



Ethnolinguistic Dimensions of the Korolele Ceremony: Ritual Language for Character Education

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Abstract: This study is motivated by the lack of ethnolinguistic studies exploring ritual language's role in traditional community character education. The purpose of the study is to analyse the verbal symbolism in ritual language and how the language is used as an informal educational tool. This study used a qualitative approach with ethnolinguistic methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with elders and ritual performers, participatory observation, and document study related to the oral tradition of the Dawan community. Data analysis was conducted using thematic and semiotic analysis to identify patterns of ritual language use. The findings show that ritual language in Korolele plays an important role in transmitting cultural values, such as solidarity, respect, and communal responsibility, to the younger generation. Language is a communication tool and a mechanism to internalise moral values and strengthen the community's collective identity. The ritual language in Korolele ceremonies is an effective instrument of culture-based character education, maintaining the continuity of oral traditions amidst modernisation. This study makes an important contribution to the study of ethnolinguistics, culture-based character education, and as a relevant informal education tool in traditional communities.

Keywords: character education; communal identity; ethnolinguistics; korolele ceremony; ritual language

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has an extraordinary cultural wealth, with thousands of tribes and traditions spread across the archipelago (Saefudin et al., 2024), where each region displays a unique culture that is part of the identity and pride of the community (Setyawan & Dopo, 2020; Utomo et al., 2024). Despite its rich cultural heritage, Indonesia's oral traditions face grave threats from the pressures of globalisation and modernisation. These influences have transformed societal values and endangered the sustainability of traditional practices that serve as informal education tools for transmitting cultural values (Mofu et al., 2024). One of the regions rich in cultural heritage is the province of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), which covers islands such as Flores, Sumba, Timor, and Alor. In NTT, oral cultures such as songs, folklore, and traditional rituals play an important role in the community's social life and character education (Ryspayeva et al., 2024; Uggla & Saarela, 2024). An example of such a tradition is the *Korolele* Ceremony performed by the Dawan Tribe in Popnam Village, Noemuti Sub-district, North Central Timor, which expresses the community's spiritual connection to ancestors through language symbolism and traditional ceremonies. Traditions like these, including *Reba* in Flores and *Pasola* in Sumba, strengthen community solidarity and identity (Darsono et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2023). *Korolele* ceremonies passed down through generations, are ceremonial events and manifestations of cultural and spiritual values that shape identity and strengthen social solidarity (Buiko, 2024; Sheydaei, 2024). The language used in these processions, through chants and prayers, has deep meaning and communicates between the community and the ancestors.

The use of language in these rituals reflects how cultural values are taught and transmitted between generations through oral interaction, making it an effective medium of informal education in instilling moral values and ethics, as well as shaping culture-based character education that prioritises solidarity, respect, and togetherness (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Ravindran, 2024). However, in the context of widespread globalisation and modernisation, the sustainability of traditional practices such as the *Korolele* Ceremony faces serious challenges. External influences have the potential to erode the authenticity of these traditions. In the long term, this may affect the transfer of cultural knowledge and character education conveyed through the ritual language

(Nuraedah & Saefudin, 2024). Rapid social and economic changes threaten the sustainability of local traditions, including the *Korolele* Ceremony, which has been seen as an integral part of the social and spiritual fabric of the community. Modernisation not only has the potential to reduce the frequency of rituals but also affects the transmission of cultural values previously conveyed through ritual language rich in symbolism (Giles et al., 1987; Hestiyana et al., 2024; Kasanova et al., 2024).

