

Intercultural Communication Study on *Mbaba Kampil* in the Traditional Marriage Process of Karo Society

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the Mbaba Kampil tradition in Karo traditional marriage, focusing on intercultural communication. Using a qualitative approach, this study collected data through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The results show that Mbaba Kampil is not just a ritual, but also a powerful symbol of cultural identity, which strengthens relationships between families from different cultures. The procession serves as a cultural bridge, bridging the differences between Karo people and couples from other cultural backgrounds. Although there are challenges in communication, such as differences in language and cultural understanding, values such as respect, responsibility and mutual appreciation help create harmonious relationships. Despite challenges such as language differences, Karo society has shown significant adaptability without sacrificing cultural identity. Mbaba Kampil remains relevant and valued by the younger generation to serve as a tool for preserving cultural identity. This research can contribute to understanding the dynamics of cultural identity and intercultural communication in the context of traditional marriage.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity in Karo society is strongly influenced by history and traditions that have existed for a long time. Karo society, which is one of the largest Batak tribes in North Sumatra consisting of six ethnic groups, namely Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, Toba, Angkola and Mandailing, has a diverse cultural wealth, ranging from language, art, to customs. Karo cultural identity can be seen from various aspects, such as the use of the Karo language in daily communication, traditional ceremonies that are still carried out, and the values adopted by the community. This shows that cultural identity is not just a symbol, but also an integral part of the daily life of the Karo people. One important element in Karo cultural identity is a strong kinship system. In Karo society, family relationships are highly valued and are the foundation for various aspects of life, including marriage. Like the marriage process, the extended family from both sides has a very important role in determining the agreement and implementation of the ceremony. This confirms that Karo cultural identity is closely related to collective values that prioritize the interests of the family and community.

The Karo traditional wedding process is not only a ritual, but also a means to strengthen intercultural relations. In the Karo traditional wedding, there are several series of activities that begin with Ngarak penganten, Pedalan kampil, Pedalan pengaloen, Mbaba Kampil (ngelegi beru), Adu pengantin and Mereken ajar pedah. In this study, the researcher will discuss Mbaba Kampil. Mbaba Kampil is one of the customs carried out to honor the party giving the wife and the form of respect given is through the provision of a kampil (betel container) containing betel leaves, gambir, areca nut, lime, tobacco and cigarettes. In this case, the husband asks permission from the wife's family to be allowed to pick up the bride which is done by dancing together and accompanied by the song Mbaba Kampil.

The role of Mbaba Kampil in the traditional wedding process is very significant. Apart from being a symbol of respect, this ritual also functions to strengthen relations between families. In a social context, Mbaba Kampil is an important moment to establish communication and cooperation between two families that will unite. (Lumban Tobing, 2022). In the context of Mbaba Kampil, Karo cultural identity is also reflected in the various rituals and symbols used during the wedding ceremony. This ritual not only functions as a ceremony, but also as a way to communicate the values and norms adopted by the community. Mbaba Kampil itself has a deep meaning related to the hopes and prayers of the family for the married couple. This shows that cultural identity not only functions as a binder, but also as a means to convey messages and hopes between generations.

According to research conducted by Herry Firman et al. (2020) regarding the Mukul Ethnic tradition in the Karo community in Seberaya Village, Tiga Panah District, Karo Regency. The study provides valuable insights into the cultural practices of the Karo community, its focus is more limited to the aspect of the Mukul ritual and does not explore the dimensions of intercultural communication in the context of marriage. Therefore, this study will broaden the

scope by emphasizing cultural identity in the marriage process as a means of intercultural communication. One significant difference between the two studies is the focus on the broader social context. Previous studies have focused more on specific rituals, while this study will look at how wedding rituals can be a medium for cultural exchange and understanding between ethnicities.

The challenge of maintaining cultural identity is increasing, but effective intercultural communication can be a solution. By understanding and appreciating differences, the Karo people can interact with other cultures without losing their identity. Therefore, it is important for the Karo people to continue to engage in traditional practices such as Mbaba Kampil, while remaining open to outside cultural influences. This will not only strengthen their cultural identity, but also create space for better dialogue and understanding between cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Almost everyone needs social relationships with other people and this need is met through the exchange of messages that serve as a bridge to unite people who would be isolated without communication. These messages emerge through human behavior. When we wave, smile, make a sour face, nod our heads or give a gesture, we are also behaving. This behavior is a message. These messages are used to communicate something to someone. Before behavior is called a message, it must meet two requirements. (Wiryanto, 2004).

