

The Stola Symbol of GKPB (Protestant Christian Church in Bali): A Landscape Linguistic Study

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Abstract. This study is discussed the symbolic and linguistic dimensions of the stola as a liturgical vestment within the Christian Protestant Church in Bali (GKPB), emphasized its role in articulating theological meaning and ecological identity. This method uses a qualitative descriptive methodology; the research was conducted at GKPB Hosana Kwanji, Bali and involved participatory observation, in-depth interviews with pastors and church council members, and document analysis of visual and textual materials. The participants included Elders, Deacons, and Evangelists who wear Stolas during worship services. The data was found through semiotic frameworks, specifically Peirce's triadic model and Saussure's dyadic model, to interpret the embedded symbols. The findings revealed three distinct symbolic patterns: grapes and chalice for Elders (representing communion and fellowship), bread and fish for Deacons (signifying service and provision), and rice for Evangelists (symbolizing sowing and evangelism). These symbols were not only delineated liturgical roles but also reflected Balinese ecological metaphors and cultural narratives. This study is concluded that the GKPB stola served as a place-based religious symbol, integrating Christian theology with local environmental and cultural contexts. Through eco-linguistic and semiotic analysis, the research showed that how visual and linguistic elements construct a contextualized Christian identity that resonates with Bali's natural landscape and spiritual heritage.

Keywords: landscape linguistics; stola; Christian Protestant Church in Bali

Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is characterized by the deep integration of technology and religious symbols serve as powerful mediums through which communities' articulate faith, identity, and cultural continuity. It is not merely decorative or ritualistic elements; rather, it encapsulates deep theological meanings and socio-cultural narratives (Martasudjita, 2021). Among such symbols, the stola is a liturgical vestment commonly worn by clergy in many Christian traditions, and the functions as both a religious and cultural signifier. By the context of the Christian Protestant Church in Bali (Gereja Kristen Protestan di Bali / GKPB), the stola is imbued with layers of significance that extend beyond its liturgical function. It stands at the intersection of Christian theology and the rich cultural heritage of Bali, reflecting the dynamic process of religious inculturation in a setting where indigenous traditions, local language, and natural landscapes co-shape religious expression (Tibo & Martasudjita, 2024).

The choice of this topic arises from an academic and contextual necessity. Although the stola's general theological meaning is acknowledged in many liturgical traditions, its context-specific symbolic resonance within the GKPB and particularly in relation to the Balinese environment. It has

received little scholarly attention. It is given the importance of landscape and ecology in Balinese culture, there exists a compelling opportunity to explore how these elements are interwoven into religious symbols and language (Widyawati et al., 2025). This underexplored area forms the central study gap this study seeks to address.

This paper proposes an eco-linguistic analysis of the GKPB stola to examine how the Balinese landscape influences its symbolic interpretation and how such meaning is constructed and conveyed through language. By investigating the metaphors, narratives, and descriptive expressions used by church members and found in religious texts, the research aims to reveal how the stola becomes a vehicle for expressing a distinctly Balinese Christian identity (Sukmi, 2012). The study not only considers the theological and aesthetic aspects of the stola but also interrogates how physical place, especially the natural features of the island is linguistically mapped onto religious symbols.

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The objective of this study is to uncover the ways in which the GKPB stola serves as a place-based symbol, shaped by and reflective of its ecological and cultural setting. Specifically, this study seeks to explore how the Balinese landscape is linguistically represented in the symbolism of the stola. It examines the types of metaphors, narratives, and semantic patterns used by GKPB members in their oral and written expressions that connect the stola with local environmental features such as mountains, rice fields, flora, and seasonal cycles. Additionally, the study investigates how these linguistic representations contribute to the construction of a contextualized Christian identity within the GKPB. By analyzing these dimensions, the study aims to demonstrate how the stola embodies not only spiritual authority but also a deep sense of place, thereby reflecting the church's theological integration with the island's natural and cultural landscapes.

