ritual discourse [27]-[29]. It moves beyond descriptive accounts by uncovering the mechanisms of linguistic encoding that transform ritual language into a structured semiotic system reflecting cosmic order and social organization. Furthermore, by focusing specifically on life-cycle rituals as transitional

moments of existential significance, this study demonstrates how language functions not merely as a vehicle of tradition but as an active agent in constructing, legitimizing, and reproducing cosmological consciousness and social hierarchy across generations. In doing so, it contributes a context-specific yet theoretically expandable model for understanding the intersection of language, power, and worldview in indigenous ritual communication [30].

The urgency of this research stems from the accelerating transformation of ritual practices and the gradual erosion of traditional linguistic forms in contemporary Sundanese society, which risk diminishing the embedded cosmological knowledge and social values encoded within ritual discourse [31]. As modernization, globalization, and linguistic shift increasingly influence local communities, ritual language is often simplified, reinterpreted, or detached from its original symbolic depth, potentially disrupting the transmission of ancestral epistemologies and hierarchical social ethics. Therefore, a systematic ethnolinguistic investigation is crucial not only for academic advancement but also for cultural preservation and intellectual documentation. The primary objective of this study is to analyze how cosmological concepts and social hierarchy are linguistically encoded in Sundanese life-cycle ritual discourse, examining morphological structures, symbolic lexicons, metaphorical patterns, and speech-level stratification as interconnected semiotic resources [32]. By doing so, this research aims to reveal the underlying worldview embedded in ritual language and to provide a comprehensive analytical framework that explains how language operates as a medium of cosmological continuity and social structuring within indigenous cultural systems.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design grounded in an ethnolinguistic approach [33], [34]. Ethnolinguistics is used as the primary analytical framework to explore the interrelationship between language and culture, particularly how linguistic forms embedded in Sundanese life-cycle rituals reflect cultural values, belief systems, and social structures [35]. A qualitative design is considered appropriate because the object of this research ritual lexicons, ceremonial utterances, and culturally bound expressions requires in-depth interpretation rather than statistical generalization.

The study adopts an interpretative paradigm, aiming to understand meanings constructed and maintained by members of the Sundanese community. Through this design, language is treated not merely as a structural system but as a cultural symbol that encodes collective cognition and worldview. The research focuses on describing, interpreting, and contextualizing ritual terminology within its socio-cultural environment, emphasizing semantic, pragmatic, and symbolic dimensions.

### **2.2. Research Subjects**

The subjects of this study consist of native Sundanese speakers who possess cultural competence and direct experience related to life-cycle rituals within the Sundanese community [36]. The participants include cultural practitioners or traditional leaders who organize or lead ritual ceremonies, respected elders who have deep knowledge of customary traditions and ritual terminology, academics or linguists specializing in Sundanese language and culture, and community members who have participated in or directly witnessed life-cycle rituals. The participants are selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) native speakers of the Sundanese language; (2) knowledgeable about life-cycle rituals; (3) actively involved in or experienced with ritual practices; (4) capable of providing clear, reflective, and in-depth explanations; and (5) willing to participate voluntarily. These criteria ensure cultural authenticity and richness of information, which are essential in ethnolinguistic research that seeks to explore the interrelationship between language, meaning, and cultural practices within their social context.

### **2.3. Data Collection Techniques and Data Sources**

The data in this study were obtained from two primary categories: primary and secondary sources. The primary data consist of ritual lexicons and linguistic expressions used in Sundanese life-cycle ceremonies, including rituals related to pregnancy, birth, childhood, marriage, and death. These data include verbal utterances, prayers, symbolic terms, and variations in speech levels employed during ritual performances, as well as interview transcripts with selected cultural informants. Meanwhile, the secondary data were derived from academic books, theses, journal articles, historical records, archival materials, and written documentation concerning Sundanese rituals and language. These secondary sources function to support, contextualize, and validate the findings derived from the primary field data.

