

THE SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF *ULOS* IN BATAK CULTURE: AN ECOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Puji Hariati

Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia (UPMI), Medan, Indonesia
Email: zeenasution@gmail.com

Purwarno Purwarno

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Email: purwarno@sastra.uisu.ac.id

APA Citation: Hariati, P., & Purwarno, P. (2024). The symbolic representation of Ulos in Batak culture: An ecolinguistic perspective. *Englishs Review: Journal of English Education*, 12(3), 935-948. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v12i3.10261>

Received: 27-02-2024

Accepted: 28-04-2024

Published: 30-06-2024

Abstract: This research investigates the symbolic representation of the *ulos* in Batak culture from an ecolinguistic perspective, highlighting its role as a cultural artifact deeply intertwined with language, tradition, and the environment. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with weavers, Raja Perhata (cultural experts), and traditional leaders who possess deep knowledge of the *ulos*. The study focuses on specific Toba Batak *ulos*, such as *Ragi Hidup*, *Ragi Hotang*, and *Sibolang*, each symbolizing unique aspects of Batak values and worldviews. *Ragi Hidup* conveys blessings for happiness, offspring, and longevity, particularly during wedding ceremonies, while *Ragi Hotang* is associated with respect and honor, and *Sibolang* signifies the act of paying homage. These symbolic meanings are intricately embedded in the patterns, colors, and material composition of the *ulos*, reflecting their significance in Batak society. The findings reveal that the *ulos* is not merely a textile but a vessel of cultural meaning, encompassing prayers for prosperity, social status, and well-being. Through the lens of ecolinguistics, this study demonstrates how the *ulos*, as a cultural symbol, contributes to the sustainability of Batak traditions by encoding and perpetuating ecological and social values within its symbolic framework. The research underscores the critical importance of preserving these traditional symbols to maintain the cultural heritage and identity of the Batak people while offering broader insights into the role of language and culture in sustaining community values.

Keyword: Batak Ulos; Blessing; *Ragi Hidup*; *Ragi Hotang*; Respecting; *Sibolang*

INTRODUCTION

Ulos, recognized as one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritages, embodies the deep thought and high-quality artistry of the Batak ancestors, making it a cultural treasure that must be preserved (Hasibuan & Rochmat, 2021). *Ulos* is a type of Batak woven cloth, typically worn as a shawl. Syabrina, Saqinah, and Sinulinga (2023) describe *ulos* as one of the most cherished cultural heritages of the Batak people in Indonesia, with profound significance in their daily lives. According to Rami, Sari, Tamba, and Afrilyani (2021), *ulos*, within the Batak tradition, is imbued with religious and mystical qualities, and in Batak society, it is revered as an object blessed with supernatural powers. Traditionally, *ulos* was woven using a loom, but modern techniques have introduced machine production. The dominant colors of *ulos* are red, black, and white, often embellished with intricate gold or silver thread. For the Batak people, *ulos* symbolizes bonds of affection, social status, and serves as a vital medium of communication within their traditional

community. Jiniputri, Panggabean, and Widiawati (2021) emphasize that *ulos* has become a powerful symbol of Batak culture, with each step in its creation, as well as its use, infused with hopes and prayers from both the maker and the owner. *Ulos* carries deep philosophical meaning in Batak life, marking every traditional event with the act of giving, which clearly distinguishes between those who give and those who receive (Saragi, Sinaga, & Tarigan, 2024). *Ulos* is deeply intertwined with the lives of the Batak Toba people, representing an ancestral heritage passed down through generations (Manalu, Simanjuntak, & Casiavera, 2023). As a key element of Batak cultural identity, *ulos* is not only central to traditional customs but is also used in various ceremonies, including births, marriages, welcoming guests, and funerals. Each type of *ulos* features motifs rich in symbolic meaning and honor (Supriyatno, Tambunan, & Ginting, 2024). Irvan (2023) further explains that the unique motifs and designs of each *ulos* pattern often convey cultural values and reflect the history of

