



REBU IN THE SPEECH NORM SYSTEM OF THE KARO COMMUNITY: CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS IN THE MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Rebu is a traditional speech norm in the Karo community that prohibits direct face-to-face communication between in-laws of opposite genders and siblings-in-law. This norm plays a crucial role in maintaining respect, social harmony, and family hierarchy. However, modernization and changing lifestyles have influenced the understanding and practice of rebu, especially among the younger generation. This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the meanings, perceptions, and implementation of rebu within the Karo community. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 informants from Naman Teran Village and validated using triangulation techniques. Findings indicate that rebu is still recognized as a vital cultural norm symbolizing respect and politeness. The younger generation generally understands the concept, though with more flexible interpretations. In young households, rebu is practiced with adaptations, such as the use of intermediaries or digital communication, to accommodate modern social contexts. Despite external influences of globalization and technology, the core values of rebu persist as a mechanism for maintaining family harmony and social order. Adaptation in practice reflects the community's efforts to balance tradition and modernity, ensuring the continuity of cultural identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Rebu is a traditional speech norm in the Karo community that prohibits direct face-to-face communication between in-laws of opposite genders and siblings-in-law, serving as a key mechanism to uphold respect, social harmony, and family hierarchy. This norm remains highly relevant in maintaining social order and preventing conflicts within extended families, even amidst rapid modernization and cultural shifts. This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the meanings, perceptions, and implementation of rebu, focusing particularly on how the younger generation understands and responds to this norm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 informants from Naman Teran Village and validated using triangulation techniques. Findings reveal that while rebu continues to symbolize respect and politeness, younger Karo individuals interpret it with greater flexibility, adapting practices through intermediaries and digital communication to align with contemporary lifestyles. Nonetheless, challenges persist, including difficulties in consistently observing rebu rules and balancing traditional expectations with modern social dynamics. Despite

these challenges, the core values of *rebu* endure as vital for fostering family cohesion and cultural identity, reflecting the community's ongoing negotiation between preserving tradition and embracing modernity.

The Karo community has strong traditions that govern many aspects of their lives, making Karo Regency a place rich in traditions and cultural values (Asmarani et al. 2024). One aspect of Karo culture is that marriage is governed by customs and traditions that have been passed down since ancient times. The traditional wedding ceremony of the Karo tribe is usually held in *Jambur*, a large building that serves as a meeting place for the village community. Besides being used for deliberations, *Jambur* also serves as a location for celebrating traditional ceremonies, both weddings and funeral rites (Ulina and Ali 2018). In the Karo tribe, the marriage process can be carried out in two ways:

First, through customs or traditional directions, and second, through an agreement between both parties called "ture direction." In marriages that follow traditional customs, the role of parents is very dominant. They play an active role from the beginning, starting with introducing the prospective bride and groom through a process called *ipetandaken*, continuing with the engagement known as *maba belo selambar*, until the entire wedding ceremony is completed (Br, La, and Topo 2020). After the wedding preparations are complete, there will be a final procession known as *mukul*. *Mukul*, this ethnic event occurs on the wedding day and is also known as *persada tendi* or *Ngulih Tudung*. Additionally, in the Karo ethnic wedding tradition, there is also a ritual known as *Rebu*.

The *rebu* tradition is a norm that regulates the prohibition of face-to-face interaction and communication between in-laws and their children-in-law of different genders. Men, the meaning of *rebu* is a prohibition on direct communication; interacting with someone who is under *rebu* is considered invalid or impermissible. For the Karo people, this custom is highly respected and must not be violated, whether during various celebrations or in daily activities. (Azka 2020). The origin of the *rebu* tradition is rooted in the Karo community settling in an ancient house called *rumah siwaluh jabu*. This term means "house with eight rooms," where *waluh* means 8 and *jabu* means house. In this place, there are eight heads of families living together, and to avoid miscommunication and unwanted incidents, a set of rules called *rebu* was established. This rule aims to foster respect, maintain ethics, and uphold politeness among the Karo community. For those who violate this tradition, they will be viewed as *laradat* or individuals who do not understand the customs, or even ridiculed by the community. In the context of the Karo traditional wedding ceremony, *rebu* is still adhered to and preserved to this day (Puja, Sakti, and Ismail 2024).

