



Jurnal Sastra Indonesia

<https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/jsi>



Ritual Language in Osing Cultural Ceremonies: A Sociolinguistic Study of Speech Genre in Seblang Ritual in Olehsari

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Article Info

Article History

Submitted February 19, 2026

Accepted April 19, 2026

Publish April 30, 2026

Keyword

ritual language, Osing culture, sociolinguistics, speech genre, ethnography of communication

Abstract

Representations of women in using qualitative methods and an ethnographic communication approach, this study aims to explain the form, function, and context of ritual language in the seblang ceremony in the Osing community in Olehsari. Data were analyzed using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model after being collected through documentation, observation, and interviews. According to the research findings, ritual language has archaic, symbolic, and formal characteristics and also serves to communicate spiritually, strengthen cultural values, and preserve traditions. In addition, the circumstances of speech, the speakers, and cultural norms influence its meaning. According to the research results, the seblang ritual language represents the living cultural identity of the Osing community.

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DOI 10.15294/jsi.v15i1.41311

P ISSN: 2252-6315 E-ISSN: 2685-9599

INTRODUCTION

Ritual language is an important part of an intangible cultural heritage that reflects a community's identity, values, and beliefs. However, due to the pace of modernization and reduced intergenerational inheritance, its continued existence is increasingly threatened. Ritual language is considered in linguistic anthropology as two things: a means of communication and representation of cultural practices, and a system of knowledge of society (Wedasuwari, 2020). This condition is also seen in the Osing people in Banyuwangi, who have many traditions, including the use of ritual language in various traditional ceremonies such as Seblang. The unique, symbolic, and hereditary Osing ritual language is currently in danger of extinction due to a lack of documentation and diminished active speakers (Lailiyah et al., 2025). Therefore, research and preservation are needed to ensure this cultural heritage remains sustainable and can be passed on to future generations.

The Osing people are an ethnic group living in Banyuwangi. They are considered the indigenous people of the area and maintain a strong cultural tradition to this day. One of the important identities of the Osing people is the use of the Osing language as a means of daily communication (Hasibuan & Muda, 2017). In addition, it reflects the community's principles, customs, and life perspective. In addition, the Osing people have many meaningful traditions. One of them is the Seblang ritual, a sacred, traditional ceremony associated with belief in spiritual and ancestral powers. In its implementation, this ritual uses a distinctive ritual language, which makes it interesting to see how language, culture, and social practices in the Osing community relate to each other (Rosa, 2020).

Previous studies of the language and culture of the Osing people in Banyuwangi, especially those related to ritual traditions, have shown some limitations. Using an ethnolinguistic approach, the research conducted by (Risqiyah et al., 2025) focuses on how language reflects society's values and thinking. This study shows the relationship between the Osing language and cultural identity. Although this study provides a solid understanding of how language shapes identity, it does not specifically examine the use of language in rituals. Study (Rosa et al., 2020) about the Seblang ritual, on the other hand, focuses more on the symbolic meaning and stages of the ritual procession, but less on the linguistic aspects, especially the structure and function of the ritual speech used.

Other anthropolinguistic research on the healing mantras of the Osing people emphasizes the

value of local wisdom in oral traditions, but focuses only on specific types of speech (mantras), and has not looked at variations in the genre of speech in the overall ritual sequence (Aini & Ribawati, 2025). In addition, research on traditional witchcraft and healing practices shows that the use of spells is an important component of ritual; however, their examination focuses more on magical functions than on the broader linguistic aspects. Based on the review, it can be concluded that although research on the Osing people and their rituals has been quite diverse, no comprehensive study has thoroughly analyzed ritual language using a sociolinguistic approach, particularly within the framework of speech genres. As a result, this research has novelty to fill this gap.

The focus of this research is as follows: (1) How is the form and structure of ritual language in the Seblang ceremony of the Osing community in Olehsari village; (2) What is the pragmatic function and sociocultural value of the ritual language; and (3) How Osing ritual language meets the criteria as a traditional speech genre according to the ethnographic framework of Dell Hymess's communication. The objectives of this research are as follows: (1) to explain the form and structure of ritual language in the Seblang ceremony of the Osing community in Olehsari village; (2) reveal the pragmatic function and sociocultural value of the ritual language; and (3) explain that the Osing ritual language meets the criteria as a traditional speech genre according to the Dell Hymess communication ethnography framework.

