Negotiating Identity: The Social Transformation of Traditional Nicknames in the Mandailing Community of Riau

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Abstract This study contributes to socially modifying traditional symbols and current cultural preservation measures. It evaluates the social transformation of the Mandailing community in using traditional nicknames *Ucok* and *Utet*, with add-on appellations in Rokan Hulu, Riau. This phenomenon represents individual negotiation from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, with labels that may result in derision, passive acceptance, or self-identity building. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from different generations in Rokan Hulu. The data were analyzed using symbolic interactionism to capture the essence of negotiation by using add-on appellations and descriptive qualitative design to assess the participant's emotions. The results showed that add-on appellations included physical, behavioral, birth order, habitual, and occupational references and impacted one's identity during social interactions. These practices seemingly began to decline in the 2000s, reflecting the shift in cultural practices. The findings illustrate the role of traditional nickname usage in the collective identity and the challenge of preserving local cultural elements amid social transformation.

Keywords: *Traditional nickname, Mandailing community, Negotiating identity, Language, Social transformation*

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1. Introduction

Add-on appellations profoundly influence personal identity and social interactions and illustrate the relationship between appearance, societal expectation, and emotional experiences (Jalil et al., 2021). These appellations frequently initiate from distinguishing characteristics such as physique or hair color and can trigger a significant emotional response, self-perception impact, and societal status (Nikolenko, 2023). These appellations hold great emotional significance, conveying feelings of pride or dislike (Archer, 2019). In this regard, symbolic interactionism underlines how interpersonal interactions shape the meaning of names, with notorious connotations potentially leading to antipathy. An appellation implying dignity may promote acceptance, even identities (Bowles et al., 2023), but an appellation

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evoking resentment can act as a mechanism for contempt (Dianitami et al., 2023). The emotional connotations of appellations differ across cultural contexts, exemplified by extreme instances such as "Hitler of the 21st century," which conveys profound hatred through metaphorical expression (Imayo et al., 2022). Studies demonstrate that appellations signify not just physical attributes but also psychological traits and life experiences, influencing individual perceptions and interpersonal interactions. Ultimately, these names function as a mechanism for individuals to negotiate their identities and recover the narratives of their experiences (Mussa-Akhunov et al., 2024).

Newborn babies are frequently assigned temporary traditional nicknames, namely *Ucok* and *Utet*, in the Mandailing community. *Ucok* is assigned to male newborns, and *Utet* is for female ones. The nicknames are often attached to them until the official names are selected. The nicknames significantly lie in their representation of traditional and social unity, as well as a shared responsibility of the community (Zhou et al., 2021). However, nicknames can be attached to them until they are adults or even long-lived. Because nicknames are common names that can be attached to any newborn, people often attach additional information to differentiate one from others by add-on appellations. The appellations include physical characteristics, behavior, or professions, such as *Ucok* ***Bolak*** or *Utet* ***Abuan***. Although the initial function of add-on appellations is to identify, sometimes amusing, they can have detrimental effects by stereotyping the appellations in the community (Kasanova et al., 2024). These add-on appellations produce varied responses. People may either accept or reject these identities (Borrelli, 2020; Brahim, 2022). Research indicates that these nicknames frequently emerge when parents do not have preselected choices and develop to mirror the child's evolving characteristics, highlighting individuality or reinforcing social connections (Jalil et al., 2021). Some individuals may take pride in their cultural background, as reflected in their names, while others experience the burden of societal expectations. They need navigation of personal identity alongside community influence (Archer, 2019; Hariyanto et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2020; Shih & Rudin, 2020). On the one hand, add-on appellations like *Ucok* ***Kote*** (having a muscular body) and *Ucok* ***Ruso*** (a hunter's son) can notoriously attach and develop as personal identities in society. On the other hand, *Ucok* ***Baba*** (small body similar to a dwarf) and *Ucok* ***Manuk*** (poultry vendor) can respectably develop into strong personal identities and are recognized by both individuals and society (Nick, 2020; Olajimbiti, 2024). The dynamics of attachment and inclusivity are unpredictable and sometimes give rise to dilemmas in preserving traditions (Kasanova et al., 2024; Khetoa & Mokala, 2022). Therefore, these add-on appellations have the power of two sides of a coin. On the one hand, it can be a profitable personal identity. On the other hand, it can be a judgmental tool that makes bearers feel secure and alienated from society (Bowles et al., 2023).

The add-on appellations that refer to several references and are attached to individuals serve as emotional identifiers of personal identity. These references provide a complex picture of the relationship between the conditions of name bearers, social expectations, and emotional expressions (Dianitami et al., 2023). Add-on appellations that have a significant emotional impact reflect various sentiments, such as affection, respect, mockery, and even contempt. Furthermore, the linguistic contexts that play a part in creating this effect also have a major effect (Nikolenko, 2023); these can be intonation, gesture, or any other context that exists during the interaction. Because people interpret add-on appellations based on their surroundings, this situation can be seen in two ways: either as supporting or opposing societal norms or traditions that have a major impact on how people act in social situations (Dianitami et al., 2023). This indicates that add-on appellations serve as a significant tool that reflects the complexity of human relationships and emotions about traditional nicknames (Bowles et al., 2023; Zhang & Patrick, 2021). Therefore, this study raises two key questions that contribute to preserving traditional nicknames.