In societies that rely heavily on oral traditions, such as the people of Popnam Village, in-depth documentation and analysis of language use in rituals becomes increasingly important. Without proper documentation, there is a high risk that these oral traditions and their cultural and educational values may be lost in the face of rapid societal changes. This would impact cultural preservation and weaken the informal education mechanisms embedded in these traditions. Research on this has been minimal. Previous research has shown the importance of rituals in maintaining social cohesion and community identity, as outlined by Ah et al. (2024) and Noortyani et al. (2023), who emphasised ritual's symbolic and social role. However, the linguistic aspect and its function as a character education tool have not been thoroughly explored. Sosiowati et al. (2022), Tao et al. (2024), and dan Haokip (2024) conducted research that introduced ethnolinguistic and cultural communication approaches. However, their research focused more on language in everyday contexts than on rituals as a medium of moral value transmission. Furthermore, research by Donzelli (2020) and Moulian et al. (2019) on ritual symbolism adds an important perspective on meaning in social contexts. However, it does not specifically address the use of language for character education. Recent research by Gullbekk et al. (2024) and Suma et al. (2024) on language performativity shows that ritual language functions as an instrument for constructing meaning but still lacks highlighting its role in transmitting values to the younger generation. Ray (2023) and Coronado (2019) also link oral traditions to character education but do not delve into the verbal symbolism relevant to rituals such as *Korolele*. While there has been much research on rituals in traditional societies, studies that specifically explore the role of ritual language as a tool for culture-based character education are still very limited. This void is particularly evident in the Popnam Village community in North Central Timor, where the *Korolele* Ceremony is a main means of teaching and reinforcing community values through verbal symbolism. The *Korolele* ceremony offers a unique perspective on how language is used as a means of communication and as a medium that conveys social and spiritual values (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Rohmatuszahroh & Rahmawati, 2024). However, documentation on the linguistic aspects of this tradition is still minimal, so there is little understanding of the mechanisms of how ritual language functions in shaping the behaviour and values of the younger generation. Ethnolinguistic literacy related to the role of language as a character education tool in this traditional cultural context is still lacking, especially in anthropology and culture-based education literature (Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Nucci et al., 2014; Sakti et al., 2024).

This study seeks to fill the gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the role of ritual language in character education and strengthening cultural identity. Through an ethnolinguistic approach, this study significantly contributes to enriching academic understanding of the importance of traditional languages as effective and adaptive instruments of informal education amid globalisation. In addition, this study is expected to be a reference for efforts to preserve and revitalise oral traditions, which are often marginalised in modernisation and globalisation efforts that permeate the lives of local communities. The findings of this study also inform policy-making at the local and national levels, guiding cultural preservation programs that aim to integrate traditional rituals into formal or informal education systems. Furthermore, this study could serve as a practical reference for communities to revitalise their oral traditions as tools for strengthening cultural identity in younger generations. Therefore, this study aims to explore in depth how language in the *Korolele* Ceremony in Popnam Village, Noemuti Sub-district, North Central Timor District, functions as a medium for character education. Through an ethnolinguistic approach, the study examines verbal symbolism in ritual language and its role in transmitting moral, ethical, and social values, which are used not only as a means of communication but also as a means of informal education. This focus is relevant as traditional societies rely on oral traditions to shape the younger generation's behaviour. The justification for this study is based on the urgency of documenting and analysing traditional languages in the midst of modernisation, which threatens the sustainability of oral traditions, enriching the literature, and supporting the preservation of local culture.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with ethnolinguistic methods to explore the role of ritual language in character education of the Dawan Tribe in Popnam Village, Noemuti Sub-district, North Central Timor District (Yin, 2016). This approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand social and cultural phenomena through the perspective of the people directly involved in the *Korolele* Ceremony. The ethnographic method allows the exploration of the meaning and symbolism of language in a natural context through direct observation and interaction, providing authentic insights into the use of language as an instrument of informal education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). With this interpretative analysis, the researcher documented how language and ritual

symbolism transmit moral values and shape community identity amidst the challenges of globalisation. The research site was Popnam Village, Noemuti Sub-district, North Central Timor District, which was specifically chosen as the research location because this village is the centre of the *Korolele* Ceremony, which is rich in language symbolism and cultural values. The choice of this location allowed the researcher to directly understand the cultural and social context of the local community, where the ritual is carried out and passed down from generation to generation. The research participants consisted of traditional elders, ritual performers, and community members who were selected using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of participants deliberately directed to individuals with deep knowledge and involvement in this ritual (Herat, 2023). This approach is designed to ensure that the data collected is sourced from individuals with credibility and direct experience to provide in-depth insights into how ritual language functions as a tool of character education and maintenance of cultural values in the community.

