

Illocutionary Force in Indonesian Forest Girl Marriage Proposal Rituals and Its Contribution to Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

By highlighting the significance of language as a channel that connects people, places, and things, illocutionary Force promotes linguistic variety and intercultural pragmatics. There is a specific function for every kind of expression. This study aims to examine the various forms and values of illocutionary Force found in the 'forest girl' marriage proposal rite in Manggarai, eastern Indonesia. This study employs a phenomenological approach, utilizing a descriptive-qualitative method, conducted from July to November 2025 in the Manggarai Regency, involving 30 key informants selected through a purposive sampling technique. Those 30 key informants (cultural leaders and practitioners) and six representatives from five sub-dialects, and the informants' criteria are Native speakers and cultural practitioners, who are familiar with the *Roko Molas Poco* rite and its illocutionary impact variations in the cultural performance. Data were gathered through cameras, recordings, interviews, and field observations, and were then meticulously processed in three distinct phases: reduction, display, and conclusions. The results reveal three distinct illocutionary forces expressed in the marriage proposal rite of the 'forest girl', namely assertive, directive, and expressive illocutionary forces. In addition, three values in illocutionary forces are used within the ritual, namely religious, symbolic, and social. Language and cultural instructors are expected to emphasize the notion that language serves as the fundamental vehicle for the preservation of cultural, environmental (including forest and spring) values, as well as religious values. Each principle of an illocutionary force fulfils a distinct yet interrelated social function and ritual of significance. This research supports the reconstruction of cultural values, community ethics, ecological sustainability, and social frameworks within indigenous communities, fostering intercultural pragmatics.

Introduction

Humans articulate their thoughts using language in the form of illocutionary speech, with language developing distinctively within the cultural frameworks of each tribe. This idea is particularly significant in the Indonesian context, which showcases the rich tapestry of oral traditions among its multiple ethnic communities. Language serves a multifaceted role; it transcends being a mere tool for communication between individuals, functioning instead as a means of preserving traditions, governing social relations, and validating social norms (Dabbagh & Keshavarz, 2025; Hosseini, 2022). The marriage ceremony of the *Molas Poco* [forest girl] within the Manggarai tribe, which is rich in social, philosophical, and spiritual significance, exemplifies the intrinsic connection between language in ritual discourse and the foundational aspects of their Culture. The multifaceted nature of language highlights the significance of intercultural pragmatics. Pragmatics underscores the construction of meaning in linguistic expression as shaped by societal context, standard values, and cultural insights (Wierzbicka, 1991).

Investigations into the relationship between language and the various cultural rituals within spoken-word communities globally have been conducted; however, there remains a lack of focused inquiry into the types and values of Illocutionary Force in the proposal rites of the *Molas Poco* 'forest girls' within particular cultural groups in Indonesia. Take, for instance, the studies conducted by Dewi et al. (2024) and Kiklewicz (2022), which focus solely on the ceremonial speech that occurs within the context of a

wedding. In the present scenario, the Illocutionary Force is conveyed through the choice of words used, including expressions of appreciation, regret, gratitude, and welcome. The dynamics between the speaker and the audience enhance the speech during this ritual, thereby fostering a marriage rite that is more enjoyable, amicable, empathetic, and respectful accordingly. Abdel-Raheem (2023) and Rota (2022) analysed the use of illocutionary Force in marriage rites, with particular emphasis on the proposal stage.

A review of the various Illocutionary forces found in the traditional rituals of the Manggarai community has been conducted by Niman (2022) and Sunarti (2023). Nonetheless, comparable to other academics, it has yet to focus on the forms and values of Illocutionary Force in the 'forest girl' associated with the building of customary dwellings. Niman (2022) and Sunarti (2023) provided a narrative focused solely on the ritual significance and the appropriate materials involved in the cultural rituals. Daar (2023) and Huan et al. (2024) further explored the traditional customs of the Manggarai people through comprehensive investigations. They contend that the importance of Illocutionary Force in diverse rituals within this community includes supernatural elements, spiritual significance, happiness with life, protection, hopefulness, successful completion, unity, and aesthetic value.