Culture is concerned with the way humans live. Humans learn to think, feel, believe, and strive for what is appropriate according to their culture. Language, friendship, eating habits, communication practices, social actions, economic activities, politics and technology, all of which are based on cultural patterns. Some speak Sundanese, eat snakes, avoid alcoholic drinks made from grapes, bury the dead, talk on the telephone or launch rockets to the moon. This is all because they have been born or at least raised in a culture that contains these elements. What they do, how they act, is a response to their cultural functions. (Larry A. Samovar, 2010).

In the context of Karo traditional marriage, intercultural communication plays an important role in preserving the Mbaba Kampil tradition, which is one of the important rituals in the marriage process. Intercultural communication is a process in which individuals from different cultures interact and try to understand each other. In this case, understanding the values and norms of Karo culture is essential so that the communication process can take place properly. (Gudykunst and Kim, 2003).

Culture includes various aspects, from language, values, norms, to symbols used by a group. In Karo traditional marriage, the cultural values contained in the Mbaba Kampil ritual reflect the identity and beliefs of the Karo people. For example, this ritual involves the procession of escorting the bride to the groom's house involving family and relatives, which shows the importance of social relations in Karo society (Sihombing, 2019).

In the context of Mbaba Kampil, effective communication between the bride's and groom's families is essential to ensure that every step in the wedding procession is carried out in accordance with prevailing traditions. This can be seen from how the bride's family communicates with the groom's family

regarding the various requirements and expectations in the procession (Harahap, 2021).

Social Identity Theory offers an important framework for understanding group dynamics, social identity, and intercultural interactions. By understanding this theory, we can better understand how cultural and social identities influence communication and relationships between individuals and groups (Revo, 2024). Cultural identity can be negotiated through communication. Cultural identity can be negotiated through communication but only under certain conditions. (Muchtar Wahyudi, 2015). This shows that communication plays an important role in the process of preserving and developing cultural identity (Siregar 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research method was chosen in this study to deeply understand the phenomenon of intercultural communication in the preservation of the Mbaba Kampil tradition in the Karo traditional wedding process. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings and experiences of cultural actors in a broader social and cultural context. According to Creswell, qualitative research aims to understand human experiences and how they give meaning to those experiences. In this context, researchers will utilize in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis as data collection methods.

In carrying out this research, researchers will conduct interviews with various parties involved in the traditional wedding process, such as parents, traditional leaders, and the younger generation of the Karo tribe. This aims to obtain diverse perspectives on the preservation of the Mbaba Kampil tradition and how intercultural communication plays a role in the process. Researchers will also conduct direct observations on the implementation of traditional weddings to capture cultural nuances and practices that are not always revealed in interviews (Fathurokhmah, 2024).

The subjects of this study consisted of various individuals involved in the Karo traditional wedding process, both as the main actors and as observers. The main subjects in this study are the prospective bride and groom, parents, and traditional figures who have an important role in the implementation of the Mbaba Kampil tradition. In addition, the younger generation of the Karo Tribe involved in this process will also be used as subjects to gain a broader perspective on the preservation of tradition.

The documents analyzed include historical records, literature on Karo culture, and official documents related to traditional marriage. Through this analysis, researchers can identify patterns of intercultural communication that have existed for a long time and how these patterns have adapted over time. (Denzin, 2011). To ensure the validity of the data, this study will use several strategies, including data triangulation, member checking, and audit trail. Data triangulation is carried out by collecting data from various sources and methods, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. In this way, researchers can compare and confirm findings from various perspectives.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Practice of Mbaba Kampil in the Study of Intercultural Communication in the Traditional Marriage Process of the Karo Community Reflects Cultural Identity

The values contained in Mbaba Kampil, such as respect, responsibility, and kinship, are reflected in the rich symbolism of the procession. The giving of Kampil Kehamaten to Kalimbubu (the maternal family), as explained by Sinar Sembiring, is a symbol of recognition of the important role of Kalimbubu in the lives of the Karo people. Kalimbubu are considered as givers of blessings and protectors, so respect for them is an integral part of every traditional ceremony. This act is not just a gift-giving, but a symbol of deep recognition and respect for the kinship structure and values upheld by the Karo people.

