



# Lexical Metaphors and Cultural Defense: How Karo Youths Preserve Tradition through 'Minyak Pengalun'

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to discuss how lexical metaphors may function in maintaining the cultural heritage of Karo youths concerning traditional use of "Minyak Pengalun", a medicinal oil which is closely related with ecological and cultural identity of the Karo people. A qualitative research design was adopted wherein data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with Karo adolescents, cultural experts, and traditional healers, as well as analyses of traditional Karo texts. In particular, the result confirms that Karo youths are still meaningfully aware of those metaphors relating to "Minyak Pengalun," and they widely practice them for cultural resistance through modernization processes. Metaphors like "Akar-akar Tanaman Obat" and "Sarang Burung Walet" refer to ecological wisdom besides reinforcing cultural tenacity and culture continuance. Their leading role in maintaining cultural defense functions and passing down the ability and traditions of ecological recognition is important for metaphors at this level to be used appropriately. However, modern influences pose a real challenge, though cultural education and digitizing programs help the youth find their ways to becoming closer to heritage. This research underlines lexical metaphors for maintaining cultural and ecological heritage continuity within the community.*

**Keyword:** Cultural Preservation, Lexical Metaphors, Eco-linguistics



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## 1. Introduction

The preservation of cultural heritage is a complex and ongoing process, particularly in communities where traditional knowledge is deeply interwoven with language. Among the Karo people of North Sumatra, Indonesia, the use of "Minyak Pengalun" a traditional medicinal oil serves as a vital link between the community's cultural identity and their ecological practices. This oil, produced from a variety of medicinal plants, functions not only as a physical remedy but also as a symbolic artifact representing the Karo people's intimate connection to their natural environment and spiritual beliefs (Haugen, 1972; Subiyanto, 2013). Central to the understanding of how "Minyak Pengalun" operates as a cultural artifact is the concept of lexical metaphors in the Karo language. Lexical metaphors, as defined by Halliday (1961), are variations in wordings where meanings extend beyond their literal sense, encapsulating broader cultural and ecological significance. These metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions; they carry the weight of the Karo people's traditional knowledge, social values, and environmental interactions. For instance, terms like "akar-akar tanaman obat" (medicinal plant roots) are more than just descriptors of ingredients—they are laden with cultural importance, reflecting how the Karo community perceives and engages with nature as both a resource and a sacred entity (Saragih, 2010).

The involvement of adolescents in the preservation and transmission of these lexical metaphors is particularly crucial. As the younger generation acts as a bridge between traditional practices and future

innovations, their understanding and application of these metaphors play a pivotal role in sustaining the cultural identity of the Karo people. Engaging with these traditional practices enables Karo youths to preserve not only the language but also the cultural heritage it embodies, effectively resisting the pressures of modern influences that threaten cultural erosion (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Stibbe, 2015). Their ability to grasp and use these metaphors empowers them to protect their community's traditions and ensure their continuity for future generations (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The significance of language in environmental and cultural preservation has been increasingly recognized in the field of ecolinguistics. Ecolinguistics, which explores the interactions between language and the environment, posits that linguistic practices can have profound impacts on ecological behavior and cultural sustainability (Stibbe, 2015). In the case of the Karo people, the lexical metaphors associated with "Minyak Pengalun" serve as a clear example of how language can function as a tool for both ecological stewardship and cultural resilience. These metaphors convey not only medicinal knowledge but also ecological wisdom passed down through generations, reinforcing the Karo community's deep connection to their environment (Mühlhäusler, 2003).

