



LEXICON AS A LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL WISDOM IN THE NASI HADAP-HADAPAN TRADITION OF THE LANGKAT MALAY COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the lexical system of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* as a linguistic representation of local wisdom within the Langkat Malay community. Grounded in the framework of culinary language relativity, the research adopts an integrated linguistic and anthropological approach to reveal how language encodes cultural knowledge. Linguistic analysis was employed to identify and systematically document Malay culinary lexicons, while anthropological methods were used to organize these lexical items into cultural realms and domains. The findings indicate that the *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* tradition encompasses 58 distinct lexicons, which are classified into three main categories: 34 lexicons denoting types of dishes, 13 lexicons referring to food-processing techniques, and 11 lexicons associated with culinary tools. Further analysis across realms and domains demonstrates that these lexicons are not merely nominative linguistic units but function as symbolic expressions of cultural meaning. Collectively, they reflect the worldview of the Langkat Malay community, as manifested in shared attitudes, behavioral patterns, and socially sanctioned values and norms. In this way, the lexicon of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* serves as a linguistic medium through which local wisdom is preserved, communicated, and reinforced within the community.

Keywords: *Lexicon, tradition, Rice face to face, Malay, Local wisdom, Linguistic.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Food is a fundamental human necessity for sustaining physical life; however, its significance extends far beyond biological survival (Dash & Sarkel, 2024; Sari & Zuber, 2020; Wang & Coe, 2021). Within a cultural framework, food constitutes a system of meaning that is linguistically encoded through lexicon and reflects a community's cognition, social

organization, and cultural practices. Culinary lexicons, therefore, function as linguistic repositories of cultural knowledge through which a society conceptualizes, categorizes, and transmits its worldview (Long, 2024; Kanter & Villagra, 2020; Damayanti, 2019). Consequently, the study of traditional food lexicons offers a strategic entry point for uncovering cultural heritage and local wisdom embedded in everyday and

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ritual practices (Mok, 2019; Partarakis et al., 2021; Trisutaguna et al., 2025).

Indonesia's vast ethnic diversity has produced an equally rich variety of culinary traditions, each shaped by distinct socio-cultural, religious, and ecological contexts (Hady et al., 2025; Yunita et al., 2022; Yati et al., 2024). Among these traditions, eating practices occupy a central position in anthropological inquiry, as they are inseparable from human life and social interaction. Early food anthropology studies published between the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated that food systems are culturally constructed rather than purely natural phenomena (McCullough, 2019; Jaya et al., 2025; Fox & King, 2020). What a society recognizes as food, how it is processed, and the meanings attached to it are determined by cultural values, collective memory, and symbolic interpretation.

Olney et al. (2019) emphasizes that food systems are not merely responses to natural resources but represent cultural processes involving transformation, interpretation, and symbolic negotiation with nature. In this sense, food is an artifact of culture a product of deliberate human construction. Humans do not consume nature directly; instead, they transform raw materials through culturally regulated techniques. Thus, the notion that food is "natural" is misleading, as culinary practices are inherently artificial and culturally mediated (Febriyanti et al., 2023).

From an anthropological perspective, food is closely linked to technology and material culture, encompassing ingredients, tools, preparation techniques,

consumption patterns, and social functions (Koentjaraningrat, 2019; Fox & King, 2020; Renyaan et al., 2020). Food choices and culinary forms reflect broader lifestyle patterns, including health orientation, environmental adaptation, and social structure. Culturally, cuisine functions as a marker of local identity, representing systems of production, regulation, consumption, and symbolic meaning within a community (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

As a cultural product, food can be categorized according to its social and symbolic functions, such as sacred versus profane food, staple versus supplementary food, medicinal food, and age-specific food consumption (Trisutaguna et al., 2025). Across societies, food plays multifaceted roles that intersect with religious rituals, social relations, and economic activities (Sari & Zuber, 2020). Variations in culinary traditions are therefore influenced not only by environmental factors but also by customs, belief systems, ethnicity, and inherited cultural norms (Long, 2024).

Indonesian traditional cuisine, in particular, is characterized by inherited recipes, the use of traditional tools, and distinctive preparation techniques passed down across generations (Amin, 2019). Traditional food serves as a tangible expression of cultural continuity and local identity, encompassing preparation procedures, ceremonial functions, and symbolic meanings embedded in communal events (Wijaya, 2019; Setyaningsih, 2024; Citraresmana et al., 2022). Despite its cultural significance, systematic documentation and in-depth analysis of traditional Indonesian cuisine

especially from linguistic and symbolic perspectives remain limited.