Over the past five years, numerous scholars have conducted research investigations on the 'Forest Girl's proposal' ritual [*Roko Molas Poco*] from various perspectives. First, a study published by Dominggus and Pandor (2022) highlights the parallels and significance of the environmental and humanistic dimensions of the *Roko Molas Poco* rite in relation to the worldwide solidarity. Furthermore, an investigation was performed by Denar et al. (2021), who elucidated the way in which the spiritual significance of the *Roko Molas Poco* rite underpins the Manggarai community's conception of traditional building houses. Third, a study conducted by Naingalis et al. (2025) demonstrated that the *Roko Molas Poco* ritual represents one of the approaches employed by the Manggarai people to conserve the forest ecosystem. Fourth, the analysis conducted by Letsoin et al. (2024) revealed that the fundamental tenets of the male-dominated marital scheme are intrinsically embedded within the *Roko Molas Poco* ritual, as understood from a Manggarai cultural perspective. Nevertheless, the four studies conducted over the last five years failed to address matters pertinent to this current research.

The distinctions from earlier studies further underscore the vacuum that this current research seeks to address. The present study aims to offer a distinct perspective to the community at large regarding the significance of analysing Illocutionary force in the context of 'forest girl' marriage proposal rituals. It underscores the necessity of comprehending the meanings, functions, and values of Illocutionary Force as a guiding tool to connect human beings, cultural ecosystems, and mutually beneficial belief systems, thereby enhancing insights into intercultural pragmatics.

The researchers highlight key distinctions in the analysis of Illocutionary Force within the ritual practices of the Manggarai community, focusing on the question: What are the various types and functions of Illocutionary Force found within the *Roko Molas Poco* ritual that contribute to the enhancement of intercultural pragmatics?

Literature Review

Illocutionary Force in the Intercultural Pragmatics

This research employs a linguistic-cultural scheme as its analytical vantage point. The linguistic-cultural hypothesis proposes a causal relationship between language and human cognitive processes, suggesting that the human brain participates in a variety of cultural routines (Coetzee et al., 2023; Ferretti, 2023). The primary focus of cultural linguistics is to examine language use within social and broader cultural contexts, as well as the role of language in shaping and maintaining specific cultural practices, manners, and socio-cultural structures within society (Nardiati et al., 2023; Tran & Nguyen, 2023).

The research's theoretical structure is fundamentally grounded in intercultural pragmatics, as posited by the researchers involved. The reason for choosing this theoretical basis aligns with the fundamental concept of intercultural pragmatics, which involves interpreting speech within various social and cultural contexts (Khanapornvorakarn & Gadavani, 2022; Moeschler, 2021). In reality, speakers from different cultural backgrounds can lead to misunderstandings or inconsistencies in interpreting the meaning of certain cultural ritual utterances (Irshad & Yousaf, 2024). Intercultural pragmatics exists to address this problem, ensuring that intercultural communication does not become frozen in certain cultural ritual practices. Based on this argument, Intercultural Pragmatics emphasizes three essential components: pragmatics (language use or production of illocutionary speech varieties), Culture (producing values, norms, and social regulations), and Interaction (meaning negotiation, utterances, misconceptions, and accommodation or tolerance) (Kecskes, 2018). The diagram that follows demonstrates how the three are mutually dependent on one another to function.

Through an understanding of the complicated connection between language and Culture, an intercultural pragmatic approach can enhance linguistic theory while preserving important indigenous cultures and traditions. Indigenous cultures encompass a diverse array of values, norms, ceremonies, and moral frameworks that guide the behaviors of the communities that adhere to these beliefs (Varghese & Crawford, 2021; Yeh et al., 2021). In pragmatic analyses, local Culture provides a unique interpretive lens for understanding illocutionary Force. The perspectives of a particular indigenous culture greatly impact the concepts of politeness, forms of address, and the employment of native linguistic idioms. Cultural pragmatics emphasises that meaning is intricately connected to the context in which a society understands itself and its environment (Rahardi et al., 2023). This premise aligns with the fundamental principles of pragmatics, as defined by Levinson (1987), as cited by Dewi et al. (2024) and Kiklewicz (2022). They argue that pragmatics focuses on the examination of meaning as expressed and recognized within a given context.

Illocutionary forces play a vital role in cultural dialogues, allowing speakers to grasp the motives of their conversational partners with clarity. Illocutionary Force refers to the process of making an affirmation, suggesting that the act of uttering a statement can be understood as executing it (Trotzke & Reimer,

2023). A similar view was affirmed by Kravchenko et al. (2022), who elucidated that illocutionary Force constitutes the essential elements of communication, through which individuals utilise language to issue warnings, extend warm welcomes, seek information, convey messages, or affirm statements. This idea suggests that when a person articulates a statement, they concurrently participate in an action, allowing listeners to extract meaning from the unfolding events. Besides, Hopkinson (2021) and Trotzke and Reimer (2023) asserted that illocutionary Force can manifest in both verbal and written forms. The concept of illocutionary Force was explored in research by Austin (1962), who found that specific sentences not only describe states of affairs but also perform actions. Furthermore, Austin (1962), as previously noted by Abdel-Raheem (2023), has been asserted that illocutionary Force can be classified into three distinct categories: locutionary acts represent the true meaning of words, illocutionary Force reflects the speaker's intention, and perlocutionary acts demonstrate their effect on those who are listening.