The data were collected through several qualitative techniques to ensure depth and authenticity [37]. First, participant observation was conducted to directly observe ritual practices in their natural settings, allowing the researcher to document lexical items, ceremonial utterances, and speech level variations through detailed field notes. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore participants' interpretations of ritual

terminology, symbolic meanings, and cultural functions; these interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for systematic analysis. Third, a documentation study was undertaken to examine written materials such as ritual manuscripts, cultural texts, and previous research in order to triangulate and strengthen the field findings. Additionally, audio recordings and comprehensive field notes were employed to preserve the authenticity of linguistic expressions and to facilitate accurate semantic and pragmatic analysis. Data triangulation across sources and techniques was applied to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

## 2.4. Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher, who serves as the main data collector, interpreter, and analyst throughout the research process [38]. The researcher plays a central role in observing, interacting with participants, interpreting meanings, and constructing analytical insights based on the data obtained in the field. Nevertheless, several supporting instruments were employed to facilitate systematic and comprehensive data collection. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions was used to explore ritual terminology, meanings, functions, and cultural contexts in depth. An observation checklist helped systematically document the stages of ritual practices and the corresponding linguistic expressions used in each phase. An audio recorder was utilized to capture authentic spoken data during rituals and interviews, ensuring accuracy in transcription and analysis. Additionally, a field note template was used to record contextual information, non-verbal symbols, situational dynamics, and socio-cultural observations encountered during fieldwork. The flexible use of these instruments allowed adaptive and responsive exploration in line with ethnolinguistic fieldwork principles, enabling the researcher to capture the dynamic relationship between language and culture in natural settings. To clarify the role of each supporting instrument, the following table summarizes their functions,

Table 1. Research Instrumen

Instrument	Function
Interview Guide	To explore ritual terminology, meanings, cultural functions, and contextual interpretations through open-ended questions
Observation Checklist	To systematically record ritual stages and related linguistic expressions
Audio Recorder	To capture authentic spoken data for accurate transcription and analysis
Field Note Template	To document contextual details, non-verbal symbols, and socio-cultural observations

The table above explains the research instruments and their functions in data collection. Interview guidelines were used to explore ritual terms, meanings, cultural functions, and contextual interpretations through open-ended questions. Observation sheets systematically recorded ritual stages and emerging linguistic expressions. An audio recorder was used to authentically capture oral data for more accurate transcription and analysis, while the field notes format helped document the context, nonverbal symbols, and socio-cultural dynamics surrounding the ritual.

## 2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted using an ethnolinguistic analytical framework integrated with semantic and pragmatic interpretation [39]. The process began with data reduction, in which all collected data were transcribed, organized, and systematically classified according to the stages of life-cycle rituals, namely pregnancy, birth, childhood, marriage, and death. Following this stage, lexical classification was carried out by categorizing ritual lexicons based on their morphological forms such as basic words, affixed forms, and compound words as well as their semantic types, including lexical meaning, cultural meaning, and symbolic meaning. Subsequently, semantic analysis was undertaken to identify both denotative and connotative meanings of each lexical item. Dictionary definitions were carefully compared with contextual meanings derived from informants' explanations to capture culturally embedded interpretations.

Furthermore, cultural interpretation was applied to examine the symbolic and cultural significance of each term in relation to Sundanese cosmology, belief systems, and social hierarchy. Pragmatic and speech-level analysis was also conducted, particularly focusing on the use of *undak usuk basa* (Sundanese speech levels), to reveal how linguistic choices reflect social relationships, politeness strategies, and cultural norms within ritual contexts. Finally, triangulation and validation were performed by cross-checking findings across multiple data sources and data collection techniques to ensure interpretative credibility. The entire analytical process was iterative in nature, meaning that interpretation developed continuously alongside repeated examination and reflection upon the data. To summarize the stages of analysis, the following table outlines the analytical framework applied in this study,

Table 2. Analysis Techniques

Analytical Stage	Focus of Analysis	Purpose
Data Reduction	Transcription and classification by ritual stages	To organize and structure raw data
Lexical Classification	Morphological and semantic categorization	To identify linguistic patterns
Semantic Analysis	Denotative and connotative meanings	To uncover contextual meanings
Cultural Interpretation	Symbolic and cosmological significance	To interpret cultural values
Pragmatic & Speech-Level Analysis	Use of <i>undak usuk basa</i>	To reveal social relations and norms
Triangulation & Validation	Cross-checking multiple data sources	To ensure credibility and validity

Table 2 illustrates the stages of data analysis, along with their focus and objectives. The process began with data reduction through transcription and grouping based on ritual stages to organize the raw data. Next, lexical classification was performed morphologically and semantically to identify linguistic patterns. Semantic analysis was then used to uncover denotative and connotative meanings contextually. Cultural interpretation highlighted symbolic and cosmological meanings to understand the cultural values contained within, while pragmatic and speech level analysis (*undak usuk basa*) aimed to uncover prevailing social relations and norms. The final stage, triangulation and validation, was conducted by examining various data sources to ensure the credibility and validity of the findings.

