Local Wisdom in Use: Batak Toba Agricultural Proverbs from Dairi

Dairi Sapta Rindu Simanjuntak – Dwi Widayati – Mhd. Pujiono – Robert Sibarani – Gustianingsih

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Abstract
This study explores metaphorical structures in Batak Toba agricultural proverbs and their role in shaping moral development, social behaviour, emotional regulation, and spirituality. Using a qualitative anthropolinguistic approach, twelve validated proverbs were analysed with insights from nine cultural informants in Dairi. Four agrarian based metaphorical themes of growth, social cohesion, discipline, and gratitude emerge as a moral ecology through which ecological knowledge structures ethical reasoning, social conduct, communal values, and the Batak Toba worldview.
Key words: agricultural metaphors, anthropolinguistics, Batak Toba, cultural linguistics, proverbs

Introduction

Proverbs occupy a significant place in many speech groups because they condense common experience, social norms, and cultural knowledge into succinct and memorable language forms. In short, Batak Toba proverbs are not only linguistic expressions. They are cultural tools that preserve local wisdom, guide social behaviour, and connect human life with the agricultural environment. (Xasanova, 2024; Wu et al., 2023; Ermitati, 2022). Their meaning depends on familiar imagery, indirect expressions, and the social context of their use. Because they are rich in metaphors, proverbs help explain a society's views on morality, responsibility, social relationships, and local wisdom (Amenorvi, 2024; Dabbagh & Babaii, 2024; Lai, 2025; Korangy, 2024; Sharifian, 2017).

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, people understand abstract concepts by connecting them. Also from a cultural linguistics point of view these metaphors are indicative of culturally shared modes of thinking, as expressing the collective conceptualisations which take shape within a speech community. In this view proverbs are dense linguistic spaces in which culturally formed metaphors are encoded and made available to guide cognition and conduct. Agricultural proverbs, in particular, use images of crops, soil, tools and environmental rhythms to conceptualise effort, cooperation, responsibility and social assessment, translating agrarian experience into a cognitive and moral resource.

An increasing collection of empirical work from many countries has revealed how agricultural proverbs convey cultural values, yet much of this scholarship is descriptive. For instance, research carried out on Acehnese and Sindhi agricultural proverbs shows that they express qualities such as diligence, discipline, thankfulness, and responsibility, and that they retain local knowledge on farming systems (Junejo & Mohamed Dali, 2019; Ibrahim & Usman, 2021). Work in other cultural contexts similarly demonstrates that agricultural proverbs are storehouses of folk wisdom and oral history. But these studies tend to classify proverbs by themes or moral messages, and less attention is given to the underlying metaphorical structures which create conceptual coherence. Accordingly, we are inclined to see agricultural imagery as a superficial element, rather than as a structuring metaphor that moulds speakers conceptions of social behaviour, moral duties and culturally valued character qualities.

Recent advances in cultural linguistics and anthropolinguistics offer strategies to bridge this gap. Cultural linguistics has argued that recurrent metaphorical schemas, such as

those involving flora, animals or spatial orientation, are networks of cultural meaning used by speakers in everyday reasoning (Ermitati, 2022; Korangy, 2024; Sharifian, 2017; Zaikauskiene, 2021). Proverbs get their meaning from the way people use them in real situations, not only from the words written in them. For this reason, agricultural proverbs can be read by looking at how people use them, what they suggest about local life, and what kinds of images they bring into speech (Guntuku et al., 2024; Issa & Ali, 2025). In Batak Toba speech, farming images appear quite often, but earlier studies have not made them the main focus (Sirait et al., 2025; Sitorus & Lubis, 2023; Widayati et al., 2024).

These proverbs need closer studies because they may show how Batak Toba people connect farming with values, behavior, and their way of seeing life. Similar topics have been discussed in Acehnese, Sindhi, and Javanese traditions, but Batak Toba agricultural proverbs are still less explored from this point of view. This leaves an important gap in understanding how farming-related expressions carry local wisdom in Batak Toba society. Linguistically, the repertoire of agricultural proverbs is itself still completely unrecorded; there is no specific study that studies Batak Toba agricultural proverbs using conceptual metaphor theory or cultural linguistics. A review of the indexed literature reveals that such work is missing, especially when contrasted with the more developed research in the Acehnese, Sindhi, or Javanese traditions (Issa & Ali, 2025). This gap has significant repercussions without a detailed investigation of metaphorical structure. The conceptual domains that organise agricultural proverbs remain untouched and the internal logic by which imagery of plants, soil, effort and growth are mapped onto social and ethical problems becomes analytically unclear. Similarly, without attention to the cultural and pragmatic functions of these metaphors, the communicative tasks performed by agricultural proverbs in guiding younger generations, subtly condemning behaviour, reinforcing solidarity or mediating conflict, cannot be properly appreciated. Thus, the existing study provides a narrow view of how Batak Toba proverbs work as culturally relevant speech acts (Sibarani, 2018; Sirait et al., 2025; Sitorus & Lubis, 2023).