Moreover, the symbolic meanings embedded in these metaphors provide Karo youths with a strong sense of identity and belonging. As they learn and engage in these traditional practices, they are actively participating in cultural defense, where the preservation of language is closely tied to the preservation of cultural practices (Duranti, 1997). This dynamic interplay between language, culture, and ecology highlights the essential role of adolescents in perpetuating Karo traditions in the face of external cultural pressures (Bang & Døør, 2007). In this study, the researcher examines how Karo youths understand and utilize lexical metaphors associated with "Minyak Pengalun," focusing on their role in the cultural defense and preservation of Karo traditions. By exploring the linguistic elements and their cultural implications, this research aims to illuminate the strategies employed by the younger generation to maintain and protect their heritage amid the challenges posed by modernity (Haugen, 1972; Stibbe, 2015).

## **2. Method**

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of lexical metaphors in the cultural preservation efforts of Karo adolescents through the traditional use of "Minyak Pengalun." Qualitative research is particularly suited for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural and linguistic phenomena within a specific community context (Creswell, 2014). The study adopts a descriptive approach, aiming to describe and interpret the meanings embedded in the lexical metaphors associated with "Minyak Pengalun," and how these metaphors are understood and utilized by Karo youths in the context of cultural defense. The primary data for this study comes from two main sources: interviews and textual analysis. The interviews were conducted with Karo adolescents, cultural experts, and traditional healers who have extensive knowledge of "Minyak Pengalun" and its cultural significance. These participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the data collected would be rich in cultural and linguistic insights (Patton, 2015). Data collection involved a combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

For the document analysis, traditional Karo texts, such as folklore, medicinal guides, and oral histories, were collected from local libraries, cultural centers, and community elders. These documents were selected based on their relevance to the study's focus on lexical metaphors and cultural practices. The texts were analyzed to identify and catalog the metaphors related to "Minyak Pengalun" and to provide context for the interviews. The data analysis followed a thematic approach, which is suitable for identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis began with a detailed reading of the interview transcripts and textual data to identify initial codes related to lexical metaphors and cultural preservation. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, such as "cultural identity," "language and ecology," and "adolescent cultural defense." The final step in the analysis involved synthesizing the themes to draw conclusions about the role of lexical metaphors in the cultural practices of Karo adolescents. The findings were validated through member checking, where participants reviewed the analysis to confirm the accuracy and relevance of the interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process helped ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's conclusions.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Results**

The results of this research are very close to the purposes, namely: describing how lexical metaphors reflect the function of preserving Karo youths' cultural heritage, describing the use of lexical metaphors in cultural defense, and highlighting the interconnectedness of language, culture, and ecology. This section of the paper is dedicated to a systematic presentation of findings that focus on how the comprehension and usage of

lexical metaphors contribute to cultural resistance and play an important role in maintaining cultural identity and ecological knowledge. Further, this data is supported by illustrative examples and the visualization of participant engagement across key aspects.

### 3.1.1 Understanding of Lexical Metaphors by Karo Youths

The following chart bar shows the percentage of respondents involved in the different aspects of lexical metaphor use, such as understanding, deployment for cultural defense, their role in the preservation of culture, problems encountered, and opportunities presented for sustaining the same. This graph compares the engagement clearly across these dimensions and identifies the main areas where Karo youths are involved.

