The Interpersonal Communication Process of Batak Toba Migrant Students in Bandar Lampung within the Martarombo Tradition

Asnirut Naomika Nainggolan[1], Noning Verawati[2], Budhi Waskito[3]

[1,2,3] Communication Studies Program, Faculty of Social and Political Science,
Bandar Lampung University, Indonesia
Email : Naomikanainggolan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Batak Toba ethnic group builds kinship through the clan system and the martarombo tradition, which is the process of tracing genealogies to establish family connections. This tradition is essential for Batak Toba migrant students in Bandar Lampung as a means of preserving cultural identity. This study aims to examine the interpersonal communication process of Batak Toba migrant students in Bandar Lampung within the martarombo tradition. This research employs a qualitative method with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data validity was ensured through method triangulation. The findings show that the roles as sender and receiver in martarombo are flexible, influenced by cultural understanding, the courage to initiate interaction, and emotional drive. The communication process takes place both verbally and nonverbally through the exchange of information about clans and genealogies, accompanied by gestures such as handshakes and smiles. The communication channels used include face-to-face interactions and online media that adapt to technological advances. Feedback is given directly, both verbally and nonverbally, strengthening kinship bonds. The success of communication is influenced by experience, interest, Batak language proficiency, and active participation in conversations. Martarombo remains a vital medium for building solidarity and upholding ethical values based on the Dalihan Na Tolu principle. Students are aware of the importance of preserving this tradition.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Students, Martarombo, Migrants, Batak Toba Ethnic Group.

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in shaping personal identity and developing interpersonal relationships. In the cultural context of the Batak Toba society, communication is not only a medium for social interaction but also a crucial tool in strengthening and preserving kinship bonds. One of the main systems used by the Batak Toba community to maintain social relations is the *marga* system a patrilineal kinship system passed down through the male lineage. When two Batak individuals meet, they usually begin the conversation by asking each other's *marga*, followed by a process known as *martarombo*, which is the tracing of genealogical ties to identify familial relationships between individuals. *Martarombo* is a distinctive communication practice of the Batak Toba people, aimed at building and strengthening kinship relations (*partuturan*) based on clan connections. This tradition is deeply rooted in Batak cultural values such as *somba* (respect and reverence), as well as the *Dalihan Na Tolu* social system, which divides societal roles into three key components: *hula-hula* (wife-giver), *boru* (wife-taker), and *dongan tubu* (same lineage). These three elements form the basis for determining appropriate forms of address and social relations, making *martarombo* not only a means of communication but also a mechanism for

preserving cultural identity and values. This tradition becomes especially significant for Batak Toba people living in diaspora, far from their *bona pasogit* (homeland).

The Batak Toba are also known as one of the ethnic groups with a strong tradition of migration. This is supported by research from Nainggolan et al (2024), which states that many Batak Toba people have migrated from their *bona pasogit* to various areas, both urban and rural. One of the most common reasons for migration is to pursue higher education in major cities, including Bandar Lampung. According to data from the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) Kedaton, there has been a significant increase in the number of new Batak Toba students migrating to Bandar Lampung 98 students in 2021, 100 in 2022, 140 in 2023, and a sharp rise to 200 students in 2024. The routine welcoming events for new students held by HKBP serve as a means of strengthening a sense of familial belonging in migration, while also facilitating the continuity of cultural traditions such as *martarombo*.

Alongside the growing number of Batak Toba migrant students, regional student organizations have also emerged, such as IKANMAS (Ikatan Mahasiswa Asal Samosir) Lampung, which functions as a collective platform for students from the same region to foster solidarity and preserve cultural values. IKANMAS membership data shows consistent annual growth: 27 members in 2020, 31 in 2021, 29 in 2022, 35 in 2023, and 39 in 2024 bringing the total to 161 members over the past five years.Preliminary research conducted through personal interviews with migrant students such as Tio Siringo-ringo and Dwi Situmorang shows that the *martarombo* practice is still actively carried out among Batak Toba students in diaspora. This practice is used to understand one's kinship position and determine appropriate forms of address, such as *ito*, *tulang*, or *namboru*. The phrase "*makuling do mudar*" which means "same bloodline" may indicate a kinship connection even among individuals who have never previously met, illustrating the deep symbolic meaning of this tradition.