To fill these gaps, this study aims to analyse the anthropolinguistic of agricultural metaphors in Dairi Batak Toba proverbs. The study instead of explaining agricultural operations, points out how metaphorical mappings in these proverbs convey culturally relevant understandings of character, obligation, cooperation, emotional restraint, and local wisdom. For this analysis, the author draws on concepts from conceptual metaphor theory and cultural linguistics in interpreting these proverbs as instantiations of bigger conceptual patterns that are culturally situated expressions that continue to influence Batak Toba social life. Thus, the study seeks to demonstrate that agricultural proverbs are dynamic language resources through which Batak Toba wisdom is conserved, interpreted, and negotiated in modern communicative practice.

Literature Review

1. Proverbs in Linguistic Anthropology and Oral Tradition

Proverbs are an important part of oral tradition and have long been considered cultural artefacts that symbolise shared experiences, social conventions, and collective values. Linguistic anthropologists consider proverbs as communication acts entrenched in cultural processes, rather than merely lexical forms (Wu et al., 2023; Xasanova, 2024). The meaning is gained through the performance, situational context, and culturally shared interpretative frameworks, not merely isolated linguistic material (Parmentier et al., 1998; Sibarani, 2018; Sirait et al., 2025). Furthermore, scholars working in the area of proverb pragmatics have argued that proverbs are complete utterances that can perform advise, criticism, appraisal or alignment depending on how proverbs are contextualised in interaction (Lai, 2025). These approaches view proverbs as flexible language instruments through which speakers position themselves culturally and

socially while making use of shared wisdom to satisfy specific communicative demands.

In cultures where oral traditions are robust, proverbs frequently operate as metapragmatic devices to govern social behaviour and to express culturally appropriate modes of reasoning. In these circumstances, proverbs also reveal deeper patterns of worldviews such as attitudes about collaboration, harmony, respect, responsibility and the management of social relationships (Hatipoglu & Daskin, 2020; Junejo & Mohamed Dali, 2019). This fusion of cultural depth and linguistic complexity makes proverbs a perfect launchpad for exploring the cultural grounding and linguistic representation of meaning.

2. Metaphor, Cultural Conceptualisation, and Proverb Meaning

The figurativity of proverbs has led scholars to relate the study of proverbs with the development of modern metaphor theory. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, people grasp abstract events by mapping them onto concrete and familiar source domains. Such mappings are systematic patterns that shape mind and language that generate figurative phrases that represent deeper conceptual organisation (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Cultural linguistics takes this further to demonstrate that metaphorical patterns are not totally individual, but are influenced by culturally shared schemas, categories and conceptualisations that arise in certain societies (Peeters, 2017; Ermitati, 2022; Korangy, 2024). From this perspective proverbs are compressed language locations encoding, transmitting and activating cultural conceptualisations via communication.

Studies of this kind demonstrate that agricultural, ecological and environmental imagery in proverbs frequently provide a metaphorical resource for the expression of wider cultural notions of character, social obligation, perseverance or moral appraisal. The imagery is relevant because it is a culturally salient conceptual realm through which speakers describe and understand social life, not because of any literal agricultural reference alone (Ermitati, 2022). However, many extant studies of proverbs still tend to focus on moral themes or descriptions of values, rather than studying the metaphorical structures and conceptual mappings that give expressions their cultural and cognitive depth.

3. Recent Regional Studies on Agricultural and Cultural Proverbs

Recent scholarship from a range of Indonesian and Asian groups has attempted to document the use of proverbs in rural contexts, however these studies often favour thematic classification. According to Ibrahim & Usman (2021), the Acehnese farming-related proverbs contain virtues such as trustworthiness, diligence, discipline, responsibility, and gratitude. Another examination of agricultural proverbs among Sindhi communities classified the sayings based on images of seeds, soil, labour and social relations, highlighting ways in which these idioms serve as repositories of traditional ecological knowledge and social perspective (Junejo & Mohamed Dali, 2019). In the same spirit, a study of Minangkabau proverb traditions found ecological elements in support of cultural sustainability (Handoko et al., 2024). Research by Pujiriyani (2020) on “Javanese proverbs” showed the moral and educational function of proverbs in the community.

These studies are useful documents but they tend to share a methodology which describes thematic content without addressing the metaphorical mechanisms underlying the organisation of proverb meaning. Such a restriction results in an inadequate analysis of the underlying rationale encoded in figurative language, in particular, of the operation of agricultural imagery as a culturally patterned source domain. This constraint is considerably more clear in the case of Batak Toba. The

review of indexed scholarship in recent years has not found any particular study on Batak Toba agricultural proverbs that uses clearly metaphor-focused or anthropolinguistic approach (Junejo & Mohamed Dali, 2019; Ibrahim & Usman, 2021). This lack underlines the necessity for a more strict language study that goes beyond the identification of thematic value and investigates deeper conceptual and cultural patterns.

4. Anthropolinguistics and Local Wisdom Studies

Anthropolinguistics studies the ways in which language reflects and constructs cultural systems, social relations and shared knowledge. However, local wisdom studies in Indonesian scholarship mostly focus on the ecological and community governance perspectives, while studies on how local wisdom is linguistically encoded and metaphorically conceived in oral tradition are limited. The integration of anthropolinguistics and cultural linguistics gives a complete framework for studying how communities structure meaning through metaphorical patterns that are culturally anchored and socially enacted (Pujiriyani, 2020).