RQ 1. What do references contribute to the add-on appellations?
RQ 2. To what extent do those add-on appellations negotiate identity in the social transformation of traditional nicknames?

2. Theoretical Framework

Appellations fulfill diverse roles in various cultures and languages, embodying emotional, social, and cultural aspects that influence human interactions (Dianitami et al., 2023). Appellations are examined for their socially pragmatic and emotionally expressive roles, which expose fundamental human

feelings and have a notable impact on behavior (Nikolenko, 2023). Emotions such as affection, friendship, or hatred can be expressed, influencing the dynamics of relationships and social hierarchies (Bowles et al., 2023). In Russian language training for foreigners, the incorporation of appellations is actively promoted because of their profound linguistic, socio-cultural, and psychological importance (Dianitami et al., 2023; Mardieva & Vladimirovna, 2021). This model allows for the involvement of language in building cultural context. In addition, individuals also have the opportunity to understand the nuanced elements of social interaction in the Russian-speaking community (Mardieva & Vladimirovna, 2021; Nikolenko, 2023). This instructional technique highlights the importance of nicknames as a tool for understanding emotions and building bonds in social interactions while placing them in the acquisition of a new language.

Add-on appellations show a crucial role in constructing identity in literary works in Uzbek anthroponymy (Bowles et al., 2023). These names vary from simple onomastic signs to complex signs. Therefore, they enrich the narrative and provide significant insights into historical and cultural contexts. The classification of appellations among certain populations illustrates their attachment to ethnic identity and historical factors (Dianitami et al., 2023). This also applies to the Mara River. The diversity of appellations shows their important role as adaptable linguistic entities involving emotional, social, and cultural values (Nikolenko, 2023). A comprehensive analysis of appellations from various perspectives enhances our understanding of their reflection and influence on personal identity, community dynamics, and cultural legacies. This study reveals these relationships (Bowles et al., 2023).

2.1. Bodily Features Appellations and Socio-Cultural Norms

Bodily features are one of the references for creating add-on appellations, but the feature is the most dominant among other features or other references (Dzhumamukhambetova et al., 2024). Bodily features include weight, height, hair color, body size, or other body markers that are considered unique and representative of appellations. Cultural and contextual interests form the add-on appellation, reflecting social and cultural norms from various perspectives (Tur et al., 2023a). In Zambia, for example, Senga appellations fulfill social and cultural functions. The appellations commonly embrace warnings against witches, discouragement of selfishness, provision of wisdom, and reflection of traditional beliefs. Shona nicknames in Zimbabwe, another instance, hold significance for both the individuals who possess them and those who use them because they reflect physical characteristics, social standing, behavior, and notable events in a person's life. These nicknames can be used for convenience or to reflect personality traits or important cultural norms and values (Borrelli, 2020).

Female nicknames in Nigeria are creative cultural symbols that express psychological, sexual, and aesthetic appeal (Mensah, 2016; Mensah, 2020), while in Java, they express social authority (Tur et al., 2023b). They are used as a form of critical resistance to stereotypical images of women in conservative societies (Ibrahim, 2022). Additionally, proverbial nicknames among rural youth in Nigeria foreground dimensions of power relations, tell stories about past exploits, and accentuate locally relevant values that emphasize conformity to societal norms (Mensah & Ndimele, 2022). These nicknames reflect cultural assumptions and moral codes in rural spaces.

Cultural identity and appellations influence each other (Moore et al., 2020). For instance, the China Museum presents a narrative that forges a cultural identity that is both historically grounded and modern. The narrative also strengthens cultural togetherness and builds a shared sense of identity. Appellation, in this case, serves to establish and accelerate this cultural identity, as evidenced by the use of narratives in various socio-cultural interactions. This emphasizes that appellation serves not only as a means of self-expression but also as a reflection of social and cultural norms (Tur & Sari, 2019).

2.2. Appellations and Emotional Expression

Appellations are a common way for individuals to show their feelings and how people see themselves in society. Appellations are not merely randomly chosen names. They also embody profound emotions and judgments. Several research studies show that appellations can show a range of feelings. This includes not only love and friendship but also disrespect and teasing (Archer, 2019). Positive appellations usually come from close relationships that show how well people know each other. In

contrast, negative appellations might come from judgment that often reminds people of ridicule. This shows how important appellations can be in how individuals relate to others and how they feel about themselves (Pais, 2018).

According to Pais (2018), cases regarding "buddy" and "champ" in familial settings are often assumed to be expressions of warmth and trust, but "clumsy" and "slowpoke" can initiate shame and insecurity in younger generations. The last two appellations are thought to be derogatory expressions, although they are in a family setting. The culture and our relationships shape these names, influencing our emotional responses. Appellations commonly echo the traits of the individuals they describe. This allows for a quick understanding of individuals' social class and reputation in society (Nick, 2020). Among the younger generation, this issue has emerged prominently. Appellation can indicate what group or fanbase the individuals belong to (Lam, 2019). Different individuals may act differently toward this condition. Some individuals see their appellations as a source of pride, while others may experience different embarrassment because of negative points of view regarding the appellations (Matfunjwa, 2024).