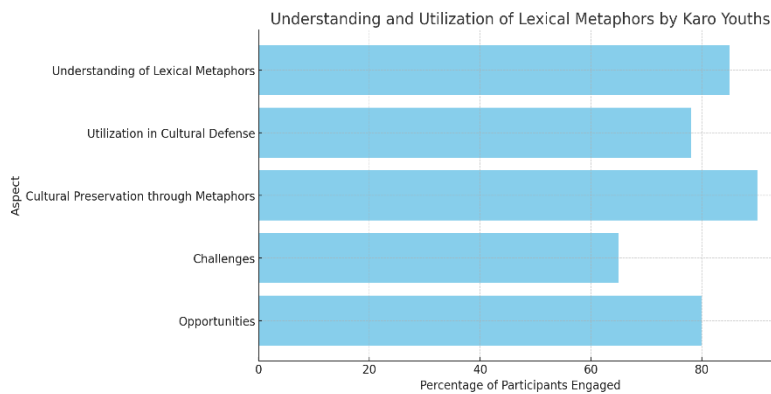


Chart 1. Understanding and Utilization of Lexical Metaphors by Karo Youths

The bar chart shows that the Karo youths are most engaged in cultural preservation through metaphors at 90%, and understanding of lexical metaphors at 85%. This shows that they are very knowledgeable about their culture and are putting in an effort to preserve the same. Utilization in cultural defense follows closely at 78%, reflecting their active role in resisting the pressures of modernization. However, on engaging in challenges like modern influences, the result is lower, with 65%, hence showing areas that might be targeted by intervention. The opportunities, including education programs and digital platforms on culture, are well embraced at 80%, which justifies integrating the traditional with modern tools in terms of sustainability.

### 3.1.2 Utilization of Lexical Metaphors in Cultural Defense

The bar chart "Utilization of Lexical Metaphors in Cultural Defense" provides a graphical overview of the proportion of Karo youth who are more actively using certain lexical metaphors in various aspects of cultural expression. It highlights metaphors such as "Minyak Pengalun" in traditional ceremonies, "Sarang Burung Walet" in healing rituals, and "Akar Wangi" in storytelling. This chart will provide a clear comparison of metaphor usage to show their role in maintaining cultural identity.

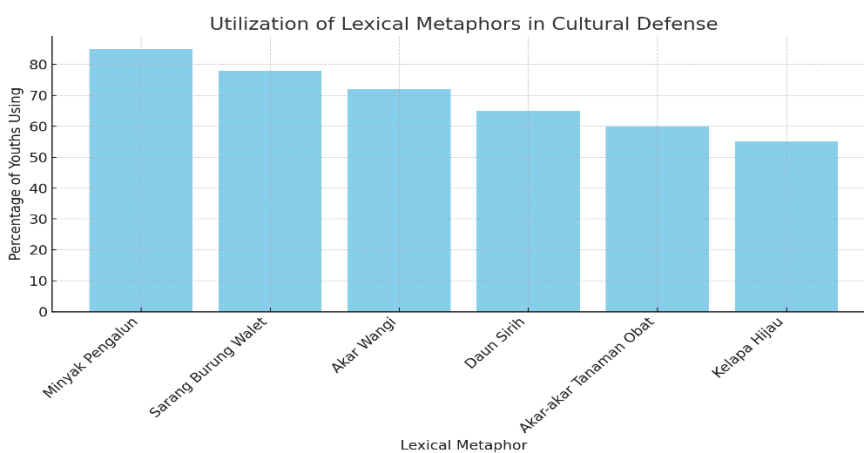


Chart 2: Utilization of Lexical Metaphors in Cultural Defense

The bar chart shows that "Minyak Pengalun" is the metaphor most used by the youth, at 85%, when conducting appropriate rituals to communicate with their ancestors. Next is "Sarang Burung Walet" at 78%,

which symbolizes health and protection during ritual healing. "Akar Wangi" was important to tell a story at 72%, for resilience and cultural education. The metaphors "Akar-akar Tanaman Obat" (60%) and "Kelapa Hijau" (55%) are used relatively less, thus indicating an area for reinforcement through cultural education. The chart underlines that the youth in Karo actively participate in defense and the maintenance of tradition in metaphorical behaviors.

### 3.1.3 Illuminating the Connection Between Language, Culture, and Ecology

The table entitled "Lexical Metaphors and Ecological Insights" summarizes the relationship between language, culture, and ecology within Karo traditions. It points out the ecological knowledge encapsulated in each lexical metaphor, its cultural relevance, and its wider importance for the conservation of cultural heritage, as well as environmental sustainability. This table summarizes how such metaphors serve as tools for maintaining ecological harmony and passing on traditional knowledge.

