

## **An Anthropological Analysis of *Cenning Rara* as a Ritual Oral Tradition in Buginese Culture**

**Zulfiqri Saputra Samsul**

samsulzs23f@student.unhas.ac.id

**Dian Rahmawati Arief**

dianrarief@unhas.ac.id

**Universitas Hasanuddin**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines *Cenning Rara*, a sacred oral tradition in Buginese culture, through an anthropological perspective. Unlike narrative folklore, *Cenning Rara* functions as a ritual speech performance recited in bridal preparations and personal adornment contexts, where language is believed to possess spiritual efficacy. This research aims to analyze the linguistic structure, figurative expressions, and indexical meanings embedded in selected *Cenning Rara* texts. The data were analyzed using morphemic segmentation, parts-of-speech identification, literal and free translation comparison, and interpretation of figurative language based on Perrine's classification. In addition, indexicality and symbolic functions were examined to understand how meaning operates within ritual performance. The findings reveal that *Cenning Rara* employs metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, and celestial imagery to construct ideals of beauty, loyalty, and spiritual purity. Linguistically, reduplication, affixation, and rhythmic repetition reinforce its poetic and performative qualities. Indexically, the ritual speech points to social identity, gender ideology, moral values (*siri*, *lempu*, *pesse*), and spiritual mediation between the physical and metaphysical realms. The study demonstrates that *Cenning Rara* is not merely aesthetic language but a performative act that sustains cultural continuity and reinforces Bugis cosmology. This research contributes to anthropological studies by highlighting how ritual language functions as both cultural resource and social action in contemporary Bugis society.

**Keywords:** Anthropology; *Cenning Rara*; Bugis Oral Tradition

### **INTRODUCTION**

Linguistic anthropology can be understood as the study of how language use shapes social life and cultural practices. It is the study of language as a cultural resource and speaking as a cultural practice (Duranti, 1997). Therefore, the scope of its study pertains to how languages are used by its speakers to perform social actions inside their community. It pays attention to the speaking performances of a language user in a speech community, how their utterances index to an immediate and/or a broad context that is relevant with the discourse, and how the speakers position themselves as social actors in their relevant speech community.

In the field of linguistic anthropology, oral traditions are a particular object of interest. Oral tradition itself is a cultural tradition of a specific community that is inherited across generations through oral transmission. This becomes relevant with linguistic anthropology due to the fact that it is a clear utilization of language to perform social actions, in this case inheriting a community's belief or cultural practices between its members. Further linguistic observation and analysis also offers an opportunity to uncover the deeper meaning of this practice in those communities, and doing the same thing for the corresponding cultural practices that is inherited through this process. It offers the opportunity to uncover how the oral traditions correspond in building local wisdom, helping the communities who practice them to perceive and solve certain issues in the present and future.

In the Buginese culture of South Sulawesi, oral tradition serves as a vital mechanism for transmitting spiritual values, social norms, and cultural identity. These spoken traditions hold a functional role in various rituals, reflecting the Bugis belief in the power of words and their connection to the unseen world. They are preserved and inherited through strong community belief systems and continue to influence everyday cultural practices. One important form of Buginese ritual oral tradition is *cenning rara*. Unlike folklore that focuses on storytelling for entertainment, *cenning rara* is a sacred verbal ritual often associated with love, attraction, and blessings for harmonious relationships. It is widely used in bridal preparations, particularly by *Indo Botting* (bridal makeup artists) who regard the mantra as a spiritual medium. The community believes that the words of *cenning rara* embody mystical energy capable of influencing emotions and strengthening romantic bonds. The sacred status of this mantra is reinforced by its restricted transmission only those who undergo specific procedures and fulfill cultural requirements are permitted to possess and recite it.