In cultural studies, communication is closely tied to the value system upheld by a society. Culture becomes the foundation of communication and vice versa. Cultural variation produces diversity in communication styles, one of which is reflected in interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication plays a vital role in bridging human relationships directly, both verbally and nonverbally. Its main objective is to create mutual understanding and build harmonious relationships (Ngalimun, 2021). This research is important to conduct because the increasing number of Batak Toba migrant students in Bandar Lampung each year creates a new space for both the preservation and transformation of cultural values. The focus of this research is to explain the process of interpersonal communication in the implementation of *martarombo* among migrant students. Interpersonal communication in *martarombo* is dialogical in nature and requires openness, empathy, and acknowledgment of differences. However, before discussing the process further, it is necessary to understand the extent to which the *martarombo* tradition is still practiced by the current younger generation.

Previous research by Sihombing et al (2024) indicates a tendency for the *martarombo* tradition to fade among the younger generation due to globalization, declining interest, and the influence of technology and external cultures. However,

this study is conducted in Bandar Lampung, a city with unique characteristics as a migrant hub and a diversity of student backgrounds. Therefore, the findings of this research have the potential to reveal dynamics of *martarombo* cultural preservation that differ from previous studies. Through this study, it is expected that the process of interpersonal communication carried out by Batak Toba migrant students in Bandar Lampung in maintaining and continuing the *martarombo* tradition can be mapped as part of efforts to preserve cultural identity and strengthen social relationships within the context of migration.

LITERATURE REVIEW
A. Interpersonal Communication

According to DeVito (2016), interpersonal communication can be defined as a communication process that involves the exchange of messages between two individuals or within a small group, where direct interaction allows for immediate feedback. Similar to other forms of communication, interpersonal communication has distinct characteristics, namely the two-way flow of messages and direct face-to-face interaction that enables immediate responses (Ngalimun, 2021). Interpersonal communication becomes more effective when supported by five key elements: openness, supportiveness, empathy, positive regard, and similarity (DeVito, 2016).

The communication process consists of two stages. The first stage is the primary process, where an individual expresses thoughts or feelings to another individual using symbols with the help of media. Symbols as the primary medium in communication include language, gestures, images, colors, and so on. The second stage is the secondary process, which involves the use of devices or tools as supplementary media after symbols have served as the main medium. A communicator uses secondary media to facilitate communication when the audience is relatively distant or large in number. Letters, telephones, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and similar channels are commonly used secondary media in communication.

B. Joseph DeVito's Communication Model

DeVito (2016) states that communication is a process consisting of six main components: source and receiver, message, communication channel, feedback, communication barriers, and context. In addition, communication ethics and competence also play significant roles in this process. Each of these elements can be further explained as follows:

1. Source–Receiver: Interpersonal communication occurs when at least two individuals are able to interact directly. In this process, each individual functions not only as a message sender (source) but also as a receiver of the message.

2. Message: In interpersonal communication, messages must be sent and received to effectively convey one's intentions and feelings to others. Messages can be categorized into two types:

    a. Verbal Messages: All forms of spoken communication that involve the use of one or more words are considered verbal communication.

    b. Nonverbal Messages: Signals that are conveyed without words are referred to as nonverbal messages. Communication using such signals is known as nonverbal communication. The forms of nonverbal communication vary depending on one's cultural background. Examples include hand gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, vocal intonation (paralanguage), and physical touch.

3. Channel: This refers to the medium that facilitates the transmission of messages and connects the source with the receiver. Communication media can take the form of face-to-face meetings, phone calls, emails, online chat groups, and more.

4. Feedback: Feedback is the reaction or response that arises as a result of the communicated message. Not only the receiver, but also the sender can hear what they have said or observe what they have written.

5. Noise: These are disruptions in communication that distort the message. Such barriers can prevent the receiver from properly receiving the message or hinder the source from delivering it. Communication barriers are unavoidable and generally fall into three categories: physical barriers, psychological barriers, and semantic barriers.

6. Context: Communication always takes place within a specific context or environment that influences both the way messages are delivered and their content. This refers to the situation in which the interaction occurs.

7. Ethics: Communication ethics refer to the moral principles used to judge whether communication behavior is right or wrong. In every interpersonal communication interaction, ethical considerations are always present and significantly impact the quality and effectiveness of the communication process.

8. Competence: Communication involves competence, which is the ability of an individual to convey and interpret messages effectively. This includes both the knowledge and the structure of the messages used.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher employed a descriptive qualitative method. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018) , qualitative research is a process aimed at exploring and interpreting the meaning embedded within phenomena in the field. This method is used to examine objects in their natural settings, where the researcher acts as the primary instrument in both data collection and analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). Data collection techniques were carried out through three methods: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, in order to obtain valid and comprehensive data. The informants in this study consisted of a Traditional Leader in Bandar Lampung, Batak Toba migrant students, and a fellow student from a different ethnic

background who frequently observed communication processes in the *martarombo* tradition.