In today's online and digital worlds, the way individuals use appellations has changed (Marcondes et al., 2020). The internet connection allows people to use names in creative ways, even if they are anonymous in social media accounts. The names are entirely unrelated to the owners' names. People usually randomly choose the names solitarily for pleasure. This can help with emotional connection in online groups. Nevertheless, it can also lead to harmful situations that can bully or alienate people. For instance, a friendly game named "Pixel Master" or "Code Guru" is able to encourage teamwork (Marcondes et al., 2020). However, negative names can cause harm and make people feel insecure. Ultimately, looking at appellations and understanding them can help people be thoughtful of the connection between languages, cultural identities, and social relationships to emphasize the essence of personal and social interaction contexts (Tur, 2023).

2.3. Emotional Evaluation and Social Identity

This part investigates the emotional nuances related to nicknames. It is different from the previous one, which focuses on how nicknames or appellations are communicated and elicited within particular social and cultural contexts. Emotional expression can indeed change how individuals act and respond to nicknames (Archer, 2019). For example, when people call a person with "Fatso", which means fatty, it can hurt. In contrast, if they call another person with "Tiny", meaning small and slim, it may make the person happy. Some cultures provide this context in which people, especially women, prefer having a slim body to having a fat one. Indeed, culture plays a fundamental role in defining people's paradigm, judgment, or behavior in responding to how individuals look in life (Uğur, 2017; Zhou et al., 2021).

In the past, it was difficult for people worldwide to look at and even exchange cultures regarding naming practice. Time and space were also a source of burden. However, today, technology and online devices are helping people promote emotional recognition and communication through, for example, sharing nicknames. Online social interaction serves as an opportunity to share identity badges (Artomova & Ivanenko, 2022; Mardieva & Vladimirovna, 2021), although previously, the identity was their misery, leading to mockery or bullying. For example, someone might call themselves "shorty" to have fun with their height or "fatty" to be grateful for their weight. Instead of lamenting the existing facts of their physical characteristics, it might be better to use them as something fun and make them a strong identity.

Shih and Rudin (2020) also emphasize the essence of social media in sharing cultures and identities among people worldwide. They argue that identities from nowhere easily come and influence people from other regions who access the identity information. Names are claimed to be the easiest aspect, and they are mostly recognized first in online interaction (Persulessy et al., 2023) through linguistic devices such as diction, rhyme, or hypocoristic renditions of names. People tend to choose cool or cute twists on names with various motivations behind them. One of them is the cultural understanding of names. In some cultures, names show respect, love, or even hope from the givers to bearers, but in other cultures, they may be used to mock or belittle (Tur, 2023).

The cohesion of nicknames as emotional evaluation and social identity is tied to connections shaped by the culture (Putri et al., 2024). Some cultures see nicknames as a badge of honor, but in other cultures,

the identity can be regarded as a threat or something negative (Sabrina & Tur, 2023). For example, the nickname "Red Devils" refers to the name of a football fan community in England, which is a social identity, but it is regarded as fearsome for fans of the same team in a different culture. Therefore, it is essential to look into how different cultures evaluate the emotional meaning of certain nicknames and understand local views, which can help people identify the social identity built for certain nicknames.

3. Methodology

In general, the design of this study was a qualitative descriptive study. The data were obtained from interviews, analyzed using a qualitative approach, and presented in descriptive form. Nurazizah et al. (2024) said that this design allowed researchers to observe, change, and compare the data they collected in order to find and group linguistic units, as well as their emotional expressions and social roles. The analysis referred to how add-on appellations were created from references found in everyday life and the downward trend in the use of these nicknames in the younger generation. People who bear these add-on appellations in their interaction provide genuine information regarding their emotional and social experiences. In addition to understanding the cultural and linguistic contexts where the appellations were used, the analysis could be better drawn by depicting their emotional and social impact in creating their personal and social identities.

3.1. Participants

The data in this study consisted of personal names, including both official names documented by the Population and Civil Registry Service and appellations acknowledged by the community as a form of social contact. The participants had been born and raised in Desa Rambah Tengah Hulu, Kecamatan Rambah, Kabupaten Rokan Hulu, and Provinsi Riau. The researchers divided the participants into four groups based on birth date. First, there was the group of participants born between 1980-1990. Second, the researchers have those who were born between 1990 and 2000. Then, the next group was those who were born between 2000 and 2010. The last group was for participants born after 2010.

Table 1
Participants Distribution by Birth Date

Group	Birth Years	Females	Males	Total
1	1980-1990	15	19	34 (51.5%)
2	1990-2000	14	13	27 (41%)
3	2000-2010	2	3	5 (7.5%)
4	After 2010	0	0	0 (0%)
	Total	**31**	**35**	**66**

3.2. Instruments

The researchers prepared a list of questions (Table 2) to conduct semi-structured interviews. The list was not shared with the participants but was conveyed orally while building eye contact to get a sense of conversation (Tur et al., 2023a).

Table 2
List of Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Project: Bodily features-based appellations as emotionally evaluative personal identity bearers in social interaction	
This interview is conducted on	
Date	:
Time	:
Place	:
Interviewer	:
Interviewee	:

Questions

1. When were you born?
2. What is your name?
3. Is there genealogical information in the personal names?
4. How do your parents call you?
5. Do you know the meaning of your name?
6. How do you respond to the names given to you by your parents?
7. What do you think of it?
8. Do your friends/people have other names to call you? Why?
9. How do you respond to the names given to you by your friends/other people?
10. Which names do you use in your daily interaction?

