
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Connotative Meanings of Meranaw Lexical Items in Folktales: A Cultural-Linguistic Analysis and Implications for Language Education

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| ABSTRACT

Language carries meanings closely tied to a community's beliefs, experiences, and cultural practices. In Meranaw folktales, certain words convey meanings that go beyond their literal definitions and offer insight into how the community understands identity, belief, history, and the natural world. This study examines the connotative meanings of selected Meranaw lexical items in folktales, with particular attention to the cultural meanings attached to these words. Using a qualitative design and semiotic analysis, the study identified culturally significant lexical items and interpreted their meanings in relation to the contexts in which they occur. The analysis yielded four broad thematic categories: socio-cultural and historical significance, cultural heritage, natural and mythical beliefs, and Islamic theology. The findings suggest that Meranaw lexical items carry layers of meaning shaped by shared experiences, social practices, religious beliefs, and cultural memory. The folktales therefore serve not only as narratives for entertainment but also as repositories of cultural knowledge through which meanings and values are passed from one generation to another. The study also suggests that examining culturally embedded words can provide useful materials for language education, particularly in helping learners understand meaning within its social and cultural context. Documenting these lexical items through folktales may likewise support efforts to sustain Meranaw linguistic and cultural knowledge. The study thus demonstrates how the analysis of connotative meaning can provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and identity.

| KEYWORDS

Meranaw language; connotative meaning; folktales; cultural identity; semiotic analysis

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1. Introduction

Language is closely connected to how communities understand themselves, remember their past, and pass knowledge from one generation to another. When a language weakens or disappears, the loss extends beyond words and expressions. Cultural practices, ways of understanding the world, and forms of knowledge carried through the language may also become difficult to sustain. The continuing decline of indigenous languages has therefore become an important concern in language and cultural studies. UNESCO (2021) and Crystal (2014) have emphasized the relationship between language loss, cultural heritage, and community identity. This concern has encouraged scholars in applied linguistics and language education to pay greater attention to local languages, cultural knowledge, and community-based forms of learning (Cummins, 2000; García & Wei, 2014).

One way of understanding the relationship between language and culture is through the study of connotative meaning. Words do not communicate only their direct or dictionary meanings. They may also carry associations shaped by a community's experiences, beliefs, values, and social practices. Leech (1981) notes that meaning can extend beyond a word's literal sense to include associations and values attached to it. Examining these additional meanings can therefore provide insights into how a community interprets people, objects, actions, events, and experiences. This is particularly relevant to oral literature, where words are used within narratives that reflect the cultural knowledge and worldview of the community.

The relationship between language and culture is especially important in multilingual contexts such as the Philippines. The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) recognizes the importance of learners' first languages in early education and seeks to make learning more responsive to linguistic and cultural contexts (Department of Education, 2013). Despite this policy direction, the use of local languages in education continues to face practical challenges. Previous research has identified concerns related to orthography development, the availability of instructional materials, teacher preparation, and the integration of local cultural resources into classroom instruction (Burton, 2013; Tupas & Martin, 2017). These concerns point to the need for educational resources that draw from the linguistic and cultural knowledge already present within local communities.

This need is particularly relevant to the Meranaw language and its oral literary tradition. Meranaw folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, and riddles contain accounts of community experiences, social relationships, beliefs, values, and ways of understanding the natural and spiritual worlds. These forms of oral literature have served not only as entertainment but also as means of transmitting knowledge and cultural values across generations. Within these narratives, particular words may carry meanings that are not immediately apparent from their literal definitions. Their interpretation may depend on shared cultural experiences and on the contexts in which they are used.

Although Meranaw folk literature has received attention as an important source of cultural knowledge, there remains a need for closer linguistic analysis of the meanings embedded in its vocabulary. Existing documentation and studies have contributed to the recording and interpretation of Meranaw oral traditions, yet relatively limited attention has been given to the connotative meanings of individual Meranaw lexical items within folktale contexts. A lexical item may refer to an object, person, action, place, or concept at the literal level while simultaneously evoking social values, historical experiences, religious beliefs, emotional associations, or culturally shared understandings. These layers of meaning can easily be overlooked when lexical items are examined only through translation or dictionary definitions.