Religiously and spiritually, *cenning rara* demonstrates the Bugis worldview that emphasizes balance between the physical and metaphysical realms. Through its poetic and symbolic language, it expresses hope, beauty, affection, and divine safeguarding over a marital union. Because of this spiritual function, *cenning rara* remains continuously practiced even in modern times, persisting alongside technological and societal change. This paper aims to analyze one selected *cenning rara* text through a linguistic and semiotic lens. The analysis includes the morpheme structure, parts of speech, literal and free translations, as well as figurative expressions. Additionally, this study will identify language functions and indexicality within the text to understand how meaning operates in ritual performance. Context and co-text will also be examined to reveal how *cenning rara* expresses core Bugis beliefs regarding love, spirituality, and the cultural significance of ritualized language.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on oral tradition within linguistic anthropology have developed significantly over recent decades. Alessandro Duranti (1997) argues that language functions not merely as a tool of communication but also as a cultural resource and a form of social practice. Within this framework, ritual speech is understood as a performative act that constructs and reproduces social reality within a speech community. This perspective provides an important theoretical foundation for analyzing *Cenning Rara* in the Buginese cultural context.

Research on Indonesian oral traditions generally highlights their role in transmitting cultural values, social norms, and collective beliefs across generations. Previous studies indicate that mantras and ritual utterances in many Indonesian ethnic groups possess strong symbolic and performative dimensions. In the Bugis context, scholars have noted the culturally embedded belief in the power of words to mediate relationships between the physical and metaphysical realms. This aligns with the anthropolinguistic view that ritual language operates as a complex semiotic practice rich in indexical meaning.

From a stylistic perspective, Laurence Perrine classifies figurative language into forms such as metaphor, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism. Perrine's framework has been widely applied to uncover implied meanings in both literary texts and oral traditions. Prior research demonstrates that figurative language in ritual speech is not purely aesthetic; rather, it enhances the suggestive force and performative power of the utterance. This insight is particularly relevant for understanding the poetic density of *Cenning Rara*.

With regard to Buginese culture, several studies emphasize the importance of local moral values such as *siri'* (honor), *lemphu'* (honesty), and *pesse* (compassion) in shaping linguistic practices and social interaction. These values are often indexed in ritual expressions, especially those related to beauty, marriage, and social relations. However, most previous research has focused on Bugis epics, myths, and folklore, while detailed anthropolinguistic analysis of *Cenning Rara* as a ritual speech practice remains limited.

Furthermore, studies on beauty-related mantras in the Indonesian archipelago reveal that bodily adornment rituals are frequently intertwined with spiritual and moral dimensions. Such practices reflect a holistic worldview in which physical aesthetics and inner purity are inseparable. These findings resonate strongly with the nature of *Cenning Rara*, which integrates poetic language, cosmological symbolism, and performative intent within bridal and self-adornment contexts.

Based on the foregoing review, a clear research gap remains in the anthropolinguistic study of *Cenning Rara*, particularly in analyses that integrate morphological structure, figurative language, and indexicality within a single analytical framework. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining *Cenning Rara* as a ritual linguistic practice that functions simultaneously as

aesthetic expression, social action, and a mechanism for sustaining Buginese cultural values.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach within an anthropolinguistic framework to analyze *Cenning Rara* as a ritual oral tradition in Buginese culture. The research is designed to uncover the linguistic structure, figurative expressions, and indexical meanings embedded in selected *Cenning Rara* texts. By positioning ritual speech as a form of cultural practice, the study examines how language functions simultaneously as aesthetic expression and social action. The primary data consist of documented *Cenning Rara* utterances used in various self-adornment and bridal preparation contexts, including eye makeup, lips, eyebrows, hair oil application, skin powdering, bathing, and male attire rituals. Data were collected through documentation and textual transcription from cultural sources and existing records. Each utterance was transcribed into standardized orthography and phonetic form using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and the unit of analysis was the individual line of the mantra.