The novelty of this study lies in its eco-linguistic approach to a religious symbol, combining insights from linguistics, theology, and cultural studies to examine the dynamic interaction between faith, language, and place. While studies on liturgical vestments and Christian inculturation exist, few have taken an ecological-linguistic perspective, particularly in the Southeast Asian context (Nariyanti et al., 2023). This interdisciplinary inquiry thus offers a fresh perspective on the symbolic life of religious communities situated within distinct environmental and cultural landscapes.

Essentially, the study contributes to broader discussions on religious symbolism, eco-linguistics, and contextual theology by highlighting how language not only reflects but actively constructs the spiritual meaning of place. In doing so, it enhances our understanding of how religious identities are localized and how symbols like the stola serve as communicative bridges between global faith traditions and local ecological consciousness (Widyawati et al., 2025). In contemporary scholarship, the intersection between language, ecology, and religious identity has received growing attention, particularly within the emerging field of eco-linguistics. This field investigates how language reflects and shapes human relationships with the environment (Stibbe, 2020); (Cowley, 2022). It provides a powerful analytical framework for examining religious symbols such as liturgical vestments not only as theological artifacts but also as cultural texts deeply embedded in ecological and linguistic landscapes. Within this interdisciplinary context, the present study explores the symbolic and linguistic construction of the stola used by the Christian Protestant Church in Bali (GKPB), which remains underexplored in academic discourse.

Several scholars have highlighted how religious language and material culture act as mediums of inculturation. Inculturation is the process through which religious practices, symbols, and

language adapt to local cultural settings. The study emphasizes the role of local languages in maintaining theological relevance in Indonesian church contexts, demonstrating how rituals and symbols are shaped by indigenous linguistic and ecological influences (Widyawati et al., 2025). Similarly investigate religious statuary in Java, revealing how local aesthetics and narratives are embedded into Christian representations (Nariyanti et al., 2023). These findings point to a broader phenomenon: religious communities often reconstruct universal faith symbols to reflect their local identities.

Religious vestments, such as the stola, are often interpreted as signs of clerical authority or ecclesiastical tradition. Yet more recent studies also emphasize their semiotic function as carriers of cultural and contextual meaning. The argument vestments act as non-verbal theological texts while examines how religious garments encode doctrinal and cultural messages (Pierce, 2018); (Yamat & Ngozi, 2021). It provides empirical insight into multicultural congregations where vestment design actively incorporates elements from local environments and belief systems. However, these studies are predominantly focused on Catholic or Western contexts, leaving Protestant vestments in Southeast Asia especially Bali significantly understudied (Soroka, 2021).

Comprehending the GKPB stola within the Balinese cultural framework necessitates an examination of literature concerning sacred landscapes and symbolic language in Bali. Eiseman asserts that ethnographic research is essential for recognizing the spiritual aspects of Balinese spatial and linguistic systems (Eiseman & Eiseman, 1989). It explores that how Balinese calligraphy serves as a sacred art form rich in religious values (Simpfen et al., 2022). Another study through an eco-linguistic analysis of Balinese song lyrics, shows how the environment is metaphorically and semantically embedded in linguistic practices (Widiatmika et al., 2023). These findings suggest that any religious symbol including clothing may draw meaning from the surrounding ecological and cultural landscapes.

In addition, eco-linguistic research across Southeast Asia demonstrates how local environments are encoded into language in both every day and ritual contexts. For example, it examines the ethno-botanical vocabulary found in Balinese medical texts, showing how traditional plant knowledge is preserved through specific lexicons (Suardiana et al., 2025). The other study identifies recurring ecological metaphors in Javanese poetry that reinforce environmental awareness. Such studies illustrate how language, landscape, and culture are interwoven, offering models for analyzing the GKPB stola as an ecologically grounded religious symbol (Rahmawanto & Suhardijanto, 2020).