This gap is important not only from a linguistic perspective but also from an educational one. When culturally embedded meanings are removed from their contexts, learners may understand the literal meaning of a word without fully appreciating what the word represents within the community. Examining lexical items in their original narrative contexts can therefore provide language educators with culturally meaningful materials through which learners can explore vocabulary, interpretation, identity, and cultural knowledge at the same time. Meranaw folktales offer a particularly valuable source for this purpose because they bring language and cultural experience together in naturally occurring narrative contexts.

To address this gap, the present study examines the connotative meanings of selected Meranaw lexical items found in folktales through a cultural-linguistic analysis informed by Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Barthes' distinction between denotation and connotation provides a basis for examining the movement from the relatively direct meaning of a lexical item to the cultural associations attached to it (Barthes, 1988, 1991). The study considers the lexical items within their narrative and cultural contexts rather than treating them as isolated vocabulary units. In doing so, it seeks to identify how particular words evoke meanings associated with Meranaw beliefs, values, practices, experiences, and worldview.

The study is guided by the view that language is not simply a means of conveying information but also a means through which cultural knowledge is represented and transmitted. From this perspective, the connotative meanings found in Meranaw folktales may provide evidence of how cultural ideas are encoded in language and made meaningful through narrative. A cultural-linguistic analysis can therefore help connect the study of lexical meaning with broader questions of cultural identity and language education.

The study specifically aims to identify and analyze the connotative meanings of selected Meranaw lexical items found in folktales, categorize these meanings according to recurring Meranaw cultural beliefs, values, practices, and worldview, and examine their implications for Meranaw cultural identity and culturally responsive language education. Through these objectives, the study seeks to understand how lexical items used in Meranaw folktales convey meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions and how these culturally embedded meanings may contribute to language learning and cultural understanding.

Accordingly, the study is guided by three research questions. First, what connotative meanings are associated with selected Meranaw lexical items found in folktales? Second, how can these connotative meanings be thematically categorized in relation to Meranaw cultural beliefs, values, practices, and worldview? Third, what implications do these connotative meanings have for Meranaw cultural identity and culturally responsive language education?

By focusing on the meanings carried by Meranaw lexical items within folktale contexts, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between language and culture. It treats folktales as linguistic and cultural texts in which words can preserve knowledge, values, beliefs, and shared experiences. The findings may also provide a basis for developing culturally responsive language-learning materials that allow learners to encounter vocabulary within meaningful cultural contexts. In this way, the study connects the analysis of connotative meaning with broader concerns in language education, cultural identity, and the documentation of Meranaw linguistic heritage.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Semiotic Theory

Semiotics provides a useful way of examining how meaning is created and interpreted through signs, including language. Drawing from Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified, Barthes (1988, 1991) explains meaning through two levels of signification: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the direct or relatively literal meaning of a sign, while connotation involves the associations, values, emotions, and cultural meanings that develop around it. Meaning, therefore, is not always contained in a word itself but may be shaped by the cultural and social context in which the word is used.

Connotation is particularly important in understanding language as a cultural resource. Fiske (2011) notes that connotative meaning develops through the interaction between signs and the cultural values of the people who interpret them. A word may have a straightforward meaning at the denotative level but evoke a much wider set of meanings within a particular community. Such meanings may reflect beliefs, social relationships, historical experiences, emotions, and shared ways of understanding the world. Barthes' framework is therefore useful for examining lexical items whose cultural significance cannot be fully understood through literal definitions alone.

For the present study, the semiotic perspective provides the analytical basis for examining selected Meranaw lexical items in folktales. The analysis considers both what a lexical item refers to and the cultural meanings associated with its use in a narrative context. This distinction is important because Meranaw words may carry meanings that are closely connected to the community's beliefs, values, practices, and worldview. Barthes' denotation–connotation framework consequently supports the study's examination of how lexical meaning becomes culturally meaningful within Meranaw folktales.