**2.6. Research Procedures**

The research procedures were conducted systematically through several interrelated stages [40]. The study began with a preliminary phase involving a comprehensive literature review to establish the theoretical foundation and define the research focus on ethnolinguistics and Sundanese life-cycle rituals. This was followed by field preparation, which included establishing communication with community leaders and identifying key informants based on predetermined criteria. The data collection phase involved participant observation of ritual practices, in-depth interviews, audio recording of linguistic expressions, and documentation gathering. Subsequently, all collected data were transcribed and systematically organized according to ritual stages and thematic categories. The analysis phase applied an ethnolinguistic framework integrating lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural interpretation. The findings were then synthesized into a structured academic discussion, and finally, triangulation and revision were conducted to ensure credibility, consistency, and interpretative validity.



Figure 1. Research Procedure

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1. Forms and Meanings of Human Life Cycle Ritual Ceremonies in Sundanese Society**

This research found 32 linguistic data consisting of human life cycle rituals classified into five stages: pregnancy, birth, childhood, marriage, and death.

**3.1.1. Pregnancy Ceremonies**

*Salamatan Tilu Bulanan* Ceremony (Third Month Safety Ceremony), a ceremony held to commemorate the third month of pregnancy. Etymologically, the word '*salamatan*' comes from the root word '*salamat*' (Javanese: safety) which receives the suffix (-an) so it means a safety ceremony activity. The word '*tilu bulan*' means three months, with '*bulanan*' coming from '*bulan + (-an)*'. The equipment prepared: rice wuduk containing peeled boiled eggs, chicken, potatoes, white porridge, red porridge, coconut oil, and water in a jug. Rice wuduk symbolizes the unity of mother and baby, while the white and red porridge symbolizes the desire of women and men to unite. [41].

*Salamatan Lima Bulanan* Ceremony (Fifth Month Salvation Ceremony), a ceremony commemorating the fifth month of pregnancy. Additional equipment includes small foods such as wajit, rangginang, opak (sweet taste), ketupat, and tantangin in triangular shape (symbolizing waluya/smoothness) and quadrangular shape (symbolizing safety).

Tingkeban Ceremony (Seventh Month Salvation Ceremony), the word 'tingkeban' comes from 'tingkeb' (meaning closed) receiving the suffix (-an). Its meaning: notification that from this ceremony until 40 days after giving birth must be closed (husband and wife may not have intercourse). Special equipment: 7 types of tubers, peda fish pepes in cangkudu leaves shaped like a boat, 7 pieces of long cloth, 7 colors of flowers, 7 dippers, rujak kanistren (7 types of fruit), jajambaran, 7 eels, gading coconut with Arjuna-Srikandi pictures, 7 needles, 7 bamboo strainers, 7 elekan, 7 oil lamps, large jar containing water, hanjuang leaves, areca palm blossom, gold jewelry, samak walimi, jug, and chicken. Meaning of equipment: 7 types of tubers symbolize life's levels; peda fish pepes as repellent of misfortune; gading coconut with Arjuna-Srikandi pictures so the child is handsome/beautiful; eel symbolizes smooth delivery; 7 oil lamps so the child has a bright mind; bitter, astringent, sour rujak kanistren symbolizes life's hardships that must be taught to the child.

Salamatan Salapan Bulanan Ceremony (Ninth Month Salvation Ceremony), ceremony for the ninth month of pregnancy. Equipment: bubur lolos (thin porridge with brown sugar and keletik burung) and a small lamp. Bubur lolos symbolizes ease of childbirth, the small lamp so the child has a bright heart.

Reuneuh Mundingean Ceremony, for pregnancy exceeding nine months. The word 'reuneuh' (pregnant) + 'munding' (buffalo) + (-eun). Equipment: kolotok (a wooden sound-making device like a bell usually hung on buffaloes) and a whip. Kolotok means that the pregnant woman should not be like a pregnant buffalo that gives birth late, also means an ignorant person (kolot kolotok).

### 3.1.2. Birth Ritual Lexicons

*Memelihara Tembuni* Ceremony (Placenta Care Ceremony), caring for the placenta which is regarded as the baby's sibling. Two methods: washed away in the river (so the child is brave in facing life, has many experiences) or buried (so the child does not forget their hometown). Equipment: salt, tamarind, pendil (clay pot), 7 colors of cloth scraps, white cloth, small bamboo for air hole, oil lamp. *Nenjrag Bumi* Ceremony, the word 'nenjrag' means stomping feet on the ground. A ceremony of pounding a pestle on the ground 7 times near the baby or stomping feet on the bamboo floor. Aims to make the baby not easily startled when hearing sudden sounds. *Puput Puseur* Ceremony, 'Puput' (detached) + 'puseur' (umbilical cord). Held after the umbilical cord falls off. The umbilical cord is placed into kanjut kundang (a small cloth bag). There is a belief that the umbilical cord, placenta, membrane, and kakawah are called "*dulur opat kalima pancer*" (four siblings with the baby as the center).