The data collection techniques used were in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document study to understand the use of language in the *Korolele* Ceremony as a character education tool. Interviews with key informants, such as traditional elders and ritual leaders, were conducted to explore their understanding of ritual language symbolism. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to directly observe the ritual, record verbal and non-verbal interactions, and understand the social and cultural context underlying the language use. In addition, the document study included a review of local texts and historical records related to oral traditions in North Central Timor, providing historical and contextual background to complement interview and observation data. Combining these three techniques allowed for strong data triangulation and strengthened the validity of the research. It provided a holistic understanding of the role of ritual language as a medium for character education and cultural preservation (Yin, 2016). Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and key themes in ritual language use. The process began with transcription and systematically coding the data based on themes, such as verbal and non-verbal elements and moral symbolism. The aim was to find consistent themes related to language in the *Korolele* Ceremony. Next, semiotic analysis explored the symbolic meanings of language elements, such as metaphors and allegories, that convey cultural and moral values within the community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach reveals how language functions as a means of communication and an instrument of identity formation. Data were coded iteratively to ensure consistency and validity, considering the social and cultural context. Triangulation of methods combined interviews, observations, and document studies to verify findings and increase reliability (Miles et al., 2014). This approach provides a holistic understanding of the role of language as an instrument of informal education in traditional communities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Korolele ceremony is one of the traditions owned by the Dawan tribe in Popnam Village, and this tradition has been passed down from generation to generation, so this tradition is very embedded in people's lives. According to the interviewees, this ritual has existed since ancient times and is passed down from generation to generation. According to a traditional elder (74), '*Korolele*' consists of two words: '*Kord*', which means 'mash' and '*Lele*', which means 'garden produce.' Based on his explanation, this ritual is a form of lamentation (*Atoin Meto*) owned by the Noemuti community and is only performed in the context of grief. The following describes the steps in the *Korolele* ceremony process. The research observations show that the first stage in the *Korolele* Ceremony is a family gathering, where the nuclear family gathers to deliberate and discuss plans for the ceremony. At this stage, the bereaved family will agree on the concept of the ritual, including preparations such as food, sacrificial animals, and other logistics needed. The discussion also involves traditional elders who guide how the ritual should be conducted. After reaching an agreement, this concept is submitted to the local elders for further direction according to the concept agreed upon by the family. This initial deliberation is important because it begins the ceremony process and reflects the value of togetherness and communal responsibility instilled in the community.

The place used for the ceremony's location is the funeral home or the deceased's house, where the *Korolele* Ceremony occurs. The ceremony usually takes place in the house because it has symbolic meaning as the centre of the grieving family. The time required to carry out the ceremony cannot be precisely ascertained because it depends on the family's economic factors and the availability of resources to carry out all ritual stages. *Korolele* ceremonies can occur in different periods, ranging from a few days, weeks, to months, depending on the conditions of the participating families and communities. According to interviews with traditional elders, in the shortest case, the ceremony can last for three days, but it is not uncommon for it to take up to 1 week and even up to 1 month. Family economic factors play a prominent role in determining the length of the ceremony, as each stage of the ritual, from preparation to execution, requires significant costs and resources. *Korolele* ceremonies usually start every day at 6 pm and last until 6 am the next day, with the duration of the ritual reaching around 12 hours each day. During this time, family and community members perform activities such as pounding rice, singing ritual songs, and praying alternately. This long duration reflects the community's strong

commitment to carry out and preserve their traditions despite the challenges of modernisation.

The community that participates in the *Korolele* Ceremony consists of participants invited through family meetings, where this invitation involves community members regardless of gender, ranging from adult men and women to the elderly. The number of participants is usually around $\pm$ 40 people, and they play an active role in each stage of the ritual. The culmination of the ritual series is the main procession, where the family and community come together to honour the ancestors through chants, prayers and other verbal symbolism. In this procession, participants simultaneously pound rice while chanting ritual songs with symbolic meanings. The verses serve not only as a means of spiritual communication but also as a means of transmitting moral, ethical, and social values, such as solidarity, respect for ancestors, gotong royong, and social responsibility. Through this ceremony, these values are instilled in the younger generation, strengthening cultural identity and togetherness within the community. One of the poems that is often used is:

Patola Kase
Lolom aklalo hoe
lolo patola kase
lolo patola kase
e'sul ana bae teo an'e bae
lolom aklalo hoe

Meaning:

Gathering with comers
Calling and calling again
relatives
to convey a message or information
with a call
to gather together