Based on the research findings, it is clear that the Mbaba Kampil tradition is not just a Karo traditional wedding ritual, but an important foundation in the construction and preservation of the cultural identity of the Karo people. Analysis of interviews with various informants, ranging from individuals who have undergone intercultural marriages to traditional figures, academics and local communities, confirms that Mbaba Kampil contains deep symbolic meaning and functions as an effective means of communication to convey Karo cultural values to the next generation and other cultures.

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The practice of Mbaba Kampil also serves as a tool to strengthen the cultural identity of the Karo people. Through participation in this procession, individuals feel an emotional attachment to their traditions. For example, the experience of E.R. Surbakti who described the feeling of emotion and pride while undergoing this procession shows how Mbaba Kampil became a moment that strengthened his cultural identity as a Karo man.

Involvement in this practice not only provides a deep personal experience, but also instills a sense of responsibility to preserve Karo culture. R. Tarigan, a Karo woman who married a man from another culture, stated that Mbaba Kampil is a way to show the uniqueness and characteristics of Karo culture to people who are not from the Karo tribe. This shows that this practice not only maintains identity, but also introduces and expands understanding of Karo culture to the new generation. Although Mbaba Kampil has great potential in facilitating intercultural communication, challenges such as language differences and social changes remain. Several informants noted that the younger generation tends to be more interested in foreign cultures and considers Karo customs as something old-fashioned. Therefore, it is important to instill a sense of love and pride for Karo culture in the younger generation.

Adaptation strategies used by couples involved in Mbaba Kampil include open communication and mutual respect for each other's traditions. Informants such as N. Pernangin-Angin emphasized the importance of open discussions with their partners to reach common ground between the two cultures. This allows both parties to understand and appreciate each other. The practice of Mbaba Kampil in Karo traditional marriages reflects a rich cultural identity and serves as a means of intercultural communication. Through this procession, the cultural values of the Karo people are transmitted and maintained, while also building bridges between different cultures. Social Identity Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals construct their identities and how these identities influence social interactions. In facing the challenges of communication and social change, it is important to maintain and preserve the practice of Mbaba Kampil as a symbol of cultural unity and diversity. In this way, Mbaba Kampil is not only a wedding ritual, but also a means to strengthen cultural identity and build harmonious relationships between two cultures.

Intercultural Communication of Karo Society in the Context of Social Change Without Losing the Essential Cultural Identity

Based on the research results that researcher have studied, the Mbaba Kampil tradition in Karo traditional weddings plays an important role as a bridge between cultures. This tradition is not just a symbolic ritual, but also a means of communication and integration between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, especially in the context of inter-ethnic or even inter-country marriages. This study involved various informants with different backgrounds, including Karo couples with Javanese, Mandailing, Malay, and English, all of whom experienced the Mbaba Kampil process directly. Observations also show that every gift in a Karo traditional wedding has a symbolic meaning. Further findings explain the symbolism in Mbaba Kampil, such as in the giving of kampil and the procession accompanied by songs that describe respect and gratitude. This shows that this ritual is rich in meaning and important for understanding culture.

Observations and findings show that Mbaba Kampil is an important element in Karo traditional weddings. The role, meaning, and challenges faced in this procession reflect the richness of culture and the importance of maintaining the cultural identity of the Karo people, especially in the context of intercultural marriages. Mbaba Kampil is interpreted as an expression of the strong cultural identity of the Karo people. This procession not only shows cultural richness, but also shows a commitment to maintaining and preserving traditional values, such as respect for parents, family, and responsibility. In the case of E.R. Surbakti and N. Pernangin-Angin, Mbaba Kampil is a way to introduce Karo culture to couples and families from outside the tribe, while strengthening relationships between families through understanding the core values of Karo culture.