the Batak tribe. Essentially, *ulos* serves as a symbol to express spiritual meanings and values, encapsulating profound significance and purpose (Siagian, 2024). According to Putri et al. (2024), *ulos* holds symbolic importance across various aspects of Toba Batak life, and is often given as a meaningful souvenir, laden with deep symbolism. Adriani and Fitriani (2023) explain that the Batak ancestors recognized three primary sources of warmth: the sun, fire, and *ulos*. Among these, *ulos* was particularly vital, especially given the Batak people's historical context of living in mountainous regions with cold night temperatures. While sunlight and fire were crucial for warmth, the frequent cloudy weather and the impracticality and risks of using fire during sleep underscored the need for an alternative. This necessity led to the creation of *ulos*, which served effectively as a body warmer. Novianti and Haryano (2022) highlight that *ulos laghir* is a cultural product of the Batak tribe specifically designed to provide warmth. Furthermore, Qothrunnada (2021) notes that although *ulos* originally served a practical function, it has evolved into a powerful symbol of cultural identity. With the development of customs, along with the introduction of various motifs and colors, *ulos* now holds deep symbolic significance and is widely used in ceremonies and other traditional rituals.

Ulos was traditionally used as a body warmer in the form of a blanket, driven by the geographic conditions of the Batak ancestors who lived in the highlands around Lake Toba, a region known for its very cold temperatures. According to Budiman et al. (2019), the Batak community sought practical ways to stay warm in these naturally cold conditions, leading to the widespread use of *ulos*. The Batak people believe in three primary sources of warmth: the sun, fire, and *ulos*. *Ulos* became a practical and reliable body warmer because it could be easily used as a blanket, anytime and anywhere. Supporting Budiman et al.'s claim, Siregar, Panggabean, Fahmi, and Hizriadi (2021) note that among the Batak, the three sources of warmth—sun, fire, and *ulos*—are integral to their daily lives, with *ulos* being the most comfortable and familiar. Initially, *ulos* served as a simple cloth for warmth, but as Takari (2009) observes, it gradually gained symbolic significance in all aspects of Batak life, becoming inseparable from Batak culture. *Ulos* is also characterized by its various functions and associations with specific elements. Harahap (2017) explains that the act of *mangulosi*, or

giving *ulos*, is not merely a gesture of gift-giving; it carries profound meaning, symbolizing blessings, love, hope, and other positive intentions. This evolution indicates that *ulos* has transformed from merely a source of warmth to a symbol of deeper values such as blessings, love, and hope.

Conversely, certain church sects hold differing views on *ulos*. They regard it as an idol or an animist symbol, used to worship ancestral spirits through an object believed to possess magical powers, thereby rendering it sacred. Vergouwen (2019) states that the creation of *ulos* is an act imbued with religious and magical qualities, governed by numerous prohibitions that must be strictly observed during the weaving process. This underscores the deep magical significance attributed to *ulos*.

Mistavakia (2015) asserts that *ulos* is seen by some as a creation of the ancestors imbued with dark powers. As a result, when *ulos* is given, it is believed to bind the recipient to these dark forces. Sitanggang (2022) explains that this rejection arises from an alternative interpretation of Batak customs, where this group views *ulos* as a demonic creation intended to deceive the Batak people. During traditional events, when the hula-hula bestows *ulos* and simultaneously offers blessings, this act is perceived as usurping the role of God, who is considered the sole source of blessings. Consequently, *ulos* is regarded by this group as a symbol of traditional, illogical, and primitive beliefs.

Ulos, as a Batak cultural heritage, represents the intellectual and artistic achievements of the ancestors and must be preserved. This identity was further reinforced by the designation of *ulos* as Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage on October 17, 2014, as stipulated by the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 270/P/2014 on October 8, 2014 (Ananda, 2021). In agreement, Hasibuan and Rochmat (2021) assert that *ulos*, recognized as one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritages, embodies the intellectual and high-quality artistic achievements of the ancestors that must be preserved. They also emphasize that the sacred value of *ulos* reflects the inner world of the Batak people. Hariani and Kusumastuti (2023) state that the Batak community's cultural identity is inextricably linked to *ulos*, which is ultimately recognized as part of the broader Indonesian identity. Each *ulos* carries specific meanings and purposes between the giver and the receiver, further solidifying its importance. Consequently,

Batak *ulos* is considered a cultural heritage of Indonesia with the potential to become a world heritage. Hasibuan and Rochmat (2021) also note that *ulos* is integral to traditional ceremonies and events, symbolizing various aspects such as individual and social status, underscoring its role as a symbol of harmonious life within communities.

