



The Symbolic Meaning of Taboo Expressions in The Mourning Tradition of The Gorontalo Community and Their Relevance to Indonesian Language Learning

Fitrawati R. Usman¹, Dakia N. Djou², Asna Ntelu³

^{1,2,3} Indonesian Language Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas
Negeri Gorontalo

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-23	<i>This study examines the forms and symbolic meanings of taboo expressions in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community and their relevance to Indonesian language learning. Academically, this study is important because mourning taboo expressions represent local cultural knowledge reflecting social values, belief systems, and symbolic communication practices that remain underexplored. The novelty of this study lies in applying Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic perspective to analyze mourning taboo expressions and connect their cultural meanings to educational contexts. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach through fieldwork conducted in Tibawa District, Gorontalo Regency, involving 10 informants. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings identified 15 taboo expressions classified into three categories: five direct taboo expressions, two indirect taboo expressions, and eight myth-based taboo expressions. Semiotic analysis revealed that these expressions function not only as social prohibitions but also as ideological and cultural instruments for transmitting local values across generations. The findings are relevant to local wisdom-based literacy and explanatory text materials in Indonesian language learning.</i>
Keywords: Symbolic Meaning; Taboo; Mourning Tradition	
DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10539	
Corresponding Author: Fitrawati R. Usman fitrawatiusman06@gmail.com Indonesian Language Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo	

1. Introduction

Indonesia, as a country with diverse ethnic groups and cultures, possesses a rich variety of traditions. Each region preserves unique customs practiced by its community. Tradition is defined as a pattern of behavior that has become habitual within a particular system, generally ceremonial in nature, and can be carried out individually or collectively according to its own implementation rules. Traditions do not emerge spontaneously; rather, they are formed through processes of socialization and the internalization of values that develop within a community (Mujiwati, 2024). Based on this perspective, preserving traditions in every region is essential.

Hasibuan (2020) argues that preserving local traditions is essentially a form of appreciation for national identity, cultural richness, and valuable cultural heritage. However, the era of globalization presents significant challenges to the sustainability of these cultural practices. The influx of popular culture, increasing urbanization, and changes in people's lifestyles have gradually weakened the existence of traditions and local cultural practices. As society becomes increasingly modern and rational, various traditional practices have gradually begun to lose their original meanings. In cultural studies, however, every customary practice carries meaning. Therefore, it is important to examine this issue through a more scientific and interpretative approach.

In a semiotic perspective, symbols or signs are understood as fundamental elements in the process of cultural communication. Signs are not limited to spoken or written language; they can also appear in the form of colors, objects, clothing, body movements, expressions, motifs, writings, and specific behavioral patterns. These elements function as signifiers that refer to particular meanings (signified) collectively agreed upon by society. Thus, cultural symbols function similarly to language by conveying messages, values, and social rules through forms that are not always explicit, Barthes in (Swandhani et al. 2023).

Symbolic meaning is not objective or universal; rather, it is influenced by social conventions and the cultural context in which symbols are used. A symbol may have different meanings when transferred from one community to another. For example, in most Indonesian cultures, the color black is often associated with mourning, loss, or death. However, in other cultures, the same color is considered inappropriate or taboo in mourning traditions. In line with this, Miswar & Muler (2022) explain that color is not merely a visual appearance but also functions as a medium for conveying feelings and certain atmospheres. The same applies to body movements, traditional clothing, ritual objects, and expressions, all of which acquire meaning through social agreement as part of a system of signs containing symbolic values.

In relation to the threat of modernity that gradually erodes the meaning of tradition, it is important to observe how some communities continue to preserve their cultural practices in their entirety. One tradition that continues to be

maintained despite changing times is the way communities deal with death. Every society has its own distinctive way of responding to death, reflected in rituals, symbols, and procedures passed down through generations. These practices are not merely expressions of emotional responses to loss but also reflect cultural values, belief systems, and the worldview embraced by a particular community.

Mustamin et al. (2021) state that Gorontalo is one of the regions in Indonesia that is rich in traditions and local cultural values that remain deeply rooted and strongly preserved, particularly in dealing with death-related events. Mourning traditions in Gorontalo society are not merely social rituals but are also deeply embedded with meanings derived from collectively shared systems of values and beliefs. One prominent aspect of this tradition is the existence of various taboos that must be observed by grieving families.

Taboos or *pamali* are understood as forms of cultural prohibitions that have traditionally been believed to be inviolable across generations. These prohibitions are not merely arbitrary rules; rather, they embody collective beliefs that violating *pamali* may bring misfortune or harmful consequences to those who disobey them. Such beliefs have developed within society as a mechanism of social control aimed at maintaining order and harmony in accordance with collectively upheld customary and spiritual values (Tasik et al. 2022).