This research has significant theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of sociolinguistic research, especially by advancing understanding of ritual language through a speech-genre approach that is still rarely systematically applied in the context of local culture. By examining the form, function, and meaning of speech in the Seblang ritual, this research can enrich scientific knowledge of the relationship between language, culture, and social practices and serve as a reference for researchers.

Practically, this research contributes to efforts to preserve the Osing language as part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Banyuwangi people. By documenting and analyzing ritual language, this research aims to help preserve the use of Osing, especially in rituals that are becoming endangered. This research can also be used by the Osing community, local governments, and cultural actors as a reference when designing cultural preservation programs, local education, and strengthening their cultural identity amid modernization.

In this study, the genre of speech is defined as a type of speech used in cultural rituals and characterized by specific patterns, functions, and meanings. The genre of speech in the Seblang ceremony includes prayers, mantras, and symbolic expressions, which serve as a way to communicate and preserve the cultural values and identity of the Osing people (Adha, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted over about 2 months by adjusting the schedule for the implementation of the Seblang ritual, which is held annually. The presence of researchers at the site is carried out in stages, covering the phases before, during, and after the ritual. The goal is to gain a thorough understanding of the social, cultural, and ritual language contexts throughout the entire sequence of ceremonies.

Observations were carried out through participatory observation, with the researcher playing a limited role in community activities to observe the natural use of ritual language. Observations are carried out between three and five times. In addition, to improve data validity, the observation was complemented by in-depth interviews and documentation.

In this study, triangulation of sources and techniques was used to enhance data validity. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from various informants, including traditional handlers and leaders, Seblang dancers, and the Osing community in Banyuwangi. Researchers do not rely solely on one source; they also check whether information about the use, meaning, and function of ritual language is consistent across informants. Additionally, data can be reinforced through additional documents, such as cultural archives or relevant customary records.

Nonetheless, the triangulation technique is carried out using multiple data collection methods, including documentation, interviews, and observations. To understand the context of ritual language use, the Seblang ritual was directly observed. Audio, video, or transcript recordings are used to record the actual ritual language. Interviews are used to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of ritual speech. The process is repetitive and complementary, such as comparing the results of observations with those of interviews, then reconfirming them through documentation. Therefore, the data obtained becomes more valid and can be scientifically accounted for through the application of source and technique triangulation.

The data analysis in this study refers to the interactive model proposed by Dell Hymes. This

model emphasizes that qualitative data analysis is a process that occurs simultaneously, interactively, and continuously until the data reaches saturation.

The first step is data collection, which is conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data obtained then undergoes a data reduction stage, which involves selecting, organizing, simplifying, and transforming raw data related to the research focus. Furthermore, the data are presented in a format that includes narrative descriptions, tables, and excerpts from interview transcripts, making it easier for researchers to understand patterns and relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the Osing ritual language used in traditional events, especially the Seblang ritual, has distinctive linguistic characteristics and is sacred. The language used tends to be archaic, symbolic, and formulaic, and is not used in everyday communication (Brahmandika, 2026). Ritual speech is spoken only by certain individuals, such as handlers or traditional figures, who have cultural and spiritual legitimacy within the Osing community. This confirms that the ritual language of Osing is a linguistic practice closely tied to the social, cultural, and religious contexts of its users.

Based on the results of field observations and interviews with traditional leaders, as well as spellcasters, the language used in the Seblang Olehsari Ceremony is dominated by the Osing language with archaic lexical variations (Piningit, 2022). The lexicon used shows the characteristics of ritual language, namely, it is fixed, sacred, and not used in the daily communication of the Osing people. Speech structure tends to be formulaic, in the form of repetition of sounds, phrases, and sentences that are passed down from generation to generation without significant changes (Lihaa, 2024).

Osing ritual language can be understood as a traditional speech genre when analyzed using the communication ethnographic framework proposed by Dell Hymes, especially through the SPEAKING model. In this framework, speech is categorized as a genre if it has a distinctive, repetitive pattern, function, and context of use within a community. (Saifudin, 2019). First, from the perspective of Setting and Scene, the language of the Osing ritual is used in a sacred context, as in the Seblang ritual in Banyuwangi, creating a distinct space and atmosphere from everyday communication. Second, participants include special actors, such as handlers, Seblang dancers, and indigenous peoples, each with a specific communicative role. Third, Ends points out that ritual speech serves a specific

purpose, such as seeking salvation, communicating with ancestors, or maintaining spiritual balance.