2.2 Lexical Meaning and Cultural Context

The lexicon represents the vocabulary of a language and provides speakers with resources for expressing experiences, relationships, ideas, and emotions. Words, however, do not function as isolated units of meaning. Their interpretation is influenced by the contexts in which they are used and by the knowledge shared among members of a speech community. Sapir's view of language as closely related to the way people experience and understand their world remains relevant to the study of culturally embedded lexical meaning. From this perspective, examining vocabulary can provide insights into how a community represents aspects of its social and cultural life.

Vocabulary is also closely related to meaning in language education. Ur (1996) emphasizes the importance of presenting vocabulary through meaningful contexts, including stories, examples, associated ideas, and other contextual resources. This view is particularly relevant to the present study because the meaning of a lexical item may become clearer when it is examined within the narrative and cultural context in which it occurs. Rather than treating vocabulary simply as a list of words to be memorized, contextualized lexical analysis allows learners to encounter words together with the ideas, practices, and experiences they represent.

The relationship between lexical meaning and cultural context is especially significant when working with indigenous or local languages. A direct translation may provide the basic meaning of a word but may not communicate the cultural associations attached to it. For this reason, culturally grounded vocabulary can serve as an important resource for language education. Examining Meranaw lexical items within folktales can reveal meanings that are difficult to capture through translation alone and can provide teachers and learners with opportunities to explore language together with the culture in which it is used.

2.3 Folktales as Cultural and Linguistic Resources

Folktales provide an important context for examining the relationship between language and culture because they preserve narratives, expressions, beliefs, and values that have been transmitted across generations. As forms of oral literature, they often reflect a community's understanding of social relationships, moral behavior, religious beliefs, historical experiences, and the natural and supernatural world. The language used in these narratives is therefore more than a means of telling a story; it can also preserve culturally significant meanings.

For the Meranaw community, folktales represent an important source of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Lexical items embedded in these narratives may refer to culturally specific objects, practices, relationships, beliefs, and experiences. Their meanings become more accessible when examined within the narratives in which they occur. A cultural-linguistic analysis of these lexical items can consequently provide a clearer understanding of how the Meranaw language represents and communicates aspects of Meranaw identity.

The use of folktales in language education also offers opportunities for culturally responsive learning. When learners encounter vocabulary through stories rooted in their own cultural environment, language learning can be connected to familiar knowledge and experiences. Such materials may support not only vocabulary development but also greater awareness of the cultural meanings carried by language. In this regard, Meranaw folktales can function as both linguistic resources and cultural texts.

2.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature suggests that meaning is shaped by more than the literal relationship between words and their referents. Semiotic theory highlights the role of connotation in revealing the cultural associations attached to signs, while research on lexical meaning emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting vocabulary. Folktales provide a particularly rich setting in which these relationships can be observed because they bring language, cultural knowledge, and community experience together within narratives.

Despite these perspectives, limited attention has been given to the **connotative meanings** of specific Meranaw lexical items within folktale contexts. Existing discussions of language, vocabulary, and oral literature provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between language and culture, but they do not fully explain how particular Meranaw lexical items acquire culturally specific meanings within narratives. This study addresses this gap by examining selected Meranaw lexical items through a cultural-linguistic analysis informed by Barthes' denotation–connotation framework. It further considers how these meanings may inform understanding of Meranaw cultural identity and the development of culturally responsive language education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive-analytical design using content analysis and semiotic analysis to examine the connotative meanings of Meranaw lexical items found in selected folktales. The approach was chosen because the study sought to understand how words acquire meanings beyond their literal definitions and how these meanings are connected to Meranaw beliefs, values, practices, and worldview. Barthes' semiotic framework, particularly the distinction between denotation and connotation, served as the main analytical lens for interpreting the culturally embedded meanings of the selected lexical items.