The validity of the data in this research was ensured through methodological triangulation. Data analysis was conducted inductively using the Miles and Huberman model which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Sugiyono, 2019). Through this methodological approach, a more complete and in-depth understanding was obtained regarding the interpersonal communication process within the *martarombo* tradition, as practiced during the initial meetings between individuals in the Batak Toba kinship context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. The Batak Toba Tribe

The Batak Toba tribe is one of the six sub-ethnic groups of the Batak people, with a wide distribution across various regions in Indonesia. Their presence is relatively easy to find in social life, especially in urban areas and among migrant communities. The Batak Toba people are considered kin, as they are believed to have descended from a common ancestor. According to Batak belief, the journey of King Batak began with his settlement in Sianjur Mula-Mula, a region regarded as the cradle of early Batak civilization, located near Lake Toba. One of the main characteristics of the Batak Toba tribe is its patrilineal kinship system, in which individuals inherit their clan (*marga*) through the paternal line.

B. *Martarombo* as a Social Identity within the Batak Toba Tribe

In tracing and confirming kinship relations between individuals, the Batak people use a system of lineage tracing through clan names, known in the Batak language as *martarombo*. The word *martarombo* is derived from two Batak Toba language elements: *mar*, a verbal prefix meaning "to" or "to be," and *tarombo*, which means "genealogy" or lineage (Sihombing et al., 2024). In the *martarombo* tradition, inter-clan relations (*pahula ianakkonon*), forms of address, and attitudes shown are contextual. Once each other's clan is known, the direction and nature of kinship relations can be established (Girsang, 2018). Generally, these relationships are formed based on how close the familial ties can be established. Within the *martarombo* tradition, *Dalihan Na Tolu* holds a crucial role and position as a kinship system that encompasses aspects of social interaction, norms of politeness, as well as customary social and legal structures. It is regarded as the philosophical foundation of Batak life. This philosophy guides interpersonal conduct through the principle of "*Somba Marhula-hula, Manat Mardongan Tubu, Elek Marboru,*" which means respecting the *hula-hula* (wife-giver), being cautious in dealing with *dongan tubu* (clanmates), and being gentle and kind to the *boru* (wife-taker).

C. The *Martarombo* Tradition Process as Interpersonal Communication

Tradition governs the way humans establish relationships with others, both at the individual and group levels. It also guides human behavior in interacting with their environment and in shaping their attitudes toward nature. The way people communicate, the media they use, and the rules that accompany it are determined by the cultural norms of each society. Based on this process, *martarombo* can be

understood as a form of interpersonal communication, as it involves two or more individuals interacting directly, exchanging information, and building personal connections. Curiosity and self-disclosure are essential because the purpose of the *martarombo* tradition is to reach an agreement or decision related to kinship at the initial encounter. According to the interview results, *martarombo* is a form of communication that can take place on a personal level or within a small group. Although it usually begins as a two-way conversation, the process can involve more people if interrelated kinship ties are discovered. The explanation of the communication form in *martarombo* can be seen in the image below.

The communication process consists of two stages: the primary and secondary processes. The primary process refers to the initial stage where individuals express their thoughts or feelings directly to others using symbols such as language, gestures, images, or colors. Secondary communication involves delivering messages from the communicator to the communicant through a secondary medium, such as letters, telephones, and other media. Based on interview data, the primary and secondary communication processes in *martarombo* are described in the following table:

Communication Process	Description	Symbols Used	Practice	Function
Primary Process	The initial stage where individuals directly express thoughts or feelings to others.	Language, Gestures, Voice, Accent, Facial Expressions	Batak-specific accent, Loud speaking style, Facial expressions, Use of *ulos*	-Starting conversations -Identifying identity -Building initial connection
Secondary Process	Delivering messages through a second medium when face-to-face communication is not possible.	Telephone, Letter, Printed Media, Electronic Media	Useof telephone for long-distance *martarombo*	-Maintaining kinship -Introducing oneself

The interpersonal communication process in the *martarombo* tradition will be further discussed through Joseph DeVito's communication model in the following section.