Data analysis was conducted through several systematic stages. First, morphemic segmentation was performed to identify free and bound morphemes and to observe morphological patterns such as affixation and reduplication. Second, lexical items were classified according to parts of speech to reveal grammatical structure. Third, the texts were translated into Indonesian and English using both literal translation (LT) and free translation (FT) in order to preserve semantic nuance. Figurative expressions were then identified and categorized based on Perrine's framework, including metaphor, hyperbole, symbolism, and personification. Finally, the study applied indexicality analysis to interpret how linguistic forms point to social meanings, cultural values, gender ideology, and spiritual beliefs within the Bugis community. Contextual and co-textual interpretation was used to understand the performative function of the utterances in ritual practice. To ensure analytical trustworthiness, the researcher conducted iterative readings, cross-checked translations, and maintained consistency between linguistic evidence and cultural interpretation throughout the analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that *Cenning Rara* is highly structured linguistically and semantically, functioning as a ritualized poetic register rather than ordinary speech. Across the data, the utterances consistently employ parallelism, repetition, and rhythmic phrasing that enhance memorability and performative force. These features confirm that the text operates within an oral-formulaic tradition designed for ritual recitation.

Morphologically, the texts demonstrate productive use of affixation and reduplication. Prefixes such as *ma-*, *na-*, and *ku-* mark agency and verbal processes,

while reduplicated forms like *nawa-nawa* and *lata-lata* intensify meaning and create poetic rhythm. This morphological pattern not only conveys grammatical relations but also contributes to the aesthetic texture of the mantra. Syntactically, the utterances tend to favor short clause structures dominated by verbs and nominal phrases. The frequent use of imperative and declarative forms indicates the performative orientation of the speech. Rather than narrating events, the lines enact states of attraction, beauty, and emotional influence, which is typical of ritual language intended to produce effects in the social world.

Figurative language is a dominant feature throughout the corpus. Metaphor and symbolism appear most frequently, particularly in expressions relating to eyes, light, celestial bodies, and beauty substances. For example, references to the sun (*esso*) and moon (*uleng*) symbolize uniqueness and constancy, while the “meeting of eyes” metaphorically encodes romantic attraction. These devices heighten the emotive and mystical tone of the utterances. Hyperbole is also widely used to intensify affective meaning. Statements implying that affection would change only if “two suns” or “two moons” existed demonstrate deliberate exaggeration to express absolute loyalty and exclusivity. Such hyperbolic constructions strengthen the persuasive and magical quality of the ritual speech.

Indexical analysis shows that the utterances point strongly to Bugis cultural values. Linguistic forms repeatedly index *siri'* (honor), *lempu'* (honesty), and *pesse* (empathic compassion). Beauty practices in the text are therefore not merely cosmetic but morally and socially meaningful, linking physical adornment with ethical personhood. Gender ideology is also encoded in the data. Many lines position women especially *Indo Botting* as mediators of beauty and spiritual harmony. The language constructs femininity as both aesthetically refined and spiritually potent, indicating that women’s ritual speech plays a key role in maintaining cultural continuity. Overall, the findings demonstrate that *Cenning Rara* operates simultaneously on linguistic, aesthetic, and sociocultural levels. It is not simply decorative language but a performative semiotic practice that reinforces Bugis cosmology, social values, and ideals of relational harmony.

*Table 1. Summary of Linguistic and Figurative Features in Cenning Rara*

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Linguistic Evidence</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Cultural Meaning</b>
Morphology	Affixation ( <i>ma-</i> , <i>na-</i> , <i>ku-</i> )	Marks agency and action	Ritual intentionality
Reduplication	<i>nawa-nawa</i> , <i>lata-lata</i>	Intensification and rhythm	Emotional persistence
Syntax	Short performative clauses	Speech-as-action	Ritual efficacy
Metaphor	Eyes meeting, heart’s eyes	Encodes attraction	Courtship symbolism
Hyperbole	“Two suns/moons”	Absolute emphasis	Loyalty and exclusivity