3.2 Data Sources and Participants

The primary textual data consisted of forty documented Meranaw folktales selected purposively based on their cultural relevance and richness of Meranaw vocabulary. The folktales served as the main corpus from which lexical items were identified and examined.

Two groups of participants provided supporting data for the interpretation of the lexical items. The first group consisted of 140 pupils from Grades One, Two, and Three at the Mindanao State University–Integrated Laboratory School, with 45 pupils from Grade One, 43 from Grade Two, and 52 from Grade Three. The pupils were exposed to selected folktales through classroom reading activities and were asked to identify Meranaw words they considered unfamiliar, difficult, or challenging to understand. Their responses helped generate an initial inventory of lexical items for further analysis.

The second group consisted of ten elderly native speakers of Meranaw who were purposively selected because of their familiarity with the Meranaw language, traditions, beliefs, values, and customary practices. As cultural knowledge bearers, they were consulted regarding the meanings and cultural associations of the lexical items included in the final list. Their explanations provided contextual information that helped the researcher interpret meanings that could not be adequately established from the texts alone.

3.3 Research Instruments and Analytical Framework

Three sources of data were used: the selected folktales, a questionnaire administered to the pupils, and a semi-structured interview guide for the elderly native speakers. The questionnaire was used to identify lexical items that pupils found unfamiliar or difficult in the selected folktales. The interview guide was used to obtain explanations of the cultural meanings and associations attached to the identified lexical items.

The analysis was guided by Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of signification. In this framework, denotation refers to the direct or literal meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the additional meanings and associations shaped by cultural values, beliefs, experiences, and social practices (Barthes, 1988, 1991). This framework allowed the researcher to examine how selected Meranaw lexical items function beyond their literal meanings and how they represent aspects of Meranaw cultural knowledge and identity.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in several stages. First, the researcher selected and reviewed the forty documented Meranaw folktales and identified their linguistic and cultural content. The selected folktales were then read to the Grade One, Grade Two, and Grade Three pupils during classroom activities. Following the reading sessions, the questionnaire was administered to the 140 pupils to identify Meranaw lexical items that they found unfamiliar or difficult to understand.

The lexical items identified through the pupils' responses were compared with the vocabulary appearing in the folktales. Items considered culturally significant and relevant to the purpose of the study were retained for further analysis. This process resulted in a final set of 100 Meranaw lexical items for detailed examination.

The researcher then consulted the ten elderly native speakers regarding the meanings and cultural associations of the selected lexical items. The interviews focused on how the words are understood and used within Meranaw cultural contexts, including their connections to beliefs, values, practices, social relationships, history, and worldview. The explanations provided by the cultural knowledge bearers were considered together with the contexts in which the lexical items appeared in the folktales.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded from the identification of lexical items to the interpretation of their cultural meanings. The 100 selected Meranaw lexical items were first examined in the context of the folktales to establish their denotative or direct meanings. The researcher then examined the associations and cultural meanings attached to each item based on its narrative context and the explanations provided by the Meranaw cultural knowledge bearers.

The lexical items were subsequently grouped according to recurring patterns in their meanings. The resulting categories reflected major areas of Meranaw cultural knowledge, including socio-cultural and historical significance, cultural heritage, natural and mythical beliefs, and Islamic theology. These categories were interpreted through Barthes' denotation–connotation framework to explain how the lexical items carry meanings beyond their literal definitions.