Toba Batak traditional ceremonies are deeply rooted in the values and beliefs that are firmly upheld by the Toba Batak ethnic group. These customs and beliefs form the foundation for maintaining social relationships, communicating, and showing respect to both ancestors and honorable individuals. A key element of these traditional ceremonies is the giving of *ulos*, which is practiced by both guests and event hosts (Sitorus et al., 2021). The ceremony of giving *ulos* serves as a symbol of respect and honor. Afrilla et al. (2024) note that Indonesia, a country rich in ethnic diversity, includes the Toba Batak tribe, which upholds various traditions in their ceremonies. Among these traditions, the giving or use of *ulos* stands out as a symbol of respect for those who observe the customs and as a form of appreciation for guests. The preservation of *ulos* is crucial, as it embodies the cultural heritage of the Batak people. However, this rich tradition is under critical threat, with the art of weaving *ulos* on the verge of extinction. The decline is largely due to the decreasing number of skilled weavers, who are the custodians of this intricate and symbolic craft. Without immediate and sustained efforts to revive and support these artisans, the tradition of weaving Batak *ulos* could be lost to future generations. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemenpppa, 2016) reports that younger generations are reluctant to learn weaving because they perceive it as difficult and complex work. Additionally, the social status of weavers is considered low, often associated with poverty.

Each *ulos* carries profound meanings and cultural values, with its characteristics influenced by the region where it was made. Carmeline (2017) highlights that many traditional types of *ulos* are no longer produced and face the threat of extinction. *Ulos* weavers have stopped creating traditional motifs due to a lack of market demand, despite the fact that each motif carries specific meanings and symbolizes prayers and blessings. Siregar (2015) observes that traditional *ulos* production has ceased since the 2000s, raising concerns about the potential loss of this ancestral

legacy. *Ulos*, a cultural artifact of significant value, is experiencing a decline in preservation efforts. This is unfortunate, as it is essential to preserve *ulos* and pass down the knowledge of each motif from generation to generation.

Ulos is a traditional cloth crafted through a weaving process performed by Batak women. Nugroho et al. (2020) confirm that in the Toba region, traditional weaving is exclusively carried out by women. These weavers infuse each thread with care and hope, imbuing the *ulos* cloth with life and meaning. *Ulos* is a traditional cloth produced through a weaving process conducted by Batak women, who create various patterns and colors that convey specific meanings. Takari (2009) notes that originally, *ulos* served primarily as a garment for warmth, but over time it has acquired a symbolic function in all aspects of Batak life. Punto (2020) argues that in contemporary culture, symbols are no longer merely linguistic signs but have evolved into social phenomena or symptoms, with interpretations of cultural symbols now extending beyond scientific thought. Siregar, Panggabean, Fahmi & Hizriadi (2021) explain that *ulos* is not only used for clothing but also plays a role in various rituals and ceremonies, including births, deaths, and marriages. Sianturi, Sanusi & Yunus (2023) claim that *ulos* is a symbol and identity of Batak people and one of the highlighted traditional festivals using *Ulos* is during the wedding ceremonies. The marriage of the Batak Toba's people cannot be separated from the gift of *Ulos*. Sianturi, Dirgeyasa & Lubis (2021) further claim that

traditional ceremony of marriage in Toba Batak society is inseparable from the awarding of *ulos*. *Ulos* is interpreted as a protective facility capable of providing protection, affection by the giver to the receiver of *ulos*. Delivering *ulos* (*Mangulosi*) is the most important thing in Batak Toba wedding ceremony events. This idea is emphasized by Octavita, Yuliana, Ulfa & Ghuftron (2024) claiming that apart from dance moves, the representation of the sacredness of marriage is also seen in *ulos*. In the traditional Batak wedding ceremony, *Ulos* is also a communication medium to deliver prayers to the bride, who is given when carrying out the *Tor-tor* Dance. Wearing *ulos* is very important in Batak wedding ceremony as for Batak Toba's people, *ulos* is a symbol of love and a form of kinship (Saragi, 2024). Consequently, *ulos* is deeply integrated into the life of the Batak tribe. *Ulos* encompasses various characteristics, functions, and relationships with specific aspects

of Batak culture. Given the impact of modernization on younger generations' understanding of *ulos*, it is crucial to preserve its true meanings. This is supported by Marella's research (2018), which found a decline in the appreciation of *ulos*' noble values due to modern development.