The tradition of *rebu* plays an important role in preventing undesirable events, such as mistakes or bonds prohibited by norms. Thus, this tradition demonstrates the existence of limitations on individual freedom. The attitudes acquired from this tradition can remind people of social principles in family life, allowing individuals to better control their own behavior. *Rebu* creates a feeling of reluctance, which in turn fosters respect and politeness. Bangun, 1986, in (Br, La, and Topo 2020). In the context of the Karo Tribe, *rebu* involves three main relationships: father-in-law (*bengkila*) with daughter-in-law (*permain*), mother-in-law (*mami*) with son-in-law (*kela*), and siblings-in-law of different genders (*erturanku*). The explanation is that if the *turanku* is a man, then he is the husband of his wife's sister; conversely, if the *turanku* is a woman, then she is the wife of her husband's brother. Tarigan, 1990, in (Br, La, and Topo 2020). In line with this, Geertz argues that not only human perception undergoes modernization, but also a cultural revolution that imbues meaning into the transformations that occur, Geertz, 1997:76, in (Br, La, and Topo 2020).

Modernization, as a phenomenon of social change, plays a very significant role in society, especially for those who are open to change. The process of modernization has a significant impact on the lives of society.

The relationship between modernization and globalization is very close. Societal renewal is often triggered by technological advancements. Muller, 2006, in (Sinuraya and Malau 2019). The impact of modernization extends to various aspects of human life, including health, communication, fashion, and lifestyle. As social beings, every individual needs interaction to communicate with others, Soekanto, 2012, in (Sinuraya and Malau 2019). However, interactions do not always proceed harmoniously; sometimes, interactions can lead to conflicts with the norms and values present within the group (Sinuraya and Malau 2019).

The process of globalization, which continuously alters the order of life, impacts the diversity of society. The difference lies in the knowledge acquired and the technology adopted. Wherever they turn, there are new inventions from foreign countries. This discovery offers unparalleled convenience and comfort that cannot be matched otherwise. This relative convenience enhances effortless interaction between information and people,

resulting in further globalization. However, the use of foreign technology presents a new problem of how to maintain long-standing values. In the process of adapting to change, it is also very important to maintain the values and norms of society so that they are not swallowed by modernism. It can be said that modernism can be reproduced, but the speech norms in the Karo community must be maintained so that the culture does not disappear due to globalization.

Modernization introduces a change, especially in the way of thinking and actions of society, due to the influence of foreign cultures. The impact of modernization is evident in the mindset of society, which is becoming more open to new things that were once considered foreign. Society now also more quickly accepts new cultural elements disseminated by media and technology. However, this openness also carries the possibility of a shift from long-held norms and values. During the process of modernization, society is expected to be selective in accepting new cultural values so that they do not conflict with existing local values. In this way, the community is able to maintain its identity, such as the speech norms of the Karo people, as part of an identity that is still contained within modernity.

Modernization is experienced in almost all sectors, including socialization, which has undergone changes due to technological advancements. Individuals in this era are able to transmit information quickly and efficiently without being limited by location. However, this ease of interaction sometimes reduces the crucial face-to-face meetings that are essential for building closeness. Moreover, technology also influences interpersonal interaction behaviors, which sometimes do not align with societal values and norms. In this regard, this change urges everyone to be polite and ethical in communication according to the existing culture. By adhering to these norms, such as the interaction and speech norms of the Karo people, society can embrace technology without violating the regional communication principles that strengthen social interactions.

Abstract values take on concrete forms through social norms or rules, including legal norms. The word "norm" comes from the Greek "nomos" and is known in English as "norm," which refers to patterns, rules, or behavioral norms. In Arabic, "norm" is defined as "kaidah," whereas in Indonesian, this term refers to guidelines, benchmarks, or rules. Norms or rules provide direction and guidance for humans in their actions and behavior.

Soedjono Dirdjosisworo explained that norms are the provisions regarding the good and bad behavior of humans in social interactions. Norms determine a series of rules in the form of commands, recommendations, and prohibitions. Prohibitions are established for actions that, if violated, can endanger communal life. Conversely, commands aim to encourage actions that can bring benefits to society (Pramono 2018).