In the context of Batak Toba culture, an anthropolinguistic approach is an important requirement since ceremonial language, ritual speech, kinship terminology, and proverb performance play important roles in social life. The agricultural imagery in Batak Toba proverbs acts as a culturally relevant metaphor, providing the conceptual framework through which speakers conceptualise character, cooperation, communal obligation, dispute resolution and moral judgement. These metaphorical systems are poorly documented, without dedicated linguistic study, although they are crucial vehicles for cultural information and representations of local wisdom. This gap underlines the importance of the present work in offering a metaphor-centered and anthropolinguistic interpretation of Batak Toba agricultural proverbs.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative descriptive design with an anthropolinguistic orientation because the main purpose of this study was to interpret the cultural meanings contained in the Batak Toba agricultural proverbs and analyse the metaphorical structures of Batak Toba agricultural proverbs as a form of local wisdom expression (Sirait et al., 2025; Sitorus & Lubis, 2023; Hasnidar et al., 2021). The qualitative technique proved the most appropriate to identify symbolic patterns, cultural conceptualisations and context - dependent communicative functions, which cannot be revealed by means of quantification. Thus the inquiry was aimed at describing, interpreting and contextualising the language forms of the proverbs within the cultural framework in which they circulate.

Data were collected from two key sources. The first was the documented Batak Toba agricultural proverbs collected from orality and from written materials circulating locally. The second was informed from cultural informants who had long term knowledge with Batak Toba figurative expression. These informants gave explanations of meaning, figurative interpretation and usage context, which helped to discover metaphorical patterns and elucidate the socio-cultural situations where the proverbs are still being utilised. Nine informants in total took part in the research, including senior speakers, cultural heavyweights and respected members of the community known for their understanding of ceremonial speech. They were purposefully selected by some criteria, including: native Batak Toba speakers, at least 64 years old, long term residents of Dairi, and actively participated in customary events that usually employ proverbs. Then, snowball sampling was utilised to reach more knowledgeable speakers, following the suggestions for reaching culturally embedded knowledge networks (Naderifar et al., 2017).

Data gathering involved documentation, guided elicitation and semi structured interviews. Proverbs were recorded and checked through further interaction with

informants from both oral and written sources. Each proverb was studied in detail to draw out information on cultural links, preferred contexts of use, figurative meaning and modern relevance. Discussions ensured interpretations mirrored understandings of the community not assumptions of the researcher. Interviews were conducted in natural settings, recorded with permission, transcribed and translated, with attention to the preservation of metaphorical nuance.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with a focus on identifying metaphors and cultural conceptualisation. To begin, significant lexical and figurative elements in each proverb were isolated, and then metaphorical mappings were identified through an investigation of how agricultural imagery produces abstract social or moral meaning. The mappings were then interpreted by the cultural conceptualisations shared among the Batak Toba community, building on the insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cultural Linguistics (Kovecses, 2020; Sharifian, 2017). Informant insights were woven throughout to confirm interpretations and to ensure that the metaphorical structures revealed appropriately reflected the community knowledge. The documented texts, interview data and theoretical frameworks were triangulated to enhance the credibility and cultural grounding of the conclusions.

Ethical norms were followed in all stages of the research. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. All informants were advised of their rights to confidentiality and all cultural knowledge supplied would only be used for scholarly purposes. The study process was directed by the respect to the cultural value of the Batak Toba proverb tradition in order to treat the linguistic heritage of the community sensitively and carefully.

Findings

Distribution of Agricultural Metaphor Types Identified

The analysis of the twelve authenticated Batak Toba agricultural proverbs shows that metaphorical expressions that are derived from agrarian life constitute a coherent set of conceptual topics that reflect the moral, social and emotional worldview of the community. The lexical items that these proverbs involve are those that pertain to soil, roots, shoots, fruits, mountains and cultivated crops, which serve as concrete experiential contexts for structuring abstract meanings connected to cooperation, discipline, thankfulness and personal progress. Table 1 presents the thematic distribution of the proverbs, exhibiting apparent trends in the use of agricultural imagery to communicate culturally important notions.

Table 1. Classification of Batak Toba Agricultural Proverbs by Metaphorical Theme

No.	Proverb	Key Agricultural Lexicon	Implied Meaning / Cultural Interpretation	Assigned Theme
1	*Marsiamin-aminan songon lappak ni gaol, marsitungkol-tungkolan songon suhat di robean.*	*lappak gaol*, *suhat*	Unity and coordinated movement are modeled on plants that grow together; cooperation strengthens social ties.	Theme 2 – Social Cohesion & Kinship Structure
2	*Bagot na marhalto niagatan di robean; horas ma hamu na manganhon; tu ganda na antong dihami na mangalean.*	*bagot*, *halto*, *agat*	A good harvest symbolizes blessings; gratitude must be expressed toward those who provide sustenance and support.	Theme 4 – Gratitude, Acceptance & Harmony

