

KASAGADAN HU PAMUHAT: THE SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE RITUAL OF THE DULANGAN HIGAONON

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ABSTRACT

Pamuhat, or ritual, has been part of the unique customary and cultural heritage of the Indigenous People's (IP) practice. Higaonon is the least known ethnic group in the province of Misamis Oriental. This study interprets the *pamuhat* or ritual performed by the *baylan* using Halliday's meta-functional approach with Peirce's theory of signs (triad approach) as adopted by Lemke's semiotic framework and Althusser's Concept of Ideology. A qualitative research method was employed to explore the symbolic meaning of various ritual objects and elements. Through immersion in multiple rituals, common objects such as *tilad* (betel nut, leaf, and ash), *lugbak* (offering of coins), and *manok* (chicken) were identified as key offerings to *magbabaya*, deities, and spirits around. These symbols, when arranged on the *panlapnay* (white cloth), form a cohesive structure that conveys meaning akin to a text. The study determined three meta-functions within the ritual: ideational (the *pamuhat* portrays a positive image in the Dulangan Higaonon community), interpersonal (the hierarchical structure of gods and deities reflects cultural practices), and textual (integration of words, gestures, spatial arrangements, and objects). Furthermore, it was determined that the *pamuhat's* interrelated beliefs and practices were established by the religious ideologies; nonconformity may result in the consequences of neglecting offerings and the significance of spirits. The study recommends further analysis of prayer speech acts to explore the cohesiveness of symbols and language of the *baylan* and suggests comparing other tribal practices to enhance understanding of cultural differences.

Keywords: Pamuhat; Baylan; Semiotics; Magbabaya; Dulangan Higaonon.

1. INTRODUCTION

The way of life of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) today may be better understood and appreciated by studying traditional practices. As they are original inhabitants, they hold a wealth of truths, practices, and a multitude of beliefs that contribute to their present-day identity (Improgo, 2012). Their continued existence in the modern era demonstrates their resilience and the adaptability of their traditions amid globalization. This survival highlights the enduring strength of their culture. Therefore, members of broader society should acknowledge and value the unique ways of life Indigenous Peoples maintain. In other words, a group's way of life includes its customs, beliefs, traditions, and artistic expressions passed down through generations (Karsten & Kuntzel, 2007). Each group is unique, shaped by its history and environment, which influence its culture and practices. This makes every community distinct, even if they share the same language and interact with one another.

The Higaonon are one of the lesser-known Indigenous groups in Misamis Oriental (Saranza, 2016). They are Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who reside in mountainous regions and are often

referred to as people of the wilderness (Quimbo et al., 2023) and weavers of peace (Ragandang, 2017). Part of the unique customary and cultural heritage of Indigenous Peoples (IP) is the practice of ritual ceremonies. These rituals are among the most distinctive forms of communication and have been a focal point in semiotic studies, as they offer rich opportunities for sense and reference (Obande & Emike, 2024) and meaning-making (Finol, 1994) through the collective practices and experiences of a community. Rituals are constructed with a well-structured narrative, culturally normative acts, objects/elements of "magical efficacy" (Bell, 2009), and mythical ethos (Douglas, 1993) as a means of expression. Durkheim (1965) posits that these rituals are designed to evoke profound emotional responses and foster acceptance by dramatizing collective experiences.

The ritual functions as an act of thanksgiving and a plea for blessings and protection from *magbabaya* (Paredes, 2006). Cullen (1979) also describes *magbabaya* as the "supreme god" overseeing all creation, comparable to the Judeo-Christian concept of "God the Father/Creator" (Paredes, 2006). Offerings play a central role in the ceremony, symbolizing gratitude and the desire for prosperity. Chickens are commonly sacrificed to show thanks for favorable weather, while pigs are offered to represent unity and shared prayers during the celebration (Steadman, 1995). Each offering embodies hopes for success and a harmonious gathering.

The Dulangan Higaonon, like other cultures, possess a rich and unique cultural heritage that reflects their distinctive ways of life, values, and worldview, especially in their traditions and customs. One such tradition is the *pamuhat*, a ritual performed by the *baylan* for specific purposes, which conveys meaning through a combination of different communicative modes (Barbosa, 2022). *Pamuhat*, in particular, is a profound expression of their religious beliefs (Garvan, 1931). Given the interplay and integration of various symbols and sign systems in communication, the analysis of multimodal texts has become crucial across numerous academic and applied disciplines (O'Halloran, 2004).

Multimodality allows participants in discourse to understand communicative events by acknowledging a variety of modes of expression, including stare/gaze, hand gestures, spatial positioning, colors, and visual elements, as valid or culturally recognized forms of communication (Kress, 2010). Van Leeuwen (2005) asserted that "semiotic resources are not restricted to writing and picture-making, but [extend to] nearly all of our activities." He posits that social events convey a variety of social and cultural meanings, a perspective that is corroborated by Danesi's (2004) assertion that "a sign is anything—a color, a gesture, a wink, an object, a mathematical equation, etc.—that stands for something other than itself."

Despite previous research, no comprehensive study has critically analyzed the language and various communicative modes in these rituals. Limited information exists about their role as dynamic expressions of multivocal communication, where society, cultural values, and social groups continuously interpret and convey evolving meanings. Recognizing this gap, the researcher was motivated to conduct a semiotic interpretation of the rituals of the Dulangan Higaonon, one of the lesser-known ethnic groups in Northern and Central Mindanao (Saranza, 2016), focusing specifically on the *kasagadan hu pamuhat*, a ritual performed by the *baylan*. This study, using Halliday's social and functional approach to language and Peirce's semiotics, along with Lemke's semiotic framework, seeks to explore the interpretations, functions, and ideologies attributed to ritual objects in the *pamuhat*. It also aims to understand the intentions of these elements and objects (signs) communicate and what ideologies the ritual reflects the

traditional beliefs of the Dulangan Higaonon people. By combining both theoretical perspectives, this study provides insights into how rituals serve as a medium for cultural expression and belief transmission within this community.