D. The Interpersonal Communication Process in the *Martarombo* Tradition Based on Joseph DeVito's Communication Model

1. Source-Receiver

The source of communication refers to the person who possesses thoughts or emotions and conveys ideas and feelings that can be understood by the receiver. Meanwhile, the receiver or communicant is the individual who receives the message conveyed by the communicator, either directly or through media (Hariyanto, 2021). Based on interviews, the roles of source and receiver in the *martarombo* tradition are

flexible, with no strict customary rules. Among Batak Toba migrant students, the message source is typically the individual with a sufficient understanding and initiative to start the *martarombo* process. On the other hand, those less familiar with the tradition tend to act as the message receivers.

2. Message

In the *martarombo* tradition, messages are conveyed both verbally and nonverbally. Verbally, individuals mention their *marga* (clan), hometown (*huta*), and trace their kinship ties. Nonverbally, messages are conveyed through facial expressions, tone of voice, and respectful gestures when delivering or receiving information related to *martarombo*.

3. Communication Channels

In practice, communication occurs through two main channels:
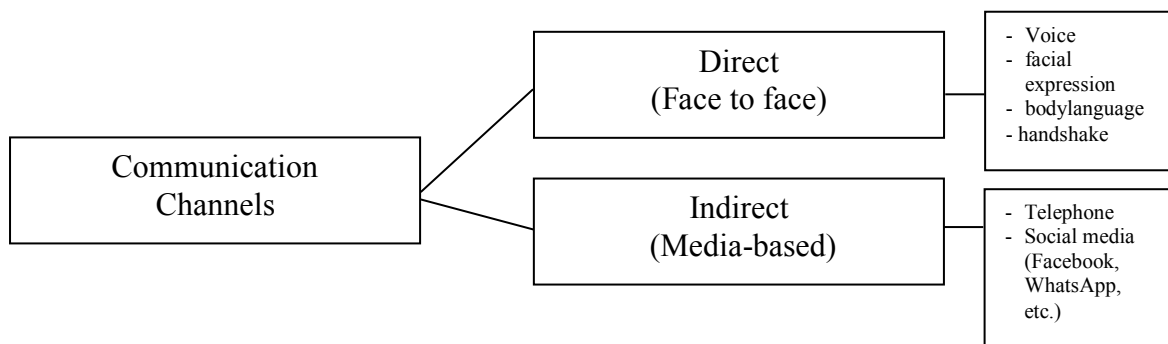
While face-to-face interaction remains ideal due to its emotional depth and clarity, modern *martarombo* practices among students have also embraced digital platforms to maintain kinship ties.

4. **Feedback**

In the context of the *martarombo* tradition practiced by Batak Toba migrant students, feedback or response plays a crucial role in maintaining the flow and meaning of interpersonal communication. Based on interview findings and to provide a more systematic understanding, the following table is presented.

Aspect	Interview Findings	Analysis	Suggestion
Verbal Feedback	Given through responses (saying "Horas"), follow-up questions, or corrections.	Enhances the flow of conversation, clarifies lineage, prevents misunderstandings.	Ensure accuracy and readiness when providing feedback.
Nonverbal Feedback	Nods, smiles, handshakes, and spontaneous expressions of openness.	Builds a welcoming atmosphere, strengthens first impressions and	Emphasize awareness and consistency in using nonverbal cues.

		nonverbal engagement.	

These various forms of feedback play a very important role in ensuring the continuity of interaction, creating a comfortable atmosphere, and preventing misunderstandings during the communication process.

5. Noise

Noise or disruptions in communication may arise during the communication process. According to Mulyana (2015), communication barriers occur when there is interference with one of the elements of communication, preventing the process from taking place actively. In the context of *martarombo*, barriers can emerge in various aspects that affect the continuity and effectiveness of this tradition, particularly among migrant students.

The barriers in the *martarombo* tradition include:
1. Lack of knowledge about genealogy, which hinders the *martarombo* process and limits communication.
2. Technological distractions, which cause participants to lose focus during interactions.
3. Limited proficiency in the Batak language, resulting in less effective responses.
4. Cultural assimilation, which leads to decreased interest in the *martarombo* tradition and greater familiarity with other traditions.

6. **Context**

Communication always occurs within a specific context, which generally includes three dimensions space, time, and values. In the context of the *martarombo* tradition, understanding these dimensions is essential for ensuring that interpersonal communication takes place effectively. The contextual aspects of *martarombo* are presented in the following table.