Norms of politeness are a set of rules that govern the ethics of interaction within society. The criteria for politeness norms are determined by propriety, customs, and traditions that prevail in a community, so each society has its own benchmarks for what is considered appropriate and acceptable. These norms are greatly influenced by local culture, including customs and traditions of specific ethnic groups. An action that is considered respectful in one area might be perceived as rude or unethical by people from another area. Thus, norms of politeness can vary between one society and another, although the essence remains the same: respecting others based on their position within the community, which in turn can invite respect for oneself (Herry et al. 2023).

In the culture of the Karo community, *rebu* is included in the norms of politeness. *Rebu* can be understood as polite behavior in society, which regulates etiquette regarding who should receive respect and who needs to show respect, as well as boundaries in speaking and socializing. The core role of this custom functions to maintain etiquette, respect family hierarchy, and prevent potential conflicts that could arise from direct interactions. As we know, culture is a product of human creation within its social context. The *Rebu* tradition also plays an important role in enhancing unity within the extended family environment, which is a crucial element of the social framework of the Karo community. (Tania et al. 2024). Through this tradition, family members have the opportunity to resolve conflicts peacefully with a symbolic procession that emphasizes mutual respect and forgiveness. In addition, *rebu* helps maintain harmonious relationships among extended family members, creating stronger bonds, and reinforcing the values of togetherness within the Karo community.

Rebu also serves as a means for the Karo community to pass on cultural and customary values to the younger generation. Through the implementation of *rebu*, the younger generation is invited to understand and appreciate the noble values present in Karo culture. They can learn how to practice patience, respect, and self-

control in facing conflicts. This tradition teaches them to always prioritize harmony within the extended family, which is one of the main values of the Karo community. Thus, *rebu* serves as an effective informal educational medium in instilling customs and ethics in the next generation. The younger generation who understand the meaning of *rebu* will have greater concern for the continuity of Karo culture.

Although previous research has explored the tradition of *rebu* within the Karo community, there remains a notable lack of in-depth, focused studies on how the younger generation perceives, interprets, and adapts this cultural norm in the context of rapid modernization and globalization; therefore, it is increasingly urgent to investigate these dynamics as changes in the application of *rebu* carry significant social implications for family cohesion and the continuity of cultural identity, making this research essential for providing valuable insights that can guide policymakers, cultural practitioners, and community leaders in developing effective strategies to preserve and revitalize this vital local heritage in an era of social transformation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, which is well-suited for capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of the Karo community regarding the tradition of *rebu*. Phenomenology allows researchers to deeply understand cultural meanings and social phenomena as experienced by participants (Suyanto, 2019). This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the cultural meanings and social dynamics that quantitative methods may not sufficiently reveal (Fiantika et al., 2022; Sugiyono, 2020).

Data collection was conducted primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observations in Naman Teran Village, Karo Regency. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select 15 informants who possess rich knowledge and experience related to *rebu*. The informants represent diverse demographic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, and social roles within the community, to ensure the data reflect multiple perspectives (Kususmatuti and Mustamil, 2019; J, 2021).

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, data triangulation was employed by cross-verifying information obtained from interviews, observations, and at different times of data collection (Kususmatuti and Mustamil, 2019; J, 2021). Additionally, the interview process involved open-ended questions and probing techniques to encourage detailed and meaningful responses (Fiantika et al., 2022).

All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes related to the understanding and practice of *rebu*. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent from all participants and confidentiality of their identities (Abdussamad, 2021).

In summary, the qualitative phenomenological approach combined with rigorous sampling and triangulation techniques provides a comprehensive and trustworthy framework to understand the nuances of *rebu* as a social and cultural norm in the Karo community (Suyanto, 2019; Fiantika et al., 2022; Kususmatuti and Mustamil, 2019).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The Meaning of Rebu in the Speech Norm System of the Karo Community

The *rebu* tradition holds positive values that need to be applied in life, as well as reminding us of social principles in maintaining family relationships (Desy et al. 2022). The tradition of *rebu ngerana*, which has existed since ancient times in Karo society, continues to thrive today among communities that still uphold traditional values.