3	*Eme sitamba tua, parlinggoman ni dengke na mokmok; amanta Debata do si lehon tua; saluhut na ma hitaon diparorot.*	*eme*	Agricultural abundance is framed as divine provision; acceptance and thankfulness are central moral values.	Theme 4 – Gratitude, Acceptance & Harmony
4	*Napuran tano-tano, rangging marsiranggongan; badan ta i padao-dao, tondita i marsigomgoman.*	*napuran*	Soil and climbing plants illustrate mutual dependence; humans must support one another through balanced cooperation.	Theme 2 – Social Cohesion & Kinship Structure
5	*Tubuan laklak ma, tubuan sikkoru di dolok ni Purbatua; sai tubuan anak, tubuan boru ma hamu, donganmu sarimatua.*	*laklak*, *sikkoru*	Growth of plants parallels growth of descendants; healthy lineage and moral upbringing ensure continuity and honor.	Theme 1 – Growth & Moral Formation
6	*Jolo tiniptip sanggar, laho bahenon huru-huruan; jolo sinungkun marga, asa binoto partuturan.*	*sanggar*	Ritual preparation and careful process symbolize the need for discipline, deliberation, and proper social procedure.	Theme 3 – Discipline & Emotional Regulation
7	*Ramba na poso, ndang piga tubuan lata; hami na poso, ndang piga na umboto hata.*	*ramba*, *lata*	Young shoots rarely produce vines; similarly, the inexperienced lack deep knowledge—humility in learning is emphasized.	Theme 1 – Growth & Moral Formation
8	*Ampapaga dolok, ampapaga nibuluan; unang hita marbada, ai hita do marsogot, hita haduan.*	*ampapaga*, *bulu*	Mountain and forest imagery evoke collective alignment; disputes should be avoided to preserve communal solidarity.	Theme 2 – Social Cohesion & Kinship Structure
9	*Ansimun sada holbung, pege sangkarimpang; manimbung rap tu toru, mangangkat rap tu ginjang.*	*ansimun*, *pege*	Bundled crops move downward and upward together; represents unity, shared responsibility, and collective success.	Theme 2 – Social Cohesion & Kinship Structure
10	*Unang parigat-rigat bulung, parigat-rigat bulung gaol; unang pasigat-sigat hinalungun, mangarungkari hinadangol.*	*bulung*, *gaol*	The fragility of leaves symbolizes emotional sensitivity; individuals are urged to restrain sadness and uphold inner strength.	Theme 3 – Discipline & Emotional Regulation
11	*Togu urat ni bulu, toguan urat ni padang; togu hatani uhum, toguan hata ni padan.*	*urat*, *bulu*	The firmness of plant roots parallels firmness in holding to law, promises, and moral commitments.	Theme 3 – Discipline & Emotional Regulation
12	*Ndang sundat pudung, nang so gabe palia; ndang sundat uhum patupaon dohot adat, tung pe sipatupaon na so sadia.*	*pudung*, *palia*	Adherence to customary law is compared to regulated agricultural practice; discipline must be	Theme 3 – Discipline & Emotional Regulation

			maintained even in hardship.	

The topic distribution shows that the largest group is formed by proverbs dealing with social cohesion and kinship structure, and it consists of four items (33.3%). These statements are anchored in pictures of entwined plants, the supporting soil or crops moving together to conceptualise unity, interdependence and cooperative behaviour, qualities which are profoundly embedded in Batak Toba communal life. Similarly, discipline and emotional regulation are encoded in 33.3% of the proverbs. The metaphors used to represent self-control, accountability, and adherence to customary norms are based on fragile leaves, exact ritual preparation, and sturdy plant roots.

Meanwhile, two proverbs (16.7%) conveying growth and moral formation (via plant development and generational imagery) articulate expectations about maturity, character formation and the obligations of lineage. The other two proverbs (16.7%) express the thankfulness, acceptance and situational harmony. They depict agricultural plenty as a gift of God and encourage the speaker to create a sense of gratitude and emotional stability.

In summary, the distribution in Table 1 suggests that Batak Toba agricultural proverbs do not only function as a metaphor of agricultural activities. They are rather conceptually embedded cultural tools which encode moral standards, control emotional life and sustain social order. The stress on themes of cohesion and discipline hints at a worldview where the agrarian environment that moulds Batak Toba cultural experience is inseparable from communal harmony, responsible conduct and intergenerational continuity.

1. Theme 1: Metaphors of Growth and Moral Formation

The first subject contains proverbs which describe the human evolution, the moral formation and the moulding of character through the imagery of plant growth, sprouting and generational continuity. Such statements are based on visible stages in agricultural life (sprouting of shoots, strengthening of stems, spreading new growth). These agricultural activities offer a solid experiential basis in Batak Toba culture's idea about the ways in which persons evolve and how moral values are transferred in families and communities. The proverbs in this category imply that growth is a relational and gradual process that requires on direction, environmental assistance, and continued cultural involvement.

Table 2. Analytical Mapping of Metaphors under Theme 1: Growth and Moral Formation

No.	Proverb	Source Domain (Agricultural Image)	Target Domain (Social or Moral Meaning)	Metaphorical Mapping	Cultural Value Emphasized
5	*Tubuan laklak ma, tubuan sikkoru di dolok ni Purbatua; sai tubuan anak, tubuan boru ma hamu, donganmu sarimatua.*	Growth of *laklak* and *sikkoru*; sprouting and propagation	Human development, generational continuity, moral upbringing	The emergence and multiplication of plant shoots is mapped onto the growth of children and also the expansion of family lines at the same level. Plants require nurturing conditions in the	Nurturing future generations, moral cultivation, responsibility for lineage, commitment to raising well-formed character

				same way that descendants require cultural guidance and moral instruction.	
7	*Ramba na poso, ndang piga tubuan lata; hami na poso, ndang piga na umboto hata.*	Young *ramba* shoot that cannot yet produce *lata* vines	Early stage of knowledge, limited experience, youthful immaturity	A young shoot is unable to bear vines and mapped onto the incomplete understanding of youth. In other hand growth is gradual and requires time, patience, and continuous learning.	Humility in learning, respect for elders' wisdom, acceptance of growth as gradual, patience in moral development