This study intends to interpret the symbolic elements in *Kasagadan hu Pamuhat* performed by the *baylan*. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the identified symbols and objects in the pamuhat?
2. What are the semiotic interpretations of the identified signs and objects?
3. What are the symbolic functions found in the pamuhat practices?
4. What ideologies can be derived from the pamuhat?

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Halliday's Social and Functional Approach

Since the 1960s, Halliday's social and functional approach to language and semiotics has had a significant impact on linguistics and related fields. Halliday's idea of language as an active process of meaning-making has inspired key figures in social semiotics, who have expanded on his theories with their own original contributions. Language is considered to be inherently multimodal from a social semiotics perspective. Furthermore, Kress (2010) contends that a significant portion of the multimodality research is based on Halliday's fundamental conceptual framework of social semiotics.

In this investigation, the corpus was examined in accordance with Halliday's (1978) meta-functions of language. These functions emphasize ideational (the transmission of information about the world), interpersonal (the expression of relationships and roles within communicative events or multimodal practices), and textual (the organization of the text itself) meanings in multimodal texts. As a result, these principles are essential for comprehending the interrelations and interactions of semiotic (meaning-making) resources in order to generate meaning, as meaning is embedded in the social practices of individuals. Analyzing multimodal activities or texts within the context of semiotics as a component of social practices is, therefore, essential. As Matthiessen (2015) contends, "the social, the interactive is central and essential" when analyzing semiosis.

2.2 Peirce's Theory of Signs

In addition to utilizing Halliday's meta-functional meanings, this study incorporates Jay Lemke's (2015) exploration of semiotic categories—icon, index, and symbol—a framework widely adopted in multimodal semiotics. Building on Charles S. Peirce's theory of signs (Atkin, 2008). Lemke (1998) relates Peirce's notions of triads: firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Peirce's framework on triads helps explain the interpretation of symbols from immediate, unreflexive, and raw sensation (firstness) (i.e., no interpretation) to interaction and reaction (secondness) (i.e., the direct relationship between entities) and making sense of experience and forming rules or habits (thirdness) (i.e., connecting and interpreting the first two categories). Lemke's work, particularly focused on the indexical aspect of meaning-making, suggests that much of the meaning assigned to signs, actions, and gestures arises not only from direct denotation but also through connotative and relational contexts.

2.3 Althusser's Concept of Ideology

Louis Althusser's (2001) concept of ideology highlights how it shapes our understanding of the world and our roles within it. He describes ideology as creating an "imaginary" connection between individuals and their real conditions of life, meaning that we experience reality not directly but through the framework of ideology. This idea is particularly relevant in the context of rituals, such as the *pamuhat* performed by the *baylan*. Aside from being symbolic, rituals are also imbued with material expressions of a community's beliefs, values, and social structures. For instance, the offerings in a ritual, such as biscuits or wine, are tangible actions that embody the belief in spirits and deities, allowing ideology to manifest materially in daily life.

This paper purposefully combines Halliday's meta-functional language analysis with Lemke's Peirce-inspired framework on the nature of signs within social practices. This synthesis highlights the dynamic interaction among the semiotic resources used in peace rituals, illustrating how these elements collectively generate indexical meanings. Modes are socially and culturally formed semiotic tools used to produce meaning (Bezemer et al., 2012). In the *pamuhat* practices of the Dulangan Higaonon, these semiotic resources function as modes, carefully selected to fulfill specific roles and convey layered meanings.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative study applied Halliday's (1978) social-functional approach to language, Althusser's (2001) concept of ideology, Peirce's triad framework for interpreting the semiotics of signs and symbols, and Lemke's (1998) framework of icons, index, and symbol—a model widely used by scholars in multimodal semiotics. These frameworks were utilized to examine the Higaonon tribe's ritual, or *pamuhat*, performed by the *baylan*. The theoretical tools were employed to interpret and perceive the semiotic meanings of ritual objects and analyze the symbolic functions and cultural ideologies within the ritual or *pamuhat* (the symbolic elements or offerings to gods and spirits and practices in rituals).

3.2 Participant

The *pamuhat*, or ritual, is a religious ceremony conducted or performed by a *baylan* to call the spirits or request their divine assistance. In this recent study, the participant is the *baylan* of the Dulangan Higaonon community, one of the Datus in Awang, Opol, Misamis Oriental, who has been acknowledged by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Divination, healing, addressing illness, removing curses, resolving agricultural issues such as drought or vermin, and maintaining harmony in human-spirit relations are among the various duties of the *baylan* (Paredes, 2006). This study focuses on the symbolic elements and objects that the *baylan* employs in his practices during cultural events (e.g., *pagkautaw*, *husay*, *amul*, *uma*) to investigate the *kasagadan hu pamuhat*.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In the data collection process, the researcher obtained permission from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples-Region 10 to conduct this study. Additionally, the researcher sought consent from local authorities and tribal councils. The appropriate procedural activities were followed, and a courtesy call was made to important local figures, particularly the Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representative (IPMR) in the Municipality of Opol. Initial contacts were established, and with the assistance of local barangay officials, the researcher gained access to the study site and was able to gather the data.