Jeferson (2022) explains that taboos, prohibitions, or *pamali* are forms of warnings inherited from previous generations in societies still strongly influenced by mystical elements. These expressions follow specific patterns and are transmitted orally from one generation to another, usually through advice given by elders such as grandparents. According to Harpriyanti & Komalasari (2018), these taboos contain values related to the character of discipline. The value of discipline refers to attitudes reflecting orderliness and obedience to prevailing rules and regulations.

The Gorontalo language holds an important position as part of the social and cultural system of the community. In daily life, the Gorontalo language functions as a means of communication used to convey ideas, feelings, and information among community members (Djou & Ntelu, 2021). Its use is not limited to informal situations but also extends to customary and traditional contexts.

This indicates that the Gorontalo language possesses a structured system of rules governing its usage. Furthermore, the Gorontalo language also serves as a medium for cultural transmission through regional literature and traditional expressions containing values, norms, and local wisdom. Therefore, the sustainability of the Gorontalo language is closely linked to the continuity of the community's culture itself.

Furthermore, the Gorontalo language has functions that extend beyond communication. According to Nua (2023), the language functions as a medium of social interaction that facilitates harmonious relationships among community members. The use of a shared language can build emotional closeness while

strengthening social solidarity. In addition, the Gorontalo language also functions as a medium of cultural transmission through the communication of traditional values, customs, and cultural practices, including mourning traditions rich in meaning. In religious contexts, the Gorontalo language is used to convey religious messages through prayers, advice, and customary rituals with spiritual dimensions. Moreover, the Gorontalo language also has a symbolic function because various expressions, taboos, and proverbs contain implicit meanings reflecting the worldview and beliefs of the community. Thus, the Gorontalo language serves not only as a communication tool but also as a symbolic system representing the social and cultural realities of Gorontalo society.

Saussure in Shilina & Zarifian (2023) Ferdinand de Saussure defined “semiology” as “a science that investigates the role of signs as part of social life”, in contrast to Charles Sanders Peirce, who viewed “semiotics” from a logical perspective with the aim of constructing a “formal doctrine of signs”. While Saussure’s key concept was “structure,” Peirce’s model emphasized “process,” suggesting that even human cognitive processes are social in nature. According to Peirce, “Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign.”

In this study, the analytical focus is directed toward the semiotic theory developed by Ferdinand de Saussure as its primary theoretical foundation (Pambudi, 2023). Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic theory is employed because this study focuses on uncovering symbolic meanings through the relationship between the signifier and the signified found in taboo expressions within the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community.

Saussure’s theory was selected because it views signs as systems composed of linguistic forms and interconnected concepts of meaning. This approach is relevant to the object of study, namely taboo expressions manifested in spoken language, as the analysis not only examines utterances as sequences of words but also explores the cultural meanings constructed behind these expressions. Compared to other semiotic theories, such as Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory, which emphasizes the triadic relationship among representamen, object, and interpretant, or Roland Barthes’ theory, which focuses more on myths and connotative meanings in popular culture, Saussure’s theory is considered more appropriate because this study seeks to identify the direct relationship between expressions as signifiers and cultural concepts or meanings as signifieds. Therefore, Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory is considered more capable of systematically explaining the structure of meaning embedded in taboo expressions within mourning traditions according to the study’s focus and objectives.

Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory views every cultural sign as consisting of a signifier and a signified, which together construct meaning within a social system. Ferdinand de Saussure classified signs into two principal elements: the signifier, referring to the physical form or external manifestation of a sign, and the signified, referring to the meaning or concept conveyed by the sign. Saussure argued that

signs do not exist independently but are formed through a systematic relationship between signifiers and signifieds within human cognitive structures. This process of meaning-making occurs mentally and becomes part of a linguistic or cultural system existing within the collective cognition of society (Susanti, 2025).

Based on the preceding discussion, this study was conducted to examine local culture, particularly the symbolic meanings embedded in cultural practices that have often been understood merely in descriptive terms. Studies on taboo expressions in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community from a semiotic perspective remain limited, despite the fact that such practices contain rich cultural, spiritual, and social values. This study aims to reveal how taboos in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community function as signs representing societal values, beliefs, and social structures. Therefore, this study is important for reconstructing a deeper understanding of traditions that are gradually being neglected.