The first proverb uses the growth of *laklak* and *sikkoru* as a metaphor for the growth of a family line. The imagery of agriculture suggests that children's development is a long process that happens through collective care and cultural training. Human growth is seen as something that demands constant attention, moral cultivation and a solid social context. The adage thus emphasises the Batak Toba's belief that the continuity of the family is a sign of the community's accomplishment in producing capable and morally upright successors.

The second is about the early phases of growth. The symbol of the inadequate knowledge and the limited experience of life of youth is the image of *ramba*, a young shoot which is not able to generate *lata*. This metaphor has two major cultural roles. It encourages younger people to understand their place in the learning process and it motivates elder community members to approach youth with patience and teaching. Maturity, the adage says, is progressive learning, constant interaction with societal standards, and receptivity to criticism.

The two proverbs together offer a consistent conceptualisation of growth as a cultivated process, analogous to agricultural development. Moral growth is like plant growth, it requires right conditions, steady supervision and a community that grasps the value of nurturing future generations. Thus, Batak Toba agricultural metaphors offer a culturally entrenched framework to explain how the individual moves from vulnerability to competence and how the community participates in this movement.

2. Theme 2: Metaphors of Social Cohesion and Kinship Structure

Proverbs with this theme characterise societal peace, collaboration and kinship obligations in terms of agricultural imagery which mirrors the interconnectedness of the natural environment. In the Batak Toba world view, communal life is an interconnected system, and individuals are part of an ecological whole. Concrete examples of interpersonal unity and shared responsibility are plants that grow together, vines that cling to supporting structures, and crops that move together in bundles. Metaphors are used by speakers to argue that social togetherness is not an optional extra but part and parcel of the ethical fabric of the community. Disagreement, division and interpersonal conflict are therefore read as disturbances of a naturally cooperative system

Table 3. Analytical Mapping of Metaphors under Theme 2: Social Cohesion and Kinship Structure

No.	Proverb	Source Domain (Agricultural Image)	Target Domain (Social or Moral Meaning)	Metaphorical Mapping	Cultural Value Emphasized
1	*Marsiamin-aminan songon lappak ni gaol, marsitungkol-tungkolan songon suhat di robean.*	Intertwined *lappak gaol* and *suhat* plants growing in proximity	Cooperative action, mutual alignment, kinship solidarity	Plants that grow in coordinated patterns are mapped onto the need for individuals to act in harmony and maintain collective unity.	Cooperation, balanced relationships, shared direction, kinship cohesion
4	*Napuran tano-tano, rangging marsiranggongan ; badan ta i padao-dao, tondita i marsigomgoman.*	The stems of Betel leaves that grow on the ground are close one to another; Although the bodies are separated, our souls remain united.	Mutual dependence, reciprocal support	The dependence of vines on soil for stability is mapped onto the way humans rely on one another for emotional, moral, and social support.	Interdependence, reciprocity, balanced mutual assistance
8	*Ampapaga dolok, ampapaga nibuluan; unang hita marbada, ai hita do marsogot, hita haduan.*	Mountain and forest landscape guiding collective movement	Avoidance of conflict, communal alignment	The tendency of paths in mountainous or forested regions to converge is mapped onto expectations that members of a group remain aligned and avoid actions that fracture unity.	Conflict avoidance, communal harmony, collective purpose
9	*Ansimun sada holbung, pege sangkarimpang; manimbung rap tu toru,*	Cucumbers in one cluster, Ginger one lump.	Shared responsibility, unified progress	Support each other, understand each other, work	Unity, collective success, responsibility

	mangangkat rap tu ginjang.	Jumping down together, Jump up together.		together. Fall together, rise together.	for group welfare

The four proverbs show a regular pattern. Agricultural life is used to conceptualize the structure and dynamics of social connections. The connection of *lappak gaol* and *suhat* in the first proverb with this is that the demonstration of the need for coordinated behavior in family systems. Unity is shown as a natural state which arise from people's recognition of their interdependent duties. Thus, the adage translates natural harmony to social harmony, underscoring that disalignment in kinship relations breaks the order that cultural norms demand.

The second adage is about vines that must be planted on solid ground. The motif symbolises the shared responsibilities of the members of Batak Toba society. Community members need one another for emotional anchoring, shared resources and moral reinforcement The metaphor offers a view of social life in which assistance is provided and received, thus creating a network of mutual dependency.

Third proverb speaks on the need for communal alignment and avoiding disagreement. The allusion to mountain and forest roads underscores the need of harmony in mind, intention and action. In this schema, metaphorically, the divide or the stubborn argument is thought of as departing from the common route. Thus the adage is a piece of advice on how to stay together in times of tension or dispute.

The fourth proverb develops the notion of unity through the movement of wrapped crops. The ups and downs of the bundles of agriculture overall indicate that the fate of individuals is connected to the well-being of the community. Success is never an individual matter but a collective one; adversity is shared. This mapping makes social cohesion a moral obligation arising from the ecological realities of interdependent farming systems.