Data gathering involved audio recordings, photographs of the ritual, and interviews with the parties involved (*baylan* and tribal council). The researcher also conducted participant observation to capture significant details essential for the study's analysis. The assistance of a gatekeeper and informant was sought to interpret the language during the interview with the *baylan*. Prior to the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the *baylan* and the tribal council and requested their consent to participate.

After transcribing and translating the corpus, validation steps were undertaken to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2003). These include the presentation of the analysis of the data to the *baylan* to confirm the interpreted data were accurate and valid. Some translation was done by a fluent Higaonon speaker on the significant linguistic features present in the ritual or prayer uttered or expressed by the *baylan* in performing the *pamuhat*, particularly on the Higaonon terms or language that viewed significantly in analyzing the symbolic functions. The researcher ensured that the process of reflection, analysis, and theme development was faithfully represented in the study's corpus.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this recent study, the presentation is divided into two sections. First, to answer research problem 1, the researcher looks into the symbolic elements or objects used in the *pamuhat* using Lemke's framework on semiotic categories. Second, the semiotic interpretations in the *pamuhat* through the lens of Pierce's theory of signs. Finally, Halliday's meta-functions of signs explored the interrelatedness and interplay of language (i.e., symbol) and Althusser's concept of ideologies in the *pamuhat*.

4.1 Symbols (Elements) and Objects (Signs) in the Pamuhat

One of the primary focuses of this study is to identify the semiotic interpretations of objects used in the performance of *Kasagadan hu Pamuhat* across rituals and practices. Following the notion of Lemke's (1998) semiotic label relates to Pierce's triads 'firstness' (similarity of the form), 'secondness' (relationship through causality), and 'thirdness' (relationship through convention). The table below shows the interrelatedness and semiotic interpretations of symbols (elements) and objects (signs) commonly used to perform *pamuhat*.

Table 1. Symbolic Elements & Objects in the Pamuhat

Firstness (Objects)	Secondness (Associating signs to their referent objects)	Thirdness (Cultural Application)
Quality/Quantity of <i>Dahon sa Buyo</i> (Betel leaf), <i>Bunga sa Acera</i> (Betel Nut), and <i>Apog</i> (Ashes)	Affirmation	<i>Tilad</i> is a form of offering to the deities, as it is their favorite food, intended to please them so they may hear the <i>baylan's</i> prayer.
	Acclamation	Praising the gods, deities, and spirits by offering their favorite food ensures they listen to the prayer, as offering betel nut is a clear sign of respect and sincerity.
Quantity of <i>Lugbak</i> (Piso Coin)	Abundance	The people involved in the performance of the ritual will be blessed, as money symbolizes blessings and wealth that are offered from the people's own pockets.
	Human Stone	It represents the people involved in the <i>pamuhat</i> . Piso coins symbolize the stone of humans or <i>bato hu lawa</i> ,

		which was originally represented by a stone, but coins now signify abundance.
Quality of <i>Panlapnay</i> (White Cloth)	Purity	The white cloth symbolizes the pure (<i>kayang</i>) intentions of the <i>baylan</i> in seeking divine providence while performing his prayer and task/job.
	Acceptance	The deities will hear the <i>baylan's</i> prayer, as it is the gods and deities who possess the <i>baylan</i> during the performance of the <i>pamuhat</i> .
Quality of the <i>Manok</i> (Chicken)	Purity	A native chicken, preferably white in color, signifies purity and cleanliness, ensuring that the gods and deities will hear the <i>baylan's</i> prayer.
	Sweeping	The chicken wings serve as an effective tool in driving away evil spirits that are unwelcome in the <i>pamuhat</i> and the community as a whole, ensuring that no malevolent forces interfere with the performance of the ritual.
	Swiftiness	The chicken represents swiftiness in receiving blessings and answered prayers from the gods and deities.
	Truthfulness	The gods and deities will grant the prayer of the <i>baylan</i> and the entire community involved in sacrificing the chicken, which is a very important creature to the Higaonon, symbolizing serious and truthful intentions.

The table above shows the common symbolic objects used in *pamuhat* were *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaves), *bunga sa acera* (betel nut), *lugbak* (coins), *panlapnay* (white cloth), and *manok* (chicken). These are elements that are used by the *baylan* in asking for divine providence in pleasing the *magbabaya* and deities prior to performing rituals for any form of occasion and/or beliefs. Therefore, these symbols and objects highlight a collective faith in divine intervention, a communal effort to ensure blessings, and the preservation of traditions that bind the spiritual and material realms. The ritual reinforces cultural identity and a harmonious relationship with the divine.

4.2 Semiotic Interpretations of the Elements and Objects in the Pamuhat

As witnessed by the researcher, prior to the performance of the *pamuhat*, the *baylan* prepared the *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaves) by cutting it into smaller pieces and forming a funnel shape (see Figure 1) while inserting the betel nut seed inside the funnel-formed leaf, making it *tilad*. These *tilad* were placed on a plate, forming a circle with the opening of the funnel-formed *bunga sa acera* (betel nut) facing outward. Facing outward signifies morning while facing inward represents afternoon. Since the ritual was performed in the morning, the *tilad* (betel nut and leaf) faced outward.



Figure 1. The *baylan* preparing the *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaves)

The *baylan* prepares seven *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaves) in a *kasagadan hu pamuhat*, representing the seven deities or spirits who guide the *baylan* in performing the rituals. These *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaf) were coated with *apog* (ash) and wrapped around the *bunga sa acera* (betel nut), making them into a *tilad*. However, these *tilad* (i.e., a combination of betel leaf and nut) may vary depending on the *pamuhat* performed by the *baylan* (see Figure 2).