Several previous studies relevant to this research include: 1) Syamsiah et al. (2022), in a study entitled *Ungkapan Pantang Larang dalam Masyarakat Bugis Desa Simbur Naik Kabupaten Tanjung Jabung Timur (Kajian Semiotika)*. This study examined the meanings of Bugis taboo expressions using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and found that taboo expressions function as reinforcements of religious values, educational values, and social control. However, the study focused more on denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in taboo expressions generally and did not examine the relationship between signifiers and signifieds within the linguistic structure of taboo expressions; 2) Lie et al. (2020), in a study entitled *Makna Simbol Ritual Kematian pada Suku Dayak Bahau Busang di Kabupaten Mahakam Ulu*.

This study examined symbols in the death rituals of the Dayak Bahau community using George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism theory. However, its focus was directed more toward social interaction and symbolic meanings in death rituals in general rather than taboo expressions as forms of cultural language; 3) Gaol & Meo (2025), in a study entitled *Simbolisme Ulos dalam Tradisi Kematian Masyarakat Batak Toba*. This study investigated the symbolic meaning of *ulos* in Batak Toba death traditions using Clifford Geertz's symbolic interpretative perspective. The study focused on cultural objects as representations of societal values and did not examine symbols manifested through oral expressions or cultural taboos.

Based on these three previous studies, there are similarities with the present study in that they all examine symbols and cultural meanings within community life. However, previous studies have focused more on rituals, symbolic objects, and cultural meanings in general while employing different theoretical perspectives. To date, no study has specifically examined the symbolic meanings of taboo expressions in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory through an analysis of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In addition, previous studies have not

linked the findings of cultural studies with their application in Indonesian language learning. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining taboo expressions as a system of signs that represent the cultural values of the Gorontalo community while also connecting them to educational contexts.

Furthermore, this study is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of Indonesian local cultural studies within a more systematic and academically oriented framework. Based on this background, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled *"The Symbolic Meaning of Taboo Expressions in the Mourning Tradition of the Gorontalo Community and Their Relevance to Indonesian Language Learning."* This title reflects the study's focus on taboo expressions within the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community, employing Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory as the primary analytical framework.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive method with a qualitative research design and a semiotic approach. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to understand and interpret the symbolic meanings of taboo expressions in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community in depth based on the community's social and cultural context. The study was conducted in Tibawa District, Gorontalo Regency, as an area that still preserves mourning traditions practiced across generations.

The participants consisted of 10 informants aged between 40–75 years. The informants included traditional leaders, community leaders, family members who had been directly involved in mourning traditions, and community members who understood and still practiced the Gorontalo mourning tradition. Informants were selected using a *purposive sampling* technique, in which participants were chosen based on specific considerations relevant to the study objectives. The criteria for selecting informants included: (1) having knowledge of the Gorontalo mourning tradition, (2) having direct involvement in mourning practices, (3) understanding taboo expressions used within the tradition, and (4) being willing to provide information openly.

The research data consisted of taboo expressions found in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using interview guidelines. The interview questions focused on the forms of taboo expressions, meanings believed by the community, contexts of use, and reasons for the intergenerational transmission of such expressions. During the interview process, field notes and documentation were also used to support the data collection process. Observations were conducted to examine mourning practices still performed within the community, while documentation was used to collect supporting materials such as notes, recordings, photographs, and other related

documents.

The taboo expressions obtained were then classified into three categories: direct taboos, indirect taboos, and myth-based taboos. The classification was conducted according to the form of expression. Direct taboos refer to explicitly stated prohibitions, indirect taboos are conveyed implicitly or through figurative expressions, whereas myth-based taboos contain beliefs regarding particular consequences if the prohibitions are violated.

Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman model consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Furthermore, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis was conducted through several stages: (1) identifying taboo expressions found in the field, (2) classifying the types of taboo expressions, (3) determining the signifier represented by the form of expression, (4) identifying the signified represented by cultural concepts or meanings, (5) analyzing the relationship between signifier and signified, and (6) interpreting the symbolic meanings and cultural values embedded within the expressions.

The analysis process employed a coding table to facilitate the identification of semiotic elements. An example of the coding process is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Example of Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotic Data Coding

No	Taboo Expression	Signifier	Signified	Symbolic Meaning
1	The deceased must not be falling on the family members to accept and sincerely touched by deceased toward the let go of the deceased tears	Tears	Emotional attachment of family members to accept and sincerely toward the let go of the deceased	Encouragement

This study considered ethical aspects by obtaining informants' consent before conducting interviews. The researcher also paid attention to cultural sensitivity since the study involved mourning traditions considered sacred within the community. Informants' identities were kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. To minimize researcher subjectivity, source triangulation and method triangulation were employed. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different informants, while method triangulation involved comparing interview, observation, and documentation findings. In addition, the researcher reconfirmed interpretations with several informants to ensure consistency between interpretation and the community's cultural context.