Mbaba Kampil functions as a means of intercultural communication. In practice, this tradition opens up space for dialogue and cultural exchange. Laila, a Javanese woman, stated that she and her family were able to understand Karo culture more deeply through involvement in the procession. In fact, her family

felt appreciated when treated specially in traditional ceremonies, such as being given Karo traditional clothing and invited to dance together. The same thing was also felt by Opinda from the Mandailing tribe who felt an extraordinary honor and appreciation when she was part of the Mbaba Kampil process, even though she came from a different culture.

The study found that Mbaba Kampil creates a mutually beneficial adaptation space for intercultural couples. Some informants faced challenges such as language differences, understanding the meaning of rituals, and feelings of awkwardness. However, these obstacles can be overcome through open communication, family discussions, and assistance from traditional leaders. For example, in the case of the couple R. Br Ginting and Thomas (both British), adaptation was carried out by learning each other's cultures and making allowances for physical or cultural boundaries that were considered heavy, such as wearing thick traditional clothing in hot weather.

The presence of Mbaba Kampil can strengthen the sense of belonging to a new identity for non-Karo couples. This was very clearly felt by several non-Karo female informants who received the Karo surname and were treated as if they were part of the extended family. This indicates that Mbaba Kampil is not only about customs, but also about social inclusion and cross-cultural acceptance. The husband's family and the traditional community open up a space of acceptance, as experienced by Linda, who felt proud and touched because she was part of a culture that she had previously only known in general.

Mbaba Kampil encourages harmonious multicultural values. Not only as a form of preserving local culture, but also as a medium to build a shared awareness that cultural differences are not barriers, but rather wealth that can be united in a family institution. Values such as mutual respect, honor, and openness become the foundation of communication built during and after the Mbaba Kampil procession. From a number of interviews with informants who have intercultural marriages such as Karo couples with Javanese, Mandailing, Malay, and even English, it was found that intercultural communication can take place effectively when both parties have an attitude of mutual respect and are willing to adapt (Humaizi et al., 2024; Mailin et al., 2023). For example, the couple E.R Surbakti and his Javanese wife showed that Mbaba Kampil was a means of introducing Karo values, such as respect and responsibility. They also went through a two-way communication process, where each partner learned about each other's culture.

Similarly, Dr. Drs Irfan, M.Sc., agreed that customs, especially in the context of Karo marriage through the practice of Mbaba Kampil, have an important role in affirming the cultural identity of the Karo people. Every cultural element, including symbols such as kampil, sirih, and other artifacts, hold deep meanings that reflect the status and respect for the woman's family. Dr. Irfan emphasized that in intercultural marriages, it is important to involve both groups so that they can unite in one family. Giving a surname to the non-Karo party is an important step in carrying out customs.

He also highlighted the need for the younger generation to understand and preserve cultural values, such as politeness and respect, which are the

essence of cultural identity. By maintaining these values, the Karo people can continue to adapt to changing times without losing their identity. Dr. Irfan added that culture is dynamic, and what needs to be preserved is not only the procedures, but also the values contained therein. Adaptation occurs in various forms. For example, non-Karo families also wear Karo traditional clothing and participate in the Mbaba Kampil dance and ritual, as a form of acceptance and appreciation for the couple's tribal culture. There is also a compromise between the customs of each party, such as the implementation of two types of wedding processions: one according to Karo customs, and the other according to the customs of the wife's or husband's family. This reflects flexibility and collaboration in building a new cultural unity in marriage.

The case of a cross-border couple (Karo-English) shows that adaptation requires a longer process, but can still be achieved through open communication and support from the extended family. Thomas, the English husband of R. Br Ginting, showed high enthusiasm in getting to know and following Karo customs. Despite experiencing physical challenges such as overheating because of the traditional clothes, he felt very appreciated and accepted by his wife's extended family.

The main obstacles found were differences in language and understanding of traditional symbols. Several couples admitted that it was difficult for non-Karo partners to understand the full meaning of the traditional procession due to language limitations. However, these challenges are overcome with informal approaches such as casual explanations from the family, the use of Indonesian as a bridge, or re-watching traditional wedding videos which are then explained narratively by the Karo couple.