Each *ulos* cloth conveys a distinct message depending on its type and intended purpose. The symbolism of *ulos* is reflected in its patterns, motifs, and colors, particularly in *Martonun Ulos*. The Toba Batak people view *ulos* as a means of communicating their cultural values. Consequently, the different types and meanings of *ulos* cloth embody local wisdom for the Toba Batak tribe. Batak *ulos* is crafted using cotton threads that are dyed with natural plant-based dyes. The blue color is derived from the indigo plant, red from *sappan* wood and *noni*, yellow from turmeric, black from a blend of noni and indigo, and green from a mixture of indigo and turmeric. Creating a sheet of *ulos* involves thousands of threads in various colors, each wound onto *hasoli*. These *hasoli* are then fed into the loom, where the threads are interwoven to form the *ulos*. The weaving process continues until the stretched threads are transformed into a finished piece of cloth. During weaving, the weaver's body is often tied to the loom, restricting movement. The loom is typically removed only when the weaver needs a break or must attend to other tasks. The weaver's dedication and persistence are crucial for the successful completion of an *ulos*. Below is a brief overview of the *ulos* production process.

In the modern era, the true significance of *ulos* faces challenges as many younger generations lack a full understanding of its importance and functions. They may not realize that their ancestors created *ulos* not only for warmth but for its symbolic and spiritual meanings. *Ulos* was designed by the Batak ancestors as a symbol of physical and spiritual well-being, used in special ceremonies. This underscores that *ulos* holds a special significance in every ceremony, from the most modest to the grandest. According to Sitompul (2019), *ulos* traditionally features three basic colors: white, red, and black. Each color carries its own sacred meaning within Toba Batak society: white represents Banua Ginjang (Upper Continent), the realm of Mulajadi Na Bolon (God); red signifies Banua Tongah (Middle Continent), the world of humans; and black denotes Banua Toru (Lower Continent), the domain of spirits and darkness. These colors

convey the knowledge, appreciation, and beliefs of the Batak people. Desiani (2022) further found that each type of *ulos* carries a distinct message depending on its purpose, highlighting *ulos* as a symbol of communication within Batak culture.

In contemporary Batak culture, *ulos* has evolved to symbolize various aspects of life, including the profound bond between parents and their children. *Ulos*, with its diverse types and motifs, each conveys specific meanings. Sherly and Sukardi (2015) identify three principal types of *ulos*: *Ulos Ragidup*, *Ulos Ragi Hotang*, and *Ulos Maratur*.

Ulos Ragidup stands out due to its intricate craftsmanship, earning it a reputation as a high-class *ulos*, also known as "nabalsa *ulos*." The term "Ragidup," which translates to "life," reflects its significance in Batak households, where it is considered essential. *Ulos Ragidup* is woven in three distinct sections: the two side panels are crafted simultaneously, while the central panel, the most complex part, is woven separately (Tinambunan, 2023). In traditional wedding ceremonies, *Ulos Ragidup* is given by the bride's parents to the groom's mother as *ulos pargomgom*, symbolizing that she, along with her son-in-law (the bride's husband), will always be connected to her in-laws.

Ulos Ragi Hotang, another high-status *ulos* (Pangaribuan, 2013), is used for individuals perceived as cunning, with the hope that it will inspire them to become wise, help those who are unfortunate, and support diligent workers. During death ceremonies, this *ulos* is used to wrap the corpse or its bones in a second burial ceremony.

Ulos Maratur features a striped motif depicting birds or animals arranged in an orderly pattern (Abdillah & Irwansyah, 2020). This *ulos* is typically used as *ulos parompa*, with the hope that after the birth of the first child, other children will follow, akin to the birds or animals represented on the *ulos*.

Mangulosi holds significant cultural meaning and value, invoking divine protection. Adiakurnia (2017) asserts that the *mangulosi* event is not a magical ritual but rather a means of preserving Batak cultural values through various pieces of advice combined with rhymes (*umpasa*) passed down through generations. Sinaga et al. (2021) state that *umpasa* is poetry or verse in the Toba Batak community, believed to influence daily life and containing hopes, requests, life guidance, and blessings. Therefore, the act of giving *ulos*, accompanied by *umpasa*, carries profound meaning for the giver, recipient, and even the

observer. Sitepu et al. (2020) note that the use of *umpasa* and *ulos* in traditional Batak culture demonstrates that the Toba Batak people continue to uphold and preserve their ancestral heritage. This indicates that giving *ulos* along with *umpasa* is more than just providing warmth; it has become an integral part of Batak life.