The interpretations were then reviewed by Meranaw linguists, academics, and cultural experts to assess the linguistic accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and consistency of the analysis. Their feedback was considered in refining the final interpretations and thematic categories.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Several measures were taken to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The study drew on multiple sources of information, including the folktales, pupils' responses, and accounts from native Meranaw cultural knowledge bearers. Comparing these sources helped the researcher examine whether the interpretations of the lexical items were consistent across textual and cultural evidence. The analysis was also reviewed by Meranaw linguists, academics, and cultural experts to help ensure that the interpretations were linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and the purpose and procedures of the research were explained to the participants. Appropriate consent was obtained from the adult participants, while parental or guardian consent was secured for the pupil participants. The identities and personal information of the participants were treated confidentially, and the data were used solely for research purposes.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Connotative Meanings of Meranaw Lexical Items

The analysis of the selected Meranaw folktales initially yielded more than one thousand vocabulary entries. From these, 538 words were identified for closer examination, particularly nouns and adjectives that appeared to carry meanings beyond their basic or dictionary definitions. Further analysis resulted in 100 lexical items with culturally significant connotations. These items were grouped into four broad categories: (1) socio-cultural and historical meanings, (2) cultural heritage, (3) natural phenomena, mythical and traditional beliefs, and (4) Islamic theology. The categorization shows that Meranaw lexical items do not simply name people, objects, places, or events. In the context of folktales, many of them evoke shared experiences, values, beliefs, social practices, and historical memories.

Table 1. Selected Meranaw Lexical Items and Their Connotative Meanings

Meranaw Lexical Items	Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning
<i>Adat</i>	custom; code of etiquette	proper conduct, good breeding, and socially accepted behavior
<i>Bantogan</i>	Honor	prestige, fame, and high social standing
<i>Bangensa</i>	clan; bloodline	ancestry, unity, influence, and family identity
<i>Bayok</i>	song; ballad; chant	collective memory, cultural expression, and historical storytelling
<i>gagaw</i>	pity; mercy; compassion	humaneness, kindness, and moral responsibility
<i>kandori</i>	offering; feast	generosity, gratitude, communal sharing, and celebration
<i>taritib</i>	customary law	order, discipline, legitimacy, and social organization
<i>malong</i>	tubular garment	cultural creativity, identity, versatility, and artistic heritage
<i>Okir</i>	carved design	beauty, prestige, identity, and artistic excellence
<i>Sarimanok</i>	Bird	good fortune, royalty, authority, and cultural identity
<i>Tonong</i>	Spirit	supernatural power, mystery, and traditional belief

<i>boloto</i>	Rainbow	omen, danger, and traditional interpretations of death
<i>agama</i>	Religion	devotion, faith, and Islamic identity
<i>malaikat</i>	Angel	divine protection, goodness, and guardianship

Note. The table presents selected examples from the 100 lexical items identified in the study.

The findings suggest that connotation in Meranaw is strongly shaped by cultural experience. A lexical item acquires additional meaning because speakers associate it with particular practices, relationships, beliefs, or historical experiences. This supports Barthes' distinction between denotation and connotation. While denotation refers to the immediate or literal meaning of a sign, connotation develops when that sign becomes associated with cultural values, emotions, and shared ways of interpreting experience. In the Meranaw corpus, therefore, the meaning of a word cannot always be fully understood by translating it into English. Its cultural associations are equally important.

For example, *adat* (custom), literally referring to custom or etiquette, carries a broader meaning associated with proper behavior, good breeding, and respect for socially accepted practices. Similarly, *taritib* (customary law), which may be translated as customary law, evokes ideas of order, discipline, legitimacy, and social relationships. These examples demonstrate how lexical meaning is connected to the social organization of the community. The words do not merely describe cultural practices; they also encode expectations concerning how members of the community should behave.

Another group of lexical items reflects social relationships and collective identity. *Bangensa* (clan), meaning clan, race, nation, or bloodline, is associated with ancestry, unity, and family identity. Its significance becomes clearer when considered within the importance of kinship and lineage in Meranaw society. *Bantogan* (clan), literally referring to honor, similarly evokes prestige, fame, and social standing. These associations show that lexical meaning is closely tied to the social values through which individuals understand their position within the community.

The lexical item *bayok* provides another example of the relationship between language and collective memory. Although it may simply be translated as song, ballad, or chant, its cultural significance extends to storytelling, celebration, historical remembrance, and the expression of emotions. In traditional contexts, *bayok* may be used to communicate important messages, honor individuals, express affection, or recount aspects of community history. Its meaning therefore extends beyond the musical form itself and reflects the role of oral performance in maintaining cultural knowledge.