Austin, as cited by Abdel-Raheem (2023) and Al-Ghazo (2024), classifies illocutionary Force into three distinct categories. Locution refers to the act of articulating thoughts or ideas through the use of familiar language. Illocution pertains to the speaker's intention that underlies the utterance, aiming to elicit a particular response. Perlocution denotes the influence that words exert on the listener, encompassing the modification of their thoughts or behaviours. Comparably, Searle (1979) categorizes illocutionary forces into five distinct types, each reflecting the intent and function inherent in the utterance. Representatives, which obligate the speaker to the veracity of the argument articulated. Illustrations encompass articulating, conveying, or notifying. Directives are actions intended to prompt the other party to undertake a specific task. Instances encompass the acts of ordering, requesting, pleading, or advising. Commissive denotes a declaration of intent or obligation to undertake an action at a future time. Expressive, referring to actions that disclose the speaker's psychological states. Instances encompass expressions of gratitude, apologies, commendations, grievances, or threats. Declaratives serve as actions intended to alter the existing circumstances, thereby facilitating the emergence of something novel through verbal expression. Instances encompass the act of forbidding or instructing.

'Forest Girl' Marriage Proposal Rituals

A diverse array of illocutionary utterances was identified within the ritual of proposing to a 'forest girl' [*Roko Molas Poco*] in the Manggarai, Indonesia (Denar et al., 2021). *Roko Molas Poco* consists of three distinct words: *Roko* distinctly denotes the act of offering, inviting, requesting permission, or possessing. *Molas* represents a charming young maiden, an elegant and unblemished tree, while *Poco* refers to a woodland, elevation, or peak. Consequently, it could be understood straightforwardly as obtaining timber from the forest. From an illocutionary perspective, it is interpreted as making a proposal to or entering into a union with a forest girl. Furthermore, the chosen forest wood is distinguished by its linearity, robustness, resistance to termites, and resilience against breakdown (*Haju Worok*, an indigenous term for it). The selection of this particular wood type is intricately connected to the local language metaphor: *worok éta golo, paténg wa waé* [never consumed by termite infestation, resistant to porosity, and impervious to water].

The spoken word of personification is interpreted as proposing, taking, marrying, and bringing a girl from the forest. The term "girl" signifies a woman of virtue, embodying purity and sanctity, which are of considerable importance in establishing a customary household that rests on a solid material base and sincere, comprehensive, and revered desires. The concept of "woman" embodies the essence of protection and tranquillity, serving as a beacon of safety, integrity, and harmonious coexistence. It signifies a unifying force within communities and stands as a resolute advocate towards inequality (Dominggus & Pandor, 2022; Letsoin et al., 2024).

The representatives for the 'forest girl' [*Molas Poco*] are village delegations arranged by a traditional figure, comprising two or three individuals who are characterized by their integrity, reliability, and marital status, whether married or unmarried. The team informs the traditional figure of *Molas Poco* of its exact location, prompting them to prepare palm wine, village chicken eggs, and an axe for use while seeking the blessings of their ancestors at the *Compang* [hometown monument]. The esteemed elders and their cohort discreetly journey to the exact location of *Molas Poco*'s inception, departing unnoticed by the other villagers. Upon entering the forest, the team engages in a *Molas Poco* ritual, which fundamentally seeks the favour of the forest's guardian. Upon the completion of the ritual, the cutting instrument is attached to a tree (*Molas Poco*) at a height of one meter from the base of the tree. The cutting instrument remains unattended for three days.

On the third morning, the group, accompanied by residents' delegates, reconvened at the site to conduct a ritual to solicit the forest's guardian's favour. The first table of the research data findings presents the illocutionary phrases associated with this purification ceremony. Following this ceremonial act, the timber was severed and transported on a stretcher. The selected guides were designated to embody the various sub-ethnic groups and clans within the village, adorned in white garments, traditional brooms or hats, *songket* fabric, and scarves, as illustrated in Fig. 1 below. The endeavour of bringing the 'forest girl' [*Molas Poco*] was undertaken amidst the melodic resonance of customary music, as the journey progressed from the forest to the village yard. The *Molas Poco* was displayed around the town's monument prior to its placement in front of the town yard, which subsequently evolved into *Siri Bongkok* (the primary supporting element) of the newly constructed customary dwelling.

Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative phenomenological approach. This study articulates natural phenomena through carefully chosen words, phrases, and sentences to facilitate a complete comprehension (Bungin, 2005). The research period spanned five months, from July to November 2025, and was conducted in Manggarai Regency, Indonesia. It involved 30 key informants, comprising cultural leaders and practitioners, as well as five representatives from six distinct sub-dialects. The researchers intentionally selected 30 pivotal respondents who met specific criteria, including proficiency in the native language and engagement in cultural practices, possessing a deep understanding of the rituals and the nuances of Illocutionary Force during the *Roko Molas Poco* ritual. This investigation into the ritual employed digital recordings of the ritual as its primary data source. The transcripts were verified with

thirty pivotal respondents after the recordings were completed. This validation aimed to capture precise words and sentences. Following the interviews with the respondents, the gathered data underwent meticulous verification and transcription. Alongside conducting interviews, the researchers meticulously observed the ceremony across six Manggarai sub-dialects to deepen their understanding of the linguistic and ritualistic processes involved. The analysis of data adhered to the three-stage framework proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994). The first stage, data reduction, involves selecting what to analyze based on the specific requirements, relevance, and goals of the research. The second stage, presenting data, encompasses a methodical arrangement of information, facilitating interpretation and analysis through the use of tables, diagrams, and narrations. The final stage, formulating conclusions, entails extracting meaning from the reduced and provided data, thereby reinforcing the preliminary conclusions.

Ethics Statement

This study followed the ethical criteria for research involving human participants. Before data collection began, all participants were told about the aim of the study, the methods involved, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All participants provided written informed consent before to their participation. The researchers protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants by eliminating all personally identifiable information from the data and providing findings in aggregated format. The study included no physical, psychological, or social risks beyond those encountered in normal life. The authors state that the study was conducted with consideration for local cultural values and customs, and that all procedures followed applicable institutional of Research and Community Service of the Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, that is Roadmap and Guideline of Doing Research and Community Service for the Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, 2024–2027.

Approval

This study was approved by the Research and Community Service Board of the Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng in accordance with the guidelines and regulations set forth by the Guideline of Doing Research and Community Service for the Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, 2024–2027. The protocol number for this approval is 248/USP/L02/KPT/12/2025.

Results

This study explores two distinct research questions: the types and value of Illocutionary force within the ‘forest girl’ marriage proposal ritual, and how they enhance intercultural pragmatic knowledge rooted in the local culture of the Manggarai tribe. Table 1 below presents the findings about these two distinct research questions.

Table 1
Illocutionary Force Data

Ritual Utterances	Illocutionary Types	Function
<i>Iyo..., [Yes....]</i>	Expressive	Spiritual value.
<i>Ho'o kin lami manuk bakok, ai kudut di'a dengé lité mori ata jari agu dédék, tana wa agu awang éta, neggito kolé sanggén ca ko ca...ata mangadn oné lino ka'eng dami mendim, [We have prepared a white rooster, listen to us, oh Lord, creator of the universe and everything in this realm where we, your devoted servants live,]</i>	Directives	
<i>Céwén kéta mori, ata ngaran haju ho'o, kudut betuan latangt te mbaru gendang dami laing, [the inhabitants of this forest, as the stewards of these trees, safeguarding their usefulness for our customary dwelling,]</i>	Representatives/assertive	Spiritual value.
<i>Ai oné telu lami, poli tombo agu tura kamping ité [We pleaded with you three days ago,]</i>	Representatives/assertive	Social value.
<i>Dasor oné haju ho'o koé, kudut jadi iné laing latangt te gendang dami mendim. [This wooden tree is anticipated to function as the principal wooden pole, protector, and vital support for our village's traditional dwelling.]</i>	Directives	
<i>Be lé mai hitun kolé mori, [Furthermore, esteemed creator, proprietor of the woodland,]</i>	Directives	Spiritual value.
<i>Ai ho'o kolé kami manga ranga neka weki, étan ngaso wan cucu, mendi koé dité, [All of your servants are assembled here,]</i>	Representatives/assertive	
<i>Kudut wanjong lako lami ga, bantang ta, kudut rokon lami ngasangn molas poco, [to seek authorization to obtain and employ the 'forest girl' as the principal foundation for our customary house,]</i>	Directives	Social value.
<i>Landing le hituy mori, [Consequently, indeed, esteemed sir, the owners of the woodland,]</i>	Representatives/assertive	Spiritual value.
<i>Oné lalong bakok ho'oy lami le mendi dité, tegi agu gesar kamping ité, [By means of this white rooster, we sought consent to utilize this tree as the principal wooden support for our traditional dwelling,]</i>	Directives	
<i>Porong, néka koé manga ronggo do'ongn agu watang lamba ko pangga oné salang lite, [It is anticipated that the process of undertaking it will proceed without any hindrances or difficulties,]</i>	Directives	Social value.
<i>Porong kali ga, wancing koé lité nggaring, wéang lité géra, kudut dumpus sanggéd nuk dami, ita sanggéd niakm, [thus, the realization of our hopes and desires may manifest,]</i>	Directives	
<i>Iyo..., mori, doposg dami tombo, sanggésd dami taé, [In truth, the esteemed protector of the woodland realm, that embodies our aspirations and desires,]</i>	Expressive	Spiritual value.
	Directives	