Taken collectively, these proverbs build up a culturally imprinted view of social life as a cooperative ecosystem. Human relations are imagined through agricultural interdependence. Here solidarity, mutual assistance and shared accountability are conditions of communal flourishing. These analogies are used by Batak Toba speakers to underscore the cultural expectation that harmony within familial networks should be maintained and performed in everyday life.

3. Theme 3: Metaphors of Discipline and Emotional Regulation

The topic is built of proverbs that conceptualize disciplined behavior, emotional self-management and adherence to customary norms. It can be achieved through the agricultural operations which need accuracy, restraint and inner fortitude. The Batak Toba speech community uses images of preparing ritual supplies, handling delicate leaves, nurturing crops and keeping plant structures firm to express demands. It is conducted by order and emotional maturity. These metaphors closely related to the successful operation of agricultural activities with socially acceptable behavior. It proof that each of them require careful attention, deliberate action and respect for established rules. In this topic cluster, the natural environment is a moral teacher that teaches people how to control impulses, fulfil commitments and keep the community in stability.

Table 4. Analytical Mapping of Metaphors under Theme 3: Discipline and Emotional Regulation

No.	Proverb	Source Domain (Agricultural Image)	Target Domain (Social or Moral Meaning)	Metaphorical Mapping	Cultural Value Emphasized
6	*Jolo tiniptip sanggar, laho bahenon huru-huruan; jolo sinungkun marga, asa binoto partuturan.*	Careful preparation of *sanggar* and ordered ritual sequence	Proper procedure, self-restraint, respect for social hierarchy	Deliberate preparation in ritual practice is mapped onto the need to act with care, follow established steps, and exercise self-control during social interaction.	Discipline, adherence to protocol, mindfulness, respect for relational order
10	*Unang parigat-rigat bulung, parigat-rigat bulung gaol; unang pasigat-sigat hinalungun, mangarungkari hinadangol.*	Fragility of leaves, especially *bulung gaol*	Emotional vulnerability, containment of sadness or distress	The ease with which leaves tear is mapped onto the sensitivity of emotion. Individuals must avoid excessive sadness and cultivate emotional steadiness.	Emotional regulation, inner strength, composure
11	*Togu urat ni bulu, toguan urat ni padang; togu hatani uhum, toguan hata ni padan.*	Firm and durable roots of *bulu* and *padang* plants	Moral firmness, constancy in fulfilling laws, promises, and obligations	The stability of plant roots is mapped onto the steadfastness expected in moral commitments and adherence to legal or customary obligations.	Integrity, reliability, commitment, moral consistency
12	*Ndang sundat pudung, nang so gabe palia; ndang sundat uhum patupaon dohot adat, tung pe sipatupaon na so sadia.*	Regulated practice of processing *pudung* and rule-bound agricultural customs	Acceptance of responsibility even under constraint, obedience to adat	Regulated crop processing is mapped onto discipline in respecting law and custom, even when resources or circumstances are limited.	Duty, obedience to adat, perseverance, disciplined responsibility

The four proverbs in this category demonstrate a common conceptualisation where disciplined action is a marker of the order, structure and attentiveness necessary in

effective agricultural practice. The first proverb uses the idea of preparing a *sanggar* to illustrate the importance of doing the right thing first, before doing anything. As ritual materials must be correctly arranged to provide a meaningful ceremony, so too must individuals approach social responsibilities with thoughtfulness and regard for relational standards. This agricultural analogy aims to underline mindfulness and to preclude impulsive or sloppy action.

The second proverb deals with the fragility of the emotions with the picture of leaves that shred easily. It suggests that emotions, if not managed, might disturb personal well-being and social harmony. The cultural message is that people should be emotionally resilient, and not let sadness interfere with daily obligations, but rather remain steady in the face of adversity. This agricultural picture of internal strength as protection for the individual is supported further by the image of delicate plants; the delicate management of the plants is analogous to internal strength.

The third proverb refers to the tenacity of the roots of plants as a symbol of moral determination. In the natural world, stable roots underpin development and survival. This is translated onto human commitments to law, promises and duties. The proverb points out that confidence in a community relies on the foundations of dependability and moral clarity. Plants that are rooted represent perseverance and honesty, characteristics of people who are true to their word.

The fourth proverb combines management of agriculture and obedience in traditional Batak Toba customary law. This process are the combination of a method and the fulfilment of commitments in customs necessitates compliance. It must be achieved with discipline even in tough situations. This metaphor addresses the cultural assumption that responsibility is faithfully discharged irrespective of personal constraints.

Taken together, the proverbs in Theme 3 bear witness to a vision of disciplined human action, informed by ecological understanding. The agricultural environment is a moral pattern guiding people to ordered behaviour, emotional stability, integrity and persistent devotion to adat. Batak Toba speakers use these metaphors to highlight the importance of self-restraint and disciplined action for societal harmony and cultural continuity.