Interviewee Signature

The list of questions was previously employed in the research on offspring names of *prajurit* Karaton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat (soldier of the palace) setting for data-gathering purposes to ascertain the responses of name bearers toward their respective names (Tur et al., 2023a). This issue was linked to the general assumption that names owned by the prajurit (in the palace circumstance) possessed profound connotations. However, the individuals bearing these names did not have an opportunity to ask the giver why these names were attached to them. Thus, this instrument was deemed appropriate for employment as a tool in this research, as it specifically targeted the emotional aspect, which aligned with the research's objective.

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Data Collection

The collection of data involved the use of in-depth and semi-structured interviews as the primary methodologies. During the interviews, a documentation tool was employed, which was an audio-video recording device, with the participants' consent (Tur et al., 2023b). The procedures for collecting data were as follows: First, the researchers came up with open-ended questions that matched the goals of the study. This helped the researchers adapt to the circumstances and learn more about the participants' experiences and views. Next, the researchers did a pilot test with a small group to make the questions clearer and more complete. After that, the interviews were done in a relaxed way. In addition to getting deeper insight, the researchers encouraged the participants by responding to their answers when necessary.

3.3.2. Data Analysis

The researchers took a look at the data using some straightforward methods. They analyzed the data using a qualitative approach and presented the result descriptively. The analysis involved identifying popular words or phrases and checking out narratives where the participants communicated about their nicknames during social settings (Tur & Sari, 2019). The symbolic interactionism approach was also used to interpret the experiences the participants shared and to build comprehensive meaning by reflecting emotional expression and cultural aspects. By understanding the natural dynamic of interaction, symbolic interactionism helped the researchers grasp how participants understood and gained the opportunity to negotiate their identities when necessary. The researchers learned about how personal experience from in-depth interviews determined their bigger chance to connect in their social contexts, especially with traditional nicknames. A conclusion was drawn and obtained from identification, categorization, and interpretation by synthesizing the result of the completed analysis (Yusuf & Putrie, 2022).

4. Results

4.1. Add-on Appellation References

The findings about add-on appellations used by the participants in this research highlight the complex and eloquent ways of focusing on physical features like weight, height, face and head shape, skin color and tone, hair texture, scars, or particular dermatology marks. These features seem to have inspired

them to give add-on appellation to the others. People usually give other people labels according to or compare to certain objects or animals' characteristics. This emphasizes that cultural values support the creation of add-on appellations. Beyond the physical features, other references encompass behaviors, habits, occupations, and birth order in familial contexts. However, our findings showed that physical attributes were the dominant factors influencing the creation of add-on appellations by 57.1%, followed by behavior (19.0%), occupation (11.9%), habit (7.1%), and birth order (4.8%).

Figure 1
Distribution of Add-on Appellatives by Categories

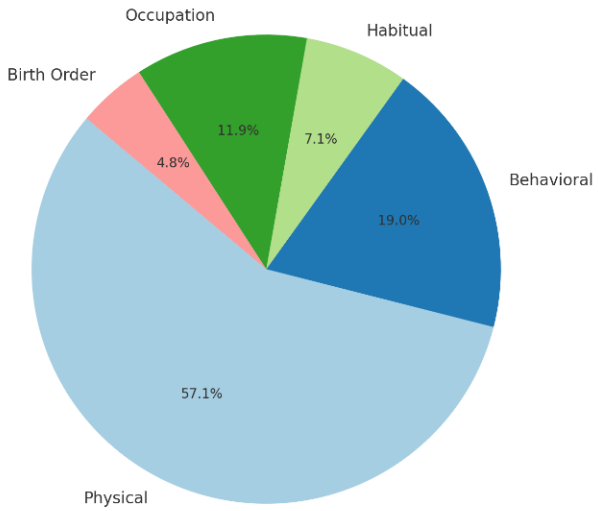


Figure 1 shows how the community's values impact the choice of add-on appellation the individuals use. Most of the add-on appellations focus on how individuals look. Some cultures, like the Mandailing community, find visual patterns to be the easiest compositions to identify someone. We compared a person's physical features with their attachments. Regarding the interview results, the physical features were initially selected only for pleasure. Nevertheless, during the interviews, the participants said that it actually was annoying. This led to further research on factors that drove people to choose these add-on appellations. We found that they used add-on appellations to fulfill cultural responsibilities that they believed in and to connect in social interaction. Within the community, members also reported behavior and occupation as being other factors that influenced them when they created add-on appellations. Other communities have a similar interest in putting them to create names (Tur, 2023). Some participants said that these references sounded nicer and softer when identifying individuals in the form of add-on appellations than physical features. Nevertheless, others had a different perspective, suggesting that bad or negative behavior may hurt an individual's emotions, such as trauma. Other findings that were interesting and unique from this community were habits and birth order. Habits refer to what individuals do every day, such as family traditions and the ways they spend their leisure moments. Such an approach to birth orders was rare among other communities. The Mandailing community used to only have a few users because it was difficult to find families that fit the special rules to attach the add-on appellations. These families had to have children of the same gender and were willing to attach *Ucok* or *Utet* to their children. These add-on appellations show a culture with a mix of identities. They reflect how individuals look, act, and fit into families and communities. Each name tells a narrative about belonging and being unique within a larger group.