The absence of comprehensive preservation efforts, both at societal and institutional levels, has rendered many traditional culinary practices vulnerable to marginalization. The rapid influx of foreign culinary influences further threatens the sustainability of traditional foods, risking the erosion of cultural meaning and eventual extinction of local culinary heritage. In this context, anthropolinguistics provides an integrative framework for examining traditional cuisine by situating lexical forms within their cultural, social, and symbolic environments.

Anthropolinguistics views language as both a product and a producer of culture, emphasizing speech and lexicon as cultural practices embedded in social life (Fadil, 2019). Through ethnographic and participant-observation methods, this approach enables researchers to understand how language operates within natural contexts and how linguistic forms reflect cultural values and lived experiences (Mok, 2019). Since culture hierarchically shapes linguistic behavior, anthropolinguistic analysis prioritizes cultural interpretation as the primary lens for understanding language use (Putman, 2024; Sihite et al., 2024; Lesiana et al., 2023).

Culture itself functions as a semiotic system composed of symbols that convey shared meanings and collective knowledge. It encompasses observable actions, material objects, rituals, and social events that structure human life, including food preparation, dining etiquette, ceremonial practices, and

material production (Pranowo, 2020). Culinary lexicons, therefore, operate as symbolic units through which cultural meanings are encoded, transmitted, and preserved.

Within this framework, the study of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* in the Langkat Malay community becomes particularly significant. As a traditional culinary presentation closely associated with wedding ceremonies, *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* represents a complex system of linguistic, cultural, and symbolic meanings. Examining its lexicon contributes to documenting the socio-cultural heritage of the Langkat Malay community and provides insight into their worldview, values, and identity within the broader context of Indonesian cultural diversity.

Previous studies on Indonesian traditional cuisine have explored culinary traditions as socio-cultural identity markers (Citraresmana et al., 2022), ethnolinguistic classifications of food terms, symbolic interpretations of iconic dishes such as *rendang*, and ethical dimensions of culinary preservation. These studies collectively affirm that traditional food functions as symbolic communication, cultural identity, and repositories of collective memory.

However, this study differs from earlier research in its theoretical orientation and analytical scope. By employing an anthropolinguistic approach, it focuses specifically on culinary lexicon as a linguistic representation of local wisdom. Moreover, it examines a comprehensive range of culinary forms associated with *Nasi Hadap-hadapan*, including main

dishes, accompaniments, and complementary foods used in both daily consumption and ritual contexts within the Langkat Malay community.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What culinary lexicons in *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* reflect the socio-cultural identity of the Langkat Malay community?
2. How do these lexicons symbolically represent culinary functions within traditional wedding rituals?
3. How does the Langkat Malay community interpret the meanings and symbols embedded in *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* as a manifestation of local wisdom?

By answering these questions, the study positions culinary lexicon as a linguistic medium through which local wisdom is articulated, sustained, and transmitted across generations.

2. METHODS

This study was conducted in the Akhir District, Langkat Regency, a regency in Sumatera Utara Province, Indonesia. It was designed by using a qualitative approach, employing ethnographic methods with an anthropolinguistic approach (Neuman, 2019; Tisdell et al., 2025; Oe et al., 2022). The data were collected from the informants' candid oral accounts, that provided information about the lexicon, the function of traditional culinary dishes as a complement to traditional ceremonies, and their perspectives on the symbols and meanings of traditional culinary dishes.

Data collection for this study was conducted by using participant

observation and interview techniques (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024; Herdayati & Syahrial, 2019; Susanto et al., 2023). The observation and participation were conducted by participating or being involved in the process of making traditional culinary or food, namely in the houses of residents who daily produce traditional culinary for sale (marketing) and in the homes of residents who make traditional culinary for holding a ceremonial event or traditional ritual. In addition, participant observation was also conducted in activities following ceremonies or traditional rituals held by local residents.

The perspectives were conducted with 8 informants as data sources, who were selected by using purposive sampling techniques. They were classified based on social status and professional criteria, namely (1) community leaders, (2) religious leaders, (3) village elders, (4) cultural figures, (5) culinary experts or practitioners. These informants were selected heterogeneously to obtain varied and comprehensive data. The data analysis technique is carried out through four stages of activity, namely (1) collecting research data; (2) reducing research data; (3) presenting research data, and (4) verifying. The results of this data analysis are presented by using an informal presentation method; verbally by providing descriptions and interpretations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, several culinary lexicons of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* were identified, including the types of dishes and how to prepare them. The following is a lexicon of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* in Selesai District, Langkat Regency, Sumatera Utara Province.