4. Theme 4: Metaphors of Gratitude, Acceptance, and Situational Harmony

The last topic is made up of proverbs that conceptualise appreciation, acceptance, and harmonious adjustment to life's circumstances that draw on imagery of agricultural abundance and heavenly supply. For the Batak Toba culture, the achievement of cultivation is a matter of spiritual appreciation, not only the result of human work, but blessings that require thankfulness and emotional steadfastness. These proverbs bring prosperity and everyday nourishment into the context of an opportunity to develop a thankful disposition through the use of words such as *bagot*, *eme*, *tua*, and other symbols of sustenance. The metaphors in this category inspire people to appreciate the resources they get, accept the conditions of life with humility and recognise the spiritual dimension embedded in agricultural cycles.

Table 5. Analytical Mapping of Metaphors under Theme 4: Gratitude, Acceptance, and Situational Harmony

No.	Proverb	Source Domain (Agricultural Image)	Target Domain (Social or Moral Meaning)	Metaphorical Mapping	Cultural Value Emphasized
2	*Bagot na marhalto niagatan di robean; horas ma hamu na manganhon; tu ganda na antong dihami na mangalean.*	Fruit-bearing *bagot* palm and harvested produce	Blessings received through labour and communal generosity	The abundance of fruit after careful cultivation is mapped onto the moral obligation to offer gratitude for support, resources, and sustenance.	Gratitude, reciprocity, acknowledgment of shared provision
3	*Eme sitamba tua, parlinggoman ni dengke na mokmok; amanta Debata do si lehon tua; saluhut na ma hitaon diparorot.*	*Eme* rice, *tua* palm wine, fish traps filled with catch	Recognition of divine providence and acceptance of fortune	Agricultural and fishing abundance is mapped onto the idea that prosperity comes from divine care. Acceptance and humility accompany gratitude for blessings given.	Humility, acceptance, acknowledgment of divine gifts, emotional steadiness

The proverbs show the close relationship between rural life and emotional balance of cultural thinking. The first proverb illustrates the thanks owed to those who promote the community welfare by using the fruit-bearing *bagot* palm. The result confirmed the shared work that underlies prosperous times. Thus, appreciation reinforces social bonds and confirms respect for those who offer help, be it in the form of labour, finances, or emotional support.

The second proverb further adds to this knowledge emphasising divine providence with the images of rice, palm wine and good fishing. These farm products are proof of wealth that cannot be credited to man's labour alone. That adage urges people to embrace both prosperity and poverty with humility, realising that life's circumstances are orchestrated by God. This acceptance of fortune helps to keep emotional balance, and unhappiness or resentment does not disturb societal harmony.

The two proverbs together express a cultural ethic that associates thankfulness with spiritual consciousness and with societal connection. Agricultural abundance is not only an economic resource, but also a symbolic reminder of blessings that must be acknowledged. These metaphors are used by the Toba Batak speakers to construct a worldview that emphasizes reciprocity, emotional stability and acceptance of the conditions as part of a wider moral and spiritual order. The imagery is meant to strengthen the understanding that harmony, or well-being, happens when people see both the human and the divine parts.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that agricultural metaphors in Batak Toba proverbs serve as a culturally based conceptual system that affects moral thinking, controls social conduct and maintains communal identity. This interpretation supports the basic argument of conceptual metaphor theory that communities build abstract meaning using metaphor as a primary means (Issa & Ali, 2025; Kovecses, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Thematic mapping of the proverbs shows that agricultural imagery is not only descriptive reference to the natural environment but also an interpretive framework for understanding human development, emotional life, social organization and spiritual orientation. These patterns resonate with the broader thesis that metaphors are extracted from cultural experience and mirror shared conceptualisations (Kovecses, 2020; Sharifian, 2017).

The first topic of the study conceptualising human development in terms of plant growth is consistent with literature showing that indigenous groups commonly use ecological cycles to conceptualise maturity and learning (Kovecses, 2020; Sharifian, 2017). The imagery of new vegetation and fruit-bearing trees imply a moral logic. It can be derived as personal creation requires continued attention, guidance, and involvement from the community. These results reinforce that proverbs are cognitive devices that convey behavioural expectations through known ecological metaphors (Norrick, 2015). The process of cultivation is a metaphor for controlled moral development.

In the second theme, metaphors carry this ecological reasoning into the social realm, showing how the cooperative and interdependent behaviour of plants becomes a model of unity and kinship solidarity. These findings are consistent with prior ethnographic work that has shown that agricultural interdependence often matches social interdependence in indigenous groups (Khairumi, 2024). The thematic focus on cooperation, loyalty and avoidance of conflict implies that ecological interactions can naturalise social expectations, a trend highlighted often in studies of indigenous metaphor systems (Ba et al., 2023). In the instance of Batak Toba, the harmony in the co-existence of agricultural elements is conceptualised as an ethical guidance to sustain the stability of kinship.

The notion of discipline and emotional regulation offers another layer of agricultural metaphor, one that emphasises fragility, order, and responsibility. Social existence as sensitive and in need of thoughtful action can be seen from various samples. The samples are delicate banana leaves as metaphors, meticulous preparations of ritual objects, and adherence to sacred promises. These samples confirm that Batak Toba proverbs are useful as instruments of social control and behavioral regulation. But in this study this view is broadened to show that it is not only admonition but also metaphor that creates ethical expectation (Dell, Spiller, and Staniland, 2024). The agricultural pictures remind us that relationships must be managed delicately and that disciplined behaviour is vital to the maintenance of harmony.