4.1.1. Physical Attributes

Table 3 shows various names based on physical attributes. These add-on appellations helped members of the community identify one another. They also showed features like skin, hair, head, body, and foot shapes. Interestingly, these add-on appellations did not focus on gender. Members of the community were treated equally regardless of their gender. They also reported how these add-on appellations were constructed to build identities in social connection.

Table 3
Add-on Appellations Based on Physical Attributes

Add-on Appellatives	References
Utet **Lebar**	Large and fatty body for women
Ucok **Bolak**	Large and fatty body for men
Utet **Layap**	A very thin body resembling a flat board
Ucok **Baba**	A small body without development, similar to a dwarf
Utet **Angin**	A skinny body that is easily carried away by the wind
Utet **Karah**	A tiny but proportional body
Utet **Tiang**	A very tall body that resembles an electric pole
Ucok **Kote**	Having a muscular body
Utet **Mosok**	Dark skin, almost charcoal-like
Utet **Rata**	A very dark-skinned person
Ucok **Biru**	Bluish-dark skin
Ucok **Lolom**	Tar-like dark skin
Utet **Abuan**	Grayish skin
Utet **Bolong**	Common dark skin
Ucok **Rara**	Very bright skin that becomes red under the sun
Ucok **Gayo**	Resembling a crab
Ucok **Tanding**	Having a fish-like head
Ucok **Mancis**	Body and head that resemble a fire match
Utet **Gappual**	A skin that resembles a black and white fish known as a Gappual fish
Utet **Pano**	Having many fungal skin infections
Utet **Pusot**	Having many hair whorls
Utet **Kariting**	Curly and frizzy hair
Ucok **Singso**	Having a scar or disability caused by a saw machine
Ucok **Begol**	Having asymmetrical head curves
Ucok **Jingkal**	Foot deformity causing tiptoe walking

Adding a nickname to names such as *Ucok* or *Utet* was a traditional symbol. It was not always easy to explain why they picked certain add-on appellations. Individuals had the same nicknames, but add-on appellations gave them extra identities. These chosen add-on appellations usually came from personal connection and how others saw them, not from certain rules. It also depended on culture, feelings, and social situations. For example, individuals called someone such as *Utet* ***Pano*** because she had a lot of dermatology issues. *Ucok* ***Begol*** was another example. He experienced asymmetrical head curves. Then, *Utet* ***Angin*** described someone really skinny who seemed as if she could be blown away by the wind.

> *Utet Pano: saya dah lama dipanggil Utet tapi kalau Utet Pano, baru-baru saja.* (People have called me Utet for long time but they have just started calling me *Utet Pano*.)

> *Utet Pano: ya sejujurnya, agak malu sih. Tapi macam mana lagi, itu sudah lekat betul dengan saya*. (To be honest, I am little bit embarrased. But I have no option. The name is attached firmly to me.)

The nickname *Utet* ***Pano*** came from a reference to a skin problem she suffered from. People had called her *Utet* since she was a kid. Because there were other people who were also called *Utet*, people gave her a single notification by adding the characteristics of her body. *Utet* ***Begol*** and *Utet* ***Angin*** also had the same root reference, namely, the reference to physical conditions. However, they had different responses to the add-on appellations.

> *Utet Begol: sejak kecil saya dipanggil Utet Begol. Ya, karena bentuk kepala saya ini. Tak bisalah saya ubah, ya kan?* (People have called me *Utet Begol* since I was born. Well, because of the shape of my head. I cannot change it, right?)

> *Utet Angin: saya biasa-biasa aja dengan nama itu. Abahku merantau waktu itu. Emak blm ada nama, jadi dikasihlah aku Utet.* (I do not mind having that name. My father was in another city when I was born. My Mom had no name yet, so I was given the name, *Utet*.)

Utet Angin: ya, karena badan aku kurus macam ini lah mereka panggil aku Utet Angin. Karena mudah terbawa angin, katanya. (Well, because of my thin body people call me *Utet Angin* which is easily blown away by the wind, as they put it.)

Ucok ***Jingkal*** (foot deformity causing tiptoe walking), for example, a teacher, declined his appellative as it conflicted with his professional image, and the community acknowledged his objection. Conversely, alterations in behavior or physical appearance render an appellation obsolete.

Ucok Jingkal: Dulu kecil, ya saya dipanggil Ucok Jingkal. Tetapi saya sekarang tidak suka. Saya marah kalua dipanggil Ucok Jingkal karena saya seorang guru. Bagaimana perasaan anak murid saya mendapati gurunya dipanggil dengan sebutan itu? (When I was child, I was called *Ucok Jingkal*. But now I don't like it. I get angry when people call me *Ucok Jingkal* because I'm a teacher. How do my students feel when their teacher is called that name?)

These kinds of names typically had a significant emotional weight for the people who were classed in this way. They drove individuals to conceal their feelings in order to deal with the societal consequences that were associated with their categorization.

4.1.2. Behavioral References

Behavioral references indicate that the add-on appellation pertains to the presence of the name bearers' conduct, as seen in Table 4. While the names Utet and Ucok are assigned at birth, further appellations are not necessarily conferred at that time.

