

EXPERIENTIAL GRAMMATICAL METAPHOR OF BATAK TOBA WEDDING CEREMONY: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper aimed to explore the experiential grammatical metaphor in the Batak Toba language, which adopts the Systemic Functional Linguistics model as its theoretical framework. This theory investigates how language is used in everyday social interaction and how linguistic context is organized to identify the functions as realized in texts and to depict the construal of meaning in the wedding ceremony of Batak Toba culture. The analysis of grammatical metaphor is classified based on the shift from congruency to incongruence as the features of experiential grammatical metaphor in the Batak Toba wedding ceremony. The incongruence of grammatical realizations contributes to the construction of meaning in formal discourse and traditional ceremonial speech. These grammatical shifts encompass the relocation and rank shift of processes into nouns and qualities. The findings indicate that the relocation of grammatical categories within A shift from congruent to incongruent clause forms is relocated to the congruent pattern, as in *Process + Actor + Goal* is modified into *Goal (noun) + Process* or a phrase structure; similarly, *Adjective + Actor + Goal/Phenomenon* shifts to *Quality/Thing + Actor*. The result of the analysis reflects the cultural values of the Toba Batak community, where grammatical metaphor functions as a linguistic resource for showing respect toward ceremony participants, expressing responsibility through commitment to spoken capacities, and emphasizing solidarity through intimacy and the preservation of social relationships among members of the ordinary community.

Keywords: congruence; incongruence; experiential; metafunction; systemic functional linguistic; Batak Toba Language

1. Introduction

Batak Toba language is not only a means of well-being in daily communication but also an expression of social relationships, cultural values, identity, and ordinary practices. The organization of language indicates that grammatical and lexical features in TBL embody the position of *whom* and *for whom*. The distinction of usage is considered by specific communicative situations and objectives—ranging from *hata nasomal* or *hata siganup ari* (normal language used in predictable interactions) to *hata ninna mandok hata* (formal speech and ordinary ceremonials); *hata andung*, which is specialized speech for expressing grief, lamentation, or sorrowing farewells; and *hata hadatuon* (traditionally used in rituals, magico-medical practices, and spiritual activities involving mantras or prayers) (Sarumpaet, 2015). The

coding of grammar and lexicon in language is selected based on the communicative purpose and the specific social context. Consequently, the choice of words and grammar serves as a crucial instrument for conveying diverse meanings within Batak Toba society. The language employed in typical expressions, specifically the grammatical and lexical choices made during the *mandok hata* tradition, such as speeches at Toba Batak wedding celebrations, integrates abstract concepts and can be expanded into formal discourse; its meaning often encompasses traditional poetic verses and proverbs known as *umpasa* and *umpama*. Each *umpasa* carries a distinct meaning and purpose; some convey their message directly or possess a clear literal meaning upon translation, while others do so indirectly. These *umpasa* are believed to embody moral values such as blessings, advice, and the belief in God. (Manurung et al., 2023; Pasaribu, 2023; Sitanggang et al., 2024). Such expressions serve as cultural vehicles enabling speakers to convey advice, values, aspirations, and social norms. For instance, the proverb *pantun do hangoluan, tois do hamagoan* reflects the cultural belief that "politeness and appropriate behavior shape life's harmony, whereas arrogance or inappropriate behavior leads to social or personal strife". This demonstrates an intrinsic relationship between language choice and the cultural values within Toba Batak society (Sitorus and Sarumpaet).

In Toba Batak wedding ceremonies, verbal communication organizes ordinary relationship terms that are cohesively tied to significance beyond the mere designation of names or family positions. In terms of *tenor*, such as *tulang*, *hula-hula*, *boru*, and *dongan tubu*, takes part in clarifying the roles and social status within the ordinary structure, roles that all family members are gratified to be respected and endorsed (Donna C.R.Lumba et al., 2025). Hence, the expressions used in the wedding ceremony symbolize social values that reflect the philosophy of *Daliha Na Tolu*.

The notion of grammar and metaphor in the Toba Batak language, and the relationship between language and social order, becomes even more evident in the formal language when it is regarded from the perspective of *Daliha Na Tolu*. This cultural system governs social standing, interpersonal roles, obligations, and appropriate attitudes and interactions (Siahaan et al., 2021). Thus, speakers are expected to select language that fits the nature of their relationships with others. These social relationships not only denote word choice but also emphasize specific grammatical arrangements (Sibarani et al., 2003). In tangible conversation, for instance, parts of a sentence may be omitted or merely implied. Even without explicitly stating an action, the intended meaning remains comprehensible to the listener through context and cultural knowledge. This demonstrates that the way grammar is employed is intimately linked to how people interact with one another.