There is a connection between *ulos* and ecolinguistics. Ecolinguistics studies the interaction between languages and their environments or the contexts in which languages are used. Halliday (2001) explains that language and environment are inseparable, influencing each other. Communication, which integrates natural and social aspects, impacts both language change and community attitudes toward their environment, influenced by the language they use. Consequently, the dynamics of Batak *ulos* are shaped by the environmental conditions in which the language is used. The way Batak *ulos* are perceived reflects the ideas, thoughts, and ideologies of the environment in which they are created. The meanings embedded in the symbols of *ulos* can influence Batak perspectives on human life and divine blessings from the creator of their environment, as well as the social functions of *ulos*. Stibbe (2010) notes that ecolinguistics has evolved from the development of human ecology, encompassing various systems such as economic, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, and ecological systems. Thus, the study of environmental contexts, language, and *ulos* as part of Batak culture is a significant area of research in ecolinguistics.

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completion of an *ulos*. Below is a brief overview of the *ulos* production process.



Figure 1. *The process of making ulos*

The process of making *ulos* does not involve a specific ceremony, but due to its sacred use, it follows a meticulously prescribed procedure. Creating a sheet of *ulos* can take weeks or even months, depending on the complexity of the design. Weaving *ulos* requires patience, perseverance, artistic vision, and a sense of devotion (Siregar, 2017: 2). This underscores the demanding nature of *ulos* production, as weavers must possess not only patience and knowledge of the *ulos*'s meaning or function but also artistic skill and creativity.

Despite extensive documentation of *ulos*'s historical and symbolic roles, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies addressing how modern influences and shifting generational perspectives impact the traditional meanings and practices associated with *ulos*. Specifically, there is a need to explore the interaction between the ecological and cultural dimensions of *ulos*, and how these elements are reflected in contemporary practices

and perceptions. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the ecological, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of *ulos* in Batak society, providing insights into its evolving significance and the challenges it faces in the modern era.

METHOD

The methodology employed in this study is descriptive qualitative research. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including:

Weavers: Individuals with hands-on experience in the production of *ulos*, providing insights into the technical aspects and challenges of weaving.

Raja Perhata: Experts knowledgeable about Batak culture, offering contextual understanding and cultural significance of *ulos*.

Traditional Leaders: Authorities with expertise in Batak traditions and customs, contributing

perspectives on the ceremonial and symbolic aspects of *ulos*.

These interviews aim to capture a comprehensive understanding of the *ulos* production process, its cultural importance, and the traditional knowledge associated with it. The qualitative data gathered would help elucidate the complexities of *ulos* weaving and its role within Batak society. Hazar, Ramlan and Arma (2024) claim that *ulos* weaving can be a local wisdom that is typical of Samosir is also a religious teaching that is a belief for religious adherents of some communities, namely the *parmeline* belief as a historical relic that can be a tourist attraction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ulos, a traditional woven cloth of the Batak people, is renowned for its numerous varieties, each serving as a symbolic instrument in the rich tapestry of Batak social interactions. The significance of *ulos* extends far beyond the physical fabric, encompassing the roles of both the giver and the recipient, which adds layers of meaning to the exchange. In Toba Batak culture, the symbolism embedded in *ulos* is reflected through its various types, including *Ragi Hidup*, *Ragi Hotang*, and *Sibolang*. Each type carries unique cultural connotations and is used in specific contexts, reinforcing social bonds and conveying messages that are integral to the Batak way of life.

Ragi Hidup

Ulos Ragi Hidup, from its name, means a style of life. It is so named because its colors, paintings and patterns give the impression as if these *Ulos* are really alive (Siregar et al., 2021). The *Ragi Hidup* motif on *ulos* fabric contains symbols of life, fertility, and sustainability, representing the philosophy of life of the Batak Toba people. Furthermore, the use of *ulos* in various traditional rituals emphasizes the importance of *ulos* as a medium of social communication and cultural identity (Sinulingga, Limbong and Pardede, 2024). This type of *Ulos* consists of three parts, two sides that are woven at once and one middle part which is woven individually very intricately. This *Ulos* is commonly used in traditional wedding ceremonies, and is usually given by the parents of the bride to the mother of the man.