Table 4
Add-on Appellations Referring to Bearers' Behaviors

Add-on Appellatives	References
Utet **Randap**	Poisonous substance for getting rid of weed
Utet **Raning**	A rich person with a fondness for buying new clothes
Utet **Katak**	Likely to sit like a frog
Ucok **Bange**	Used to eat dirt that is known as *bange*
Utet **Dayak**	Like to lie down in almost every situation
Ucok **Baci**	A man who behaves like a woman
Ucok **Nakal**	Cannot stay still but keep moving messily
Ucok **Aek**	Like playing water or being in the water

Utet ***Randap*****'s** narrative diverges from the preceding instances. The term *Randap* originates from a chemical extensively utilized for weed eradication on plantations. Her life took a catastrophic turn when she sought to terminate her troubles by ingesting the poison.

Utet Randap: ya, mau mati. Saya minum racun saja. Tapi tak jadi mati. Tetangga mendapati aku dan membawa ke bidan. (Yes, I committed suicide by ingesting weed pesticide. But my neighbor found me and brought me to a midwife to get medical treatment)

Fortunately, her neighbors located her promptly and transported her to the hospital, preserving her life. Rather than bringing her relief, the appellation, *randap*, weighed her down and caused her distress. The community regarded the appellation as a means of identification, although for her, it rekindled traumatic wounds each time she encountered it. She felt unable to oppose the label, as cultural norms and power relations marginalized her voice.

Ucok ***Katak*** received his appellation following a change in behavior.

Ucok Katak: Namanya juga anak-anak ya kan, mau duduk ya duduk saja. Tak pernah aku tuh berpikir duduk gaya apa, ya kan? Nah, orang-orang bilang duduk aku tuh pake gaya katak. Mirip katak katanya. Aku tak paham. Lalu mereka panggil aku pakai Ucok Katak itu lah. (Kids were kids. They never considered what style of sitting

they wanted to choose. People said I sat like a frog. I was not aware. Then, they called me *Ucok Katak*.)

Ucok Katak: Sekarang aku tak begitu lagi. Dah dewasa ya kan? (I do not sit like that anymore. I am a mature man.)

Ucok Katak: Iya. Mereka panggil aku Ucok Katak sampai hari ini. Entah sampai bila-bila. (But, they keep calling me *Ucok Katak*.)

The community continued to refer to him as *Ucok Katak,* even though he no longer engaged in such behavior. This indicated that there was a strong connection between him and that persona.

4.1.3. Habitual References

A habitual reference refers to the routines of the individual bearing the name or those associated with them, such as relatives. In addition, the habit has been practiced for a considerable amount of time and is continuously maintained in the present.

Table 5
Add-on Appellations Referring to Habits

Add-on Appellatives	References
Ucok **Ruso**	Having a father who is a deer hunter
Ucok **Pangkalan**	Likely to hang out around *Pangkalan*

Ucok Ruso: Bapak saya gemar berburu. Dulu berburu rusa di hutan. Tapi sekarang tidak. Bahkan, saya tidak bisa berburu. Sekarang semua ada, buat apa berburu. Itu pasti diambil dari bapak saya, bukan saya. (My father used to hunt deer in the forest but I cannot hunt. Today, everything is available. There is no need to hunt in the forest. The appellation must be taken from my father's habit, not mine)

Ucok Pangkalan: tiap-tiap abis kerja aku di sini. Kali saja ada yang butuh tumpangan kan, lumayan dapat uang. Tapi, cuma kalau-kalau saja bukan pekerjaan aku. (I always go here [*Pangkalan*]. In case someone needs a ride, I can get extra money from it, right? But it is just in case, it is not my job.)

4.1.4. Occupational References

Occupation references refer to the practice of incorporating an individual's occupation into a name. This can serve various purposes, such as indicating a person's trade, providing context for their identity, or even reflecting social status. Irrespective of the profession, it is evident that society associates individuals with that designation.

Table 6
Add-on Appellations Referring to Occupation of the Bearers

Add-on Appellatives	References
Ucok **Bengkel**	Fixing electronic tools
Ucok **Goni**	Bringing a sack to put belongings
Utet **Sayur**	Selling vegetables as a side job
Ucok **Manuk**	Keeping and selling chicken

Utet Sayur: Sehari-hari saya jual sayur keliling. Pas lewat, walnya seorang panggil saya Utet Sayur. Lama-lama banyak orang panggil saya Utet Sayur. (I sell vegetables around the neighborhood. One day, as I passed by, someone called me *Utet Sayur*. Over time, many people started to call me *Utet Sayur* as well.)

Ucok Manuk: Saya jual ayam di pasar. Ayam peliharaan dan ayam aduan. Banyak juga yang jual ayam macam saya. Mungkin, mereka panggil saya Ucok Manuk untuk membedakan satu sama lain. (I sell chickens at the traditional market. Domestic chickens and fighting cocks. Many people also sell chickens like me. Maybe, they call me *Ucok Manuk* to differentiate me from the others.)

Ucok Bengkel: ow tidak, pak. Saya tidak punya bengkel. Saya hanya kerja di rumah macam ini saja. (Oh no. I don't have a workshop. I just work at home like this.)

Ucok Bengkel: ya saya bantu perbaiki alat-alat saja, macam TV, kulkas, mesin cuci, ya alat-alat beginian saja. (Yes, I only repair appliances, such as televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, and just appliances like these.)

