

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

Language is crucial for humans due to their nature as an individual and social being. An individual thinks, considers, and decides something by talking to himself using language. It can be used as a means of communication and interaction one to another. It functions to express feelings, emotions, ideas, and all things about the world to one another. Language is naturally the dominant means one uses for these activities. He can meet his goals through the interactions with one another using either verbal or non-verbal language (e.g. spoken, written, intonation, gestures, pitches, mimics, or body-movements). Speaking is a production of an auditory signal delivered orally to a listener. On the other hand, writing is concerned with verbalizing messages in symbols in which the ideas, thoughts, and feelings are combined and expressed to the readers. Both the verbal and nonverbal languages provide messages that allow the sender and receiver to perform them meaningfully. The ‘sending-receiving’ activities of messages may successfully work due to each of the messages containing meanings. This fact indicates that interaction and communication is an act of making, conveying, and finding meaning processes among the communicants.

Investigations of ‘what makes meaning’ become highly important in communication acts. Studies on meanings have been undertaken within a long history until recently (Nöth, 1995, p. 14) under the study of meaning, called ‘semiology/semiotics’. Semiology took the sounds of language (*parole*) into account and they were found as the materials of making meanings (Saussure, 1983). Recently, the modern study of semiotics has moved its focus from the study of meaning based on the nature of signs (forms and concepts) of language to the broader account.

In addition, the study of what makes meaning was carried out by Charles Sanders Peirce proposing symbols, icons, and indices (Peirce, in Chandler 2007, p. 36).

Further, the psychological and concept foci are expanded until recently to take other possible resources to meaning (social semiotics) into account. Some examples of studies in this field were noted are the works of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). For almost four decades van Leeuwen has examined the phenomena of meaning resources in various areas diverse as film (van Leeuwen, 1985, pp. 216-232); 1991, pp. 76-114; 2014, pp. 347-410; and van Leeuwen and Boeriis, 2017, pp. 44-46;); and children toys (Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen, pp. 355-382) just to mention a few. These studies implied for them the world provides abundant resources of meaning. When combined one to another, the semiotic resources enable humans to make meaningful expressions as the representations of his ideas, existences, and experiences textually or compositionally through his interaction. Meaning 'lives' in every aspect of human lives, resulting in human's unique properties. It can be stated then that human's lives are typically textual.

The studies described above showed that in social semiotics, texts (language, sounds) are not seen as those produced in spoken and written language only, but also in other possible resources to express meanings. They play the roles as the fundamental bases of communication activities, termed 'mode'. A 'mode' is a term replacing the traditional term 'sign', and is redefined as any potential or semiotic resource of meaning-making as it is developed in a broader area. Lorusso (in Lenninger, 2017, p. 68) stated all sign phenomena are both social and systematic as they are connected to communication and human understanding. Writing, speech, gesture, music, layout, magazines, photos, artefacts, and the sorts are recently categorized as texts or modes that possess communicative functions. Van Leeuwen's theory (2005) underlines the central to social semiotics is the notion of 'semiotic resource' or mode. It possesses a dynamic meaning-making potential and simultaneously shaped by and shapes the social context

in which it is employed. The process of being shaped and shaping semiotic resources goes through their past repeatedly (i.e. ‘materialized’) used, with a set of affordances in accordance with their possible uses, and what they can do (provenances) in concrete social contexts (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 285). Further, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 20) suggested that to examine modes they should go through the examination to convince that they are functionally communicative. In other words, not every ‘resources’ may function as a means of communication. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 285) also suggested that one should examine the potentials through Halliday’s theory of language metafunctions. Language metafunctions comprise: ideational/representational: representing patterns of experiences; interpersonal/interactional: enhancing social interaction; and textual/compositional: interweaving ideational and interpersonal meanings into cohesive and coherent units. Language metafunctions are the testers towards the affordances and provenances of modes to make sure if they meet the communicative function acceptability requirement. Meaning making can, then, be redefined as a process of choosing semiotic resources (or modes) from the available sources which possess affordances, provenances, and materiality applicable in a given community and in a particular situated social interaction and communication.

Such a nature of meaning making has attracted linguists and philosophers to excavate the semiotic resources in sake of their own areas of disciplines. By using social semiotic approach, researchers have taken such those as: visual images, magazines (layout, publication), advertising, politics, etc. into account (Maire & Liarte, 2018, pp. 1405-1423; Hochman, 2014, pp. 1-15; & Mertz, 2007, pp. 337-353).