Context Aspect	Context Aspect	Saran
Space	*Martarombo* can be carried out in various locations such as homes, campuses, cafeterias, churches, student organizations, and even informal gatherings like hanging out. A comfortable and conducive space is preferred by some, while others enjoy livelier settings.	Choose a comfortable and conducive space, whether formal or informal, to support the *martarombo* process effectively.
Time	There is no specific time requirement. *Martarombo* can	Optimize timing; selecting the right moment will ensure the

	take place at any time during traditional ceremonies, formal meetings, or casual daily interactions. Flexibility in timing is a key feature of *martarombo*.	*martarombo* process runs smoothly and does not feel rushed.
Values/Motivation	The main goal of *martarombo* is to establish and strengthen kinship, discover ancestral roots, and reinforce Batak identity, especially while living away from the homeland.	Increase awareness of the value of *martarombo* by strengthening cultural identity and encouraging active participation in every social opportunity.

7. Communication Ethics

In everyday communication, there are ethical principles that must be understood to create harmonious and balanced interactions. The *martarombo* tradition also emphasizes communication ethics that align with *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which governs etiquette within the kinship structure of the Batak Toba community. In the *martarombo* tradition practiced by Batak Toba migrant students, even if a relative identified through the process is younger in age, the rules of address or forms of calling must still be observed in accordance with the prevailing kinship structure.

8. Competence

Competence in the *martarombo* tradition refers to an individual's level of knowledge about this tradition, which affects the effectiveness of two-way communication. Interview results show that the competence of Batak Toba migrant students varies from fair, good, to very good. These differences are influenced by early exposure to traditional customs, the intensity of interaction with the Batak Toba community, and interest in cultural heritage.

E. The Importance of Preserving the *Martarombo* Tradition in the Era of Modernization

The *martarombo* tradition holds a highly complex and profound role in the lives of the Batak Toba people. This role becomes increasingly important, especially for the younger generation, such as migrant students who live far from their homeland. For Batak Toba migrant students in Bandar Lampung, the values embodied in the *martarombo* tradition are deeply felt and highly beneficial. Based on interview findings, this tradition serves as a means for fellow Batak individuals to get to know and support one another, whether in academic matters, economic needs, or personal challenges encountered while living away from home. Furthermore, *martarombo* also functions as an effort to preserve cultural identity, strengthen familial bonds, and build solidarity among individuals. Therefore, maintaining and preserving this tradition amidst the unstoppable wave of modernization is of great importance, so that the noble values of ancestral heritage remain alive and can be passed down to future generations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of the study titled "*Interpersonal Communication Process of Batak Toba Migrant Students in Bandar Lampung within the Martarombo Tradition,*" it can be concluded that communication plays an essential role in building social interactions among the Batak Toba community, particularly through the *martarombo* tradition. The communication process within *martarombo* reflects complex dynamics as described in Joseph De Vito's communication model, which includes eight elements: source-receiver, message, channel, feedback, noise, context, ethics, and competence. These elements illustrate that *martarombo* is a communication process that takes place in a complex and dynamic manner.

However, the preservation of *martarombo* faces several challenges, such as limited understanding of family genealogy, and the widespread use of gadgets, mobile phones, social media, and various digital communication platforms, which pose significant threats to the sustainability of this tradition.

This research offers opportunities for further development, particularly in deepening the understanding of emotional closeness and social relationships among Batak Toba individuals. The *martarombo* tradition is a unique and meaningful cultural aspect that deserves to be studied more specifically and thoroughly within the context of communication and social relations.

REFERENCES

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. . (2018). *Research Design : Qualitatite, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publishing.

DeVito, J. . (2016). *The interpersonal communication boo, 14th edition*. Pearson Education.

Girsang, L. (2018). *Komunikasi Interpersonal Mahasiswa Perantau Suku Batak Toba UNTIRTA dalam Menerapkan Perilaku Martarombo*. Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa.

Hariyanto, D. (2021). Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi Penulis. In *Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi*.

Mulyana, D. (2015). *Ilmu Komunikasi : Suatu Pengantar* (Cetakan ke 20). PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

Nainggolan, E., Vebilola Manalu, F., Marito Nainggolan, F., & Delita, F. (2024). *Analisis Tradisi Masyarakat Suku Batak Toba Perantauan* (Vol. 17, Issue 1).

Ngalimun, M. P. . M. I. K. (2021). *Komunikasi Antar Pribadi*. Paranama Ilmu.

Sihombing, R., Nurman, S., Indrawadi, J., & Dewi, S. (2024). *Martarombo dalam Interaksi Sosial Generasi Muda Suku Batak Toba*.

Sugiyono. (2019). *METODE PENELITIAN KUANTITATIF, KUALITATIF , DAN R&D* (Sutopo (ed.)). Penerbit Alfabeta, Bandung .