Mantras and prayers recited during ceremonies are believed to have the power to request protection, prevent disasters, and maintain balance among humans, nature, and supernatural forces. The success of a ritual is not judged based on the truth of the lexical meaning, but on the continuity and success of the ritual implementation. Therefore, the main function of ritual language is in the social and spiritual impact it creates.

In addition to its performative function, Osing ritual language also functions as a regulative and legitimative. Certain speeches outline the ritual's stages, regulate the order of events, and determine the behavior expected of participants. At the same time, the application of ritual language by traditional leaders strengthens the social structure and cultural power in the Osing community. This discovery is in line with Hymes' ethnographic theory of communication, which emphasizes the signification of speech contexts, including participants, goals, norms, and types of communication, in understanding the meaning of a communication platform (Novia, 2025).

Analysis of the Pragmatic Function and Sociocultural Value of Osing Ritual Language

The analysis of the pragmatic function and sociocultural value of the Osing ritual language is based on qualitative data collected through observation and interaction with traditional leaders during the Seblang ceremony. The ritual language is generally in the form of mantras and prayers, with a formulaic structure and archaic

vocabulary. One example of ritual speech is: "O ancestors of the past, I beg for salvation, away from bilahi and pestilence". This speech does not function to convey information, but as a means of asking for salvation for the ancestors (Syahfitri, 2023).

Pragmatically, speech is a performative act because, through its pronunciation, the speaker is considered to be performing a spiritual act. The magical-religious function is clearly visible, because speech is addressed to supernatural entities that are believed to influence social and environmental conditions (Hartanto, 2023). The success of speech is not determined by the lexical understanding of the ritual participants, but by the legitimacy of the speaker, the accuracy of the act, and the conformity with customary procedures. This shows that the pragmatic meaning of Osing ritual language is highly context-dependent.

In addition, the ritual language of Osing plays a regulative function. This can be seen in the words that mark the ritual's stages, for example: "is ayahe Seblang miiti, everyone must be silent and respectful". The speech serves to regulate the behavior of the ritual participants and marks the start of the sacred procession (Rahmawati et al., 2022). "At the same time, ritual language plays a legitimative role, because only paang or certain traditional leaders have the right to say it" (Traditional head of Olehsari, aancara, December 12, 2025). Thus, language became a tool of strengthening social and spiritual authority in the Osing community.

Table 1. Osing Ritual Speech

No.	Osing Ritual Speech Data	Context of Speech (Ritual)	Pragmatic Function	Sociocultural Values	Analytical Interpretation
1	<i>"Ya leluhur sing mbiyen, kaula nyuun slamet, adohna saka bilahi lan pageblug."</i>	The opening prayer of the Seblang ritual, spoken by the paang	Performative speech (magical-religious))	Religiosity, ancestral beliefs	Speech serves as a spiritual plea believed to bring salvation. Pragmatic meaning arises from the sacred context and legitimacy of the speaker, not from a lexical meaning alone.
2	<i>"is ayahe Seblang miiti, kabeh kudu meneng lan ngajeni."</i>	Markers of ritual procession	Regulative function	Customary compliance, social order	Speech regulates ritual participants' behavior and affirms sacred norms. Language serves as a tool of social control in customary contexts.
3	The closing speech of the ritual in the form of a	End of the ritual procession	Expressive-performative speech	Social solidarity, togetherness	Ritual language is a means of uniting communities and strengthening social cohesion across

prayer for
mutual
salvation

generations.

"Opening ritual, "Ya leluhur sing mbiyen, kaula nyuun slamet, adohna saka bilahi lan pageblug", spoken by paang as an authoritative figure in the Seblang ritual. Pragmatically, this speech is classified as a magical-religious performative speech act because it not only conveys a request, but at the same time is believed to be able to bring safety and spiritual protection to the community" (Juru Mantra Olehsari, aancara, December 12, 2025). The sociocultural values evident in this speech are religiosity and belief in ancestors as transcendental entities that continue to play a role in collective life. The meaning of speech does not solely come from its lexical structure, but also from the sacred ritual context and the social legitimacy of the speaker. Thus, the pragmatic power of this speech arises from the cultural agreement and belief system that lives in the Osing society (Hartanto, 2023).