Ritual Utterances	Illocutionary Types	Function
<i>porong pung kéta no'o maig gami sampai oné natas baté labarm</i> [It is to be hoped that the journey from this location to the hometown park will commence,] <i>Porong, wancing koé nggaring, wéang koé géra k dengkir koé tain, amen,</i> [We earnestly wish that this forest girl, for whom we plead, will be safeguarded from the process of being taken, thereby establishing her as the central wooden pillar, a source of protection and sustenance for us eternally, amen.]	Directives	Social value.

Discussion

Types of Illocutionary Force

The classification proposed by John Searle in 1979, which encompasses representatives/assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, serves as a framework for examining the illocutionary force inherent in this Ritual. Each illocutionary force exemplifies the manner in which speakers of a culture engage in that particular Ritual. Examining these illocutionary forces reveals that language transcends mere interaction; it serves as a vehicle for cultural progress and underscores the deeper significance of ceremonial discourse. Following an elucidation of the various types and functions of illocutionary forces present in the Ritual.

Representatives serve as an illocutionary force that articulates a proposition which the speaker asserts to be true. An assertive illocutionary force consists of declarations that express the speaker's convictions about the external world. An alternative perspective on assertive illocutionary force involves utterances that connect the speaker to the veracity of the propositions expressed (Dewi et al., 2024; Kholid et al., 2024). The speaker regards the declaration conveyed by the assertive illocutionary force as a truth; it can further be posited that this declaration binds the speaker to the veracity articulated (Peneva, 2023; Seeliger & Repp, 2023). Dependable, an illocutionary force of stating is an oral communication that clarifies or defines a concept for the listener. Within the context of the Ritual, one may refer to a specific part of language as outlined in Table 1. The researchers acquired samples of speech information such as "*ai oné telu lami, poli tombo agu tura kamping ité* [We pleaded with you three days ago,]". This discourse encapsulates the elder's endeavor to elucidate and persuade the villagers that the proprietor of the forest has recognized and sanctioned the initiative to employ the 'forest girl' as the principal sustaining wooden pole for their customary dwelling. The information concerning other assertive illocutionary phrases in the study's results table exhibits coherence; notably, the traditional elder articulated, reported, informed, and asserted what he considered to be true, prompting every villager to acknowledge and accept that the 'forest girl' in the Ritual represented the bedrock of human existence and the basis of harmony for the whole community.

This analysis elucidates the compelling illocutionary force inherent in Manggarai rites, serving as a framework for establishing cultural, social, and spiritual legitimacy. Assertive discourse conveys information, documents, and affirms the truths acknowledged by the conventional community of a village. The Manggarai traditional community articulates an ecological ban: *néka poka puar, rantang meti waé, néka tapa satar, jaga mata kaka* [illegal forestry is forbidden to ensure the sustainability of rivers and lakes and the preservation of agricultural land]. This definitive statement underscores the notion that the forest represents an ancestral legacy or that the proposed tree embodies a revered forest maiden, thereby reinforcing the sacred significance of the forest within the context of traditional cosmology. Furthermore, the assertive illocutionary force cultivates a sense of harmony between humanity and the natural world, encompassing woodlands and waters. The discourse surrounding prohibition emphasises the need to safeguard the water supply by preventing illegal logging. This perspective, embodied in the notion of the 'forest girl' [*Molas Poco*], symbolises an inheritance, suggesting that the removal of trees is not an act of destruction but rather a means to preserve the community's vitality. It underscores the imperative for human endeavours to harmonise with the demands of the natural world.