“usahay daghanon nako pagbuhat sa tilad, sir...kay naa man gayud uban na gusto mag-mamaa. Mas maayo kung daghan kay sa magkulang.”

[sometimes I make many tilad, sir...for there are other who wants to mamaa (chew). It is better to have more than to scarce.]

In a common and usual *pamuhat*, there are seven *tilad* (betel nuts) for the seven deities. These *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaves) form a circle inside the *bato hu lawa* (coins), which also form a circle or *kontay*. This arrangement implies that the gods, spirits, or deities are the center of human life, protecting people in their everyday lives, as represented by the *bato hu lawa* (coins). In the case of *pamuhat*, the number of coins represents the people involved in the ritual.

Figure 2. The *lugbak* (*bato hu lawa*) forms a *kontay* (circle) outside the *tilad*

The cultural bearer, that is, the *baylan*, explained that there are standards that need to be followed when making offerings to please the *magbabaya*, other gods, spirits, and deities present around. First, the white cloth, or *panlapnay*, should cover the table before placing the other elements and objects. This *panlapnay* (white cloth) signifies purity (*kayang*) and represents the pure intention of the *baylan* in asking for mercy and divine guidance from the *magbabaya* and the deities present. Second, the *tilad* or *dahon sa buyo* (betel leaf) rubbed with *apog* (ashes) with *bunga sa acera* (betel nut) is an important symbolic element in performing the *pamuhat*. Even without the chicken or *manok*, the *tilad* would suffice to call the *magbabaya*, deities, and spirits as it is their favorite food offering. The *bato hu lawa* or coins are also optional but symbolic of the people present during the performance of the *pamuhat*, signifying human stone and an abundance of people.



Figure 3. The *baylan* offers the *manok*

The *manok*, or chicken, was the last offering made to the deities. For example, in the *amul-amul ha pamuhat*, which refers to the gathering or assembly of the tribe, the *manok* (chicken) was the only medium used by the *baylan* to please and invoke the presence of the deities and other unseen spirits. The *manok* used in the *pamuhat* was native, symbolizing humbleness, as the use of other types or varieties of chicken would invalidate the *pamuhat* or ritual (Barbosa, 2022).

The wings of the *manok* (chicken) serve as a significant symbol in the performance of the *pamuhat*. They are used as a tool to drive away evil spirits that could afflict and disrupt the place and people involved in the ritual, as represented by the *bato hu lawa* (coins). According to the *baylan*, the chicken's wings are swift in frustrating and banishing the evil forces and spirits present. The white native chicken signifies purity and represents the clear, sincere intention of the *baylan* in seeking divine guidance from the *magbabaya*, deities, and the spirits present around.



Figure 4. The *padugo* uses the blood of the *manok* (chicken)

Moreover, after killing the *manok* (chicken), the blood was scooped into a basin, which could be used in the *padugo* (washing of hands) for protection against evil spirits or *pamalas* (bad luck) and *pangilis* (cleanses). By washing their hands with the chicken's blood, the people involved in the *pamuhat* will be protected, as the *manok* (chicken) will drive away the bad spirits.

The offerings made on various occasions hold distinct meanings in the Higaonon culture. For birthdays or *pagkautaw*, a single offering is made to acknowledge and recognize the god, the

alumo, and other beings or animals born on the same day. In conflict resolution (*husay*), two offerings are presented to appeal to the *magbabaya* and spirits for peace and reconciliation between both parties. During gatherings (*amul-amul*), one offering is made to seek divine guidance and protection for the celebration as a unified community. Lastly, in farming (*pag-uma*), a single offering is given to please the *magbabaya* and *ibabaso(k)*, the god of crops, ensuring the farm is safeguarded from evil spirits. These offerings reflect the community's strong spiritual connection and reliance on divine intervention in their daily lives.

In other words, the findings of the study on the meanings of these symbolic elements and objects used in performing the *pamuhat* represent a multimodal communicative event. This traditional practice involves various methods and tools for expressing thoughts, emotions, and desires, facilitating participants in communication to utilize a diverse set of semiotic resources to convey meaning (Barbosa, 2022; Ademilokun & Olateju, 2015). These tribal practices support Finol's (2012) idea that ritual is defined by repetitive characters and structures that lead to a determined context, giving it a particular sense. Similarly, in performing the *amul-amul*, *panghawid*, *panumpay*, *lentubo*, and *pangilis*, uses the same repetitive symbolic objects and elements are used in the *pamuhat*. Thus, Durkheim (1965, as cited by Roth, 1995) suggests that rituals serve to dramatize collective beliefs, imbuing them with a mystical quality. This shared experience not only fosters acceptance of these beliefs but also deeply influences participants' emotional responses. Through the *pamuhat*, these affective responses become ingrained, reinforcing the group's collective identity and values.

4.3 Symbolic Functions in the Pamuhat

The third research question focused on determining the symbolic functions, particularly on the meta-functions of the elements used to communicate the intention of the *baylan* in the ritual related to *pamuhat* for the Dulangan Higaonon people. To answer this question, the functional approach to language and semiotics developed by Halliday (1978) was utilized in this study. This method focuses on understanding language as a tool for communication, emphasizing its social and functional aspects. It enables the analysis of how language operates in context, especially in terms of its ability to convey meaning through various semiotic resources and modes of communication.