From these diverse yet interconnected fields, a clear pattern emerges: religious language and symbolism are deeply informed by place-based experiences and local ecological consciousness (MARAN, 2023). The strengths of current literature lie in its rich methodological approaches' ethnography, semiotic analysis, and discourse studies that reveal how symbols function within specific sociocultural contexts. However, a notable gap persists: while studies on inculturation, vestment semiotics, and eco-linguistics are available, none directly address the linguistic and ecological symbolism of the stola within the GKPB. Moreover, conflicting perspectives exist while some scholars highlight orthopraxy in Balinese ritual, others argue for the presence of deep semiotic systems in clothing and sacred texts (Simpfen et al., 2022)

By this literature review, it suggests that religious garments like the stola can act as richly layered texts—encoding theological, cultural, and ecological narratives. However, there is an evident lack of research exploring this within Protestant liturgical contexts in Bali. This study thus addresses a significant scholarly gap by analyzing how the GKPB stola embodies and expresses the linguistic

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Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the symbolic meaning and communicative function of Stolas in worship activities at GKPB (Sugiyono, 2013). This method was selected to enable a naturalistic inquiry into how symbols on Stolas are interpreted and used within a specific religious-cultural context, providing in-depth, holistic insights (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The qualitative design used in this study was both descriptive and interpretive. It allowed to describe how Stolas were worn and interpreted during religious services, and to interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in the Stolas. The central variable examined was symbolic representation specifically, how different symbols on the Stolas communicate spiritual, social, and hierarchical meaning. The theoretical framework applied was semiotics, particularly the triadic model of Peirce (sign, object, and interpretant) and the dyadic model of Saussure (signifier and signified) (Chandler, 2017).

This study was conducted at GKPB Hosana Kwanji, selected due to the affiliation and familiarity with the worship context. The study focused on members of the GKPB Congregational Council, including pastors, elders, evangelists, and deacons, chosen purposively to obtain in-depth insights from those directly involved in Stola usage during religious rituals (Patton, 2015).

Data collection used the Participatory Observation conducted direct observations during multiple worship services to document the use of Stolas and the context in which their symbols appeared. This method enabled the capture of naturally occurring interactions and ritual behaviors involving Stolas (Angrosino, 2007). The observations helped identify how symbols functioned as non-verbal communication tools that reinforce spiritual authority and liturgical roles by In-depth Interviews with Pastors (to explore theological perspectives), Elders and Council members (to gain insight into practical use and interpretation), The Head of the GKPB Fellowship and Development Department (to understand institutional perspectives and symbolic consistency). These interviews sought to uncover the intended meanings of the symbols and their relevance in religious identity and authority (Matthews & Smith, 2024). Document and Visual Analysis collected and analyzed visual and written documentation such as Photographs of the Stolas and liturgical guides and internal church documents. This documentation provided supplementary data for identifying symbolic patterns and conducting visual semiotic analysis (Rose, 2016). Data from the field notes, transcripts, and documents were thematically analyzed. The researcher identified three primary patterns of Stola use, corresponding to Elders, Evangelists, Deacons Each category was analyzed using semiotics to determine the denotative and connotative meanings of the symbols. The symbols were interpreted through Peircean semiotic analysis to reveal how meaning is constructed in religious rituals and spiritual communication (Eco, 1979).

Results and Discussion

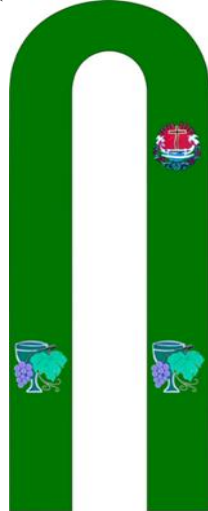
Linguistic landscape analysis conducted on GKPB Stolas reveals that the symbols applied do not merely function as markers of religious identity. These symbols are visual representations that

convey theological messages in ministry. The results of the analysis and discussion are based on linguistic landscape data in the form of visual images of language signs found on the Stolas of the Church Council, which is called Elders, Deacons, and Evangelists. The following is an explanation based on the results of the analysis and discussion of the data:

Symbols and Meanings of the Stola on the Elder

Figure 1 shows the GKPB symbol at the top of the Stola, meaning that the Elder's Stola belongs to GKPB. The Stola was officially issued by GKPB through the Department of Fellowship and Training. Figures 1 and 2 show the Grape Symbol

(Glass and Grapes).