Expressive speech acts are a category of speech acts within the theory of pragmatics that convey the speaker's feelings or opinions regarding a specific circumstance, event, or situation. In such speech acts, the speaker conveys information and expresses emotions, utilizing tone of voice and nonverbal expressions (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Ogiermann & Bella, 2021). The researchers applied an instance from the results report: "*Iyo...*, *Mori*," which means "Yes..., the keeper of the woodland." The customary parents want to express how they have felt by speaking in a lengthy, begging sound (*Iyo...*, [yes...]) that is recognised as an extremely profound desire and an impression of profound reverence for the soul of the resident of the forest [*Mori agu Ngaran*] to let them propose to their 'forest girl' and make her the main strong wooden pole of the newly built cultural house. In the wedding of the "forest girl," expressing illocutionary acts is important for showing psychological and religious aspects. Utterances like "*Iyo...*" and "*Mori*," which mean "Yes..." and "Lord of the Forest," not only convey information but also reveal how people of indigenous descent feel about various things, such as gratitude, respect, prayer, or happiness. For example, saying "*Iyo..., Mori, dopos dami tombo, sanggés dami taé*" to show respect and gratitude for ancestors or to honour the protective spirits of the forest emphasises that asking a forest girl to marry you is a holy meeting between people, ancestral relatives or guardian beings of the forest, and the earth itself. Hence, using illocutionary aims to demonstrate that what people do is not inherently bad, but rather is done with respect and love for the woodland, which forms the foundation of humans' existence (Jaya et al., 2025; Radovanović, 2023).

Expressive speech enables people in society to connect on a deeper, emotional level. When the woods girl approves the proposal, the joy that comes from it creates a sense of togetherness that strengthens the feeling of solidarity. The primary goal of the expressive illocutionary speech act in the 'forest girl' proposal ritual is to convey spiritual insight, conservation ethics, and psychological compassion as the foundational elements for a new ancestral dwelling. This way, the house will be more than just a physical symbol; it will also be a place where individuals, the environment, and ancestral spirits can coexist in peaceful harmony.

A commissive speech act is a type of speech act that shows that the person speaking has to do something in the future. The speaker promises, commits, or affirms that they will do something (Kholid et al., 2024; Kravchenko et al., 2022). After considering empirical data and listening to key informants, it was decided that commissive speech actions should not be used in the forest girl's proposal ceremony, as they are symbolic and collaborative in nature, and do not convey an individual vow or commitment from the ancestral relatives. The people interviewed informed the researchers that *Ritual pertains to cultural and communal reverence and prayer, rather than individual commitment; hence, commissive speech acts, such as proposing to the "woodland girl," are not employed in such a setting.*

Declaratives are illocutionary forces that change the situation or position of an individual or thing through spoken words. Declarative illocutionary forces can bring about changes in reality, and declaratives can lead to authentic transformations through the use of language (Mohammed, 2021; Trochemowitz, 2025). The study we conducted discovered no such utterance, just like earlier speech actions that promised something. Field data and key informants indicate that the Ritual excluded declarative speech acts, as no institutionally legitimate claim could alter a situation or context. The idea of declarative speech acts backs up the reasoning previously stated. The authors questioned respondents and determined that declarative speech acts were not included in the ceremony process (the proposal of the forest girl) because of the following three reasonable premises: (1) *deciding on of the customary house's primary wooden pole is neither legal nor administratively authorised by the government;* (2) *the diversity of speech within the rite does not alter its institutionally acceptable legally binding position;* and (3) *the Ritual is characterised as spiritual and cultural, rather than legal, as acknowledged by the government legal framework.* Directive speech acts have the purpose of getting someone to act on what they have already done or want to do. This speech act is all about the person who is listening and what the speaker wants them to do in response. This speech act often uses verbs like "order," "request," and "suggest." (Alekseev, 2024; Nagy, 2022). Directive speech acts data: *"Kudut wanjong lako lami ga, bantang ta, kudut rokon lami molas poco,* [to be kind permission for us to remove and take the 'forest girl' as the main wooden pole of our customary residence] means that the person we are talking to or the sub-ethnic representative team from the village should respond quickly and appropriately.