History records that the tradition of *rebu ngerana* developed from the customs of the Karo people who lived in a traditional house called "rumah si waluh jabu." In the past, each Karo family lived together in one traditional house, which could be inhabited by several families depending on its size. In one house, it could consist of 4, 6, or even up to 8 families. The diversity within one household includes parents, children, grandchildren, sons-in-law and their children, as well as siblings and their descendants. All family members live together without any barriers separating them from one another (Azka 2020).

Etymologically, "rebu" means a prohibition on speaking, and can be understood as a principle of politeness in Karo culture. In this context, *rebu* symbolizes what is considered sacred, closely related to etiquette, prohibitions, taboos, and behavioral boundaries. Etiquette encompasses all aspects of behavior, conduct, and

interaction methods, including greetings and speech that align with prevailing norms. The tradition of Rebu functions as a pattern of social behavior in society, containing values and rules that serve as guidelines for each of its members in acting and interacting.

The above is related to the functional-structural theory Emile Durkheim views society as a biological organism composed of interdependent parts that maintain the continuity of the social system. In this context, rebu in the Karo community's speech norm system can be understood as one of the structural elements that functions to maintain social order and harmony (Nugroho 2021).

Rebu regulates patterns of communication and interaction between individuals, especially in relationships considered sensitive, such as between in-laws, with the aim of creating respect, maintaining appropriate social distance, and avoiding potential conflicts. The function of rebu aligns with Durkheim's idea that social norms and rules play a vital role in creating social solidarity, whether mechanical or organic, depending on the complexity of the society. Thus, the existence of rebu not only reflects Karo cultural values but also demonstrates how unwritten norms can support the overall social order through accepted and adhered restrictions. Along with this, it is in line with what was conveyed by the traditional leader Ngalemi Br Karo, who stated

"...Rebu is a taboo on speaking between in-laws and between siblings-in-law, and this rebu is made to avoid undesirable bad things." If you want to speak with someone who is under the rebuke, you must go through an intermediary or a third party. If we have a third party, we start the conversation with a noun. For example, "kursi suruh lebe gulai permen eina manuk ndai," which means "the chair asked the daughter-in-law to cook the chicken first..."

That statement emphasizes that the rebu system is a social mechanism designed subtly yet effectively to maintain the harmony of kinship relations in Karo society. With the presence of rebu, the community not only applies politeness values verbally but also forms a communication structure that reflects respect for hierarchy and status within the family. This shows how local culture has its own mechanisms for supporting social cohesion and preventing conflict through unwritten rules passed down through generations.

Rebu in Karo culture is divided into three main relationships: first, between the male in-laws (bengkila) and the female daughters-in-law (permain); second, between the female in-laws (mami) and the male sons-in-law (kela); and third, the relationship between siblings-in-law of different genders (erturangku). In this context, there are two understandings that need to be considered. If the person referred to is a man, then "turang" refers to the wife of his male sibling's wife. Conversely, if the person being discussed is a woman, then her turangku is the husband of her husband's sister, Tarigan, 1990 in (Ginting, Harahap, and Wuriyani 2022).

One tangible manifestation of the application of rebu values is the necessity to understand the narrative flow. In the Karo tribe's tradition, there is something called "tutur." The tuturs play a very important role in Karo society. The word "ertutur" in the Karo language comes from the root term "tutur," which refers to the degree of family relationships. On the other hand, "ertutur" is a verb that describes the effort to determine the degree of familial relationship between one individual and another. In Karo society's tradition, when meeting someone for the first time, they will always start with "ertutur" to find out the kinship relationship between them. When someone wants to greet another person, they must use kinship terms to address them. For example, terms like ersenina for sister, erturang for brother, ernande for mother, erbapa for father, and ermama-ermami for uncle and aunt (Sembiring and Nurjannah 2021). Such terms of address are justified based on an interview with Mr. Reno Surbakti, who stated.

"...Yes, in the Karo community, there is something called "tutur." Before we want to interact with someone, we must first understand the proper way to communicate with that person. For example, the younger brother of your mother should be called "mama" and the wife of your mother should be called "mami." The younger sister of your mother should be called "bibik" and the husband of bibik should be called "pak tengah" if he is the middle child and "pak uda" if he is the youngest child..."