Figures 1. Glass and Grape Stola (Elders)



Figures 2. Glass and Grape symbol

This is a symbol used in the Holy Communion. Its meaning is fellowship with fellow believers in the love of Christ. This image is also related to the main task of ELDERS, which is to build and strengthen fellowship in the congregation (Christ).

In Figures 3 and 4 the symbol of the Elder's Stola in embroidered knitwear, are worn by a member of the GKPB Hosana Kwanji Congregation in church service.



Figure 3. Wear by Church council



Figure 4. Symbol in Stola

Symbol and Meaning of the Stola for Deacons

Figure 5 shows the GKPB symbol at the top of the Stola, indicating that the Deacon's Stola belongs to GKPB. It is officially issued by GKPB through the Department of Fellowship and Training.



Figure 5. Symbol Of Bread and Fish

Figure 6 shows the symbols of bread and fish. This reminds us of the event when Jesus fed 5,000 hungry people. This figure signifies that the tasks of the Deacon Council— “feeding” (table service), social care, and building the economy of the congregation and community—are related to the duties of the Deacon.



Figure 6. Bread and Fish Stola Symbol (Deacon)

Figures 5 and 6: the symbol of the Deacon's Stola in embroidered lace worn by a GKP Hosana Kwanji Church Council member during church service.



Figures 7. Wear by Church council and Symbol in stola

Symbol and Meaning of the Stola for Evangelists

Figure 8 is showed that the GKP symbol at the top of the Stola, which is indicated that this Evangelist's Stola is owned by GKP. The Stola was officially issued by GKP through the Department of Fellowship and Training.



Figure 8. Rice Stola Symbol (Evangelist)



Figure 9. There is a rice symbol. Rice is associated with sowing

In the Balinese context (GKPB), rice is the seed sown by farmers to produce rice grains. This symbol represents the role of the Evangelist as a sower of the Good News to the world. Figures 8 and 9 show the symbol of the Evangelists Stola, which is made of embroidered lace and worn by a member of the GKPB Hosana Kwanji Church Council during church services.



Figure 10. Wear by Church council and Symbol in stola

Discussion

Elder Stola Symbols

The embroidered GKPB emblem, consistently placed at the top of the Elder's Stola, functions as an institutional marker and echoes findings on religious vestments as identity texts (Chupungco, 1997). Studies affirm that such symbols not only designate affiliation but also visually embed theological and organizational narratives into liturgical garments (Melodi, 2024). For instance, (Chupungco, 1997) highlight how pastor vestments in multicultural settings signal both unity and localized identity—a pattern mirrored in GKPB's Stola design.

The presence of the grape and chalice motif visually references the Eucharist and underscores the Elder's role in fostering spiritual fellowship, aligning with ritual vestment semiotics that connect garment imagery to ministry functions (Bible, 2024); (Innemée, 2020). Moreover, eco-linguistic research suggests these vegetal metaphors can carry localized ecological resonance, especially in agrarian cultures. Thus, the grape illustration on the Stola articulates both global Christian symbolism and a Balinese ecological context—reaffirming religion's rootedness in cultural landscapes.

Embroidery style, notably the ornate knitwork observed in Figures 3–4 reinforces the Elder's status and reflects recent ethnographic insights into how tactile symbols (like weave and texture) function as semiotic carriers within Balinese ritual attire (Simpfen et al., 2022).