3. Result

Type and Forms Symbolic Meanings of Prohibitive Expressions in the Mourning Traditions of Gorontalo Society

This section presents the research findings based on the types of taboo expressions found in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community. The classification was conducted to identify the characteristics of each expression according to its mode of delivery. Based on the findings, 15 taboo expressions were identified and classified into three categories: direct taboo expressions, indirect taboo expressions, and myth-based taboo expressions. This classification demonstrates the variety of ways in which the Gorontalo community expresses and transmits cultural values through mourning traditions.

Table 2. Summary Table of Taboo Expressions in the Gorontalo Mourning Tradition

No	Taboo Expression	Type	Signifier	Signified	Cultural Function
1	Expressing pity toward the deceased is prohibited	Direct	Expressions of pity and regret	Sincere acceptance of death	Regulating of emotional expression
2	Speaking of the deceased's bad qualities is prohibited	Direct	Discussion of the deceased's faults	Respect for personal dignity	Maintaining communication ethics
3	The deceased must not be touched by tears	Direct	Tears touching the body	Excessive emotional attachment	Controlling emotional expression
4	Wearing bright-colored clothing is prohibited	Direct	Bright clothing	Modesty and respect	Creating and collective symbols of mourning
5	Neighbors are prohibited from holding celebrations unless through <i>tonggu</i> tradition	Direct	Restriction of entertainment activities	Respect toward grieving families	Maintaining social harmony
6	Maintaining a calm atmosphere during the dying process	Indirect	Avoiding disturbances and loud sounds	Respect for the dying process	Maintaining spiritual calmness
7	Prioritizing burial over serving guests	Indirect	Not serving food before burial	Prioritizing funeral obligations	Strengthening solidarity
8	The deceased	Myth	A cat crossing	Belief	in Regulating

No	Taboo Expression	Type	Signifier	Signified	Cultural Function
	must not be stepped over by a cat		over deceased	the supernatural consequences	collective behavior
9	People should not immediately enter the house after attending a funeral	Myth	Spitting cleansing oneself	or Protection from negative influences	Maintaining domestic purity
10	Attendees should not sneeze during the funeral process	Myth	Sneezing during the ritual	A sign of ritual incompatibility	Preserving ritual sacredness
11	Cooking or consuming water spinach is prohibited	Myth	Water spinach	Symbolic meaning during mourning	Maintaining adherence to customs
12	Cooking or consuming layered food is prohibited	Myth	Layered foods	Specific symbolic meanings	Preserving symbolic values
13	Cooking or consuming sweet potatoes is prohibited	Myth	Sweet potatoes	Traditional belief	Strengthening social solidarity
14	The funeral bier must not be returned with its attributes still attached	Myth	Attributes attached to the bier	Traditional belief Completion of ritual processes	Maintaining of ritual order
15	Food for <i>doa aruwa</i> must not be passed directly hand-to-hand	Myth	Direct hand-to-hand transfer of food	Compliance with ritual rules	Maintaining ritual order

Direct Taboo Expressions

Direct taboo expressions refer to prohibitions delivered firmly and explicitly

without the use of complex figurative meanings. Based on the findings, five expressions were categorized into this type.

Data 1: Expressing pity toward the deceased is prohibited

This taboo was identified as a prohibition against family members expressing excessive pity or regret toward the deceased. Based on interview findings, this expression commonly appears when family members show deep sorrow regarding matters, they were unable to fulfill during the deceased's lifetime.

Data 2: Speaking about the deceased's bad qualities is prohibited

This taboo concerns the prohibition against mentioning the mistakes, faults, or shortcomings of the deceased. Field findings indicate that community members avoid conversations that may diminish the dignity of those who have passed away.

Data 3: The deceased must not be touched by tears

This taboo commonly appears when family members have their final interactions with the deceased. Observational findings showed that mourners often remind family members not to let their tears touch the body of the deceased, particularly during highly emotional moments.

Data 4: Wearing bright-colored clothing is prohibited

This taboo is related to clothing practices during mourning periods. Mourners generally avoid bright or striking colors and tend to wear colors considered appropriate for mourning situations.

Data 5: Neighbors are prohibited from holding entertainment activities or celebrations except through the *tonggu* tradition

This taboo takes the form of a prohibition against organizing entertainment activities or celebrations near a mourning household. However, if an event had already been planned beforehand, the Gorontalo community has a customary mechanism known as *tonggu* as a form of requesting permission from the grieving family.

Indirect Taboo Expressions

Indirect taboo expressions refer to prohibitions conveyed implicitly and understood through the community's cultural context. Based on the findings, two expressions were categorized into this type.

Data 6: Maintaining a calm atmosphere during the dying process

Findings indicate that community members attempt to maintain a peaceful atmosphere around individuals experiencing the final stages of life. Actions such as loud crying, causing disturbances, or creating sudden shocks are avoided during this period.