Several lexical items are also closely associated with Meranaw material and artistic heritage. Terms such as *malong* (tubular garment), *okir* (carved design), *panolong*, *torogan*, *sarimanok*, and *kulintang* refer to recognizable cultural objects or practices, but their meanings extend beyond their physical referents. *Malong*, for instance, signifies more than a tubular garment. Its multiple uses and artistic designs associate it with creativity, adaptability, and cultural identity. Likewise, *okir*, referring to a carved design, carries associations of beauty, prestige, and artistic identity. *Torogan* is not simply a mansion or traditional house; it may also signify social status, authority, community cooperation, and the cultural heritage of the Meranaw.

The same pattern is evident in *sarimanok*. At the denotative level, the word refers to a bird. Within Meranaw cultural expression, however, the *sarimanok* is associated with good fortune, royalty, authority, and artistic identity. Its frequent representation in visual and material culture demonstrates how an ordinary lexical referent can acquire a much wider cultural significance. The meaning of the word is therefore connected not only to the object itself but also to the cultural knowledge that surrounds it.

4.2 Natural Phenomena and Traditional Beliefs

A further group of lexical items reflects Meranaw interpretations of the natural and supernatural worlds. Words such as *tonong*, *boloto*, *dalandeg*, *kalasan*, *laod*, *lawasaig*, and *nonok* demonstrate how elements of the natural environment may become associated with beliefs, warnings, fears, and explanations of events.

For instance, *tonong*, literally translated as spirit, carries associations with supernatural power and mystery. Similarly, *boloto*, or rainbow, has been associated in traditional narratives with omens and the death of an influential person. These meanings should be understood as cultural interpretations rather than empirical explanations of natural phenomena. Their significance lies in what they reveal about the ways earlier generations made sense of the world and transmitted those understandings through oral narratives.

The findings also show that some traditional beliefs coexist with, or have been reconsidered in relation to, Islamic teachings. This is particularly visible in lexical items associated with spirits, omens, rituals, and supernatural forces. The presence of these meanings in the folktales does not necessarily indicate that contemporary Meranaw speakers continue to accept all of the beliefs represented in the narratives. Rather, the lexical items provide evidence of layers of cultural knowledge that have developed and changed over time.

This observation is important from a cultural-linguistic perspective because language preserves traces of earlier worldviews even when particular practices or beliefs are no longer actively observed. Folktales consequently provide an important record of cultural memory. They allow researchers to examine how older beliefs, social practices, and religious influences have been represented and reinterpreted within the Meranaw linguistic tradition.

4.3 Islamic and Religious Connotations

Another prominent pattern in the findings concerns lexical items associated with Islamic belief and practice. Words such as *agama*, *akirat*, *aoliya*, *malaikat*, *nabi*, and *olama* carry meanings that are strongly connected with Islamic theology and the religious life of the Meranaw community.

For example, *nabi*, literally prophet, carries associations of divine revelation, religious authority, and reverence. *Malaikat*, meaning angel, evokes ideas of divine guardianship and accountability, while *akirat* refers to the Hereafter and is associated with judgment, reward, and punishment. These meanings illustrate how Islamic concepts have become embedded in Meranaw vocabulary and cultural expression.

The presence of Arabic-derived terms in Meranaw also demonstrates the role of language contact in cultural development. Borrowed words do not necessarily remain foreign elements once incorporated into everyday communication. Over time, they may become part of the linguistic resources through which a community expresses its own worldview. In the Meranaw context, Islamic vocabulary has become closely connected with local cultural practices and identity.

At the same time, the findings indicate that Meranaw cultural meaning cannot be understood through a single religious or historical layer. Some lexical items reflect indigenous beliefs and practices, while others express Islamic concepts. Together, they reveal the historical complexity of Meranaw cultural experience. Rather than treating these meanings as isolated categories, the analysis suggests that Meranaw vocabulary reflects the interaction of indigenous knowledge, historical experience, social organization, and Islamic influence.