Cohn and Magliano (2019), for instance, studied visual images in the psychological field. In their “editors’ introduction and review: visual narrative research: an emerging field in cognitive science” article they evidenced the effectiveness of social semiotics approach to applying to increase human cognition capability, especially in meaning making. John (2013)

undertook research on the use of social semiotic approach to visual images in magazines in Nigeria. The visual images were concerned with politics in relation to associated linguistic texts. They found and evidenced that social semiotic approach can ease the interpretation of visual images as linguistic text read. Even, he suggested this approach to apply to all forms of images and illustrations without direct relation or dependence on linguistic text.

Social semiotics entails the culture of the society as its central. Studies on specific culturally-bound semiotic resources have also been taken into account by some researchers. Bin, et.al. (2019) applied a semiotic approach to cultural symbol study in relation to business concerns (e.g. trade mark) in visual language in tea packaging design in China. The study analysed materials, textures, shape, colour, writing and typography, the iconography of its package, the representational, interactive and compositional meaning of its package, the Chinese visual language, and the cultural meaning of tea package. They concluded that icon (i.e. the dragon) plays a significant role and affecting in designing the packaging of a product. They found that the designer of this package ignored it. In order to obtain the necessary knowledge about the way consumers approach and understand advertisements, one needs to construct models that accurately predict actual visual exposure and advertising impact (Damaskinidis, et.al., 2017, p. 46; & Trendafilov, 2016, p. 1).

Butar-Butar (2018) took the artefact *Ulos* into account of her research entitled: “The Aesthetic Study of Traditional Cloth of North Sumatera”. In her research she investigated the process of making *Ulos* as of Batak artefacts and the meanings of the artefacts based on the addressees. Djawa’s, et al (2021) carried out a study on artefacts entitled “Symbolic Form and Meaning of Non-verbal Artefacts of Dawanese Community in South Central Timor District” employing qualitative descriptive methods. They found various forms of artefacts found in the Dawan community. They claimed the meanings of the artefacts cannot be distinguished from their functions.

Realizing culture as the ‘provider’ or ‘supplier’ of semiotic resources, the researcher was inspired to take the artefacts employed in Toba Batak ceremonies into a study. Based on the observations, the researcher found that “*Panahu*” (the upper head of pork), for instance, had different meanings in Toba custom from that in Samosir custom. In Toba custom it signified “an act of respect toward the daughter party of the host’s parents in-law”; while in Samosir custom it represented “a respect or indication of an honourable person/leader” in Baptism and Entering a New House ceremonies.

“*Tandok*” (a bag into which rice is put) was formerly made of woven-*mendong* (Latin) and taken when attending any Toba Batak ceremony. However, nowadays, it is rarely used. Most of those attending a party were found using *Tandok* made of plastic. Such a kind of artefact is signifies ‘a woven bag into which rice ( or food) is put. A certain type of “*Ulos*” (Batak traditional woven-clothes) in Humbang custom ceremony was used in a certain period of time in the past, but it is no longer used in the recent time.

The phenomena of cultural artefact meanings described above indicates that cultures have abundant semiotic resources that can be used as modes. Also, the researchers’ observations showed the artefact of Toba Batak employed in ceremonies possessed certain meanings, variations, and even changes. Nainggolan (2014, p. 52) identified that in reality every ethnic has various kinship systems. He also found that the Samosir ethnic is very rich in terms of address. For example, *uncle*. In Toba Batak Samosir ethnic, *uncle* is classified into four classifications, namely: (1) *Amangtua* (father’s elder brother and mother’s elder sister’s husband), (2) *Amanguda* (father’s younger brother and mother’s younger sister’s husband), (3) *Tulang* (mother’s brother) and (4) *Amangboru* (father’s sister’s husband). Such descriptions indicated that the same terms of address have different functions (variations of meanings). Another instance of the variations of meanings is what is called ‘*marhusip*’ (‘talking about marriage plans between the groom’s and the bride’s parties’). To a certain respect of a culture, it is still regarded

a must and formal; but to another is informal. In *Toba Holbung* and *Laguboti*, the term “*Marhusip*” is not common, but *patua hata* (‘affirmation’) (Manihuruk, 2019, p. 16).