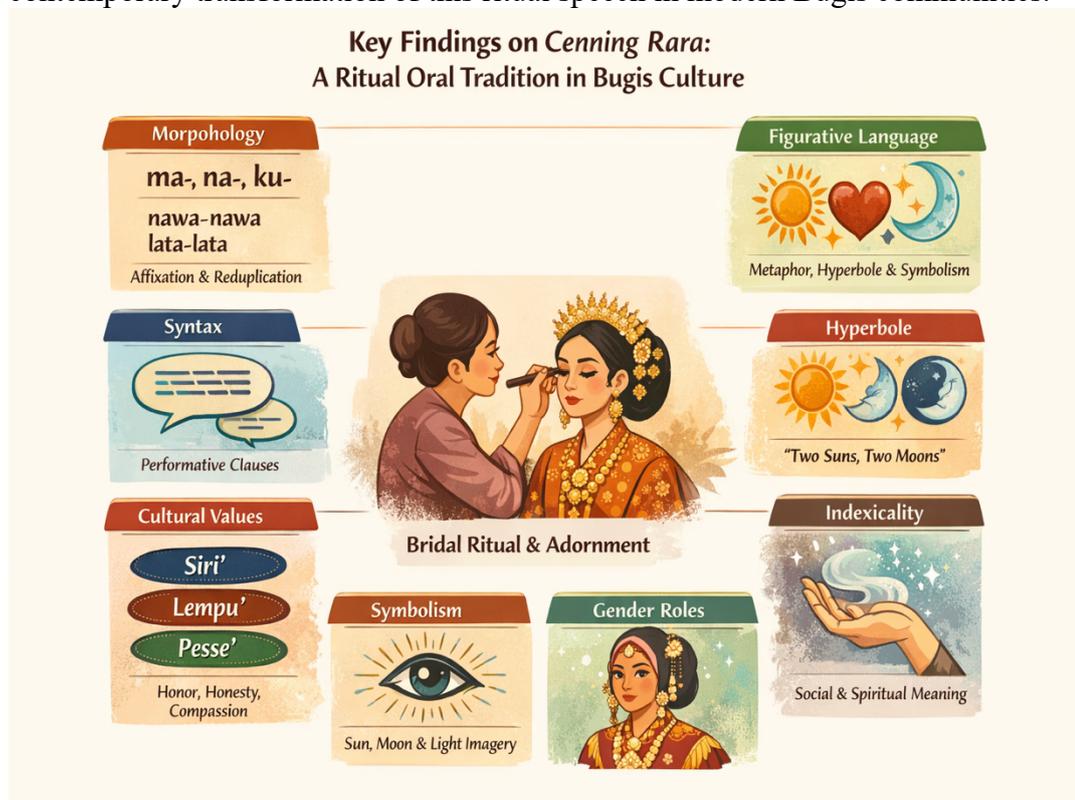
Symbolism	Sun, moon, light imagery	Idealized beauty	Spiritual radiance
Indexicality	References to values	Social positioning	<i>Siri', lempu', pesse</i>
Gender marking	Female ritual voice	Cultural transmission	Feminine authority

The findings confirm that *Cenning Rara* functions as a form of ritual language in which linguistic structure and cultural meaning are inseparable. The strong presence of repetition, parallelism, and affixation supports the view that the text belongs to an oral-formulaic tradition optimized for memorization and performative delivery. This aligns with anthropolinguistic perspectives that treat ritual speech as socially consequential action rather than mere ornamentation. From a morphological standpoint, the productive use of affixation and reduplication demonstrates how grammatical processes are recruited for poetic and pragmatic purposes. The repetition patterns do not merely intensify meaning but also create rhythmic cohesion that enhances the mantra's perceived efficacy. This supports the argument that in ritual discourse, form itself contributes to performative power. The dominance of metaphor, symbolism, and hyperbole indicates that figurative language is central to the semantic architecture of *Cenning Rara*. Celestial imagery and sensory metaphors transform everyday beautification into a cosmologically meaningful act. This finding reinforces previous scholarship that ritual aesthetics often rely on symbolic elevation of ordinary practices.