The statement indicates that speech not only functions as a form of respect but also serves as a cultural mechanism in maintaining social order and strengthening family bonds. Through knowledge of language, the Karo community can avoid social mistakes and build harmonious interactions, as each individual understands their roles and appropriate titles within their social relationship structure. This aligns with the sociological view

that symbolic systems like language are an important part of forming solidarity and order in society. This is also in line with what Mrs. Sempurna Br Surbakti said, where she also stated the following interview quote.

"...In Karo society, there is something called 'tutur' wherever you are. If you have a surname or clan name, you must know this 'tutur' because it is important. When you go to a place and accidentally speak Karo, and there is a Karo person next to you, they will immediately invite you to use 'tutur'." For example, if you are br Karo and he is br Karo, if you are still young you call him bibik or mami, but if he is older you will call him Nini Karo. That's how Karo etiquette works..."

This statement emphasizes that speech is not only structural but also functional within a broader social context. It becomes a social bridge that allows individuals to immediately feel connected with others in the same ethnic community. Knowledge and application of language enable interactions that are not awkward, respectful, and in accordance with customary norms, while also demonstrating how cultural values remain alive and functional even outside their geographical context. This aligns with social construction theory, which states that identity and social relations are formed and upheld through symbols and cultural practices that are internalized from an early age.

Youth is a generation burdened with various hopes on their shoulders. This is understandable because the youth are expected to be the next generation, the generation that must fill and continue the baton of sustainable development. Talking about the younger generation as the successors is a moral burden that the youth must bear to fulfill the responsibilities given by the older generation (Pinilas, Ronny Gosal, and Ventje Kasenda 2017).

The era of globalization can bring about changes in the lifestyle of society, making it more modern. As a result, society tends to choose new cultures that are considered more practical compared to local cultures. One of the factors causing local culture to be forgotten in the present time is the lack of successors who are interested in learning and inheriting their own culture (Nahak 2019).

The role of the younger generation in understanding, preserving, and maintaining culture is very important. A love for culture must be taught from an early age. Don't let the arrival of the modern digital era make young people forget their principles and culture. Therefore, a refresh of cultural knowledge is needed in schools and communities to analyze and repackage the forms of our local culture. The weak role of youth in preserving and maintaining the arts and culture of their respective regions can be seen in the trend of lifestyles that are heavily influenced by Western modern culture. As a result, they are less familiar with the local culture of their own country, let alone able to study and preserve it (Pudianingsi et al. 2022).

Therefore, this research will discuss how the Karo youth understand rebu and how the Karo youth interpret the meaning of rebu.

3.1. The Karo Youth in Understanding the Meaning of Rebu

The younger generation understands the concept of "rebu" in the speech norms of the Karo community in various ways, depending on their family background, education, and involvement in customs. Some young people who grow up in environments that still strongly uphold traditional values tend to understand rebu as an important part of linguistic politeness and respect for kinship structures.

They usually learn through direct observation in traditional ceremonies and the teachings of parents or tribal elders. However, some others who are more influenced by the currents of modernization and less involved in traditional activities are starting to lose a deep understanding of rebu, even considering it irrelevant. even so, there are still efforts from the community and traditional leaders to reintroduce the value of rebu through cultural education and the active involvement of the younger generation in Karo traditional events.

Based on an interview with Yuni Sari, a young woman from Naman Village, the younger generation's understanding of rebu is obtained through daily experiences. She stated the following quote.

"...I understand the Karo tribe's traditions from the experiences and daily events that I often see." In our family, whenever there is a family event or gathering, there are always rules about who should be respected. From there, I learned about rebu..."

From that statement, it can be concluded that the understanding of rebu among the younger generation is mostly obtained through observation and direct involvement in family life. Rebu is understood as a form of respect shown in daily behavior towards certain relatives. This proves that although modernization is becoming stronger, the understanding of traditional values, especially rebu, remains alive among the younger generation.

3.2. The *Rebu* Phenomenon as Karo Speech Among the Younger Generation

In Karo society, *rebu* is one of the highly esteemed customary norms as a form of politeness and respect in communication. *Rebu* regulates the boundaries of interaction between individuals who have certain kinship relations, especially between parties who have relationships through marriage, such as between in-laws and parents-in-law, or siblings-in-law and the husband/wife of a sibling. However, the understanding and application of *rebu* are not limited to adults or those who are married; it is also passed down and introduced to the younger generation from an early age.