It is noted that Toba Batak people are widely spread in such regions as: Toba, Samosir, Humbang, and Tarutung. The social groups of the four regions of Toba Batak respectively are such those as: Sibisa, Porsea, Laguboti, Balige, and some other regions are categorized into Toba customs; Limbong Sagala, Pangururan, Simanindo, Ambarita, and some other regions are categorized into Samosir customs; Sait ni Huta, Dolok Sanggul, Siborong-Borong, and Lintong ni Huta, and some other regions are categorized into Humbang customs; Hutabarat, Huta Panggabean, Hutatoruan (Lumban Tobing), and some other regions are categorized into Silindung customs to mention a few. Further, it can be claimed that the clans of particular Batak people are highly identical and typical to the regions and to the customs they apply which have been inherited from their ancestors. The clans such as: Sibarani, Marpaung; Ambarita, Naibaho; Simamora, Sihite; and Hutabarat, Panggabean, for instance, are identical to employing Toba, Samosir, Humbang, and Silindung customs respectively.

In addition, based on the researcher’s observations in some Toba Batak ceremonies, the researcher found some different artefacts used by a particular community from the others. *Osang-osang* (the jaw of pork), for instance, could be served to different parties in different regions of Toba Batak community. In Sibisa it was given to the brother’s mother of a baptized baby’s father in a Baptism ceremony. Whereas, in Limbong Sagala, the same object was served to the parents/brother-in law of the baptized baby’s father. In Sait ni Huta *Upa Sira* (the back part of a pork) was given to the host’s parents-in law in a Baptism ceremony. However, in Lumban Siagian the researcher observed that it was for the host (the baptized baby’s parents) in a Baptism ceremony.

All the phenomena described above inspired the researcher to carry out a further study. The researcher expected to find out the meanings of the arfacts used in Toba Batak ceremony. To deepen the study the researcher also put the variations, changes, and the causal factors the

artefact varied and changed the way they were. To meet the researcher's expectation this study was entitled: "Semiotic Meanings of Artefacts in Toba Batak ceremonies Across Regions: A Study on Variations and Changes". Among a number of the types of artefacts in Toba Batak, the researcher put the scopes of the study on such those as: *Dengke na ni Arsik* (driedly-cooked fish), *Ulos* ('Batak's traditional woven cloth'), *Tudu-tudu ni Sipanganon/Parjambaran* ('a complete set of animal organs for allotments'), *Boras si Pir ni Tondi* (rice), *Tandok* ('a woven mendong bag for keeping things in') and some other cultural objects that might be found in the study.

## **1.2 The Problems of the Study**

As described in the background of the study, the research was concerned with the analysis of the meanings of the artefacts employed in formal Toba Batak custom across Toba Batak regions. In relation to the study, some problems were formularized as follows:

- 1) What are the semiotic meanings of artefacts and their variations in Toba Batak ceremonies across Toba Batak regions?
- 2) How are the changes of the semiotic meanings of artefacts in Toba Batak ceremonies across Toba Batak regions?
- 3) What are the factors causing the semiotic variations and changes to occur the way they do?

## **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

The research will be undertaken to meet the following objectives:

- 1) To identify and collect the semiotic meanings of artefacts and their variations in Toba Batak ceremonies across Toba Batak regions.
- 2) To investigate the changes of the semiotic meanings of artefacts in Toba Batak ceremonies across Toba Batak regions.

- 3) To find out the causal factors of the semiotic meaning variations and changes of the artefacts in Toba Batak ceremonies across Toba Batak regions.

#### **1.4. The Scopes of the Study**

There are a great deal of phenomena that can be taken into account in a research, especially those related to Toba Batak traditional ceremonies employing artefacts. However, in order to avoid bias and to keep the researcher's stance in the focus, the researcher took the semiotic meanings of the artefacts, variations, and changes they had within the four regions of Toba Batak. The artefacts taken into account included those as: *Ulos* ('Batak traditional woven clothes'), *Dengke na ni Arsik* ('driedly-cooked fish'), *Tudu-Tudu ni Sipanganon/Parjambaran* ('a complete set of meat allotment'), *Tandok* ('woven *mendong* bags'), and some others that might be used in the traditional Toba Batak ceremonies, covering: *Pamasu-masuon* (Wedding), *Tardidi* (Baptism), and *Mangompoi Jabu* (Entering a New House)

#### **1.5. The Significances of the Study**

The results of this study were highly expected to give contributions to: 1) social semiotic realms; 2) language learning; 3) the local and central government of Indonesia to design policies; 4) Toba Batak ethnic institution administrators that they socialize the culture and values to the young; 5) Toba Batak individuals that they are familiar with their own culture and the cultural values they embrace; 6) to motivate the other researchers to excavate more semiotic resources in similar or different scopes to widen the nuances and to higher the interests in this field; and 7) the researcher himself to broaden his nuances and interests in semiotic field.



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