This method involved examining the three meta-functions of language present in the *kasagadan hu pamuhat*: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions. These functions reflect how language is used to convey content (ideational), facilitate interaction (interpersonal), and structure communication coherently (textual) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The analysis aimed to understand how each function contributes to the overall meaning-making process in the ritual performance.

4.3.1 Ideational Signs in the Pamuhat

The ideational meta-function of signs involves the vocabulary used to convey content and meaning, focusing on how language constructs individuals' experiences and their interpretation of the world (Butler, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). It consists of two components: the experiential, which describes the content, and the logical, which relates to the linguistic system through recursive or repetitive structures. This framework illustrates how meaning is constructed not just through vocabulary but through the grammatical structures that organize and express experiences.

The symbolic objects and elements used in the *pamuhat* encode the intention of the baylan, together with the elders, cultural bearers, and *lumads* of the barangay. This, in turn, elucidates the ideologies behind the performance of the *pamuhat* as part of the traditions and practices of the Dulangan Higaonon community. Based on the results shown in the table above (see Table 1), the community holds a positive view of the *pamuhat*, not only as part of tribal practices but also as rooted in their belief system, with divine guidance from the *magbabaya*, deities, and spirits. They seek help to drive away any form of evil spirits present around them.

In the performance of any *pamuhat*, such as *pangilis* (to change), the offerings used are said to have positive qualities. These offerings aim to please the *magbabaya* and deities, encouraging them to listen and respond to the prayer requests performed by the *baylan*. The purity of the *kayang* and *manok* signifies the sincere intention and clear conscience of those involved in the *pamuhat*, who seek guidance and supervision from the *magbabaya*, deities, and spirits. The *lugbak* (offered coin) represents the people involved in the ritual. The offering of *tilad* (betel nut) symbolizes respect and sincerity, as it is considered the favorite food of the deities (Barbosa, 2022) and has been used for centuries by ancestors in religious practices. These symbolic objects, along with their inherent qualities, play a vital role in expressing good intentions to the *magbabaya* (ruler of all). The act of offering *tilad* reflects a desire to please the deities, seeking their blessings for the success of prayers or activities such as *pag-uma* (farming) and *pag-tanum* (planting), which require spiritual guidance and protection. This highlights the deep cultural and spiritual connection between the Higaonon people and their religious practices, emphasizing respect for tradition and the divine.

When the offerings are arranged on the *kayang* (white cloth), they form a cohesive structure that conveys meaning, much like a text that communicates understanding. This arrangement serves as a symbolic representation that holds cultural and spiritual significance. It reflects how the Higaonon people interpret and interact with their belief system, showing how the objects are not only physical items but also carry deeper communicative power within the ritual context. This process is similar to how multimodal texts, which combine different modes of communication, can convey complex messages and ideologies (O'Halloran & Smith, 2004). The organization of the offerings in the ritual thus becomes an active form of communication, bridging the spiritual and material realms of the Higaonon culture. For this reason, a logical relationship exists between these symbolic objects and the elements used in the *pamuhat*. A critical examination of the signifiers reveals a positive relationship among the people involved in the ritual.

Thus, *pamuhat* has a positive image among the Dulangan Higaonon community. In other words, there is cohesion in the text (referring to the objects or elements placed/arranged together on the *kayang*). This quality is achieved in the *pamuhat* because no objects or elements placed on the *kayang* suggest a negative meaning that would deter or displease the *magbabaya*, deities, and spirits from listening to the prayers of the baylan and the people involved. Moreover, the gestures of the *baylan* corresponded with his exclamations or prayers. For example, when the *baylan* uttered that he would swing the chicken to the south to drive away evil spirits, he also faced north and swung the chicken as he recited his prayers. After swinging the chicken and offering a prayer, the *baylan* kills the chicken and scoops the blood to wash the hands of the people who participated in the *pamuhat*. This *padugo* serves as protection for the people, and if marked on the household's doorstep, it protects the household by driving

away evil spirits. This explains the logical function of these objects and elements in expressing meaning.

Therefore, the findings indicate that *pamuhat* functions similarly to culturally produced texts, offering a structured way of interpreting and assigning meaning to personal and collective experiences. These practices, embedded within the community's traditions, serve as interpretive frameworks that not only convey cultural values but also foster a deeper understanding of the participants' connection to their heritage, environment, and shared social identity. By engaging in *pamuhat*, individuals partake in a symbolic language that reinforces cultural continuity and enriches the significance of their lived experiences.

4.3.2 Interpersonal Signs in the Pamuhat

The interpersonal meta-function of signs involves the interaction between participants in communication, focusing on the mood of the exchange as indicated by the structure of the clauses (Muir, 1972; Halliday, 1981; Bloor & Bloor, 1995). In this study, it was found that the mood of the objects used in the *pamuhat* as offerings are declarative, meaning the offerings assert a statement or declaration rather than posing a question or giving a command. This suggests that the offerings serve to affirm or express something about the community's intentions or beliefs in the ritual.

In the context of this study, understanding the interpersonal meta-function requires identifying the discourse participants in the *pamuhat*. It is apparent that the *baylan* did most of the talking or praying during the ritual. However, the *datu*, the tribal council, a representative of the Higaonon tribe, or other members involved observed solemnity and respect throughout the *pamuhat*. Other members of the elder council and the community simply listened to the *baylan*, making minimal verbal responses while observing the ritual. This context is determined by the structure of the *pamuhat* (i.e., from preparation to the actual ritual). In fact, before engaging in an interview, the researcher undergoes *pamuhat hu panalangin*, asking the *magbabaya*, deities, and spirits to bless the *baylan* so that whatever comes out of his mouth is not from him but from the ruler of all (i.e., *magbabaya*) and all other deities present.