Ragi Hidup, known for its vivid colors, intricate patterns, and designs, is often referred to as "living yeast" due to its vibrant appearance and the dynamic impression it imparts. This *ulos* is

emblematic of life itself, which is why it is a common sight in Batak households. Its primary role is to symbolize vitality and to offer a blessing for a prosperous and fulfilling life. Specifically, *Ragi Hidup* embodies prayers for happiness, particularly in terms of fertility and offspring (*gabe*), and longevity (*saur sarimatua*).

This symbolism aligns with the broader aspirations of the Toba Batak people, who seek to achieve three key goals in their lives, known as the 3H: *Hagabeon* (offspring), *Hasangapon* (wealth), and *Hamoraon* (social status). *Ragi Hidup*, therefore, is not merely a decorative or practical item; it is a profound expression of these fundamental life goals. It represents the Batak people's desires for a prosperous lineage, social advancement, and the accumulation of wealth, all of which are deeply embedded in their cultural values and worldview.

The presence of *Ragi Hidup* in almost every home underscores its importance and the widespread belief in its symbolic power. It serves not only as a physical artifact but also as a cultural emblem of life's continuity, prosperity, and the social values cherished by the Batak community.



Figure 2. *Ragi Hidup*



Figure 3. *Ragi Hidup*

In the traditional Batak wedding ceremony, the *ulos Ragi Hidup* plays a significant role as it is given by the bride's parents to the mother of the groom in a ritual known as *ulos Pargomgom*. This gesture is laden with profound cultural and symbolic meanings that extend beyond the mere act of gift-giving.

The role of Ulos Ragi Hidup in traditional wedding ceremonies

Symbolism of Ulos Ragi Hidup

Ulos Ragi Hidup is recognized for its intricate patterns and vibrant colors, which symbolize life and vitality. Its presentation during the wedding is not just a customary practice but a deeply symbolic act. The *ulos* is imbued with blessings and good wishes for the newlyweds, reflecting the aspirations of the Batak people for a life filled with happiness, health, and prosperity.

Ceremonial significance

The act of presenting *Ragi Hidup* to the groom's mother, also known as *ulos Pargomgom*, carries significant ceremonial weight. In this context, the *ulos* serves as a bridge between two families, symbolizing the formal union of the bride and groom. The gift is a tangible expression of respect, goodwill, and the formal acknowledgment of the new familial bond.

Blessings and protection

According to tradition, the giving of *ulos Ragi Hidup* is accompanied by a profound blessing with the permission of God Almighty. The blessing expresses a hope that the mother of the groom will be able to navigate the various challenges and changes that come with this new phase in her life. It is an acknowledgment of the support and guidance that the bride's family hopes the groom's mother will extend to her son-in-law and his new family.

Continuity and support

The *ulos* symbolizes not only the continuity of family ties but also the ongoing support and mutual respect between the two families. By giving this *ulos*, the bride's family affirms their commitment to a harmonious relationship with the groom's family. It is a gesture of goodwill that signifies the blending of two family lineages and the shared responsibility of nurturing the marital union.

Cultural and spiritual dimension

In addition to its practical and symbolic roles, the *ulos Ragi Hidup* is imbued with a cultural and spiritual dimension. It is believed that the *ulos* carries spiritual significance and that its blessings, coupled with the divine approval, ensure that the couple will be shielded from adversities. The ritual thus reflects the Batak people's deep-seated beliefs in the interconnectedness of the spiritual and the material aspects of life.

Social and emotional impact

The ceremonial exchange of *ulos Ragi Hidup* also has a profound social and emotional impact. For the groom's mother, receiving this *ulos* is a recognition of her role in the new family dynamic and her ongoing influence on her son's life. For the bride's family, it is an opportunity to demonstrate respect and honor towards the groom's family, reinforcing social bonds and mutual respect.

The *ulos Ragi Hidup*, as part of the *ulos Pargomgom* ritual, is much more than a ceremonial gift; it embodies the hopes, blessings, and respect that define the Batak wedding tradition. Through this act, the Batak people honor the union of two families and affirm their commitment to supporting and nurturing this new relationship. The *ulos* serves as a symbol of life, continuity, and divine protection, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs of the Batak community.



Figure 4. *Ulas Ragi Hidup*



Figure 5. *Ulas Ragi Hidup*

Ragi Hotang

Ulos Ragi Hotang including *Ulos* with high status and rank. *Ragi Hotang* comes from two words, namely *ragi* and *hotang*, *Ragi* means pattern and *hotang* means rattan (Siregar et al., 2021). Originally known as *sibolang*, *Ulos Ragi Hotang* holds significant cultural and ceremonial value among the Batak people.