4.4 Connotation as a Carrier of Cultural Identity

Across the four thematic categories, a common pattern emerges: Meranaw lexical items function as repositories of cultural knowledge. Their meanings are shaped by the experiences of the community and are sustained through repeated use in stories, conversations, practices, and other forms of cultural expression.

The findings support the view that words are not culturally neutral. A lexical item may have a relatively simple English equivalent but evoke a considerably richer network of associations for Meranaw speakers. *Kandori*, for example, may be translated as an offering or feast, but its cultural meaning includes generosity, gratitude, communal participation, and religious devotion. *Kalalagan*, meaning wise or intelligent, may similarly evoke qualities of goodness and wisdom rather than simply intellectual ability.

This relationship between language and culture is particularly important in the interpretation of folktales. A reader who understands only the literal meaning of a lexical item may understand the basic plot of a story but miss some of the cultural meanings embedded in the narrative. The connotative dimension therefore becomes essential to a fuller understanding of Meranaw oral literature.

The findings also reinforce the idea that cultural meaning is not fixed. Meanings may change as communities experience social, religious, political, and linguistic transformations. Some traditional meanings are retained, others are modified, and still others may gradually disappear. Documenting these meanings in folktales therefore provides a record of cultural knowledge at a particular point in the history of the language.

4.5 Implications for Language Education

The findings have important implications for Meranaw language education. The 100 lexical items identified in the study can serve as culturally grounded resources for vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and cultural learning. Rather than teaching vocabulary solely through direct translation, teachers can present words together with the stories, practices, beliefs, and social contexts that give them meaning.

This approach is particularly relevant for learners who may recognize a Meranaw word but no longer be familiar with its cultural associations. A folktale-based vocabulary activity, for example, can ask learners to identify a word, determine its literal meaning, examine its use in the story, and discuss the cultural meaning associated with it. Such activities can develop both linguistic competence and cultural awareness.

The findings further suggest that folktales can serve as living linguistic resources rather than merely as literary texts. They provide naturally occurring contexts in which vocabulary, values, beliefs, and social relationships can be explored together. Incorporating these materials into language education may help learners see the relevance of their indigenous language while encouraging greater appreciation of their cultural heritage.

For language preservation, documenting culturally significant lexical items is equally important. When a word disappears, the loss may involve more than vocabulary; associated cultural knowledge, practices, and historical memories may also become less accessible to younger generations. Systematic documentation of Meranaw lexical items and their cultural meanings can therefore contribute to language maintenance and revitalization.

4.6 Synthesis of the Findings

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the connotative meanings of Meranaw lexical items are closely connected to the community's cultural knowledge, social relationships, artistic traditions, historical experiences, traditional beliefs, and Islamic worldview. The four thematic categories identified in the study are not entirely separate; rather, they overlap and interact within the narratives.

The findings provide support for Barthes' concept of connotation as a second level of signification in which signs acquire meanings shaped by cultural and social experience. In the Meranaw folktales, lexical items move beyond simple reference and become carriers of values, memories, beliefs, and identity. This cultural dimension of lexical meaning is particularly significant for language education because it demonstrates that learning indigenous vocabulary also involves learning the cultural knowledge embedded within that vocabulary.

Thus, Meranaw folktales offer more than entertainment or historical narratives. They constitute a valuable linguistic and cultural resource through which meanings can be documented, interpreted, and transmitted. Bringing these materials into language education can help learners understand not only what Meranaw words mean, but also why those words matter within Meranaw culture.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that selected Meranaw lexical items carry meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions, reflecting the community's cultural values, traditions, historical experiences, beliefs, and Islamic worldview. The four identified themes—sociocultural and historical meanings, cultural heritage, natural and mythical beliefs, and Islamic theology—demonstrate the close relationship between language, culture, and identity. These lexical items therefore serve not only as words for communication but also as carriers of collective memory and cultural knowledge. Preserving and integrating their meanings into language education can help younger generations better understand, value, and sustain Meranaw language and cultural heritage.