*Ekah* Ceremony, from Arabic 'aqiqatun' (biological child). A ceremony to redeem the child's soul as a sign of gratitude. Held at 7, 14, or 21 days of age by slaughtering animals: 2 goats for a boy, 1 goat for a girl. *Nurunkeun* Ceremony, 'Nurunkeun' from 'turun + N- + -keun' meaning taking the baby to the yard for the first time. Aims for the baby to recognize the environment and as notification to neighbors. Equipment: *kebon alas* (a structure decorated with banyan leaves, coconut fronds, areca palm blossoms, sugarcane plants, banana trees, and hanging foods). *Opat Puluh Dinten* Ceremony, the 40-day ceremony after childbirth. Handing over of mother and baby from indung beurang (traditional birth attendant) to the husband. There are three stages of massage: *ngurut ngibakeun* (removing diseases), *ngurut netepkeun* (positioning the uterus back), *ngurut ngarekepeun* (tightening the feminine parts). *Cukuran* Ceremony, 'Cukuran' from 'cukur + (-an)' meaning haircutting. Cleansing and purifying the baby's hair. Equipment: long cloth, bokor (metal bowl) containing water with 7 kinds of flowers, scissors decorated with gold jewelry, ringgitan money. Hair is cut by 7 people (ajengan and 6 elders). *Turun Taneuh* Ceremony, 'Turun' (descend) + 'taneuh' (earth) meaning the baby steps on the ground for the first time. Aims to determine what the child will become by observing the first item the baby picks up.

### 3.1.3. Childhood Transition Lexicons

Gusaran Ceremony 'Gusar + (-an)' meaning filing a girl's teeth to make her more beautiful. Held at approximately 7 years of age, often together with a brother's circumcision. Equipment: ringgitan coins (symbol of wealth), 7-colored flowers (symbol of fragrance, beauty, happiness). Usually accompanied by ear piercing [42].

Sepitan Ceremony, 'Sepit + (-an)' or 'sunat + (-an)' meaning cutting part of the foreskin of the male genitalia to purify and open the path so urination is not blocked. Two or three days beforehand, the child is smeared with boboreh (fragrant balm), visits ancestral graves, and is paraded around the village. During circumcision, festivities are held (wayang golek puppet show, musical instruments) so the child does not focus on the pain.

### 3.1.4. Marriage Ritual Lexicons

*Neundeun Omong* 'Neundeun' (N- + teundeun) + 'omong' meaning storing words/arranging conversations. The initial exploratory stage from the family to gather information about the prospective in-law (bibit, bobot, bebet - lineage, qualities, background) [43]. *Ngalamar* or *Nyeureuhan*, 'Ngalamar' (ng- + lamar) and 'nyeureuhan' (ny- + sereh + -an) meaning proposing. Betel leaf/sereh becomes a symbol of agreement between two extended families. In some areas, there are strength/pencak silat competitions as a symbol that to achieve something one must strive.

*Siraman*, 'Siram + (-an)' meaning bathing. Symbol of physical and spiritual self-purification before marriage. Water from 7 springs mixed with 7 kinds of flowers. The bathers are an odd number (minimum 7, maximum 11 people). There is a ceremony of cutting back hair (*miceun geuleuh keumeuh*/removing bad luck).

*Ngaras*, Washing parents' feet. An expression of love and respect from children, also a hope that married life will be like the parents who live harmoniously and happily.

*Ngecagkeun Aisan*, '*Ngecag*' + (-keun) + '*ais*' + (-an) meaning releasing the carrying cloth. Symbol of the mother's last carrying, that responsibility will transfer to the husband. *Ngeningan*, Shaving fine hair of the bride-to-be before makeup. Done after siraman. Seseheran, '*Se* + *serah* + (-an)' meaning handing over. The groom's family hands over equipment that the groom will use at the wedding party. Parawanten to fill dongdang includes fruits, hampangan (cakes), food ingredients, kitchen spices, coconut, beubeutian (cassava with plant), pare ranggeuyan (rice with stalks), lemarguh (complete betel nut set), and others.