Ucok Goni: saya tak paham asal muasal saya dipanggil macam Ucok Goni. Siapa yg memulai pun saya tak tahu. Saya hanya terima saja selama tak merugikan siapa pun, kan? (It is unclear to me how I came to be known as *Ucok Goni*. I don't even know who started it. I just accept it as long as it doesn't harm anyone, right?)

4.1.5. Birth Order References

Birth order refers to the sequence of an individual's birth within a family. A family with multiple children of the same sex often assigns them add-on appellations that denote their birth order.

Table 7
Add-on Appellations Referring to Birth Order in a Family

Add-on Appellatives	References
Ucok **Godang**	An older child in a family
Ucok **Keneng**	A younger child in a family

Ucok Godang: Aku anak tertua. Laki-laki. Awalnya aku dipanggil Ucok aja. Tetapi setelah adikku lahir, laki-laki pula, aku diapnggil Ucok Godang untuk membedakan dgn adik laki-lakiku. (I am the oldest child. A boy. At first they called me *Ucok*. But after my younger sibling was born, also a boy, they called me *Ucok Godang* to differentiate me from him.)

Ucok Keneng: Kalau aku, sejak lahir katanya sudah dipanggil Ucok Keneng. Karena lebih kecil umurku. (As for me, I have been called *Ucok Keneng* since I was born. Because I was younger than him [his elder brother].)

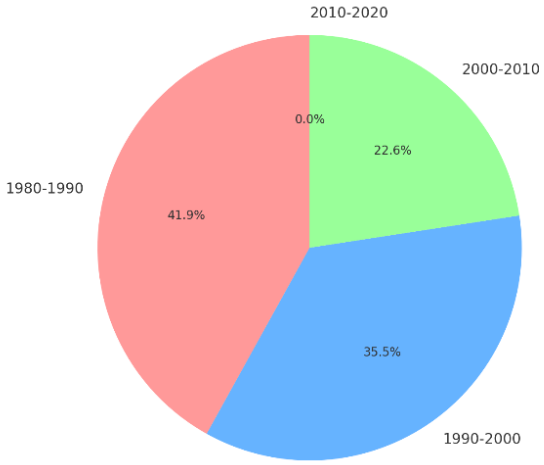
4.2. Social Transformation in Using Add-on Appellations

The data indicated a notable decline in the frequency of occurrences associated with the nicknames *Ucok* and *Utet* from before 1980 to after 2010. The decade from 1980 to 1990 experienced a peak occurrence of 41.9%, succeeded by a gradual decrease to 35.5% from 1990 to 2000 and further to 22.6% from 2000 to 2010, ultimately culminating in zero (0%) after 2010. This trend signified a social, cultural, or policy change that affected the phenomenon's existence. The reduction to zero during the past decade signified the vanishing of this tradition, possibly shifting in societal ideals or the influence of external factors that fundamentally altered traditional patterns.

Figure 2 illustrates the transformation in using the traditional nicknames *Ucok* and *Utet* in the Mandailing community. The first category, people who were born between 1980-1990, installed the traditional nicknames. The second category, people who were born between 1990 and 2000, kept installing the traditional nicknames but in smaller numbers. The third category, the installation of nicknames, kept declining for the period of 2000-2010. After 2010, these traditional nicknames were no longer used by newborns. This showed the social transformation of installing traditional nicknames in the Mandailing community. Traditionally, those nicknames were not no longer meaningful to the

younger generations, but the nicknames are considered no longer fit to be installed in the younger generations.

Figure 2
Distribution of Decreasing in Using Ucok and Utet



Regarding the in-depth and semi-structured interviews, the participants shared the shift in using the traditional nicknames in younger generations. Parents are more conscious nowadays of keeping their children safe from any problems caused by installing traditional nicknames. They picked certain names for their children as soon as possible to avoid the traditional nicknames attached to them, although the chosen name was only for greeting. In addition, parents are also focusing on modern names. They consider many things, especially modernization, when choosing certain names. They would like to choose names that fit well with today's trends (Tur, 2023).

5. Discussion

This research has two main goals. First, it examines how people use and understand add-on appellations attached to *Ucok* and *Utet*. These nicknames help show how people shape their identities in different cultures and social situations. Second, it determines how people negotiate these nicknames. Researchers are eager to know why some nicknames are accepted, whereas others are disregarded. This section highlights how these nicknames relate to personal emotions and identities. Then, the contribution of this research is the depiction of the connection between symbolic interactionism, meaning, and social interactions. This helps researchers determine how identities are formed and negotiated (Archer, 2019; Borrelli, 2020; Moore et al., 2020; Shih & Rudin, 2020).

The first issue is that traditions play a crucial role in maintaining cultural and community identity over time. These reflect how people live and interact in the community (Sariah et al., 2023). That is why they are very special. Yet here is the thing: cultures are not set in stone. They can evolve. With time, they can change to accommodate new situations or challenges (Lam, 2019; Tur et al., 2023a). As communities grow and adapt, these changes can strengthen or sometimes weaken traditions. Therefore, traditions are important and flexible. Some traditions may thrive despite modernization, whereas others may experience the strain and a shift. The Mandailing community in Rokan Hulu, Riau, has many social and cultural factors that shape how it makes and uses add-on appellations related to *Ucok* and *Utet.* These transient nicknames, initially rooted in tradition as gender markers, use physical attributes, behavioral features, occupations, and birth orders (Figure 1). Tables 3-7 delineate the add-on applications that, in most cases, are influenced by physical features. People employ add-on appellations primarily to establish *Ucok* and *Utet* as proper names and to differentiate between their bearers. Several add-on appellations persist until adulthood and death. The deep attachment makes the add-on appellations an important part of the bearers' identities, for example, *Ucok* ***Baba*** (who looks like a dwarf), *Ucok* ***Kote*** (who has a muscular body), *Utet* ***Mosok*** (whose skin looks like charcoal), *Utet* ***Pusot***