The singing in the *Korolele* Ceremony is presented in the form of rhymes combined with rhythmic blows using pestles and mortar. This rhythmic pattern is a characteristic that distinguishes the *Korolele* Ceremony from other traditions while strengthening the spiritual and social dimensions contained in the procession. The harmony between singing and rhythmic beating symbolises cooperation and mutual aid, which are core values in traditional Noemuti society. In this procession, the male and female participants sit face-to-face while holding pestles and pounding rice in a long mortar, surrounding the mortar with parallel sitting positions between the male and female groups. The singing in this ritual has an aesthetic function and a deep meaning as a form of respect for the ancestors. The *Korolele* ceremony aims to prepare provisions for the departed spirits, an eschatological procession that aims for the salvation of the deceased's soul. The gentle chanting of the poems is expected to soothe the deceased's soul, reflecting respect for human dignity, even though they are no longer alive. The rice pounded during the ritual is used in *Fole Mako*, a thanksgiving held after death, which symbolises communal eating and community solidarity. Traditional elders explained that through this procession, the spirit of *gotong royong* in building welfare and justice among the Dawan ethnic group is strengthened, so this ritual is not only religious but also a vehicle for character education for the younger generation (Kasanova et al., 2024).

Before the implementation of *Fole Mako* (eating together), the community worked together to build halls made of wood and boards, which would be used as a place to eat together. The community and the bereaved family prepare the meal by cooking the sacrificial animal, usually a pig, which is cooked without the use of flavourings. This simplicity reflects the authenticity and sanctity of the tradition in maintaining the pure meaning of the ritual. The cutting of the manger is also an important part of the ceremony, where the manger- the place where food or traditional paraphernalia is served- is cut to symbolise the preparation of food and offerings. This stage involves cutting wood or other materials for ritual paraphernalia, such as balai-balai or tools for pounding rice. It is a powerful symbol of the spirit of gotong royong that underpins the entire ceremony (Rohmatuszahroh & Rahmawati, 2024). From observations, plates and bowls are neatly arranged in the balai-balai, rice is placed in baskets, and unseasoned cooked meat is served using *Haik* (woven palm leaves). The food is then distributed to all attendees, usually organised by tribal groups. Before the meal, a traditional speech session serves as a prelude, conveying cultural values and respect for ancestors. The food is served repeatedly until everyone has had enough, and leftovers can be taken home as provisions for the family (Hestiyana et al., 2024). These stages demonstrate not only the value of togetherness and solidarity within the community but also the effort to preserve traditions in a meaningful way. The language used in the *Korolele* Ceremony not only functions as a communication tool but also as a marker of community identity and a means of strengthening social solidarity within the Popnam Village community. In the context of traditional culture, ritual language reflects an essential aspect of community identity because it contains symbolism, values, and norms that are specific and understood only by members of the community itself (Budasi et al., 2023; Septiana et al., 2024; Takwa et al., 2024). The language used during rituals distinguishes this community from others, making it a strong identity marker (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004; Rohmatuszahroh & Rahmawati, 2024). This is evident from empirical findings where customary elders use specific chants and phrases passed down from generation to generation. These expressions contain deep meaning, encompassing history, ancestral values, and moral teachings that the community collectively identifies as part of their cultural heritage.

Apart from being an identity marker, ritual language strengthens social solidarity (Ah et al., 2024; Noortyani et al., 2023). Every time the *Korolele* Ceremony is performed, all community members gather, actively engage, and repeat the exact customary phrases. This collective participation strengthens community and solidarity, where each individual feels integral to the larger community. The ritual consolidates social relations and renews bonds between community members, as the language used creates a sense of unity and oneness within the community. Through the meaningful use of language in these rituals, communities reaffirm their values, such as gotong royong and togetherness, which in turn strengthens social structures and relationships between members (Haokip, 2024; Sosiowati et al., 2022; Tao et al., 2024). In this context, ritual language serves to create and maintain social cohesion. By actively involving all members of the community in the ceremony and the use of a shared language, social solidarity is formed and strengthened. This maintains the attachment between members and strengthens the cultural heritage and collective identity on which the community is founded. Therefore, language in the *Korolele* Ceremony not only functions to convey messages or teachings but also as an important means of building and strengthening social solidarity, as well as maintaining cultural identity in the midst of social changes faced by the people of Popnam Village. The ritual language in the *Korolele* Ceremony is understood and internalised by different generations in the community through a deep and repeated socialisation process that occurs during the ceremony. As custodians of tradition and ritual leaders, elders play an important role in guiding the younger generation to understand the meanings and values of each verbal element of the ritual. They use language rich in symbolism and metaphor, passed down through generations, to teach the importance of ancestral history, spirituality, and social values, such as respect, solidarity, and togetherness.