In the marriage proposal rite for a "forest girl," directive Illocutionary force is crucial for getting people to work together and maintaining the ritual process in its structure. Directive speech instructs the other person on what to do. It is a way to ask for blessings from ancestral relatives, spirits that protect the forest, and the 'forest girl', who is being recommended to. People are aware of what is possible and depend on the blessings of supernatural beings, as evidenced by practices such as asking for permission and forgiveness before cutting down a tree. These instructions are designed to ensure that the procession adheres to the rules that have been passed down through several generations within an ethnic group. Directive speech takes the form of group invitations, such as asking everyone in the community to worship together, which fosters communal faith in a holy space. In addition, rules are used to control actions that can damage the purity of the rite. The prohibition on cutting down trees prior to the end of prayer illustrates a method for governing human behaviour to ensure compliance with

established customs. The main purpose of directive speech acts in the forest maiden's proposal ritual is to direct, organise, and control the villagers' actions as a cohesive unit. This concept ensures that the entire procession proceeds in a respectful and orderly manner, adhering to traditional rules that maintain peace among people, the environment (the forest), and ancestral beings.

Illocutionary Force Function on Rituals

Furthermore, this ritual encompasses three categories of illocutionary act functions: spiritual, symbolic, and social. These three functions were obtained after researchers triangulated data with 30 key informants in the research locus. The diversity of ceremonial illocutionary speech acts is rooted in a spiritual orientation, as their meaning encompasses gratitude, admiration, and belief (Nardiati et al., 2023; Nursugiharti et al., 2024). This spiritual function aligns with the characteristics of expressive illocutionary speech acts that convey religious values, as each component of these rituals expresses joy and optimism.

The spiritual function of the illocutionary utterance in this ritual (the proposal of the forest girl) is to reconnect humans with the universe and to ask for protection, blessings, and harmony for the inhabitants of the traditional house and all the villagers. This ritual is not just a regular ceremony; it holds sacred meaning, reflecting the Manggarai people's ideology regarding their belief system and the forest. The religious value of the forest girl's proposal ritual serves as a space for reflection on how indigenous communities display the perspective of the interdependence of humans, ancestral beings, ancestors, and the Almighty. Various illocutionary utterances in this ritual indicate requests for permission and blessings from the guardian spirits of the forest, so that the construction of the traditional house runs smoothly, successfully, and brings blessings to all village residents. The utterances of "*Landing le hitu mori, oné lalong bakok ho'o lami le mendi dité, tegi agu gesar kamping ité*", [we beg you, Lord of the forest, through this white rooster, to let adopt this tree in question as the principal wooden pole of our ancestral building] as evidence of how the power of this illocutionary speech acts to strengthen the spiritual dimension of the village residents.

The symbolism of the 'forest girl' suggests that the sustainability of the forest provides purity, fertility, peace, and spiritual values for humanity. The primary role of religious values in this rite is to maintain cosmological harmony, validate the sacred legitimacy of cultural practices, and foster an understanding that all human endeavors must be aligned with the spiritual principles and traditional norms applicable to a particular ethnic group. The results of this study confirm that the 'forest girl' proposal ritual is an inseparable reflection of the cultural practices and religious dimensions of a particular ethnic group, which follows the basic premise that religion, customs, and forests are interdependent components in promoting harmony in human life. The symbolic role of speech in a ritual serves as a means of incorporating various cultural and spiritual values. This view reinforces the proposition that speech functions not primarily as a means of verbal communication but also as a non-verbal means that serves as a mechanism for constructing cultural and spiritual values for an ethnic group or community. The symbolic function in this ritual has implications for cultural, spiritual, and social practices that are

manifested through words, images, and speech structures that adhere to the rules and principles of the local language's syntax and phonology (García, 2020; Sitoto et al., 2022).

Illocutionary force has a social function that depends on the intent and purpose of the speech act itself (Jem et al., 2024; Ryndina, 2021). Illocutionary speech acts do not perform spontaneously or suddenly appear; rather, these speech acts transpire in an event with the intention and purpose of having an impact on the interlocutors. The variety of utterances in the *Roko Molas Poco* ritual plays a role in its social function. The findings of data strengthen this proposition through the utterance "*Iyo..., Mori, dopos dami tombo, sanggés dami taé, dasor pung kéta no'o maig gami sampai oné natas baté labar, wancing koé nggaring, wéang koé géraak dengkir koé tain, amin*", [Indeed, the guardian spirit of the forest, that is our request and hope; we believe that from this place to the village yard, the 'forest girl' we propose will be a solid, strong foundation, protector, and source of our life, forever, amen]. The meaning of this utterance is to encourage the villagers to live in harmony, peace, prosperity, and be blessed with blessings.