Historically, this type of *ulos* was presented to individuals who contributed to the practice of *mabulangbulangi*, which refers to the respectful honoring of the bride's parents during a traditional wedding. It is in line with Muliono, Iranita & Syah's (2023) who claim that *Ulos Ragi Hotang* is used in wedding traditions. This gesture of respect involved covering the groom's father with the *ulos*, known as *ulos pansaniot*.

In the context of a traditional marriage ceremony, the *Ulos Ragi Hotang*, often referred to as *ulos siholang si toluntuho*, is given by the bride's parents to their son-in-law as *ulos Hela* (son-in-law's *ulos*). This specific type of *ulos* plays an important role in symbolizing the bond between the bride's family and the groom. The

pattern on *Ulos Ragi Hotang*, characterized by its three distinct sections, is known as *Tuho*, which reflects the principle of *Daliha Na Tolu*.



Figure 6. *Ragi Hotang*



Figure 7. *Ragi Hotang*

Roles and symbolism of Ulos Ragi Hotang
Sinulingga, Tampubolon & Siahaan (2024) claim that *ulos* represents a quintessential and signature aspect of North Sumatran culture, notably exemplified by *Ulos Ragi Hotang*, integral to traditional ceremonies within the Toba Batak tribe, such as weddings and funerals. In the rich tapestry of Batak cultural heritage, *Ulos Ragi Hotang* emerges as a prominent symbol with profound significance. This traditional cloth, renowned for its intricate patterns and ceremonial use, is more than just a decorative piece; it embodies the values, social structures, and spiritual beliefs of the Batak people. As we delve into the roles and symbolism of *Ulos Ragi Hotang*, we uncover its multifaceted importance in Batak society.

Historically known as *sibolang*, *Ulos Ragi Hotang* is deeply intertwined with Batak customs and rituals, particularly those associated with marriage ceremonies. Its use in these contexts

reflects a broader spectrum of meaning that extends beyond mere functionality. The *ulos* plays a pivotal role in reinforcing social bonds, honoring familial relationships, and imparting cultural teachings.

This analysis explores how *Ulos Ragi Hotang* functions as a symbol of respect and honor, embodying the social principles of *Dalihan Na Tolu* and serving as a guiding artifact for the son-in-law in his new familial role. The role of this *ulos* in contributing to cultural continuity and identity within the Batak community will also be highlighted.

By understanding these roles and the symbolism embedded in *Ulos Ragi Hotang*, we gain insight into how traditional practices sustain cultural values and social harmony among the Batak people.

Symbol of respect and honor

The presentation of *Ulos Ragi Hotang* to the groom's father during the wedding ceremony signifies a deep level of respect and acknowledgment of the role of the groom's family in the union. This practice highlights the importance of honoring both families involved in the marriage.

Representation of Dalihan Na Tolu

The three sections depicted in the *yeast* (patterns) of the *ulos* symbolize *Dalihan Na Tolu*, a core Batak social principle representing the tripartite structure of Batak society: *Hula-hula* (the wife's family), *Dongan Tubuh* (the husband's family), and *Boruna* (the clan or community). This principle emphasizes the interconnectedness and mutual responsibilities of these groups.

Guidance for the son-in-law

By giving the *Ulos Ragi Hotang* to the son-in-law, the bride's family imparts a symbolic message about social behavior and relationships. The *ulos* serves as a reminder for the son-in-law to navigate his social interactions with care, respect his in-laws, and maintain harmony within the extended family.

Cultural continuity and identity

The use of *Ulos Ragi Hotang* in wedding ceremonies reinforces cultural continuity by adhering to traditional practices and upholding Batak values. It underscores the importance of maintaining cultural identity through ceremonial symbols that embody historical and social significance.

Ulos Ragi Hotang is much more than a ceremonial garment; it is a deeply symbolic artifact that embodies respect, social structure, and cultural values. Its intricate patterns and usage during traditional ceremonies reflect the Batak people's commitment to preserving their heritage and guiding new generations in their social roles and relationships. The *ulos* not only marks significant life events but also reinforces the principles that sustain Batak society.