Data 7: Prioritizing funeral procedures over serving refreshments to mourners

Based on observational findings, grieving families do not provide food or drinks while the deceased remains in the house. Refreshments are generally served after the burial process and are often prepared by community members.

Myth-Based Taboo Expressions

Myth-based taboo expressions refer to prohibitions associated with inherited beliefs regarding specific consequences if such taboos are violated. Based on the findings, eight expressions were categorized into this type.

Data 8: The deceased must not be stepped over by a cat

This taboo is associated with the belief that a corpse should not be stepped over by a cat. According to interviews, this belief has led to the practice of continuously guarding the deceased until burial.

Data 9: People should not immediately enter the house after attending a funeral before cleansing themselves

This taboo is practiced by spitting or washing certain body parts before entering the house. This practice is especially emphasized for mourners who have infants or young children at home.

Data 10: Attendees should not sneeze during funeral ceremonies

This taboo is related to bodily responses while attending mourning rituals or funeral ceremonies. If sneezing occurs, community members usually perform certain symbolic actions as a response.

Data 11: Cooking or consuming water spinach is prohibited

This taboo concerns the prohibition against cooking or consuming water spinach during the mourning period. The restriction primarily applies to grieving families.

Data 12: Cooking or consuming layered foods is prohibited

Community members avoid foods with layered structures, such as layered cakes, during mourning periods. This taboo has been transmitted across generations.

Data 13: Cooking or consuming sweet potatoes is prohibited

This taboo applies to family members and close relatives during mourning periods. Sweet potatoes are avoided in all forms of preparation.

Data 14: The funeral bier should not be returned while its attributes are still attached

Findings indicate that attributes used during funeral processions must be removed before the bier is returned. This practice forms part of the customary procedures observed by the community.

Data 15: Food during *doa aruwa* should not be passed directly from hand to hand

This taboo concerns the process of transferring food from the kitchen to the prayer area. Food should not be passed directly from one person to another but must first be placed on an intermediary surface before being transferred.

Overall, the findings indicate that taboo expressions in the mourning tradition of the Gorontalo community function not only as behavioral restrictions but also as social rules transmitted across generations. The variation in these expressions reflects the interconnectedness of language, cultural practices, and belief systems within Gorontalo society.

4. Discussion

Type and Forms Symbolic Meanings of Prohibitive Expressions in the Mourning Traditions of Gorontalo Society

This section integrates the analysis of taboo expression types and their symbolic meanings because both are closely interconnected within the cultural sign system of the community. The findings identified three categories of taboo expressions: direct taboo expressions, indirect taboo expressions, and mythical taboo expressions. These classifications indicate that taboos do not merely function as verbal prohibitions but also operate as cultural mechanisms that regulate behavior, instill values, and maintain social structures within the

community.

This finding is in line with Putra E.A., et al. (2023:75), who explain that taboo expressions may appear through direct prohibitions, indirect forms, or mythological constructions linking actions with specific consequences. In a cultural context, these constructions do not merely function as customary rules but also create symbolic systems that shape social actions. This view is reinforced by Setiani & Widyastuti (2025:24), who argue that myth-based taboos possess regulatory functions because they operate through collective beliefs regarding social and symbolic consequences.

From a broader perspective, the existence of taboos may also be understood as a form of symbolic power within society. Prohibitions are not necessarily maintained through formal sanctions but operate through collective awareness, leading individuals to obey cultural rules without direct coercion. Such mechanisms demonstrate how culture works subtly through internalization and social consciousness. Therefore, taboo expressions function not only as cultural heritage but also as ideological instruments shaping societal perspectives concerning death, grief, and socially acceptable behavior.

The Deceased Must Not Be Touched by Tears

One of the direct taboo expressions identified in the Gorontalo mourning tradition is the prohibition against tears touching the deceased. This expression is conveyed explicitly, placing it within the category of direct taboo expressions. Although linguistically simple, this expression carries substantial symbolic significance because it emerges during emotionally sensitive moments, especially when family members confront their final farewell to the deceased.

From Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic perspective, tears function as the signifier, namely the visible physical manifestation of crying. Meanwhile, the signified refers to concepts such as emotional attachment, unwillingness to let go, or difficulty accepting separation. The relationship between signifier and signified creates a system of meaning collectively understood within Gorontalo culture. This symbolic meaning demonstrates that society does not merely perceive tears as biological responses but as representations of emotional ties between the living and the deceased. Excessive expressions of grief are viewed as potentially disturbing the solemnity of the mourning atmosphere.