Table 2. Dulangan Higaonon Deities/Spirits and their Functions

Deities or Spirits	Designations or Functions in the Community
Magbabaya	Referred to as 'The Ruler of All,' he is the supreme deity overseeing minor gods and goddesses who are assigned specific tasks and responsibilities. He is also considered the god of the west.
Dumalondong	He is recognized as the 'northern god.'
Ongli	He is referred to as the 'southern god.'
Tagolambong	He is known as the 'eastern god.'
Ibaso(k)	He is responsible for overseeing the crops planted by the Higaonon people and monitoring their growth. They honor him through a modest ritual held at the center of the rice field.
Tagabugta	The spirit that protects the farm and the forest from evil spirits and humans.

Dagingon	They pay tribute to this deity with a grand celebration that features songs and dances, lasting nine nights during both the planting and post-harvest seasons.
Bulalakaw	The spirit who governs the rivers, ensuring the success of fishermen's catches and safeguarding them during their fishing activities.
Tumpaa Nanapiyaw or Intombangol	He watches over the foundation of the earth day and night to prevent it from collapsing.

Moreover, as pointed out in the interview, the *baylan* serves as the channel for the Dulangan Higaonon people to express their prayers and desires to the deities. The *baylan* functions as a representative of the Dulangan Higaonon people, communicating their aspirations and yearnings to their gods and spirits.

It is evident that during the *pamuhat*, the *baylan* communicated with the gods, deities, and spirits, despite them being unseen. These deities were important to the ritual as they were summoned to participate in the ceremony. Essentially, their role was to protect and guide the community as they engaged in various activities such as farming (*pag-uma*), planting (*pag-tanum*), and other practices like *panumpay* (extending life). The *baylan* invoked the deities according to their rank and significance within the Higaonon religious system. The *baylan* acknowledges the gods, deities, and spirits in ascending process (i.e., from land, seas, air, heaven, and cosmos). Table 2 presents the hierarchy of the gods and their respective roles in the ritual.

It was observed in the *pamuhat* that the *baylan* called upon the *magbabaya* (The Ruler of All), followed by other deities and spirits, from the lowest ranks to the highest. This demonstrates that power structures permeate even in prayer and ritual, a point affirmed by the *baylan*. In the interview, he stated that:

“sa pamuhat sir ga-ampo raman mi...gikan sa ubos sa pinakagamay na mananap sa ilalom na adunay ispirito apil kana sa amo pag-ampo...sa dagat, sa hangin, ug ibabaw sa langit, sir.”

[in ritual, sir, we just pray...from beneath the land down until the smallest creature underneath that has spirits is part of our prayers...in the ocean, in the air, and above the heaven, sir]

In other words, the *baylan* could not randomly mention or call upon the deities and spirits in the *pamuhat* or rituals. He further explained that, as a *baylan*, he always adhered to the hierarchy of their deities according to their rank and significance in Dulangan Higaonon culture. If this hierarchical structure were violated, not only would the *baylan* be punished or suffer, but also his family and the entire community (i.e., the Higaonon) could be severely cursed. He further explained that using a *pamuhat* as a business, such as asking for money or a monetary contribution, was forbidden.

“kung ma-limot o masayop lang ko sir... dako na siya na sala para kanako kay masilutan dili lang akong kaugalongon apan apil na pud ang tibuok tribo kay ako

man ang baylan... sa ato pa, mura ko ug pari sa tribo. Mao na bawal himuon na negosyo ang pamuhat kay magabaan ta."

[if I will forget or commit a mistake [in ritual], sir... that is a big mortal sin for I will face the consequences not only I but even the entire tribal community for I am the baylan... in other words, I am like a priest in our tribe. That is why it is prohibited to make pamuhat as a business, for we will be cursed.]

The baylan affirms that the hierarchical structure of the gods and deities in the *pamuhat* conveys an important aspect of their cultural practices. This means that the tribal community, in general, respects the order and specialized roles or statuses portrayed by their gods, deities, and spirits in the cosmos in an ascending process (from Earth to the universe).

"kay kini tanang mga bahandi diri sa kalibutan iya kaman kini sa magbabaya, sir...mao kana na kailangan dayigon sila ug pasalamatan ingon man ang magbubuhat."

[for all these things on earth belong to him to the magbabaya, sir...that is why we need to adore them and give thanksgiving even the magbubuhat.]

Recognizing them hierarchically symbolizes how the baylan and the Higaonon perceive authority and the interaction between human and spiritual realms. By acknowledging this structure, the *baylan* communicates to the community that their cultural practices are deeply intertwined with reverence for divine powers and structured relationships that influence social roles and values within the community.

4.3.3 Textual Signs in the Pamuhat

The textual meta-function of signs pertains to the semiotic resources used to present the ideational and interpersonal meta-functions. Examining the textual meta-function involves analyzing the structure of the text (e.g., *pamuhat*) to understand how ideas and objects are systematically arranged, developed, and projected in a coherent and cohesive way (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This analysis of structure and transitions can uncover the ideological foundations underlying the text. By observing how the text is organized, we gain insight into the underlying beliefs and values reflected in the ritual (Kress, 2010; Lemke, 2015).