The young Karo generation, even before getting married, already has a role or position in the kinship structure that places them within a complex web of social relations. In practice, they already understand who their *senina* (blood relatives) or *erturang* (sisters from the same father) are and how to interact with them. This relationship serves as the foundation for understanding the boundaries of communication regulated by *rebu*.

Through observing customary practices such as marriage, death, and other cultural ceremonies, the younger generation begins to realize that they cannot act arbitrarily towards certain individuals due to prohibitions stemming from the *rebu* relationship. The understanding of *rebu* for the younger generation does not stop at verbal or physical prohibitions, but also evolves into a cultural awareness that maintaining boundaries in communication is a form of respect for customs and familial relationships. They interpret *rebu* as a symbol of respect for the social structure that has been deeply rooted for a long time.

With a phenomenological approach, the personal experiences of the younger generation in facing and applying *rebu* can be analyzed to understand how this norm remains alive and is passed down, even as times change. In line with the explanation above, there is a portrait of togetherness between *turang* and *senina* who are eating together. The photo below depicts the closeness between *Senina's* brother and *Erturang's* sister, which forms the basis for the structure of speech. From this relationship, the younger generation begins to understand communication patterns and their social roles within the customs. Moments like this are part of the value transmission process, where children learn by observing and directly experiencing the dynamics of social relations within the extended family.

The Phenomenon of *Rebu* Implementation in Young Households

Marriage is a new chapter for individuals to begin a set of obligations and various roles that are new in nature with their partners (Edwin, Shirley, and Hendrik 2021). In the context of the Karo community, particularly among young households, this phase is also marked by the emergence of challenges in adapting to customary norms, one of which is *rebu*. This phenomenon often creates a unique dilemma, as young couples must learn to balance the demands of the husband-wife relationship with the obligation to maintain communication boundaries according to the *rebu* rules.

The phenomenon of implementing *rebu* in young households shows how Karo cultural values are maintained despite the dynamics of modern life. In newly formed households, the implementation of *rebu* can serve as a platform for affirming cultural identity and a mechanism for regulating relationships among extended family members, especially between the husband and wife and their respective families.

Usually, newly married couples are given guidance on who falls into the category of *rebu*, and how they should behave. For example, a wife might be prohibited from speaking directly to her father-in-law or certain brothers-in-law. This creates communication boundaries aimed at maintaining respect and avoiding conflict or embarrassment. However, its implementation often involves negotiation. In the modern context, some couples seek compromise methods, such as using intermediaries to convey messages or utilizing digital media in communication. This shows a cultural adaptation in facing the changes of the times, while still maintaining the core values of *rebu*.

The impact of implementing *rebu* in new households maintains harmony because *rebu* functions as a social mechanism to avoid conflict, maintain boundaries, and foster mutual respect within the extended family. On the other hand, the *rebu* rules can create tension and make communication ineffective. New couples sometimes feel pressured because they have to adhere to many taboos, especially the wife who has to adjust to her husband's family.

Based on interviews with young couples, Sawal Ginting and Vero Br Surbakti, it was found that the understanding and implementation of *rebu* in their married life began when they participated in the traditional wedding ceremony. At that moment, they were introduced to the entire extended family and given an explanation about who they could communicate with directly and who they had to respect by performing *rebu*. They admitted that they were not surprised in performing *rebu* because since childhood they had often heard and learned about the concept of *rebu* from their parents. As they said.

"...we are not surprised in carrying out this rebu, because since childhood we have often heard about rebu from our parents." But yes, occasionally we do accidentally break it because we still forget who should be rebuked. Sometimes while chatting, they accidentally forget and are reminded by their parents or other family members. However, after a few months of living the household life, they start to get used to it and remember better who should be respected with the rebu rules..."

This statement illustrates that understanding *rebu* is the result of a long socialization process, but it does not always occur linearly. Although individuals have been introduced to it from an early age, actual application in the context of marriage and inter-family relations often requires ongoing adjustments. The mistakes that occur are not intentional violations, but rather part of the social learning process corrected through reminders from the family. This reinforces the view that *rebu* is a collective norm upheld through informal social control and aims to maintain harmony and boundaries in interpersonal relationships within the extended Karo community.