This perspective illustrates how culture regulates emotional expression through social mechanisms. Society indirectly establishes standards regarding how grief should be expressed. From an anthropological perspective, emotions are not solely individual experiences but are socially constructed through cultural norms. This finding also reveals the relationship between local culture and Islamic values. As explained by Nteli (2012:139), individuals are encouraged to maintain proper conduct near the deceased and avoid excessive lamentation. Thus, this taboo does not stand independently but emerges from the interaction between local cultural

values and religious teachings.

This finding also corresponds with Syamsiah et al. (2022), who found that taboos function not only as customary prohibitions but also as mechanisms for strengthening religious values, education, and social control. However, unlike that study, which employed Roland Barthes' perspective focusing on connotation and myth, this study reveals a direct relationship between linguistic forms and cultural concepts through Ferdinand de Saussure's signifier-signified analysis. Furthermore, the persistence of this taboo within contemporary society demonstrates the existence of collective memory continuously transmitted across generations. Although younger generations may no longer fully understand its origins rationally, the practice remains preserved because it has become part of Gorontalo cultural identity. Therefore, this taboo not only regulates individual behavior but also constructs collective morality concerning respect toward death.

Prioritizing Burial Proceedings over Serving Guests

Another finding revealed an indirect taboo involving the prioritization of burial proceedings over serving food to visitors. This taboo is rarely expressed through explicit prohibitions but survives through social practices transmitted across generations.

From Ferdinand de Saussure's perspective, prioritizing funeral arrangements functions as the signifier, while the signified refers to respect for the deceased, sacred priorities, and social solidarity. The relationship between signifier and signified demonstrates that funeral processes are not merely technical procedures but symbols representing Gorontalo societal values. Neonnub & Habsari (2018:109) explain that traditions function as unwritten social laws guiding societal behavior. Within this context, the taboo shapes social structures by directing communal attention toward honoring the deceased rather than prioritizing other matters.

From a critical perspective, this taboo also demonstrates cultural hegemony. Community members comply not because of formal coercion but because the practice has been internalized as socially natural and unquestioned. Such collective consciousness allows traditions to operate without explicit enforcement. This finding parallels Lumban Gaol and Lena Meo (2025), who found that symbols in Batak Toba death traditions extend beyond ritual functions and contribute to social solidarity. Nevertheless, modernity introduces new tensions. Urban communities increasingly prioritize efficiency, resulting in shortened ritual practices. However, Gorontalo communities continue preserving these traditions as forms of cultural respect. This situation illustrates ongoing negotiations between tradition and modernity.

Prohibition Against Cooking or Consuming Water Spinach

One form of mythical taboo identified in this study is the prohibition against cooking or consuming water spinach during mourning periods. From Ferdinand de

Saussure's perspective, water spinach functions as the signifier through its physical characteristics, namely its spreading roots and creeping growth patterns. The signified, meanwhile, refers to the concept of grief that spreads, extends, and potentially affects other family members. This relationship demonstrates how everyday objects undergo symbolic cultural construction.

Barthes in (Riyadi Swandhani & Wahjudi, 2023:184) explains that cultural symbols can become attached to ordinary objects through social processes. Within this context, water spinach is no longer understood merely as food but as a culturally symbolic object. Furthermore, from an ecological perspective, the persistence of this taboo cannot be separated from Gorontalo's historically agrarian social structure. As explained by Thayer in (Mega Sari, 2018:158), environmental conditions may influence the formation of cultural symbols.

This taboo also demonstrates how culture constructs collective morality. Community members continue practicing the prohibition despite lacking rational explanations regarding its origins. This persistence indicates that cultural power does not depend entirely upon logical proof but rather upon the intergenerational transmission of meaning. The survival of this taboo within modern society reflects tensions between modern rationality and traditional belief systems. Modern perspectives frequently demand empirical explanations for cultural practices. However, the community continues preserving these taboos because they have become embedded within Gorontalo identity and collective memory.

In addition to cultural implications, this study also has pedagogical implications. The findings may be implemented in Indonesian language learning based on local wisdom through cultural explanation texts, symbolic meaning analysis, and literacy projects. Students may be encouraged to identify signifiers and signified concepts within local cultural practices, thereby creating more contextual learning experiences.

The Relevance of the Research to Indonesian Language Learning

The relevance of this research to Indonesian language learning demonstrates that language cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts surrounding it. Prohibitive expressions in the Gorontalo mourning tradition represent a form of language rich in meaning and function as a medium for representing the collective values of the community. Therefore, their relevance in learning becomes important as an effort to provide contextual and meaningful learning materials.