Indexically, the utterances clearly embed Bugis moral philosophy. The repeated orientation toward honor, sincerity, and emotional fidelity demonstrates that beauty in this tradition is ethically grounded. Physical adornment becomes a semiotic surface through which inner virtue is displayed and socially recognized. The gendered dimension of the data is particularly significant. The positioning of *Indo Botting* and female speakers as ritual agents suggests that women hold an important role in mediating between aesthetic practice and spiritual intention. This challenges simplistic readings of beauty rituals as purely cosmetic and highlights their function in sustaining cultural authority. Furthermore, the hyperbolic constructions involving cosmic impossibilities (e.g., two suns or moons) illustrate how emotional exclusivity is linguistically dramatized. Such exaggerations are not merely poetic flourish; they index culturally valued ideals of unwavering loyalty and relational constancy in Bugis society.

The study also demonstrates that *Cenning Rara* remains culturally resilient because it integrates multiple semiotic layers linguistic form, ritual performance, and moral ideology. This multilayered structure enables the tradition to persist even amid social change, as its meanings can be reinterpreted while its poetic core remains stable. In sum, the analysis supports an anthropolinguistic understanding of *Cenning Rara* as a performative cultural resource. The tradition operates not only to beautify the body but also to reproduce Bugis cosmology, gender roles, and

ethical values. Future research may further explore variation across regions and the contemporary transformation of this ritual speech in modern Bugis communities.



The illustration summarizes the key findings of this study on *Cenning Rara* as a ritual oral tradition in Buginese culture. At the center, the visual of a Bugis bridal makeup process highlights the primary performance context of the mantra, emphasizing its close connection to beauty rituals and ceremonial preparation. Surrounding elements present the main linguistic features identified in the analysis, including productive affixation (*ma-*, *na-*, *ku-*), reduplication patterns, and the dominance of short performative clauses. The infographic also highlights the pervasive use of figurative language particularly metaphor, symbolism, and hyperbole demonstrated through recurring celestial imagery such as the sun and moon.

Beyond its linguistic structure, the illustration foregrounds the sociocultural meanings indexed by *Cenning Rara*. Core Bugis values *siri'*, *lempu'*, and *pesse* are shown as central moral frameworks embedded in the ritual speech. The visual representation of gender roles further underscores the important function of women, especially *Indo Botting*, as cultural and spiritual mediators. Overall, the infographic conveys that *Cenning Rara* operates not merely as poetic ornamentation but as a performative cultural practice that integrates language, beauty, spirituality, and social identity within Bugis cosmology.

## CONCLUSION

The oral tradition of *Cenning Rara* is one of the most profound and meaningful cultural heritages of the Bugis people, symbolizing the intricate relationship between language, belief, and identity. Far beyond its role as a bridal charm or beauty incantation, *Cenning Rara* embodies the Bugis worldview that harmonizes the physical and metaphysical realms. It represents the indigenous ideology that words are not merely linguistic expressions but sacred forces imbued with spiritual energy. Through poetic language, rhythmic repetition, and symbolic imagery, the recitation of *Cenning Rara* functions as both a prayer and a performance, an act of communication between the human soul and divine power. Culturally, *Cenning Rara* reflects the Bugis people's deep respect for balance, purity, and harmony. It is inseparable from the traditional values of *siri'* (self-respect and honor), *pessé* (empathy and compassion), and *getteng* (steadfastness). These values manifest through the ritual, where beauty is seen not as mere physical appearance but as an expression of inner virtue and spiritual alignment. The ritual's connection to bridal preparation further highlights its role in reinforcing social and moral ideals: purity, devotion, and readiness to enter a sacred union. In this sense, *Cenning Rara* is not only an aesthetic practice but also a moral and religious preparation, strengthening both body and soul for harmony in relationships and in life.