The notion of experiential grammatical metaphor (EGM) is one of the most significant characteristics of academic, bureaucratic, scientific, cultural, and educational discourse. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, 2013; Martin, 2020; Taverniers, 2003, ;Ravelli, 2003). The concept of grammatical metaphor has also been expanded in Indonesia, particularly in the fields of education and culture. (Saragih, 2014; Wiratno, 2018). Grammatical metaphor lends a distinctive character to language use and serves as a universal model for the study of regional languages. From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language is viewed as a resource for creating meaning, wherein grammatical structures facilitate the expression of ideational meaning.

Experiential grammatical metaphors are integrated to make language more accurate, rigorous, concise, and comprehensible, while reducing grammatical complexity and repetition. (Xie & Zhang, 2024). Additionally, semantic condensation is conceptualized as the

key characteristic of grammatical metaphors. (Li, 2023). This provides them with various ways to manage social relationships, attitudes, judgments, and positions.

This paper aims to identify the function and meaning of including rank shifts that make clauses more abstract or condensed, and construal meaning through the realization of grammatical and lexical relationships in Toba Batak discourse, particularly at Toba Batak wedding ceremonies. Hence, this study is expected to provide comprehensive insights into the relationship between grammar, cultural context, and meaning in the use of the Toba Batak language.

2. Literature Review

This study employs Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, developed by Halliday, which positions language as a system of meaning choices utilized by humans within social contexts. From this perspective, language is understood not merely as a set of grammatical rules but as a resource for constructing and conveying experiences, establishing social relationships, and organizing messages. The case of SFL by grammatical metaphor (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) explicates the incongruity between semantic meaning and the grammatical form used to realize that meaning.

This study focuses specifically on experiential grammatical metaphor, the process of clause formation wherein meaning is realized through a shift from a congruent form to an incongruent or metaphorical one. Experiential grammatical metaphor involves how speakers modify word classes through rank-shifting and relocation, coding semantic condensation. Experiential meaning is realized through abstraction and the relocation of word classes without diminishing the density of the meaning. The choice of experiential metaphor not only demonstrates the rank function and the potential to specify the structure condensation, realizing the specific meaning of each function, but also reflects the word functions, grammatical shifts, the speaker's stance, politeness levels, and the social relationships between communication participants.

The Analysis of experiential grammatical metaphor features reveals that shifting a complex clause into a single clause, while potentially a form of clause reduction, semantically condenses meaning around the focus of the utterance. The grammatical transformation within the clause, specifically shifting a process into a noun, aims to reduce the emphasis on the actor, sensor, or speaker, focusing instead on the noun as the clause subject. This study is supported by (Taverniers, 2003), who asserts that grammatical metaphor is a semogenetic phenomenon involving the expansion of meaning potential through variations in lexicogrammatical realization. Thus, the theory proposed by (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, 2013; Taverniers, 2003) serves as a relevant framework for systematically, contextually, and thoroughly explaining the form, function, and meaning of experiential grammatical metaphor in language use within specific social contexts.

Clause condensation is one form of logical grammatical metaphor identified in this study. It occurs when the meaning of a congruent form realized through two or more clauses is condensed into a more concise metaphorical form, typically a nominal group or a more compact lexicogrammatical structure.

Data analysis reveals that clause condensation in the Toba Batak language frequently appears in speech associated with death rituals, wedding ceremonies, and Toba Batak songs. This condensation generally occurs through nominalization, whereby relationships of cause-effect, purpose, circumstance, or social process are no longer explicitly realized through clause

complexes but are instead condensed into nominal units that encapsulate specific logical meanings.

3. Research Method

This paper uses a qualitative descriptive approach to gain a deeper understanding of data that naturally emerges within the context. This approach was chosen because the paper is not directed at statistical calculations, but rather at the process of systematically describing, interpreting, and explaining the characteristics of the data. Data analysis refers to the interactive model of (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This model includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

Furthermore, the data reduction is presented in narrative form and in tables associated with the specific grammatical coding. This presentation helps researchers identify trends, relationships between data, and findings.