However, in practicing *rebu*, they also realize that there are challenges in implementing *rebu*, one of which is maintaining composure in a crowded atmosphere so as not to lose oneself. To avoid mistakes, they remind each other before speaking at family gatherings. They believe that *rebu* is important to preserve as part of Karo customs, and hope to teach it to their children in the future so that the culture remains sustainable.

This phenomenon shows that in young households, *rebu* is still practiced even though it requires an adaptation process. The introduction of *rebu* is carried out through family channels and traditional ceremonies, and it is positively accepted as part of the politeness norms of the Karo community. This is related to the politeness theory, where This theory teaches that in communication between individuals, especially in the context of hierarchical social relationships, it is very important to maintain politeness to avoid violating social norms (Melati and Sabaruddin 2022).

In the context of *rebu*, the speaking rules that require the use of intermediaries or nouns when communicating with the rebuked party reflect an effort to maintain face (social face) and show respect. Thus, the theory of linguistic politeness helps explain how the *rebu* norm functions as a communication strategy that minimizes the risk of disharmony within families and communities.

The findings reveal that *rebu* continues to hold significant cultural value among the Karo community, especially as a norm embodying respect, politeness, and social order within family interactions. The younger generation generally understands the concept of *rebu* as a mechanism to maintain harmonious relationships between in-laws and siblings-in-law. However, their interpretation and application show flexibility, reflecting adaptations to contemporary lifestyles.

For instance, during interviews, several young informants shared concrete examples illustrating these adaptations. One participant described using intermediaries or digital communication platforms like WhatsApp to convey messages instead of direct face-to-face conversations, thus respecting the *rebu* norm while accommodating modern communication habits. Another informant highlighted occasional unintentional breaches of *rebu* rules in social gatherings due to forgetfulness, followed by reminders from elders, illustrating the ongoing learning process in applying this tradition.

Comparatively, similar speech norms regulating communication boundaries in kinship relations can be found in other cultures, such as the avoidance of direct address between certain in-law relations in Javanese or Minangkabau societies. This cross-cultural perspective emphasizes the universal role of such norms in preserving family harmony but also highlights how modernization universally challenges these practices.

The discussion further elaborates on the impact of technological advancements and globalization on *rebu*. While technology facilitates faster and more convenient communication, it simultaneously poses challenges by potentially diminishing the necessity for traditional face-to-face interactions that underpin *rebu*. Global cultural influences introduce alternative communication norms and values, sometimes conflicting with local traditions.

These dynamics require the Karo community, particularly its youth, to negotiate between preserving cultural identity and embracing modern social realities. The ability of *rebu* to adapt without losing its core values

demonstrates the resilience of cultural norms amidst social transformation. However, the tension between tradition and modernity also points to risks of cultural erosion if not consciously maintained.

In conclusion, this study underscores the continuing relevance of *rebu* in fostering respect and social cohesion within the Karo community, while also recognizing the challenges posed by rapid modernization and technological change. By deepening the understanding of these challenges and adaptations, the research contributes to broader discussions on cultural preservation in the global era.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the tradition of *rebu* remains a vital component of the speech norm system within the Karo community, symbolizing respect, politeness, and social harmony in familial relationships. While the younger generation generally understands and values *rebu*, their practice involves adaptive strategies to accommodate modernization, technological influences, and evolving social dynamics. Maintaining *rebu* plays a significant social role in supporting family cohesion and reinforcing cultural identity by regulating interpersonal boundaries and preventing conflict. However, the pressures of globalization and digital communication necessitate conscious efforts to sustain these norms. To preserve *rebu* in the modern era, it is recommended to strengthen cultural education targeting younger generations through school curricula, community programs, and cultural events, while also leveraging technology to promote and adapt these traditions. Future research should focus on longitudinal changes in *rebu* practices, its role in urban settings, and comparative studies with other indigenous speech norms facing similar modernization challenges. Ultimately, this study highlights that although *rebu* encounters pressures from social change, its core values remain resilient, and with proactive preservation efforts, it can continue to thrive as a living tradition within the Karo community.

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