Pamuhat are carefully structured narratives designed to foster acceptance of ideas and evoke strong emotional responses in listeners (Durkheim, 1965). In the case of the *pamuhat*, which combines elements like words, gestures, spatial arrangements, and objects, the central themes are logically presented as the ritual unfolds. The clear articulation of the theme, especially at crucial moments of transition, helps listeners follow the progression of the narrative. This structured presentation allows participants to engage deeply with the ritual, understanding its meaning and the cultural values it reflects (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

As demonstrated in both the data transcript and the actual ritual, once the *baylan* had prepared the symbolic elements and objects, he initiated the *pamuhat* with a prayer to call upon the gods' presence and seek their guidance. Following this, he introduced the purpose of the ritual, which was to request divine guidance, ensuring that his words were influenced by the gods' will. The *baylan* also acknowledged the people involved in the *pamuhat*. Through this, the text producer,

the *baylan*, established the theme of the text or ritual. In the *pamuhat*, it is not a structured prayer, as stated by the *baylan*:

“sa among ritual, sir...mura ra gayud mi nag-ampo. Wala siya’y pattern na among paggatanawon...apan, naay uban na baylan labi na ang mga bag-ohay pa naa pa sila’y tanawon. Pero, sa ako na dugay naman gayud ko ani mura ra gayud ug ampo sir...pagdayeg sa magbabaya taman sa ilalom sa yuta ug ingon man sa mga tao kauban.”

[in our ritual, sir...it is like having a prayer. There is no pattern that we need to follow...however, there are baylan who are new to this work; they need to look [read notes]. But, in my case, who’s been a while from this work, it seems that I’m praying, sir [spontaneously] ...acknowledging the magbabaya (The Ruler of All) until beneath the land and even the people involved.]

It was observed that the *baylan* recited a prayer to all the benevolent gods and spirits, whom they believed would fulfill their desires and hopes. During this part of the ritual, the *baylan* acknowledged each deity according to their rank and significance, indicating that the prayer adhered to a hierarchical structure (i.e., lowest to highest) based on power. Additionally, blessings and guidance were sought for the protection of the people involved in the *pamuhat*. In the *pamuhat*, the *baylan* consciously used transitional signals in his ritual, such as *sabuwa* (first), *daduwa* (second), *tatulo* (third), *haupt* (fourth), and so on. These signals characterized the structure and progression of the ritual. The ritual also demonstrated the use of repetition to emphasize important points, particularly if the *pamuhat* required it, for example, *panumay*, *pangilis*, etc. The *baylan* repeats the words during the ritual. In other words, the purpose of the ritual is to guide the *baylan* in performing his duties with the divine guidance of the gods, spirits, and deities through the repeated performance of the *pamuhat*.

4.5 Ideologies in the Pamuhat

The analysis of the symbolic elements and objects involved, along with the meta-functions of the language used in the ritual, clearly shows that the Higaonon ideologies regarding the performance of the ritual are constituted in the *pamuhat* led by their cultural bearer or *baylan*. Read and Gonzalez (2000) defines ideology as an organized system of thoughts, often pertaining to creation myths, worldviews, the supernatural, and a reality that lies outside the immediate control of humans. The *pamuhat* reflected religious ideologies characterized by interconnected beliefs, practices, and values (Boutyline & Vaisey, 2017). In fact, as part of the belief, it had serious consequences when *pamuhat* was taken for granted, particularly on the offerings, and neglecting the sequence of acknowledging and praising the gods, deities, and spirits.

4.5.1 Consequences of Neglecting Offerings in Pamuhat

As embedded in the ritual, the Dulangan Higaonon community believes that performing the *pamuhat* is a direct consequence of how the tribe observes customary laws and practices, whether written, verbal, or symbolic. For them, these gods, spirits, and deities control a wide range of social and environmental phenomena. Adhering to established rules means maintaining harmony between their gods and the human race. This suggests that making proper offerings (i.e., *tilad*, *lugbak*, etc.) and recognizing the power structure of the gods, spirits, and deities is essential. For the Dulangan Higaonon, particularly the *baylan*, disregarding these

symbolic elements and objects will certainly result in retribution against the *baylan* and cause conflict within the tribal community as a whole. In this way, rituals become a means of reproducing and mending external and internal dominance and social stratification. In their culture, rituals not only dramatize collective representations endowed with mystical ethos but also reinforce political dominance and inequality underlying the group consciousness (Lukes, 1975). Therefore, in Higaonon culture, people express shared beliefs with a cultural quality that unites them, but these shared practices also strengthen their social hierarchies and reinforce inequalities. Thus, aside from political dominance, religion significantly affects and influences the depreciation of the cultural identity of younger generations. As the *baylan* states:

“usa sa mga hinongdan ngano dili kaayo aktibo ug dili na kaayo gatu-o ang mga kabatan-onan ani among ritual sir kay ang relihiyon...kung asa aduna kami amul-amul, usahay respitar nila diha ra sila sa likod mag-tanaw.”

[one of the reasons why [our] youth are not active and not so believers of our ritual is because of religion...if we have gatherings, sometimes as a show of respect they stand behind]

Paredes' (2006) study affirms that many Higaonon have already converted to Evangelical Protestantism. With the influence of evangelicalism, the converted tribe members gradually ceased and forgot the cultural practices their forefathers had observed. This shift presents a challenge for the *baylan* as a cultural bearer. In addition to the impact of evangelicalism, he recognizes that future generations may be even less inclined to embrace their cultural traditions due to the influence of digital media.