In general, research shows that intercultural communication in Karo traditional weddings does not only occur verbally, but also symbolically and emotionally. Traditional processions such as Mbaba Kampil carry values that can be understood across cultures, such as parental affection, the responsibility of the couple, and the harmony of the extended family. Even those from non-Karo cultures feel a strong sense of warmth and appreciation, thus strengthening integration and a sense of belonging to the new family (Dalimunthe, 2022).

Thus, intercultural marriage in the Karo community is not a barrier, but an opportunity to broaden horizons, strengthen values of togetherness, and create a form of harmonious and tolerant cross-cultural communication. Mbaba Kampil is a symbol of the success of intercultural communication that is not only symbolic, but also practical and emotional, which ultimately unites two different worlds in a strong bond of marriage.

Social Identification Through Mbaba Kampil. Based on research findings, Karo individuals who practice the Mbaba Kampil tradition expressed that they felt more emotionally and spiritually connected to their ethnic identity. Examples from E.R. Surbakti and N. Pernangin-Angin show that the implementation of Mbaba Kampil is not only a traditional ritual, but also a way to affirm who they are as part of the Karo ethnic group. This is in accordance with the process of social identification in Tajfel's theory, where individuals feel proud and committed to their cultural group. In this case, previous research such as that

conducted by Dwi Tris Apriani, highlighted how the Karo people utilize plants in their traditional rituals. This study shows that knowledge about plants has a rich symbolic value, similar to how Mbaba Kampil reflects Karo cultural identity. This study shows that cultural preservation can be done in innovative ways, even in the context of social change. Cindi Klaudia br. Girsang et al also highlighted the importance of poetry in Karo wedding ceremonies that contain moral messages and cultural values. This is in line with how Mbaba Kampil functions not only as a ritual, but as a medium to convey values and hopes to the bride and groom.

In this way, the Karo people maintain their traditional values while adapting to changing times. The Karo people have succeeded in carrying out intercultural communication in the context of social change by maintaining the essence of their cultural identity through the practice of Mbaba Kampil. Despite facing challenges, they are able to adapt by implementing effective and open communication strategies. Previous research shows that the cultural values contained in Karo customary practices remain relevant and important to preserve. Thus, Mbaba Kampil is not only a tradition, but also a symbol of unity and harmony that connects various cultures in a modern context.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mbaba Kampil is not just a procession to welcome the bride, but also a symbol of respect for the bride's family. In this tradition, values such as family, responsibility, and respect for ancestors are prioritized that this tradition is a way to show seriousness and commitment in establishing a relationship, especially when marrying a partner from a different culture. This shows that Mbaba Kampil functions as a cultural bridge that connects two families, allowing them to get to know and appreciate each other. The Mbaba Kampil process also functions as a means of intercultural communication. The importance of this tradition in establishing understanding between the husband and wife's families. Through participation in this procession, families from other cultures can learn about the values upheld by the Karo people. In addition, involvement in Mbaba Kampil helps reduce the potential for misunderstandings that often occur due to cultural differences. Thus, this tradition not only introduces Karo culture, but also creates a harmonious dialogue space. Although Mbaba Kampil has great potential in strengthening intercultural communication, challenges remain, especially in terms of language and understanding traditional symbols. Several informants admitted that it was difficult for non-Karo couples to understand the full meaning of this procession. However, this challenge can be overcome through open communication, family discussions, and support from traditional leaders. This shows that openness and willingness to learn from each other are key in dealing with cultural differences.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Advanced research on the Mbaba Kampil tradition can explore its role as a dynamic medium of intercultural communication and conflict prevention in multicultural marriages, particularly within the increasingly globalized and pluralistic context of modern Indonesia. A qualitative ethnographic approach

combined with intercultural communication theory could be employed to investigate how symbolic rituals, language, and traditional narratives embedded in Mbaba Kampil foster mutual understanding and social cohesion between culturally diverse families. Furthermore, research could examine the mechanisms through which traditional leaders and community elders mediate cultural translation and interpretation, thus functioning as informal cultural educators. Investigating the adaptive capacity of Mbaba Kampil in contemporary settings such as urban diasporas or interethnic unions could yield valuable insights into how indigenous customs evolve to remain relevant while preserving their core values.

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