The social function of speech production in the proposal of the 'forest girl' is to provide new energy to empower, build, strengthen, and solidify social bonds within the village community. In this context, speech serves not only as a means of communication but also as a social connection, an indicator of societal hierarchy, and a means to strengthen and maintain the collective values of the villagers, thereby maintaining a balance in life. This ritual is consistently carried out collaboratively, involving traditional elders, community leaders, and residents, thereby creating an atmosphere of solidarity that strengthens the community's social fabric.

The wedding ceremony teaches people how to be polite, respectful, and ask for permission, as well as make requests. These things are like rules for how people should act in a customary society. This ritual also clarifies who is responsible for specific tasks, such as leading traditional prayers, making sacrifices, or assisting with technical arrangements. This idea creates a sense of shared responsibility. It also has social value, as it teaches younger generations about the importance of following laws, respecting their ancestors, the environment (the forest), and working together to protect their cultural legacy. The 'forest girl' wedding is not only sacred, but it also serves as a way for the Manggarai community to stay connected, demonstrate how to live by an agreed-upon set of ethics, and preserve their traditions.

Previous research results reported that illocutionary force in intercultural pragmatics substantially contributes to supporting the production of meaningful utterances in particular cultural performances (Daar, 2023; Jem et al., 2024). The results of their study confirmed that illocutionary force in intercultural pragmatics serves as a bridge for negotiating meaning, thereby avoiding ambiguity in the interpretation of meaning. The similarities between the results of the study by Daar (2023) and Jem et al. (2024) and this study focus on illocutionary force, which is inherently linked to particular socio-cultural settings, as each culture possesses distinct norms, values, and conventions of social meaning. Negotiating differences in interpretation can be overcome by using appropriate and correct illocutionary force by both the speaker and his/her interlocutor. What distinguishes this study's insights from those of earlier studies? This study presents an alternative novelty in the form of expressing illocutionary force in

intercultural pragmatics, specifically in the marriage ritual of the 'forest girl', which occurs during the process of building a traditional Manggarai house. This ritual represents a form of sacred speech act that has not been linguistically explored.

Novelty

This study enhances awareness of pragmatics by demonstrating that illocutionary force, embedded in the framework of culture, serves not only as a social action but also as a performative-cosmological action that strengthens the connection among humans, nature, ancestors, and God. This study introduces the concept of ecological ritual illocutionary acts, namely speech acts that negotiate approval, blessings, and ecological harmony through symbolic interactions with forests and spiritual entities. Furthermore, this study reveals how variations in illocutionary acts emerge through different social roles and demonstrates the transformation of illocutionary acts across generations in the context of modernization. Thus, this study contributes to the documentation and analysis of the linguistic practices of an uncommon ritual, thereby broadening the scope of intercultural pragmatics into the previously overlooked realm of ritual ecology. This novelty aligns with the Intercultural Pragmatics proposed by Kecskes (2018), which emphasizes three important interconnected components: pragmatics, culture, and interaction, thereby resolving misunderstandings. Therefore, further study is required to explore the use and value of Illocutionary force within the diverse Traditional Rites of Indonesian society; this would be a substantial contribution to Indonesian linguistics.

Conclusion

The illocutionary force of speech acts in local cultural rituals is interpreted as a space or platform for affirming the relationship between humans, nature, ancestors, and the creator in the Manggarai speech community. This assertion is affirmed through interpretations of the meaning, function, and value of the various illocutionary speeches encountered from key informants. Illocutionary force serves as a bridge for connecting humans, culture, nature, and religious belief. Three types of illocutionary force are expressed in the marriage proposal rite of the 'forest girl' (*Molas Poco*), as determined by the speeches used and field triangulation in the research locus, namely assertive, directive, and expressive illocutionary forces. In addition, the illocutionary force in intercultural pragmatics in the marriage ritual of the 'forest girl' in the process of building a traditional house of the Manggarai people as a form of sacred speech act that has not been linguistically explored, also reveals three essential values, namely religious, symbolic, and social, all three of which are interconnected in the frame of intercultural pragmatics.

Declarations

Consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent to publish

Consent to Participate and Consent to Publish were obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Author Contribution

Every researcher has contributed to every aspect of this study, including the background, theoretical framework, research design, instrument construction and distribution, data collecting and analysis, discussion, dissemination of research findings, and relevant references.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to the culturally sensitive nature of the ritual materials and community-restricted knowledge but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Figures



Figure 1

The interrelation of pragmatics, Culture, and Interaction



Figure 2

Roko Molas Poco Rite in Manggarai, Source: Researchers' document

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