4.5.2 Importance of gods, deities, and spirits

The *baylan* believes in the importance of gods, deities, and spirits in the community's cultural belief systems, as they are seen as protectors and sustainers of life. Acknowledging these gods, deities, and spirits is essential for guiding the *baylan* in performing the *pamuhat*. According to Agoncillo and Guerrero (1997) in their History of the Filipino People, Filipinos believed in the existence of a supreme creator, whom they called *Bathala*. Beyond their social structure, they also believed in an invisible society that coexisted with their own. This society was thought to be inhabited by spirits, including the souls of dead ancestors, deities, and lesser gods (Almocera, 2000). Moreover, pre-Hispanic Filipinos (including the Higaonon) respected these spirits through rituals and feast days, as these supernatural beings were believed to preside over all aspects of life, such as birth, sickness, death, courtship, marriage, planting, and harvesting.

“Busa sa akong pagpamuhat, sir...kung mahimo sangpiton gayud nako tanan mga ispirito sugod sa ilalom sa yuta, sa tubig, ug sa hangin, kay wala kita kung wala sila dinhi sa kalibutan maoy nag-bantay kanato.”

[That is why in my ritual, sir... as possible [I] need to acknowledge all the spirits from beneath the land, in the water, and in the air, for we are not here if they are not present in the world who oversee us.]

Some of these spirits were considered friendly, while others were viewed as tyrannical enemies. For this reason, the *baylan* needed to ask the gods, deities, and spirits for protection by offering gifts to these unseen beings. Offering gifts such as biscuits, wine, cigarettes, and other items

were believed to please and nourish these spirits, ensuring that the people involved in the *pamuhat* would be protected and that no harm would befall the community. These offerings served as alternatives, utilizing readily accessible materials within the community. According to Lapeña and Acabado (2017), simple items such as rice wine, rice cakes, betel nut, tobacco, and meat (including chicken, pigs, and carabaos) were naturally used in rituals to appease various deities, ancestral spirits, and other supernatural entities (Conklin, 1980; Barton, 1919). These symbols and objects, produced by the community, were offered as an expression of gratitude for the blessings bestowed by the *magbabaya*.

“kanang mga biskwit, fighter wine, sigarilyo ug uban pa diha sa lamisa, sir... para kana sa mga ispirito na among i-lugbak na among i-bubo, ug i-itsa dala pag-ampo na kung kinsa man ang mo-kaon ug mo-inom niini mabusog.”

[those biscuits, fighter wine, cigarettes, and others on the table, sir... [as offerings] for the spirits that we pour, and throw anywhere together with prayers that whoever may eat and drink there will be full.]

The importance of these gods, deities, and spirits played an important role in the fulfillment of the *pamuhat*. Failure to recognize and acknowledge them could result in consequences, including potentially unprecedented events affecting the health of the *baylan*, their family, and the entire tribe. In other words, the *baylan* must exercise caution in properly acknowledging these entities. According to the *baylan*:

“lisod gayud among tahas, sir, isip baylan kay kung naa mi masayop pag-sangpit sa mga spiritohanon, kami sa among kaugalingon, among pamilya ug kinatibukang tribo ang ma-alaot.”

[as a baylan, we portrayed a critical task, sir; if we failed to mention [acknowledge] any form of the spirits, I, among ourselves, our family, and the entire tribe, in general, will suffer]

In the event that the *baylan* fails to mention a deity during the *pamuhat*, he often asks forgiveness from the *magbabaya*, requesting understanding on behalf of the unintentional oversight in the ritual. In other words, even in modern times, the Dulangan Higaonon community continues the invocation and adoration of the *anitos*—the souls or spirits of ancestors believed to be present in the world (Blumentritt, 1895; Almocera, 2000). The *baylan* acknowledges the ideology of a supreme God (religion), reverence for other gods, and the fear and worship of spirits.

5. CONCLUSION

The *pamuhat* performed by the *baylan* is more than a ritual; it is a rich multimodal communicative event that embodies the Dulangan Higaonon's deeply rooted traditions, Indigenous religiosity, and worldview. This practice reflects a belief system passed down through generations, emphasizing the importance of pleasing gods, spirits, and deities to sustain earthly needs like farming and protection. The ritual's significance lies in its use of symbolic offerings, such as *tilad*, *lugbak*, and *manok*, each carrying specific meanings tied to sincerity, abundance, purity, and protection. These elements, arranged according to cultural rules, signify the central role of deities and spirits in human life while reinforcing adherence to ancestral

customs. The *baylan*'s role in observing these customary standards ensures the ritual's success and harmony within the community. Nonconformity, however, risks spiritual and social disruption, emphasizing the importance of strict adherence to ritual norms. Furthermore, the *pamuhat* is not only a spiritual practice but also a reflection of social and political hierarchies within the Higaonon community. The acknowledgment of gods and spirits in a ranked ascending order mirrors the structured power dynamics within their society, reinforcing the interconnectedness of spiritual and social life. There were three key roles of the ritual: ideational (it promotes a positive image of the Dulangan Higaonon community), interpersonal (it reflects the community's cultural hierarchy through gods and deities), and textual (it combines words, gestures, space, and objects). Through the *pamuhat*, religious ideology was observed as the *baylan* serves as an important link between the human and divine realms, embodying the community's respect for both cultural tradition and spiritual authority. This study highlights the rich semiotic complexity of the *pamuhat* and its broader implications (symbolic functions and ideologies) for understanding Higaonon culture. Future research could delve deeper into the speech acts and symbolic elements within these rituals, offering insights into their multifaceted meanings. Comparative analyses with other Indigenous groups could further enhance our understanding of shared and unique practices, enriching the broader discourse on Indigenous cultural heritage.

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