*Ngeuyeuk Seureuh*, '*Ngeuyeuk*' (ng- + heuyeuk) + '*seureuh*' meaning managing/arranging betel. The main event is giving advice to the bride and groom through symbolic language, including sex education. Equipment: *seureuh ranggeuyan* (betel with stems), *mayang jambe* (areca palm blossom), *waluh gede* (large pumpkin), *pare gedengan* (bundle of rice stalks), *kembang setaman* (7 kinds of flowers), and various offerings. Symbolic meanings: hitting with broomsticks (must be united), rolling cloth (competing to earn a living), cutting areca palm blossom (husband must be gentle and wise with wife), pounding mortar (prayer for safety), competing for money under the mat (spirit of seeking sustenance).

*Munjungan* or *Sungkeman*, Asking for blessings from both parents. Saweran, '*Sawer* + (-an)' or '*nyawer*' (ny- + awer) meaning scattering advice. Scattering rice mixed with turmeric, coins, and candy while singing songs containing advice. Symbol that the couple should be generous in sharing sustenance. *Meuleum Harupat*, '*Meuleum*' (burning) + '*harupat*' (sugar palm rib). The groom holds a sugar palm rib, the bride burns it with a candle, then puts it into a jug of water and breaks it. Symbol that when the husband is emotional (burning rib), the wife can calm him (water in the jug). *Nincak Endog*, '*Nincak*' (N- + tincak) + '*endog*' meaning stepping on an egg. The egg in a plastic bag is placed on a cobek (stone mortar), stepped on by the groom until it breaks. Symbol of virginity that becomes the husband's responsibility. Afterwards, the wife washes the husband's feet, the husband presses his thumb on the wife's crown (symbol of balance and harmony). The jug is smashed until broken (symbolizing not dwelling on the past).

*Buka Pintu*, the groom knocks on the door 3 times, a dialogue in pantun occurs with the bride, ending with a test of memorizing the two sentences of the shahada. Symbol that the one entering is truly a Muslim husband. *Huap Lingkung*, '*Huap*' (feeding) + '*lingkung*' (crossing). Feeding each other rice. First, parents feed both bride and groom (the last feeding), then the couple feeds each other. Ends with pabetot-betot bakakak ayam (pulling the chicken thigh) as a symbol of sustenance. *Ngaleupaskeun Japati*, '*Ngaleupaskeun*' (ng- + leupas + -keun) + '*japati*' meaning releasing doves. Symbol of harmony, so that life will be as harmonious as doves.

### 3.1.5. Death Ritual Lexicons

*Ngemandian Mayit*, '*Ngemandian*' (ng- + mandi + -an) meaning bathing the deceased. Done with specific procedures: gently seated, stomach massaged, genitals, mouth, nose cleaned, ablution performed, and rinsed with water mixed with sidr. [44]. *Ngaboehan*, '*Ngaboehan*' (ng- + boeh + -an) meaning shrouding the deceased with white cloth. *Nyolatkan*, '*Nyolatkan*' (ny- + solat + -kan) meaning performing the funeral prayer for the deceased, 2 rak'ahs in congregation without bowing and prostration. *Nguburkeun*, '*Nguburkeun*' (ng- + kubur + -keun) meaning burying the deceased. *Nyusur Taneuh*, '*Nyusur*' (ny- + susur) + '*taneuh*' meaning reciting prayers and dhikr so that the soul is forgiven of sins and accepted in good deeds. *Tahlilan* is held on specific days, Poena (first day), tiluna (third day), tujuhta (seventh day), matang puluh (fortieth day) natus (one hundredth day), newu (one thousandth day), mendak taun (one year). [45].

## 3.2. Functions of Human Life Cycle Ritual Ceremonies in Sundanese Society

Based on analysis, the functions of human life cycle ritual ceremonies in Sundanese society have four main functions.

### 3.2.1. Ceremony as an Educational Tool

Pregnancy Stage, through symbols in ceremonies, the expectant mother is taught about life. The bitter, astringent, and sour rujak kanistren teaches that life's hardships must be taught to children. Birth Stage, the nenjrag bumi ceremony teaches the child not to be easily frightened. The ceremony of caring for the placenta by washing it away teaches courage in facing life; burying it teaches not to forget one's hometown. The turun taneuh ceremony becomes a medium for observing the child's talents. Childhood Stage, the sepitan (circumcision) ceremony teaches cleanliness and purity. The festivities during circumcision (wayang golek with heroic stories) function to instill values of courage and love for the homeland. Marriage Stage, ngeuyeuk seureuh functions as sex education and marriage advice. Huap lingkung teaches sharing sustenance. Nincak endog teaches the husband's responsibility to protect the wife's honor. Meuleum harupat teaches anger management. Saweran teaches generosity. Death Stage, Tahlilan functions to remind the living of death and the importance of good deeds.