(who has many hair whorls), *Utet* ***Dayak*** (who likes to lie down in different situations), *Ucok* ***Aek*** (who likes to play in the water), *Ucok* ***Pangkalan*** (who likes to go to *Pangkalan*), *Utet* ***Sayur*** (who sells vegetables), *Ucok* ***Godhang*** (who is older), and *Ucok* ***Keneng*** (who is younger). The bearers accept the add-on appellations as part of their identities. Although some may view these embellishments as amusing, they can have negative implications, resulting in stereotyping and societal unease. Various circumstances, such as advancing age, shifting social standing, or rejection, often lead to the abandonment of many nicknames and their add-on appellations. *Ucok* ***Jingkal*** (abnormal foot causing tiptoe walking) served as an identity. Nevertheless, upon becoming a teacher, he perceived an elevation in his social standing that led to his embarrassment regarding the add-on appellation. *Utet* ***Randap*** (poisonous substance for removing weed) exemplifies a manifestation of the unacceptability of a bearer due to the evocation of trauma associated with her previous suicide attempt. Another example is *Utet* ***Lebar***. She was overweight as a child, but now she has slimmed down and does not like the add-on appellation.

The second issue is the social transformation associated with the establishment of traditional nicknames. The symbolic interactionism perspective indicates that bearers have sentiments (Archer, 2019; Borrelli, 2020; Ibrahim, 2022; Moore et al., 2020; Shih & Rudin, 2020). Some individuals acquiesce and embrace it as an identity due to coercion and dismiss add-on appellations (Dianitami et al., 2023). Figure 2 illustrates a trend in which add-on appellations started to be discarded after the 2010s. The interview results indicate that children born in that year or later have parents who were assumed to be proprietors of *Ucok* and *Utet*, with the add-on appellations. Parents prefer that their children do not share the same nicknames, leading to societal prejudice. For instance, *Ucok* ***Nakal*** (cannot stay still but keeps moving messily), *Ucok* ***Katak*** (likely to sit like a frog), and *Utet* ***Layap*** (very thin body resembling a flat board) are those who wish to prevent their children from undergoing similar experiences. Because of his kinesthetic tendencies, *Ucok* ***Nakal*** was frequently assumed to cause disruptions at school. *Ucok* ***Katak*** and *Utet* ***Layap*** frequently experience insecurity because of the associated societal perceptions caused by the appellations. Although they accept the add-on appellations attached to them, they do not wish for their children to undergo the same experience. They exemplify individuals who negotiate social conventions (Kasanova et al., 2024; Khetoa & Mokala, 2022) by preparing names for their newborns to avoid being called *Ucok* or *Utet* at birth.

However, the loss of traditional nicknames like *Ucok* and *Utet* in use after the 2010s is hurting local culture. These symbols are used to help people feel connected and strengthen their community (Hariyanto et al., 2023; Khetoa & Mokala, 2022). Furthermore, it is the picture of fulfilling responsibility as community members regarding what they should do in their belief toward newborns (Matfunjwa et al., 2024). However, the functions of traditional nicknames have changed in social interactions. Those attached to those nicknames feel insecure and uncomfortable with the add-on appellations (Yusuf & Putrie, 2022) referring to certain features of their appearances, behaviors, occupations, habits, and birth orders. The need for naming practices that agree with the trends is also fostering the decline in the use of nicknames (Tur, 2023). Without objection, people must find a balance between moving forward and keeping the tradition alive. Traditions should matter to them while they allow changes in their lives.

The essence of installing the traditional nicknames, *Ucok* and *Utet*, in the Mandailing community, especially in Rokan Hulu, has changed. This prodigy describes a transformation in social dynamics. Naming practice means giving labels to newborns. Yet, people today understand that giving names is not merely attaching labels regarding genders or other specific marks (Persulessy et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2021). Names are identifying tools (Tur, 2023). They play an essential role in how people perceive their social status or how people feel about these names, which can vary. Some may dislike them, some may just accept them, and others may see them in a better light. This shows that names carry considerable social weight that is influenced by how people interact and how values shift over time. Fortunately, the community shares a space for negotiation regarding shared identities, and no firm rules exist regarding refusal to perform the tradition in the community. The negotiation space provided people in the community with the opportunity to mingle with the world outside their community. However, different rules may apply to other traditions. People must respect them.

For further research, it will be crucial to investigate thoroughly the motivations affecting the decline in the use of *Ucok* and *Utet* from cultural, social, and linguistic viewpoints. Longitudinal studies on the younger generation can elucidate how this cohort determines their identity in the context of evolving cultural values. Comparative studies with other groups that have similar traditions can also provide us with much information about how cultural symbols change over time and how they affect our sense of identity as a group in a globalized world. This approach facilitates the profound comprehension necessary to sustain the equilibrium between modernization and the conservation of local culture.

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