Table 1. Lexicon that has been found in Nasi Hadap-hadapan

Lexicon		
Type of serving	Processing	Tool
- Nasi Lemak	- cooked / steamed	- panci
- Grilled chicken	- boiled / baked	- grill
- Rendang	- ground	- cauldron
- Fish curry	- baked	- rock mill
- Sour curry	- stir-fried	- steamer
- Chilli sauce	- assembled	- pudding mold
- Layer cake	- carved	- strainer
- Pudding	- dried	- jars
- Lemang	- burned	- bamboo reeds
- Frangipani cake	- preserved	- vessel
- Kue Rasidah	- steamed	- sieve
- Kue Tumpu Banda	- dried	
- Kue Lumpur	- brewed	
- Kue Bando		
- Lemper		
- Nagasari		
- Rolled omelet		
- Papaya leaf halua		
- Halua betik papaya		
- Pineapple halua		
- Halua mergat		
- Halua lace fruit		
- Halua asam glugur		
- Halua chili		
- Halua nutmeg		
- Halua mango		
- Halua salak		
- Halua kundru		
- Eggplant halua		
- Flower		
- Fruit		
- Vegetables		
- Sweet teak leaf tea		
- Juice		

Discussion

Based on the results of the data analysis, the lexicon of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* consists of 58 lexicons, which are classified into three main categories: 34 lexicons related to culinary types, 13 lexicons referring to food processing methods, and 11 lexicons denoting traditional tools. These lexicons function not merely as linguistic labels but as cultural markers that reflect the values, beliefs, and local wisdom of the Langkat Malay community. Within the context of traditional wedding ceremonies,

Nasi Hadap-hadapan occupies a central symbolic role, signifying its position as a distinctive and essential element of Malay ceremonial culture.

From a functional perspective, *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* serves as a symbolic culinary tradition that represents marital harmony and social order within Malay society. The ritualized interaction surrounding the food conveys moral and cultural teachings embedded in local wisdom (Wijaya, 2019). The symbolic

contest over flowers reflects the value of harmony and mutual balance between husband and wife. Similarly, the distribution of chicken parts embodies gender roles within marriage: the man who receives the chicken's head symbolizes leadership and responsibility, while the woman who receives the thigh represents fertility and her role in sustaining family continuity. The act of offering food and symbolic "bribes" further signifies affection, mutual care, and the ethical guidance provided to the bride in supporting her husband within the household.

In the Langkat Malay tradition, the symbolic meanings embedded in *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* extend beyond the couple to encompass broader social relations. The offerings function to strengthen the spiritual bond between the bride and groom, unite the two extended families, and reinforce socio-cultural cohesion (Yolles, 2020). Through this ritual, marriage is not viewed solely as a union of individuals, but as a social contract that binds families in brotherhood, mutual respect, and communal harmony.

More specifically, the meanings conveyed through the *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* tradition include:

1. Strengthening the marital bond, as the couple feeds each other and selects preferred foods, symbolizing affection, openness, and mutual respect at the beginning of married life.
2. Unifying extended families, where the ritual serves as a medium for social integration and the reinforcement of kinship ties.
3. Preserving socio-cultural values, by maintaining ancestral customs

and transmitting cultural norms across generations.

4. Introducing partners to one another, providing space for communication regarding preferences and expectations, which lays a foundation for harmonious domestic life.
5. Symbolizing harmony, representing the hope for balance, peace, and mutual understanding throughout married life.

In this context, the lexicon of *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* functions as a linguistic representation of local wisdom. The naming of traditional foods is not merely a practical act of identification, but a reflection of complex socio-cultural considerations, including ingredients, taste, texture, preparation methods, presentation styles, and symbolic meanings. Consequently, traditional culinary lexicons are culturally distinctive and philosophically rich, as they encode the values, worldview, and collective identity of the Langkat Malay community. Through language, local wisdom is preserved, articulated, and transmitted within the framework of traditional culinary practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* comprises 58 lexicons categorized into culinary types, processing methods, and traditional tools, which together function as a linguistic representation of local wisdom within the Langkat Malay wedding tradition. The practice of serving *Nasi Hadap-hadapan* is not merely a communal dining activity but a culturally rich ritual embedded with philosophical meanings related to harmony, kinship, social roles, and

cultural identity. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening cultural awareness among the Langkat Malay community, particularly in the context of globalization, to ensure the continuity of cultural values and prevent the erosion of local identity. The implications of this study extend to cultural preservation efforts, as the documented lexicons and their meanings can serve as a valuable resource for government institutions, educators, and cultural practitioners in preserving, conserving, and revitalizing Malay cultural heritage in Langkat Regency, North Sumatra. Despite its contributions, this study is limited to a specific cultural setting and focuses primarily on lexical and symbolic aspects of one traditional culinary practice. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore comparative studies across different Malay subcultures, incorporate multimodal or ethnographic approaches, and examine the intergenerational transmission of culinary lexicons, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive documentation and sustainability of Indonesia's diverse traditional cultures.

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