### 3.2.2. Ceremony as a Means of Prayer

Pregnancy Stage, every ceremony (tilu bulanan, lima bulanan, tingkeban, salapan bulanan, reuneuh mundingun) contains prayers for the safety of mother and fetus, ease in childbirth, and for the child to become righteous. Birth Stage, the ekah ceremony contains prayers of gratitude and hope that the child will be a helper for parents in the afterlife. The cukuran and puput puseur ceremonies are also filled with prayers for safety. Childhood Stage, prayers are offered so that the child undergoing gusaran/circumcision becomes clean and pure. Marriage Stage, pengajian (religious gathering) before siraman, prayers during the marriage contract (akad nikah), and sungkeman all contain requests for blessings. Death Stage, tahlilan on various days (poena, tiluna, tujuhta, matang puluh, natus, newu, mendak taun) contains prayers for forgiveness of the deceased's sins.

### 3.2.3. Ceremony as a Means of Notification

Pregnancy Stage, salamatan tilu and lima bulanan notify neighbors and relatives that a woman is truly pregnant. Tingkeban notifies husband and wife not to have intercourse until 40 days after childbirth. Birth Stage, the nurunkeun ceremony notifies neighbors that the baby can now be taken outside. The opat puluh dinten ceremony notifies the husband that the wife has recovered and can resume marital relations. Childhood Stage, ngaleunggeuh (pounding the rice mortar) during the sepitan ceremony notifies neighbors and guests that the event will begin. Marriage Stage, neundeun omong and ngalamar are official notifications that a family relationship will be established. Seserahan notifies the seriousness of the groom's party. Death Stage, notification through takziah (condolence visits) and tahlilan that a family member has passed away.

### 3.2.4. Ceremony as a Reminder

Pregnancy Stage, tingkeban reminds husband and wife of prohibitions that must be observed. Salamatan salapan bulanan with its small lamp reminds that the child should have a bright heart. Birth Stage, the ceremony of caring for the placenta reminds that the placenta is the baby's sibling that must be respected ("dulur opat kalima pancer"). Childhood Stage, pilgrimage to ancestral graves before circumcision reminds the child of their origins and to pray for those who have passed away. Marriage Stage, ngecagkeun aisan reminds that the child will be released from parental responsibility. Saweran with its sung verses reminds the couple of important advice. Death Stage, the entire series of tahlilan (from poena to mendak taun) reminds the living to always pray for the departed and prepare for their own death.

The life cycle ritual ceremonies of the Sundanese people represent a complex system of cultural knowledge, where linguistic forms and ritual equipment function as identity markers as well as media for transmitting ancestral values. Based on research findings, there are 32 linguistic data classified into five life cycle stages, each with distinctive morphological characteristics through affixation processes (prefixes, suffixes, or combinations). Anthropological studies view that ritual lexicons such as "*tingkeban*" (from the root word 'tingkeb' + (-an) meaning closed), "*nurunkeun*" (turun + N- + -keun), and "*reuneuh mundingun*" (reuneuh + munding + -eun) are not merely naming conventions, but rather reflections of how Sundanese society organizes their cultural knowledge [46]. As revealed in research on Sundanese heortonyms, these ceremony names serve as linguistic and cultural markers that directly reflect the values and identity of Sundanese society [47]. These linguistic forms demonstrate that the Sundanese people possess metalinguistic awareness in distinguishing levels and phases of life through morphological markers, while also showing how language functions as a system for classifying human experience. Furthermore, the existence of undak-usuk basa (speech levels) in the Sundanese language significantly influences the choice of vocabulary used in ritual contexts, where the selection of refined (lemes) or neutral (loma) vocabulary depends on the social status, age, and kinship relations of the participants involved in the ceremony [48].

The meanings contained in each Sundanese life cycle ritual ceremony are multidimensional, simultaneously encompassing cosmological, social, and spiritual aspects. Research on the cosmology of West Javanese society reveals that each life stage pregnancy, birth, circumcision, and marriage contains important symbolic meanings in building identity and social relations, closely related to the substance of belief or religion (Islam) [49]. The concept of safety (slamet) becomes the common thread connecting the entire series of ceremonies, where the "slametan" as a communal feast functions to achieve a state of tranquility, physically and spiritually, and to avoid all disturbances [50]. In the tingkeban ceremony, for example, the gading coconut illustrated with Arjuna and Srikandi contains the hope that the child to be born will possess handsomeness or beauty as well as a noble personality like these wayang figures. Meanwhile, the release of an eel into the cloth during the bathing procession of the expectant mother symbolizes a smooth delivery process, just as an eel is slippery and easily slides out of its hole [51]. These symbolic meanings demonstrate how Sundanese society uses natural metaphors and cultural figures to articulate their transcendental hopes. The offering of rujak kanistren with its bitter, astringent, and sour taste to children contains the profound meaning that all life's hardships and bitterness must be taught to the child, preparing them for the realities of adult life [52].