From an anthropolinguistic perspective, *Cenning Rara* demonstrates how language functions as a cultural performance that carries meaning beyond words. Every morpheme, rhythm, and figurative expression in the text reveals layers of Bugis cosmology, where humans, nature, and the divine coexist in reciprocal harmony. The linguistic analysis of *Cenning Rara* shows how morphology, syntax, and figurative language work together to produce spiritual and emotional effects on both the speaker and the listener. Its use of metaphors and repetition not only creates beauty but also reinforces memory and sacred intention, ensuring that the oral formula remains alive through generations. Ideologically, *Cenning Rara* mirrors the Bugis belief that power resides in speech (*basa to rilangi'*, "the heavenly word"). Words are viewed as carriers of truth, healing, and transformation. Through the ritual act of utterance, the reciter invokes divine protection and radiance, linking beauty to moral integrity and divine favor. This ideology contrasts with modern notions of beauty based solely on appearance, reaffirming instead that true beauty is spiritual, moral, and relational. Thus, *Cenning Rara* stands as a cultural resistance against superficiality, maintaining the Bugis philosophy that harmony between body, mind, and spirit defines the essence of human existence. *Cenning Rara* remains a living tradition that bridges the past and the present, the sacred and the everyday. Despite modernization and changing social contexts, it continues to thrive as a symbol of identity and continuity within Bugis society. Through its oral transmission, the Bugis people reaffirm their cultural pride and philosophical depth, reminding future generations that words, when spoken with sincerity and reverence, hold the power to bless, to heal, and to connect the human with the divine.

## REFERENCES

- Acciaoli, G. (2004). From economic actor to moral agent: Knowledge, fate and hierarchy among the Bugis of Sulawesi. *Indonesia*, 78, 147–179.
- Ambo Upe, A., Mutahir, T. C., & Suratman, B. (2025). Siri culture representing self-respect and honor in higher education leadership: A case study at Puangrimaggalatung University. *International Journal of Emerging Research and Review*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.56707/ijoerar.v3i3.123>
- Basri, E., & Ramadhani, S. (2023). Kajian semantik mantra Cenning Rara pada suku Bugis. *JIP – Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 6(8), 6222–6229. <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v6i8.2601>
- Duranti, A. (1997). *Linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511810190>
- Elva Utami, Arono, Wisma Yunita, Safnil, Nila Kencana, & Sam Hermansyah. (2025). Indonesian Students' Perspectives on Problem-Based and Multicultural Learning in Basic Reading Comprehension. *EduBase : Journal of Basic Education*, 6(1), 120–130. Retrieved from <https://journal.ljpi.bbc.ac.id/edubase/article/view/370>
- Finnegan, R. (1992). *Oral traditions and the verbal arts: A guide to research practices*. Routledge.
- Fitriana, F. (2025). Cenning Rara dalam perspektif komunikasi Islam: Kajian hermeneutik mantra masyarakat Bugis Makassar. *Retorika: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam*, 7(1), 86–97. <https://doi.org/10.47435/retorika.v7i1.3983>
- Hymes, D. H. (Ed.). (1974). *Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- M U, Sari H, Hermansyah S, Maming K, Kahar A, Hasan, Elfahmi FK (2025), "Understanding Indonesian students' reading knowledge in digital literacy within socio-cultural of rural middle schools". *International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, Vol. 42 No. 5 pp. 432–448, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-12-2023-0239>
- Nakassis, C. V. (2018). Indexicality's ambivalent ground. *Signs and Society*, 6(1), 281–304. <https://doi.org/10.1086/694753>
- Sain, Y., & Hermansyah, S. (2025). Exploring the Language Attitudes of the Tolaki Community in Kendari: A Comprehensive Sociolinguistic Analysis. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 13(2), 983–993. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v13i2.14415>
- Silverstein, M. (1976). Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. In K. H. Basso & H. A. Selby (Eds.), *Meaning in anthropology* (pp. 11–55). University of New Mexico Press.
- Silverstein, M. (2022). *Language in culture: Lectures on the social semiotics of language*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009198813>
- Suparman, S., Syukur, A., & Tsamratul'aeni, T. (2025). Taboo as oral discourse and cultural code: Performative communication of moral and ecological

values in Bugis society. *LETS: Journal of Linguistics and English Teaching Studies*, 7(1), 20–37. <https://doi.org/10.46870/lets.v7i1.1860>

Wahyuddin, N. R., Yanti, N. E., Arnas, R., & Hermansyah, S. (2024). Digital Literacy Integrated with Blended Learning in Improving EFL Students' English Language Skills: A Lesson Learned from the Independent Campus Program. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 4(4), 744-757. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v4i4.2351>