Deacon Stola Symbols

Like the Elder's Stola, the Deacon's version features the GKPB emblem, signaling institutional unity (Innemée, 2020). The key motif, however, is the bread and fish imagery, which echoes narrative symbols of provision and service. This aligns with broader liturgical symbolism where vestment imagery functions to anchor clergy identity to ministerial mission (Bible, 2024) (Innemée, 2020). The food motif is particularly meaningful in agrarian and fishing communities, resonating with Balinese environmental metaphors (Sujarwo et al., 2016).

In eco-linguistic terms, this imagery transforms the Stola into a place-based ecological signifier, visually encoding local subsistence patterns (rice, fish) within Christian iconography (Cowley, 2022); (Widiatmika et al., 2023)). It also parallels findings that scriptural symbols are frequently reinterpreted through local ecological experiences (Rodríguez, 2019; Suhardi & Kartika, 2020).

Evangelist Stola Symbols

The Evangelist's Stola again features the GKPB symbol at the top, confirming its official origin (Melodi, 2024). The central motif is a rice symbol, signifying "sowing" a powerful metaphor linked to evangelistic mission. This imagery aligns with agrarian metaphors in Javanese and Balinese literary ecology, where rice symbolizes growth and spiritual nourishment.

This symbol thus bridges Christian metaphor ("sowing the Word") with Balinese cultural practices (rice cultivation), echoing eco-linguistic insights that religious communities linguistically and visually inculturate scriptural metaphors in harmony with local ecological knowledge (Widayawati et al., 2025).

Synthesis and Theoretical Integration

Overall, the GKPB Stola designs reflect an eco-linguistic inculturation process where religious roles (Elder, Deacon, Evangelist) are visually woven into ecological metaphors (grape, bread/fish, rice). This confirms hypotheses in recent literature that vestments function as multimodal texts,

encoding theological identity, environmental experience, and local culture simultaneously (Simpfen et al., 2022)

These visual-linguistic patterns align with broader findings that material religious symbols—especially clothing—serve as dynamic sites of theological contextualization (Chupungco, 1997). The GKP Stolas thus exemplify how a Protestant community in Bali uses environmentally resonant symbolism to articulate its ministry and spiritual identity in place-based terms.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the stola of the Christian Protestant Church in Bali (GKP) embody a rich interplay between theology, ecology, and language. Using semiotic and eco-linguistic analysis, three symbolic patterns were found: grapes and a chalice for Elders, bread and fish for Deacons, and rice for Evangelists. Each symbol not only defines specific liturgical functions but also mirrors the ecological and cultural realities of Balinese life. These findings demonstrate that GKP Stolas function as place-based religious symbols that integrate Christian theology with local environmental and cultural narratives. By addressing the research gap concerning the lack of ecolinguistics studies on Protestant liturgical vestments in Southeast Asia, this study contributes a novel perspective on how faith and environment are interwoven in religious semiotics. This research emphasizes an indigenous Protestant community in Bali, contrasting with earlier studies that concentrated on Western or Catholic contexts. It illustrates how theological meanings are linguistically and visually localized through symbols derived from agrarian and ecological imagery. The research novelty lies in its interdisciplinary approach—combining semiotics, eco-linguistics, and contextual theology—to interpret vestments not merely as ritual attire but as dynamic linguistic and cultural texts. This analytical lens advances understanding of how language and symbolism construct a contextualized Christian identity deeply rooted in the natural landscape and cultural heritage of Bali. The broader implication of this study extends to the fields of ecotheology, linguistic anthropology, and religious semiotics. It demonstrates that material symbols can serve as communicative bridges between global faith traditions and local ecological consciousness. Future research may build on this framework by comparing similar processes of inculturation across other Indonesian or Southeast Asian churches, further enriching discussions on how religious language and symbolism evolve within specific ecological and cultural environments.

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