The functions of life cycle ritual ceremonies are not limited to the spiritual dimension but also encompass social education functions, strengthening community cohesion, and preserving local wisdom. Research on the



mikul lodong ritual in West Java confirms that traditional ceremonies have a very important role in educating the younger generation and strengthening moral, social, and religious values in society, while also preserving the environment through harmonizing the relationship between nature, humans, and God [53]. This educational function is clearly visible in the ngeuyeuk seureuh ceremony during the wedding procession, where the bride and groom are given marriage advice including sex education through subtle yet profound symbolic language. The use of symbolic objects such as mayang jambe (areca palm blossom) that must be carefully cut by the groom symbolizes how a husband should treat his wife gently and wisely, as a woman's feelings are generally very delicate. Similarly, in the sepitan (circumcision) ceremony, the festivities with wayang golek puppet shows featuring heroic stories function to instill values of courage and love for the homeland, while the commotion of musical instruments is created to divert the child's attention from the pain [54]. The social cohesion function is realized through collective community participation in every stage of the ceremony, from the closest neighbors to distant relatives, which strengthens communal solidarity and kinship networks. This aligns with classical theories of ritual functions in strengthening collective consciousness and social solidarity, as well as the concept of *communitas* in ritual processes, where participants experience a sense of togetherness and equality beyond their daily social status [55].

The interrelation between language, culture, and religion in Sundanese life cycle ceremonies demonstrates a dynamic of harmonious acculturation between local traditions and Islamic values. Studies on ritual prayers in Sundanese tradition reveal that ritual texts function as a means of transcendental communication and repellent of misfortune, constructed by culturally meaningful terms accompanied by co-text (paralinguistic, kinetic, proxemic) and context (cultural, situational, social, ideological) that are integrated and interconnected [56]. Research on *raja* (incantations) in the *ngikis* ceremony in Ciamis also confirms that mantras in Old Sundanese contain moral teachings and social rules that must be obeyed, functioning as reminders of the importance of the past as a "tonggak" or "tatangkalan" (foundation/root) for the present generation [57]. The influence of Islam is evident in the use of loanwords from Arabic such as "ekah" (from *aqiqah*), "salamatan" (from *salam*), as well as the recitation of Islamic prayers such as *barzanzi* and *tahlilan* in every series of ceremonies [58]. This syncretism is not viewed as contamination, but rather as a form of cultural negotiation that enriches the spiritual meaning of the ceremonies. According to several scholars, this phenomenon reflects a pattern of religious syncretism common in Java and its surroundings, where Islamic values are integrated with pre-existing local traditions without losing their essential meaning [59]. The sustainability of this tradition aligns with efforts of revitalization and preservation carried out by ritual practitioners and local governments, as a form of protecting intangible cultural heritage rich in local wisdom values [60]. This is also reinforced by the concept of "tatali paranti karuhun" (ancestral customary ties) which still lives in Sundanese society, where carrying out ancestral customs is believed to bring safety and blessings in life [61]. The adaptation of ceremonies to modern times, such as the simplification of some processions without eliminating their essential meaning, demonstrates the dynamic and adaptive nature of Sundanese culture, which can maintain its relevance across generations while preserving its fundamental values.