The use of prohibitive expressions as teaching materials can help students understand that language is not merely a means of communication, but also a system of signs containing symbolic meanings. In addition, the integration of the findings of this research into Indonesian language learning also supports a culturally responsive teaching approach. Students are encouraged to recognize, understand, and appreciate their own local culture. Based on this, learning

becomes closer to the students' real-life experiences, thereby increasing their motivation and engagement in the learning process.

From the perspective of character building, prohibitive expressions in mourning traditions contain values such as guarding one's speech, respecting others, and adhering to social and religious norms. These values are in line with the goals of national education, which emphasize not only cognitive aspects but also affective and moral dimensions. Therefore, the utilization of this research in Indonesian language learning can contribute to shaping students who are ethical and culturally aware. In conclusion, the relevance of this research lies not only in its alignment with the Basic Competencies in the curriculum, but also in its contribution to creating contextual, meaningful learning that is oriented toward strengthening cultural values and students' character development.

Indonesian language learning in a pedagogical context plays an important role as both an intellectual and cultural medium capable of preserving the continuity of local traditions. Literacy is not only interpreted as the ability to read and write, but also includes the ability to think critically, understand the cultural meanings embedded in an expression, and express ideas according to the social and cultural context of society (Fareza et al., 2025). This aligns with the aim of this research, which positions prohibitive expressions in mourning traditions as part of cultural texts rich in meaning.

Therefore, the findings of this research can be utilized as a contextual learning resource in lessons on meaning analysis, oral literature, and cultural text studies in Indonesian language learning. Integrating prohibitive expressions into the learning process can also encourage students to develop critical and interpretative thinking skills in interpreting the relationship between the signifier and the signified in cultural expressions. Furthermore, the use of local wisdom as teaching material has the potential to strengthen students' cultural awareness while fostering an appreciative attitude toward traditions and values inherited within society.

Integrating the findings of this research into the learning process will enable students not only to study language from a structural perspective, but also to understand the cultural values embedded in traditional expressions. This can help younger generations understand the meanings behind the cultural practices they carry out, so that traditions are no longer inherited mechanically, but are also understood critically and reflectively. Therefore, this research not only contributes to the development of cultural linguistics and semiotic studies, but also provides pedagogical implications for Indonesian language learning that is more contextual, reflective, and oriented toward the preservation of local culture.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion regarding the symbolic meanings of taboo expressions in the Gorontalo mourning tradition, several conclusions can be drawn

as follows:

- a. The types of taboos in the Gorontalo mourning tradition are manifested through various forms of prohibitive expressions, namely direct taboos, indirect taboos, and mythical taboos. These taboo expressions include prohibitions against consuming certain foods, engaging in specific activities, and verbal prohibitions expressed through speech. Structurally, these taboos generally take the form of negative imperative expressions containing prohibitive and symbolic meanings. The existence of these taboo forms is closely related to Gorontalo as an agrarian region, where people maintain a close relationship with nature and interpret natural phenomena as symbols of life. Furthermore, the predominance of Islam within the community also influences the construction of these taboos, both in terms of the values upheld and the way society interprets mourning as part of divine decree.
- b. The meanings of taboos in the Gorontalo mourning tradition are not understood merely as literal prohibitions but also contain symbolic meanings associated with cultural values, beliefs, and societal perspectives on grief. Through Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic perspective, these taboos reveal the relationship between the signifier (the form of expression or prohibited object) and the signified (the culturally constructed meaning), such as prolonged grief, hopes for safety and protection, and efforts to maintain emotional and social balance during mourning situations.
- c. The relevance of this study to Indonesian language learning lies in the utilization of the findings as teaching materials, particularly in cultural texts, descriptive texts, and explanatory texts. Taboos within the mourning tradition may serve as contextual learning resources that enrich students' understanding of local wisdom while simultaneously enhancing their abilities in language and meaning analysis. Furthermore, this study may also contribute to strengthening character education through the introduction of cultural values embedded within community traditions.

6. Acknowledgement

The author would like to express the deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Dakia N Djou, M.Hum and Prof. Dr. Asna Nteli, M.Hum as academic supervisors who have devoted their time, energy, and thoughts in providing guidance, direction, criticism, and suggestions throughout the process of completing this research. All the attention, patience, and support given have become meaningful motivation for the author in accomplishing this study. The author also sincerely appreciates the knowledge and academic experience that have been shared, enabling this research to be completed in a better and more meaningful manner.