**Table 1.** Lexical Metaphors and Ecological Insights

Lexical Metaphor	Ecological Knowledge Embedded	Cultural Relevance	Significance
Minyak Pengalun	Sustainable use of multiple plant parts for medicinal purposes	Used in ceremonies and healing rituals	Connects cultural identity to ecological practices
Akar-akar Tanaman Obat	Importance of roots for soil stability and traditional medicine	Highlights resilience and cultural values	Promotes sustainable harvesting of resources
Kelapa Hijau	Use of coconut tree for purification and sustenance	Rituals and cleansing practices	Demonstrates ecological versatility
Daun Sirih	Knowledge of leaves as natural antiseptics	Spiritual protection in ceremonies	Reflects ecological harmony
Bunga Pancur	Significance of flowers in water purification rituals	Integral to cleansing and spiritual rituals	Promotes awareness of natural water resources
Kayu Secang	Use of bark for ecological balance and medicinal properties	Used in ceremonies and ecological preservation practices	Encourages sustainable use of bark and plant resources

The table shows how lexical metaphors play a critical role in integrating ecological knowledge with cultural practices. Each of these lexical metaphors contributes uniquely to the preservation of cultural heritage and environmental sustainability:

- "Minyak Pengalun": This reflects the sustainable use of various parts of plants for medicinal purposes. It plays a very important role in healing ceremonies and rituals and is a symbol of the bridge between cultural identity and ecological practices.
- "Akar-akar Tanaman Obat" means the root of medicinal plants. The roots are important with respect to the stability of soil and medicinal uses from the traditional medical perspective. It also represents the resilient thought, then, of sustainable harvest in Karo culture.
- "Kelapa Hijau": The Coconut Tree is for Purification and Life. It shall play a central role in purification rituals highlighting ecological importance by representing the symbol of life.
- "Daun Sirih": Showing the knowledge of leaves acting as natural antiseptics. This metaphor is part of rituals for spiritual protection and reflects ecological harmony.
- "Bunga Pancur": Reflects how flowers are essential in water purifying rituals; it creates awareness toward natural water and reinforces the bonding of the people with nature around them.
- "Secang Wood": It symbolizes the use of bark in a sustainable manner for ecological balance and medicinal purposes. This metaphor underlines the importance of ecological preservation within cultural practices.

These various metaphors signal that Karo youths are actively involved in practices that pay respect to their traditions and contribute to ecological stewardship. By so doing, they make sure that both their cultural and environmental legacies are passed on to future generations.

### *3.2 Discussion*

This section deconstructs how the discussion of findings falls into three main purposes of the study: understanding the lexical metaphors by Karo youths, how such are used in cultural defense, and how these relate to the relationship between language, culture, and ecology. These are critically deconstructed below with respect to the data.

#### *3.2.1 Understanding of Lexical Metaphors among Karo Youth*

This study shows that the Karo youths have a deep-seated understanding of metaphors concerning lexical items, which have grown out of cultural and ecological backgrounds. Such metaphors like "Akar-akar Tanaman Obat" and "Minyak Pengalun" are typical representations of the knowledge passed on across generations in which metaphors carry along with themselves cultures and ecological awareness. They develop this understanding while continuously being exposed to stories, rituals, and practice in nature.

For example, the metaphor "Akar-akar Tanaman Obat" symbolizes resilience and the critical role of roots in both ecological balance and cultural identity. In using the image of roots to speak about resilience, the Karo community emphasizes sustainable harvesting practices. Similarly, "Minyak Pengalun" functions as a linguistic and symbolic bridge, carrying the integration of multiple plant parts into a cohesive healing practice. These metaphors do not only retain traditional knowledge but also embed ecological practices into cultural identity.

These results are taken to indicate that Karo youths are not passive recipients but, in fact, active agents of these metaphors' interpretation and usage. That they could advance meaning for these expressions attests to the solid cultural background that forces of modernization will hardly wear down. This way, the lexical metaphors would remain integral to Karo linguistic and cultural identity.