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APPENDIX A

Meranaw Lexical Items and Their Connotative Meanings

A. Socio-Cultural and Historical Meanings

Lexical Item	Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning
<i>adat</i>	Custom, etiquette	Social norms, proper conduct, moral order
<i>Agamaniyog</i>	Legendary kingdom	Ideal society, prosperity, grandeur
<i>akir balig</i>	Adolescence	Maturity, readiness for social roles
<i>bagi'an</i>	Fate, share	Destiny, divine will, life fortune
<i>Bantogan</i>	Honor	Prestige, fame, high status
<i>bangensa</i>	Clan, lineage	Identity, ancestry, unity
<i>bayok</i>	Chant, song	Cultural expression, history, emotion
<i>betang</i>	Dowry	Wealth, prestige, marital value
<i>Dansalan</i>	Shore	Stability, historical identity
<i>dowaya</i>	Co-wife	Polygamy, marital structure
<i>gagaw</i>	Mercy	Compassion, moral virtue
<i>imbhama</i>	Betel nut	Hospitality, social bonding
<i>kalilang</i>	Feast	Celebration, unity, tradition
<i>kalilintad</i>	Peace	Harmony, spiritual calm
<i>kandori</i>	Offering, feast	Gratitude, generosity
<i>kapanganakan</i>	Courtship	Social relations, family bonds
<i>kawasa</i>	Wealthy	Status, prosperity
<i>kota</i>	Fort	Protection, security
<i>taritib</i>	Customary law	Order, legitimacy, governance
<i>warna</i>	Color	Symbolism, cultural meaning

B. Cultural Heritage

Lexical Item	Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning
<i>agong</i>	Gong	Status, festivity
<i>ampas</i>	Cloth	Elegance, refinement
<i>bilik</i>	Room	Privacy, protection
<i>debakan</i>	Drum	Celebration
<i>kapal</i>	Boat	Journey, exploration
<i>kotiyapi</i>	Instrument	Artistic expression
<i>kulintang</i>	Gong set	Tradition, performance
<i>lamin</i>	Chamber	Seclusion, nobility
<i>landap</i>	Skirt	Elegance, identity
<i>malong</i>	Garment	Versatility, cultural identity
<i>Okir</i>	Carving	Art, prestige
<i>pandi</i>	Flag	Identity, representation
<i>panolong</i>	Ornament	Protection, wealth
<i>sarimanok</i>	Bird	Good fortune, authority
<i>tabak</i>	Tray	Hospitality
<i>tambor</i>	Drum	Celebration, disturbance
<i>torogan</i>	Mansion	Power, nobility

C. Natural, Superstitious, and Mythical Beliefs

Lexical Item	Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning
adimat	Amulet	Protection, power
bagel	Wave	Difficulty, life challenges
boloto	Rainbow	Omen, warning
dalendeg	Thunder	Power, destruction
inetokan	Illness	Spiritual imbalance
kalasan	Forest	Mystery, danger
kokok	Dwarf	Trickery, fear
laod	Deep water	Life, danger, spirituality
nonok	Balete tree	Fear, supernatural
paririmar	Augur	Divination, mysticism
tarapan	Locust	Destruction, loss
tonong	Spirit	Supernatural influence

D. Islamic Theology

Lexical Item	Literal Meaning	Connotative Meaning
<i>agama</i>	Religion	Faith, devotion
<i>akirat</i>	Afterlife	Judgment, destiny
<i>aoliya</i>	Devout person	Spiritual devotion
<i>ga'os</i>	Powerful	Divine strength
<i>garoda</i>	Vulture	Protection (mythic)
<i>malaikat</i>	Angel	Guidance, purity
<i>nabi</i>	Prophet	Divine message
<i>olama</i>	Scholars	Knowledge, authority
<i>sedepan</i>	West	Prayer direction, spirituality