7. References

Djou, D. N., & Nteli, A. (2021). Bahasa Gorontalo dan Bahasa Suwawa pada Anak

- Usia Dini. *Jurnal Obsesi : Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 5(2), 1359–1367.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v5i2.895>
- Fareza, I. A., Saputro, J., Hapsari, I. A., & Karlinda, I. T. (2025). Peran Literasi Bahasa Indonesia dalam Pelestarian Sastra Daerah pada Peserta Didik Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah. *Leksikon: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya*, 3(2), 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.59632/leksikon.v3i2.474>
- Gaol, C. L., & Meo, W. Lena. (2025). Simbolisme Ulos dalam Tradisi Kematian Batak Toba: Perspektif Teori Interpretatif Simbolik Clifford Geertz. *Sabda: Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan*, 20(1), 97–108.
<https://doi.org/10.14710/sabda.20.1.97-108>
- Harpriyanti, H., & Komalasari, I. (2018). Makna Dan Nilai Pendidikan Pamali dalam Masyarakat Banjar di Desa Barikin Kabupaten Hulu Sungai Tengah. *STILISTIKA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya*, 3(2), 242–252.
<https://doi.org/10.33654/sti.v3i2.962>
- Hasibuan, A. (2020). Tantangan Melestarikan Budaya Lokal di Era Globalisasi. *Jurnal Kajian Budaya*, 15(1).
- Ismayanti, D., & Syam, A. T. (2022). The Community Manipulation through Big Brother™ s Tyranny in George Orwell™ s Nineteen Eighty-Four. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 10(2), 1556â-1569.
- Jeferson, J. (2022). Pamali Dalam Masyarakat Dayak Meratus Kecamatan Hampang Kabupaten Kotabaru. *Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Pembelajarannya*, 12(1), 181.
<https://doi.org/10.20527/jbsp.v12i1.13053>
- Lie, F. O., Purwanti, S., & Boer, K. M. (2020). Makna Simbol Ritual Kematian pada Suku Dayak Bahau Busang di Kabupaten Mahakam Ulu. *EJournal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 8(4), 26–34.
- Masruddin, M., Amir, F., Langaji, A., & Rusdiansyah, R. (2023). Conceptualizing linguistic politeness in light of age. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 11(3), 41-55.
- Miswar, M., Rian, R., Muler, Y., & Rajudin, R. (2022). Studi Warna dan Gaya pada Karya Yazid. *Gorga: Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 11(2), 370.
<https://doi.org/10.24114/gr.v11i2.38384>
- Mujiwati, Y. (2024). Perjalanan Budaya: Eksplorasi Nilai-Nilai Budaya Prosesi Pindah Rumah (Boyongan Omah) pada Masyarakat Jawa. *Pusat Pengembangan Pendidikan dan Penelitian Indonesia*.
- Mustamin, K., Rahman, M. G., & Salim, A. (2021). Tradisi Maulid pada Masyarakat Muslim Gorontalo: Pertautan Tradisi Lokal dan Islam. *Potret Pemikiran*, 25(1), 91. <https://doi.org/10.30984/pp.v25i1.1492>
- Nua, S. P. (2023). Peran dan Fungsi Bahasa Daerah pada Komunikasi Masyarakat di Kelurahan Dembe 2 Kota Gorontalo. *Hulondalo Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan Dan Ilmu Komunikasi*, 1(2), 77–87. <https://doi.org/10.59713/jipik.v1i2.75>
- Pambudi, V. B. S. (2023). *Buku Ajar Semiotika*. UNISNU Press.
- Shilina, M. G., & Zarifian, M. (2023). Re-thinking Semiotics: a New Categorization of a Sign? *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 14(2), 305–313. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2023-14-2-305-313>
- Susanti, R. (2025). *Buku Ajar Komunikasi Terapan: Antara Teori dan Praktik*. Intelektual Manifes Media.

Fitrawati R. Usman, Dakia N. Djou, Asna Ntelu
The Symbolic Meaning of Taboo Expressions in The Mourning Tradition of The Gorontalo Community and Their Relevance to Indonesian Language Learning.

- Swandhani, A. R., Wahjudi, D., & Lukitaningsih, L. (2023). Semiotika Roland Barthes sebagai Pendekatan untuk Mengkaji Logo Kantor Pos. Gorga : Jurnal Seni Rupa, 12(1), 182. <https://doi.org/10.24114/gr.v12i1.43650>
- Syamsiah, E., Suryani, I., & Wulandari, S. (2022). Ungkapan Pantang Larang dalam Masyarakat Bugis Desa Simbur Naik Kabupaten Tanjung Jabung Timur (Kajian Semiotika). Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra, 1(2), 183–191. <https://doi.org/10.22437/kalistra.v1i2.20302>
- Tasik, F. B., Karlina, Sapu, N., & Wulandari, D. (2022). Peran Penalaran Logika dalam Pemecahan Masalah Pamali di Lembang Ratte Kecamatan Masanda. ENGGANG: Jurnal Pendidikan, Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, Dan Budaya, 3(1), 91–99. <https://doi.org/10.37304/enggang.v3i1.7839>