#### *3.2.2 Lexical Metaphors in the Cultural Defense*

The lexical metaphors used by Karo youths act as an active tool in the cultural defense that keeps their identity resistant to modernity. In this study, several cultural practices are identified where metaphors have played a significant role, such as traditional ceremonies, healing rituals, and storytelling. These are not mere traditions but ways of resistance against erosion.

For example, the metaphor of "Sarang Burung Walet" is part of the core of curing rituals, signifying health, protection, and prosperity. In this process, Karo youths keep reaffirming their commitment by incorporating this metaphor into medicinal knowledge. Similarly, storytelling uses "Akar Wangi" to convey these themes of resilience and cultural pride; it teaches the values engrained in cultural heritage to the younger generations.

Data also show adaptability among Karo youths. They combined the traditional with the modern, such as using sustainable alternatives for rare ingredients while retaining the metaphors' symbolic meanings. Such adaptability was a manifestation of their agency in keeping their culture relevant to the contemporary contexts.

Further, the deliberate use of metaphors such as "Kelapa Hijau" in the purification rites is indicative of how lexical expressions are mobilized for service to ritual purity and ecological awareness. In these ways, Karo youths demonstrate that they are not just maintaining static traditions but are actively engaging with their heritage as a way to profess their cultural identity.

#### *3.2.3 Illuminating the Connection Between Language, Culture, and Ecology*

The study underlines the intrinsic connection of language, culture, and ecology through lexical metaphor analysis. Each metaphor represents ecological knowledge and practices while reaffirming cultural identity. For instance, "Daun Sirih" embodies a dual function of spiritual protection in rituals and antiseptic property in ecological practice. This duality points to the seamless integration of environmental stewardship and cultural expression.

Similarly, "Bunga Pancur" represents flowers in water purification rituals and points to natural water resources. An ecological meaning for this metaphor acts as a symbol of the sustainability of the interaction between the Karo community and the environment. Further, the metaphor "Kayu Secang" shows the balance of ecology and how the community has ensured the continuity of the bark being used for medicinal purposes and in ritualistic ways.

These metaphors inscribe ecological values into the cultural framework of the Karo people and ensure their passage to future generations. In continuation, youths among the Karo people play a very important role in continuing such practices, not only in using the metaphors but also in adapting them to contemporary challenges such as deforestation and climate change.

These findings show that the lexical metaphors are a key bridge between language and ecological consciousness. The persistence of these metaphors among Karo youths supports both cultural resilience and environmental sustainability. This double role strengthens the necessity to embed linguistic, cultural, and ecological studies in order to understand how traditional communities deal with modern challenges while maintaining their identity.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study also finds that lexical metaphors are essential in the maintenance of Karo cultural heritage and work as a link between language and culture with ecological knowledge. Such metaphors, like "Akar-akar Tanaman Obat" and "Minyak Pengalun," signify resilience, sustainability, and cultural identity that the youths of Karo possess in depth. These metaphors serve as vessels for intergenerational knowledge, representing the deep embedding of ecological and cultural values in the community. Furthermore, the metaphors are actively employed by Karo youths in cultural defense; they have incorporated these metaphors into traditional ceremonies, healing rituals, and storytelling. For example, the metaphors of "Sarang Burung Walet" and "Akar Wangi" act as a form of resistance in their ability to preserve culture within modern changes. This study also highlights how metaphors like "Daun Sirih" and "Bunga Pancur" have expressed ecological wisdom related to sustainability in practices, including the use of natural antiseptics and water purification. This nexus of language, culture, and ecology underlines the dynamic role of Karo youths in reappropriating these metaphors into contemporary contexts, fusing traditional and modern practices while preserving authenticity. Thus, lexical metaphors are an indispensable part of linguistic expressions vital for the resilience of cultural traditions and their continuity into a more ecologically sustainable future in the Karo study.

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