Sibolang

Sibolang ulos holds profound significance within Batak society, particularly in the context of death and mourning rituals. Its multifaceted role in Batak culture is emblematic of both respect for the deceased and hope for the future. Here is a detailed analysis of the roles and symbolism of *Sibolang ulos*

Honoring the deceased and their relatives

The *Sibolang ulos* plays a central role in funeral ceremonies among the Batak people. Traditionally, this *ulos* is used to honor the relatives of the deceased, reflecting a deep respect and appreciation for the familial connections that remain strong even in death. It signifies the communal acknowledgment of the loss and the importance of family ties.

Acknowledging the widow

During the mourning period, the *Sibolang ulos* is presented to the deceased's wife, symbolizing her transition into widowhood. This act of giving *ulos* signifies both recognition of her new status and an offering of support from the community during her time of grief. It marks her shift from wife to widow, reflecting the societal norms and expectations surrounding mourning and widowhood in Batak culture.

Use in funeral and burial rituals

The *Sibolang ulos* is traditionally used to wrap the corpse during funeral ceremonies. This practice underscores the *ulos*'s role in providing a dignified farewell to the deceased. In the second burial ceremony, known as *Mengongkal Holi* (moving the bones), the *ulos* is again used to wrap the bones. This repetition in its use highlights its significance in ensuring the proper treatment of the deceased's remains and reflects the deep respect Batak culture accords to death and burial practices.

Symbolism in Parompa rituals

In addition to its use in death-related rituals, the *Sibolang ulos* is frequently employed as a *parompa ulos*, a type of *ulos* associated with fertility and the hope for future offspring. The motifs of birds or stars depicted on the *ulos* symbolize the hope that, following the birth of the first child, additional children will follow. This aspect of the *ulos* conveys a cultural desire for family growth and prosperity, blending traditional values with spiritual aspirations.

Cultural continuity and identity



Figure 8. *Sibolang ulos*

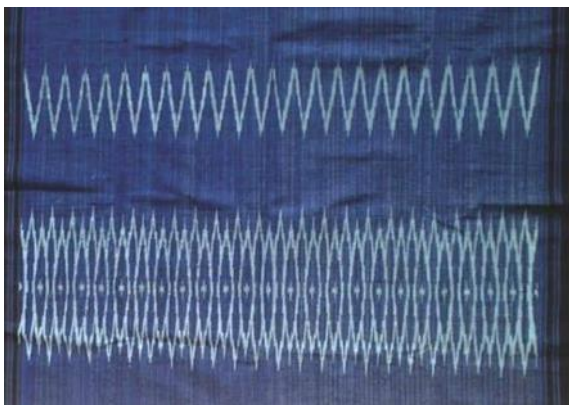


Figure 9. *Sibolang ulos*

The *Sibolang ulos* embodies a continuity of Batak cultural practices and serves as a tangible link between past traditions and present-day customs. By preserving the use of this *ulos* in significant rituals, the Batak community maintains its cultural identity and upholds the values that have been passed down through generations. The *ulos* functions as both a ceremonial object and a symbol of cultural heritage, reinforcing the communal and spiritual bonds within Batak society.

Overall, the *Sibolang ulos* serves multiple roles within Batak society, from honoring the deceased and acknowledging the widow to facilitating important rituals and symbolizing

hope for future generations. Its use in these varied contexts underscores its importance as a cultural artifact, integral to maintaining Batak traditions and identity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the *ulos* is deeply embedded in Batak culture, serving not just as a textile but as a powerful symbol of life, respect, and social obligations. Each type of *ulos* carries distinct meanings: *Ragi Hidup* represents blessings for prosperity, offspring, and longevity, playing a crucial role in wedding ceremonies as a symbol of enduring partnership. *Ragi Hotang*, associated with honoring individuals and social responsibilities, reflects the core values of Batak society, particularly through the principles of *Daliha Na Tolu*. *Sibolang*, used in both mourning and burial ceremonies, symbolizes respect for the deceased and hopes for future generations. The study underscores the *ulos*'s role as more than a cultural artifact; it is a vessel of Batak identity and tradition. This research contributes to the fields of ecolinguistics and Batak cultural studies by illustrating how the *ulos* encapsulates ecological and social values through its symbolic meanings. Future research could explore the evolving significance of the *ulos* in contemporary Batak society or investigate its practical applications in cultural preservation efforts. By understanding and preserving the *ulos*, we sustain the cultural heritage and identity of the Batak people.

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