Second speech, "wis wayahe Seblang miiti, kabeh kudu meneng lan ngajeni", serves as a sign of the start of the ritual procession. Pragmatically, this expression serves a regulatory function, shaping ritual participants' behavior to be disciplined, calm, and respectful. The sociocultural values contained in it reflect adherence to the tradition of social order, and a shared awareness of the sacredness of the Seblang ritual. In this context, language serves not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument of social control that reinforces cultural norms. The speech shows how ritual language can shape the pattern of community behavior collectively in a certain cultural space (Fitriani et al., 2025)

Prayer for mutual salvation as a closing ritual marking the completion of the entire series of seblang processions. From a pragmatic perspective, this speech is expressive because it expresses gratitude, hope, and togetherness, and is expected to have a spiritual impact on the community. The main sociocultural values are social solidarity and intergenerational community cohesion. Ritual language at this stage serves as a unifying means that strengthens the Osing cultural identity.

The Osing ritual language meets the criteria of the traditional speech genre because it has distinctive linguistic characteristics, social roles, and cultural contexts, and is preserved across generations in the life of the Osing people in Banyuangi. The traditional speech genre refers to a form of speech that is conventional, bound by customary norms, and used in certain sacred or social situations. In this context, the ritual language

of Osing, as used in Seblang, village clean, and slametan ceremonies, serves as the primary means of representing the collective cultural values of the supporting community.

First, in the context of communication, Osing's ritual language is always used in formal and sacred events. Speech is not spoken in daily communication, but only in certain acts, places, and individuals, such as paang, traditional elders, or ritual figures. This indicates that there are limitations on participants and situations, which are the main characteristics of traditional speech genres. Osing ritual speech also follows a fixed and repetitive pattern, such as the opening prayer, the plea for salvation, and the closing, thus creating a conventional language formulation.

Second, in terms of structure and form, Osing ritual language employs archaic word choices, symbolic metaphors, and religio-magical expressions that are often not taken literally. Word choices, such as references to ancestors, natural forces, and supernatural elements, reveal the performative function of language: speech not only conveys meaning but is also believed to produce certain spiritual effects. The patterns of repetition, parallelism, and speech rhythm also strengthen the aesthetic and sacred qualities, which are usually found in traditional speech genres such as mantras and traditional prayers.

Third, in terms of social and cultural functions, the Osing ritual language serves to preserve traditions and common identity. Through ritual speech, the Osing community reproduces cultural knowledge, belief systems, and harmonious relationships between humans, nature, and ancestors. Ritual language is not just a means of communication, but an instrument of customary legitimacy that strengthens the social order and tranquility of traditional figures. This function confirms that the ritual language of Osing works in a broader social realm than individual communication.

Fourth, the Osing ritual language has a transmissible, collective nature, meaning it is transmitted orally from generation to generation. This arisan process requires precision in speech, because changes are considered to reduce the sacredness of meaning. The stability of form and meaning is what makes the Osing ritual language meet the principle of continuity of the traditional speech genre.

Thus, the Osing ritual language fulfills the traditional speech genre through the uniqueness of

its context of use, its formulaic and symbolic linguistic form, its sacred socio-cultural function, and its continuous oral form. All of these elements make the ritual language of Osing an authentic representation of traditional speech practices in sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic studies.

Osing Ritual Language as a Traditional Speech Genre

Ritual language among the Osing people can be classified as a traditional story genre because it has unique characteristics that distinguish it from ordinary language. As a narrative genre, this ritual language is traditional, passed down from generation to generation, and is linked to the cultural context and beliefs of the communities that support it. Speech applied in rituals, such as mantras, prayers, and symbolic expressions, is not spontaneous, but adheres to certain patterns, structures, and formulas that already exist in tradition. (Agustin, 2025).

The structure of speech also shows a similar pattern, which is to be addressed with an ancestral call, followed by a plea for salvation, and ending with the hope that cosmic balance will be maintained (tiara Isnaeni et al., 2025). This pattern shows that the Osing ritual language is not spontaneous but is bound by customary conventions passed down from generation to generation. In addition, the ritual language of Osing can only be spoken by certain speakers, such as Seblang handlers or traditional leaders, who have social and spiritual legitimacy in the community.

This restriction of speakers is an important indicator of the traditional speech genre because it emphasizes the existence of social hierarchies and cultural authority in language practice (Laksono & Nurhayati, 2025). In terms of function, the ritual language of Osing acts as a performative speech act that is believed to be able to present real effects, such as village safety and the avoidance of the community from danger (Amaliah et al., 2026).