The findings of this study align with previous research highlighting the intrinsic relationship between language, culture, and belief systems in Sundanese traditions. Similar to previous studies on Sundanese oral literature and semiotic structures [62], which suggest that linguistic forms function as cultural markers and reflections of collective worldviews, this study asserts that ritual lexicons in life cycle ceremonies are not merely terminological labels but structured semiotic representations of cosmological concepts and social organization. Previous works on the semiotic analysis of Sundanese texts emphasize that linguistic signs operate at both denotative and connotative levels, encoding mythology, moral values, and ecological harmony, similarly [63], this study reveals that ritual terms such as *tingkeban*, *nurunkeun*, *reuneuh mundingneun*, and *ngeuyeuk seureuh* systematically encode cosmological beliefs, natural metaphors, and ethical teachings through morphological processes and symbolic objects. In addition, previous research on *undak-usuk basa* (levels of speech) confirms that language choices in Sundanese society reflect social hierarchy and relational ethics [64]. This is in line with recent findings that ritual discourse is shaped by refined or neutral vocabulary depending on the age, status, and kinship of participants, thereby reinforcing social stratification in the ceremonial context. Furthermore, consistent with anthropological studies that view ritual as a medium of education, prayer, social notification, and collective memory, this study shows that Sundanese life cycle ceremonies function simultaneously as pedagogical tools, spiritual communication, social regulation, and cultural reminders. Therefore, the current findings strengthen and extend previous research by empirically confirming that Sundanese ritual discourse embodies a multidimensional system in which linguistic structures, symbolic meanings, cosmological worldviews, and social hierarchies operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive and integrative analysis of Sundanese life-cycle ritual discourse by systematically connecting morphological structure, symbolic lexicon, cosmological worldview, social hierarchy, and functional dimensions within a single ethnolinguistic framework. While previous studies have examined Sundanese oral literature, semiotics, ritual symbolism, or speech-level systems separately, this research advances the field by demonstrating how 32 ritual lexicons across five life stages (pregnancy, birth, childhood, marriage, and death) collectively form a coherent semiotic system that encodes cosmological order and

social stratification simultaneously [65]. This study does not merely interpret ritual symbols culturally, but also analyzes their linguistic formation (affixation patterns, lexical derivation, and speech-level selection) as mechanisms of knowledge classification and worldview construction. By positioning ritual discourse as an active site of encoding, negotiation, and reproduction of both transcendental beliefs and hierarchical social relations, this research contributes a multidimensional model of ethnolinguistic encoding that expands theoretical discussions on language, power, and cosmology in indigenous ritual traditions [66].

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches ethnolinguistic and anthropological scholarship by providing empirical evidence that ritual language operates as a structured semiotic system integrating cosmology, morality, and social order, thereby strengthening interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics, anthropology, semiotics, and cultural studies. It also offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating how morphological analysis, symbolic interpretation, and discourse analysis can be combined to uncover deeper layers of cultural cognition embedded in ritual practices. Practically, this research contributes to cultural preservation efforts by documenting and systematizing ritual lexicons that are increasingly vulnerable to simplification and erosion in contemporary society. The findings may inform educational materials, local cultural revitalization programs, and policy initiatives aimed at safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that ritual discourse continues to function as a medium for transmitting ancestral knowledge and ethical values to future generations.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is confined to selected life-cycle rituals within Sundanese society and does not include comparative data from other ethnic groups, which limits broader generalization across Indonesian or Austronesian ritual traditions. Second, while the study examines linguistic forms and symbolic meanings in depth, it focuses primarily on textual and discourse-level analysis and does not extensively explore performative, paralinguistic, or multimodal aspects of ritual communication that may further enrich understanding of meaning construction. Third, variations across regional dialects and contemporary adaptations of rituals were not systematically compared, meaning that the dynamic transformation of ritual discourse in modern contexts requires further investigation. Future research may therefore expand the scope through comparative, multimodal, and longitudinal approaches to deepen insights into the evolving relationship between language, cosmology, and social hierarchy in ritual practices.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study set out to examine how linguistic forms and ritual lexicons in Sundanese life-cycle ceremonies reflect cultural concepts, belief systems, and social structures from an ethnolinguistic perspective. The findings presented in the Results and Discussion confirm that ritual lexicons across pregnancy, birth, childhood transition, marriage, and death ceremonies function not merely as terminological labels, but as symbolic-cultural representations encoding cosmology, social hierarchy, ecological cognition, and religious syncretism. The semantic, metaphorical, and pragmatic analyses demonstrate clear compatibility with the research objective stated in the Introduction, particularly in revealing how language operates as a cultural symbol that preserves collective memory and structures the Sundanese worldview regarding life transitions. Furthermore, the persistence of these ritual lexicons amid modernization indicates strong potential for their development as sources of cultural documentation, linguistic preservation, and educational integration, especially in local-content curricula and ethnolinguistic studies. Future research may expand this study comparatively across different regional variations of Sundanese communities or investigate intergenerational semantic shifts to explore how cultural meaning evolves in contemporary contexts, thereby strengthening both theoretical development in ethnolinguistics and practical applications in cultural sustainability efforts.

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#### **USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY**

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technologies were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All stages of the research process, including data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation, were conducted entirely by the authors without the assistance of any AI-based tools.

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