The final stage is drawing and verifying the conclusions as they are formulated based on the patterns found. This process is carried out to ensure that the resulting interpretations remain consistent and accurate. The stages are designed to strengthen the validity of interpretations because each finding is explored in its context, allowing the discussion to provide a comprehensive, in-depth frame for further research of the object being studied.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 The Categorical Shift of Material Process into Noun

Note:

Mt: metaphorical meaning (incongruence)

Cng: Congruency (non-metaphorical meaning)

[1] *Mt: Ima* *Elek-elek nami* *Raja nami,*

DEM-FOC.PART persuade-NMLZ~RED 1PL.EXCL.POSS king

tulang na burju

uncle REL good

[that is our persuasion our king, the good uncle]

Cng:Hami manglek songoni tu hamu Raja nami, tulang naburju

1PL.EXCL ACT-persuade like. that to-2PL king

[we persuade like that for you, our king, the good uncle]

Category	Incongruency (metaphor)			
Clausa	Ima	elek-elek nami	Raja nami, tulang naburju	
Experiential Meaning	Carrier/ Identified	Token / Value		
Category	Congruency			
Clausa	<i>Hami</i>	<i>mangelek</i>	<i>songoni</i>	Raja nami, <i>tulang naburju</i>
Experiential Meaning	Participant:Actor	Process: Material	Circumstance:	Goal / Target

[2] *Mt: tubuan anak tubuan boru*
NMLZ-be. born NMLZ child NMLZ-be. Born-NMLZ daughter
ma hamu

FOC.PART 2PL

[Become a born child and be born of daughter for you]

Cng: *tubu ma anak dohot boru di hamuna*

PASS-be.born-CAUS -FOC.PART child CONJ daughter LOC 2PL

[Be born the child and daughter for you]

The clause in data [1] *ma elek-elek nami Raja nami, tulang naburju* is an utterance delivered by a speaker representing the groom's side (Raja Parsaut) to the groom's uncle (*tulang*). This clause is realized through an experiential-ideational grammatical metaphor marked by the process of nominalization, specifically the transformation of the congruent form "*Hami mangelek songoni tuhamu*" (We make this humble appeal to you) into the metaphorical form "*elek-elek nami*" (our humble appeal). Similarly, in data [2], the phrase *tubuan anak tubuan boru ma hamu* (may you be blessed with sons and daughters) is a metaphorical form in which the word *tubuan* serves as the focal point of the utterance. The experience of "being born" is metaphorically realized as a "*Thing*" through nominalization. Thus, a process is construed as a noun. In contrast, in a congruent form, the experience would be directly realized as a "*Process*" via the verb "to be born," with "son and daughter" functioning as the participants involved in that process. In the congruent form, the experience is represented through a Process + Participant configuration, in which *mangelek* is formulated as a verbal/material Process involving the Participant *Hami* (We) as the actor and *tuhamu* (you) as the target.

Nevertheless, in the metaphorical form, the Process is reified into the nominal entities *elek-elek* and *tubuan*, causing the clause structure to shift into a relational identification pattern of Carrier + Token. This shift results in the loss of the explicit Process and agent, which are instead "packaged" within a possessive form via the marker *nami* (our). Consequently, the experience is no longer represented as an action but rather as a conceptual object that can be "presented" or "expressed." The grammatical metaphor in this clause lies in the reduction of the Process dynamic to a static form (a noun), the condensation of meaning (semantic condensation whereby a single nominal unit encapsulates the meaning of a complex action a shift in implicit interpersonal orientation, and a cultural rhetorical strategy in which nominalization is employed to enhance politeness, deference, and formality when communicating with respected figures (such as *Raja nami* or *Tulang naburju*).

4.2 The Categorical Shift of Adjective into Noun

[3] *Mt:jadi songon dia ma na uli*

so like what- FOC. PART REL beautiful

na denggan di hamuna hasuhuton

REL good LOC 2PL family large

[So, what is the beauty and the best for the large family]

Cng:*jadi songon dia ma i,*

So like what FOC.PART DEM

asa uli dohot denggan di hamuna hasuhuton

PURP beautiful CONJ good LOC 2PL family large

[Be more beautiful and better for the large family]

Category	Incongruency (metaphor)		
Clausa	jadi songon dia	na uli na denggan	di hamu na hasuhuton
Experiential Meaning	Process: Relational	Thing	Circumstance :
Category	Congruency		
Clausa	jadi songon dia mambahen	uli dohot denggan	di hamu na hasuhuton
Experiential Meaning	Process:Relational	Attribut	Circumstance

The clause "*jadi songon dia ma na uli na denggan di hamu na hasuhuton*" represents an experiential ideational grammatical metaphor that occurs by the shift of the *attribute* to a *thing*. Congruently, the qualities *uli and denggan* are realized as adjectives that function as complements in the material process of *mambahen*. However, in metaphorical form, these two adjectives are coded to nominal phrases *na uli* and *na denggan*, reifying the qualities as objects.