The last subject, about appreciation, acceptance, and situational harmony, touches on the spiritual and emotional sides of agricultural metaphor. Metaphors of *padi*, *enau* and seasonal abundance support a worldview in which human prosperity is linked to natural cycles and divine sustenance, consistent with observations that ecological experience informs indigenous conceptions of appreciation and resilience (Sibarani, 2018). The agricultural metaphors teach us that harmony is found in identifying blessing and embracing circumstance and responding to life with humility and equanimity.

The findings together show that agricultural metaphors in Batak Toba proverbs are embedded in an integrated moral ecology that orders multiple domains of cultural life. Previous studies have described Batak Toba values, kinship norms, and the moral function of oral tradition (Sibarani, 2018), but this study makes a unique contribution by showing how agricultural imagery systematically organises these values into an integrated conceptual framework. While previous studies have observed metaphorical

tendencies in Batak language, no study has charted agricultural metaphors across intertwined moral, emotional, and social issues. This research contributes significantly to the fact that ecological experience is not only an inspiration for linguistic expressions but also for the moral philosophy of Batak Toba culture.

The theoretical contexts above break down metaphor theory, indigenous ecological scholarship, and Batak cultural studies. Based on the analysis of them, this research provides two significant insights. First, it develops the knowledge of the Batak Toba worldview, showing that the agricultural life is not just a linguistic source but is the conceptual underpinning of ethical reasoning and social norms. Second, it contributes to a wider body of study on cultural metaphor systems by demonstrating how ecological metaphors facilitate the transfer of moral information, control interpersonal behaviour and sustain cultural continuity. The agricultural metaphors explored in this study thus operate as cognitive, moral and cultural tools that shape the ways in which persons develop, relate and respond to the hardships of community life.

Conclusion

This study represents a significant contribution to the literature on Batak Toba as it offers the first thematic interpretation of agricultural metaphors within the proverb tradition. The cultural values and pragmatic uses of Batak Toba proverbs have been discussed in previous studies, but the underlying metaphorical structures of these values have received less attention. The present work aims to fill this gap by showing how ecological experience is transformed into ethical instruction through consistent metaphorical patterns. It also builds on work in cultural linguistics by showing how shared ecological information is conceptualised culturally and influences moral and social standards. Thus, the study reveals how metaphor works as a cognitive and cultural resource

One important result of this research is that agricultural metaphors are vital to the continuity of culture in Batak Toba community. These proverbs continue to be used in guidance, ceremonial communication, conflict mediation and everyday discourse to transfer the local wisdom from generation to generation. They emphasise that moral life, like agricultural practice, demands patience, discipline, cooperation and thankful acceptance of life's conditions. Thus, metaphors operate as cultural devices that reflect and control collective behaviour. Their endurance with oral tradition shows the importance of agrarian knowledge in continuing to shape their worldview.

The study has several limitations, such as a focus on a specific corpus and senior informants, which may not reflect all current variations of usage. Future studies could enlarge the dataset, examine generational variations, or study the adaptation of agricultural metaphors in contemporary or diasporic settings. Such work would add to the understanding of how metaphor develops in cultural systems, yet grounded on local wisdoms. Despite these constraints, our study reveals that the agricultural metaphors of Batak Toba express a holistic worldview that combines moral lessons, social harmony, emotional balance and spiritual thankfulness. The research contributes to the preservation of the Batak Toba cultural legacy and the advancement of general discussion on the role of metaphor in cultural cognition by making visible these metaphorical structures.

AI Use Declaration:

The authors did not use any generative AI tools such as Chat GPT, Gemini, Claude, etc. The authors declare that they used Quillbot to paraphrase some of the writing in order to enhance the language. The authors also used Grammarly to check whether the grammar and structure of the writing well polished. Since all of the authors are from Indonesian, they use Deepl to help them translate certain terms into English. As for the reference manager, the authors used Mendeley Reference Manager to make sure the

citations and references already followed the journal's standard. All of the content of this manuscript is purely the authors own intellectual work and none is produced by generative AI.

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Dairi Sapta Rindu Simanjuntak
Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Universitas Sumatera Utara
Dr. Mansyur Street No. 9, Medan 20115
North Sumatra
Indonesia
dairisapta@students.usu.ac.id
ORCID: 0009-0007-8507-2458

Dwi Widayati (Corresponding Author)
Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Universitas Sumatera Utara

Dr. Mansyur Street No. 9, Medan 20115
North Sumatra
Indonesia
dwiwidayati@usu.ac.id
ORCID: 0000-0002-6098-4983

Mhd. Pujiono
Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Universitas Sumatera Utara
Dr. Mansyur Street No. 9, Medan 20115
North Sumatra
Indonesia
mhd.pujiono@usu.ac.id
ORCID: 0000-0002-9961-7064

Robert Sibarani
Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Universitas Sumatera Utara
Dr. Mansyur Street No. 9, Medan 20115
North Sumatra
Indonesia
rs.sibarani@usu.ac.id
ORCID: 0000-0002-6208-8170

Gustianingsih
Faculty of Cultural Sciences
Universitas Sumatera Utara
Dr. Mansyur Street No. 9, Medan 20115
North Sumatra
Indonesia
gustianingsih@usu.ac.id
ORCID: 0009-0006-7888-5584