This internalisation occurs not only through direct verbal teaching but also through the active participation of the younger generation in rituals. Children and young people are invited to listen, repeat, and interact with the language used in ceremonies, such as chants and prayers. This repetition creates a deeper understanding, as through direct and repeated experience, the younger generation begins to associate the spoken words with their intended meaning and cultural value. This process allows ritual language to be an effective informal education, where young people learn by observing and actively participating (Donzelli, 2020; Moulian et al., 2019). Furthermore, ritual language also serves as a means of connecting individuals to the collective identity of their community (Gullbekk et al., 2024). By understanding and using the same language used by their ancestors, younger generations not only learn moral and spiritual values but also reinforce a sense of cultural identity and belonging (Suma et al., 2024). This experience internalises a sense of pride and responsibility towards preserving the community's culture, making language an educative tool that instils social attachment and responsibility. In this context, ritual language functions as more than a means of communication; it is a mechanism systematically used to transmit cultural and spiritual values, ensuring that the next generation not only receives the cultural heritage but also plays an active role in maintaining it (Coronado, 2019; Ray, 2023). Through participation in rituals, the younger generation is integrated into the social and spiritual fabric of the community, where language becomes a bridge between the past and the present, connecting and strengthening a sustainable collective identity.

This study supports and extends the theory of character education based on oral tradition and local culture by demonstrating that ritual language in *Korolele* Ceremony is an effective informal education mechanism. Recent opinions, such as that of Herat (2023), emphasise the role of oral traditions in transmitting moral values within communities. This finding is in line with that view, where symbolism in the language of the *Korolele* Ceremony teaches values of solidarity, respect, and togetherness. Through phrases and songs, the ritual language becomes an educative tool that allows the younger generation to experience and practice these values directly, accelerating their internalisation. Apart from being a communication tool, it strengthens the young generation's collective identity and social responsibility towards the community. This study confirms that oral tradition remains relevant for character education in traditional societies (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Ravindran, 2024). Practically, the findings of this study can be applied to cultural preservation and community education. Culture-based education programmes can be designed by integrating the *Korolele* Ceremony language into the local curriculum to teach values such as solidarity and respect. Collaboration between schools, communities and cultural organisations can strengthen young people's identity through cultural workshops and festivals. The results of this study contribute significantly to ethnolinguistic studies by showing how language, culture, and education interact in traditional societies through rituals. Ritual language, as in the *Korolele* Ceremony, is not only a means of communication but also a mechanism that links cultural values with informal education. This study reveals that verbal symbolism and linguistic structures in rituals transmit (Buiko, 2024; Saefudin et al., 2023; Sheydaei, 2024). Ritual language has multifaceted functions in building collective identity and strengthening social solidarity, creating communal experiences through active participation. This study proves that oral tradition is important as an informal educational tool that ensures cultural continuity and social cohesion amid modernisation (Darsono et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). This study also shows that ritual language is dynamic, adapting to social change while maintaining core cultural values.

This study has limitations, such as the scope being limited to one community in Popnam Village, so the results may not be generalisable to other areas. Time and resource constraints also limit long-term observations, while the participatory observation method risks producing interpretation bias. For future researchers, a more in-depth study involving several communities and using a multidisciplinary approach is recommended to understand more aspects of ritual language. This study also has significant social and ethical implications, emphasising the importance of ritual language preservation in community education and involving communities fairly in the research process. Collaboration between indigenous leaders, educational institutions, and policymakers is necessary to preserve these oral traditions.

CONCLUSION

This study provides critical insights into the role of ritual language in the *Korolele* Ceremony as a medium for culture-based character education within the Dawan community of Popnam Village, North Central Timor. Through an ethnolinguistic lens, the study reveals how ritual language functions as a communication tool and a mechanism for transmitting moral, ethical, and social values, fostering communal identity, social solidarity, and cultural cohesion. The findings underscore the importance of symbolic verbal expressions in preserving cultural practices and transmitting values across generations, reinforcing the role of oral traditions as informal education systems. This study highlights the urgency of preserving traditional languages amidst the challenges posed by modernisation, suggesting that ritual language can be effectively integrated into culture-based education initiatives. While focused on the *Korolele* Ceremony, this study opens pathways for further exploration of ritual language in other cultural contexts, advocating for interdisciplinary approaches to deepen understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and education. The implications emphasise the need for collaboration among educational institutions, cultural organisations, and local leaders to sustain traditional practices, ensuring their continued relevance in shaping communal and educational values.

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