The realization of structure based on the metafunction evokes a metaphorical clause and a shift from a process-based representation of experience to an entity-based representation. The *attribute* function is no longer attached to the *process*, but it is coded as a *participant*, which can be treated as a conceptual object.

The uniqueness of the grammatical metaphor in this clause lies in the use of the relative particle *na* as a construal meaning based on a nominalization category in the Toba Batak language. This modification of category not only alters the lexicogrammatical form but also affects the structure of meaning, where quality is no longer perceived as an inherent characteristic but rather as an entity that can be considered, negotiated, and evaluated within customary discourse (*hasuhuton*).

Furthermore, this metaphor demonstrates the linguistic tendency toward formality and abstraction in typical and customary speech contexts. Thus, this metaphorical clause functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a rhetorical strategy to refine and enhance the value of meaning in socio-cultural interactions.

4.3 The Categorical Shift of Circumstance into Noun

- [4] Mt: *tangiang i do parhitean mi di ngolu mi*
 prayer DEM- FOC.PART bridge-2SG. POSS LOC life -2SG.POSS
 [The prayer is the bridge in your life]
 Cng: *ho mangolu di portibi on marhitehon tangiang do*
 2SG live LOC world DEM ACT-bridge-APPL prayer-3SG. POSS
 [You live in this world to bridge the prayer]

Category	Incongruency (metaphor)			
Clausa	tangiang i	do	parhitean mi	di ngolumi
Experiential Meaning	token	Process: Relational	value	Circumstance: Location
Category	Congruency			
Clausa	ho	mangolu	di portibion	marhitehon tangiang do

Experiential Meaning	Participa nt	Process: Material	Circumstance	Circumstance
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The data point *tangiang i do parhitean mi di ngolumi* that *prayer* is the means of *your life* demonstrates the presence of an experiential-ideational grammatical metaphor achieved through nominalization. The metaphorical element is evident in the use of the lexical item *parhitean* "means/medium", which derives from the process verb *marhitehon* "to use as a means". In its congruent form, the clause would be realized as *ho mangolu di portibion marhitehon tangiang do*, which depicts the meaning *you live in this world by means of prayer*. That clause exhibits a material process, *mangolu*, as to live, accompanied by the circumstance of manner *marhitehon tangiang*.

In the metaphorical form, the process undergoes nominalization into *parhitean*. Consequently, the transitivity structure shifts from a material process to an identifying relational process. The metaphorical clause positions *tangiang* "prayer" as the Token and *parhitean* "means" as the Value. Thus, prayer is no longer represented merely as a tool within the act of living, but rather as the very identity of the life path itself.

The unique nature of the grammatical metaphor in this clause illustrates a characteristic of the Toba Batak oral tradition: the tendency to condense experience into abstract nominal forms. This condensation results in speech that is more formal and symbolic, imbued with customary significance, and which highlights spiritual values.

5. Conclusion

Clause condensation occurred in the form of experiential grammatical metaphor identified in this study. This transformation occurs when a meaning normally realized as a Process, specifically a material process functioning as an action at the beginning of a congruent clause, is substituted with a noun. This process condenses the clause's meaning into a more concise metaphorical form, typically a nominal group or a compact lexico-grammatical structure.

Data analysis reveals that clause condensation in the Toba Batak language frequently occurs in traditional wedding speeches. A shift from congruent to incongruent clause forms is evident: the congruent pattern of Process + Actor + Goal is transformed into Goal (noun) + Process or a phrase structure; similarly, Adjective + Actor + Goal/Phenomenon shifts to Quality/Thing + Actor. The trans category of relocation based on word class and function represents a shift from an *adjective* form to a *quality*. Such condensation, usually achieved through nominalization, means that the action itself is no longer the clause's core focus but instead becomes a singular semantic domain. Goals, circumstances, and social processes are no longer explicitly in complex clause structures but are condensed into nominal units with specific meanings.

This grammatical realization of the Toba Batak language integrates grammatical and lexical variations while conveying social and cultural experiences. Within the context of culture and custom, this condensed speech style is viewed as an embodiment of the speaker's wisdom, authority, and politeness. An analysis of clause forms suggests that Toba Batak speakers tend to avoid overly direct or lengthy explanations, opting instead for more condensed, symbolic, and metaphorical expressions. Beyond serving as a strategy for information condensation, clause condensation also drives grammatical abstraction, whereby

experiential grammatical metaphors appear as a marker in structures and meaning. This semantic condensation of clauses in the Toba Batak language elaborates the features of grammatical metaphors and cultural values.

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