Thus, the ritual language of Osing not only conveys linguistic meaning but also performs symbolic and magical functions. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the Osing ritual language fulfills the traditional speech genre by being embedded in the traditional context, conventional linguistic forms, speaker restrictions, and sacred functions that cannot be separated from the belief system of the Osing people.

The Osing ritual language in the Seblang ceremony in Olehsari Village exhibits strong characteristics of a traditional speech genre, as its emergence is completely tied to the sacred context. Ritual speech cannot be separated from the space, and the act of carrying out the ceremony, where the

atmosphere created is not just a social gathering but a cultural peristia believed to have a spiritual dimension. Prayers and mantras are said only during the ritual and are not used in everyday communication. This attachment of context makes Osing's ritual language a medium that distinguishes between profane and sacred spaces, while at the same time emphasizing that language has a symbolic function that goes beyond mere linguistic meaning. In this ritual atmosphere, language is the main means to build relationships between humans, ancestors, and natural forces, which are believed to maintain the balance of life of the Osing people (Achmad, 2022).

In practice, the Osing ritual language cannot be spoken by just anyone. Ritual speech is only spoken by a handler or traditional figure who has cultural and spiritual legitimacy (Patiung et al., 2024). This restriction of speakers shows that the use of ritual language is closely related to the social structure of the Osing society. The handler not only serves as a speaker but also as a symbolic intermediary between the human and ancestral worlds. Meanwhile, the community serves as listeners and witnesses who affirm the ritual's validity. This condition shows that language competency materials in ritual contexts are cultural and risky, not just individual linguistic abilities. Ritual language thus becomes a means of strengthening the social role and authority of customary (Fitriyanti et al., 2026).

In terms of form, the Osing ritual language has a standard speech structure and is relatively unchanged. The sequence of speeches that begins with the invocation of the ancestors, continues with the plea for salvation, and ends with a symbolic closing shows that the ritual language is formulaic (Shulhani, 2025). This structure does not allow room for free improvisation because each part of speech has an interrelated symbolic meaning and function. The structure's stability maintains the continuity of tradition and ensures that the ritual's meaning is preserved from generation to generation. Ritual language is not understood as an individual expression, but rather as a collective property of the Osing people (Widiyanto, 2023).

The choice of vocabulary in the Osing ritual language also strengthens its position as a traditional speech genre. The words used are archaic and full of symbolic meaning, and are rarely used in everyday communication (Andre et al., 2022). This vocabulary presents a sacred feel and emphasizes the distance between ritual and profane language. Through these lexical choices, the Osing ritual language builds cultural identity and represents the Osing people's belief system,

which respects the ancestors and maintains the balance of the cosmology.

The purpose of Osing ritual speech is not to deliver information, but to achieve transcendental goals (Ansori, 2026). Prayers and mantras are said to seek salvation, repel forces, and maintain harmony among humans, nature, and ancestors. Speech is understood as a symbolic act believed to have a real impact on the community's social life. Belief in the performative power of language makes ritual speech an important part of cultural practice that continues to be maintained (Eddyono, 2025).

In addition, the use of Osing ritual language is governed by strict interaction norms. Intonation, body posture, and the act of telling are part of the meaning of the ritual itself (Rahim & Hidayat, 2024). This norm serves as a social control mechanism that instills ethical values and respect for customs. The oral inheritance of ritual language from generation to generation confirms its function as a living cultural archive that stores the knowledge, values, and identity of the Osing people (Brahmandika, 2026). Through these characteristics, the Osing ritual language fully meets the criteria of the traditional speech genre and illustrates the strong connection between its language, culture, and belief systems.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ritual language in Osing cultural ceremonies is a linguistic practice laden with sociolinguistic values and functions as a traditional speech genre in the national context. The ritual language of Osing is not only used as a means of symbolic communication in traditional ceremonies, but also as a sacred medium that depicts the relationship between humans, ancestors, and power that transcends. The lexical peculiarities, speech structure, and language use that are limited to certain speakers indicate the existence of social norms and cultural rules that influence the practice of such language. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the ritual language of Osing reveals a close relationship among language, social context, and the belief systems of the communities that support it. The analysis of the speech genre shows that Osing ritual speech has a consistent pattern, a clear communicative purpose, and a specific setting and participants, as characteristic of traditional speech genres. The language in the ceremony is not spontaneous. However, it is governed by traditional norms and is passed down from generation to generation as part of the Osing community's collective identity.

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