

## Conference Paper

# Pragmatic Meanings of Karonese Proverbs Spoken in Wedding Party

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### Abstract

Pragmatics is the subfield of linguistics which studies language and focuses on the users and the context of language rather than reference truth, or grammar. The aim of this article is to analyze the pragmatic meanings of Karonese proverbs spoken in the wedding party. It has become the Karo custom to advise the bride and the bridegroom in a wedding party by using wise words and proverbs. Such a ceremony is known as advisory expressions and explanatory meanings. The meanings are based on pragmatics which can be classified into three types: explanatory meaning, psychological meaning, and social meaning. The method of research applied in this study is qualitative research in which the data were based on some references in the library. This is also a field research as some of the data were obtained from respondents who expressed advisory speech to the bride and the bridegroom in wedding parties. This study applies Cass' (2012) theory of pragmatic usage which focuses on the inferred meaning that the speakers and listeners perceive, referring to Karonese proverbs spoken by family members and the married couple as the listeners. The results of this research are: (1) Karonese proverbs are commonly expressed in advisory speech of a wedding party that is addressed to the couple, (2) Among the three types of meaning discussed here, the social meanings are found most dominant. It can be concluded that the analysis of pragmatic meanings of the Karonese proverbs is very significant for language learners and for a newly married couple as to comprehend good advice from the elderly so that they can apply the advice in their new life. This is also significant as an attempt to preserve the asset of Indonesian culture, Karonese custom in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic meaning, explanatory meaning, psychological meaning, social meaning, Karonese proverb.

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## 1. Introduction

Human language is important because of the meanings they convey. Without language, human being cannot interact with one another. Therefore, human being must

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have language for their communication to convey meanings. It is a system of communication among the speakers to transfer their ideas or information in either oral or non-oral system. One of the local languages or dialects in Indonesia is Karo language. The origin of Karo language is difficult to know when it was there and who found it (Sitepu, 1996). Most of Karo people live in Sumatra Province or Karo Land. The main town of the Karo district is Kaban Jahe and Berastagi. It has 17 sub-districts and 258 villages. The total population is about 276.763 people. Recent total population of Karo people around Sumatra is about 600.000 people (<https://www.facebook.com>). Barus (2014) notes that Karo language is badly known as its dialect or style enrich again with its socio-culture by the proof of its history and factuality.

The term pragmatics was first coined in the 1930s by a philosopher named C.W. Morris in the 1970s. Pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on the other (Christal, 1989).

Pragmatics involves three major communication skills:

- Using language for different purposes such as:

Greetings: (English): Hello, Goodbye, I'm going to get a cookie

(Karo language): *Mejuah-juah, Kai berita?* (Expression of greeting, meaning *How are you.*)

Demanding: (English): Give me a cup of water.

(Karo language): *Enta nakan ena.* 'Give me that rice.'

Promising: (English): I'm going to get you a cookie.

(Karo Language): *Kari kubaba man bandu berita simehuli.*

'I'll give you good news.'

Requesting: (English): I would like a cookie, please.

(Karo language): *Sentabi aku, babandu lau ena kujenda.*

'Excuse me, bring that water here, please.'

Pragmatics is the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. It studies the meaning of words, phrases, and full sentences but unlike

semantics which deals with the objective meaning of words that can be found in dictionaries.

Some of the proverbs in Karo language are:

1. *Erendi enta kam bas geluhndu.* 'Give and take in your way of life.'
2. *Ula bagi perturah sukat kam adi enggo erjabu.* 'Don't be like the growth of taro if you have got married.'
3. *Bagi menci ndabuh ku cimpa.* 'Like the mouse falling into the cake.'
4. *Bagi kirik ndatken lubang.* 'Like the cricket getting the hole.'
5. *Belinen kuran asa takal.* 'Bamboo (place of water) bigger than head.'
6. *Bagi sinehteh jambai.* 'Like to carry the pumpkin.'
7. *Mehamad erkalimbubu.* 'Be polite to the parents in law.'
8. *Bagi lau bas kaca.* 'Like water in the glass.'
9. *Bagi pergeluh bindoran.* 'Like the life of a chameleon.'
10. *Bagi manuk, adi lacikais la man.* 'Like chicken which cannot get food without scraping.'
11. *Adi ngalo la rido, nggalar la rutang.* 'When receiving without gain, and paying without debt.'
12. *Adi enggo erjabu, ula bagi perturah sukat.* 'If you have got married, you should not be like taro any more'.
13. *Menang bas babah, talu bas perukuren.* 'Win in the dialogue, but lose in heart.'
14. *Ngkimbang i amak i babo lubang.* 'Spreading the mat on the hole.'

## 2. Literature Review

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics and semiotics that studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. Pragmatics encompasses speech act theory, conversational implicature, talk in interaction and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology, linguistics and anthropology. Pragmatics helps anthropologists relate elements of language to broader social phenomena; it thus pervades the field of linguistic anthropology. Because pragmatics describes generally the forces in play for a given utterance, it includes the study of power, gender, race, identity,

and their interactions with individual speech acts. For example, the study of code switching directly relates to pragmatics, since a switch in code effects a shift in pragmatic force. [9]

When learning the English language, understanding the differences between semantic and pragmatic meaning can be a valuable tool to maximize your linguistic ability. Although both are terms used in relation to the meanings of words, their usage is drastically different. Pragmatic meaning looks at the same words and grammar used semantically, except within context. In each situation, the various listeners in the conversation define the ultimate meaning of the words, based on other clues that lend subtext to the meaning. Both the pragmatic and semantic meanings is important when communicating with other people. Although semantics is concerned only with the exact, literal meaning of the words and their interrelations, pragmatic usage focuses on the inferred meaning that the speakers and listeners perceive Crass (2012).

Barus (2015) discusses and analyzes pragmatics from its connotative meaning in Karo language and to be associated with their culture. Pragmatics can also be defined as the study of how language is used and of the effect of context on language. It is viewed from several types of context such as physical, linguistic, social and epistemic context. Ramirez (2015) in his article entitled "A pragmatic approach to proverb use and interpretation" analyzes the pragmatic meanings of proverbs including some points of discussions such as: irony in proverbs, metaphors in proverbs and ellipsis.

This article is completely different from those works presented above. This article discusses the pragmatic meanings of Karonese proverbs spoken in the wedding party covering such related aspects as place of living, social networks and belief, based on the theory of Cass (2012) in which pragmatic usage focuses on the inferred meaning that the speakers and listeners perceive.

### 3. Research Method

Since this research deals with social phenomena of language, to find the answer to this research, qualitative method is applied through the analysis of language particularly the pragmatic meanings of proverbs in Karo language. In this research, the data were collected from text books in the libraries and from some other sources from some websites. In addition some data were also collected from some informants in some events of wedding parties. The data in this study are analyzed in several steps. The researcher collected the data from some text-books and some informants. Some data were also derived from the writer's invention as the native speaker of the language under research, Karo language; then, they were analyzed by providing the meanings

on the basis of pragmatic meanings which are classified into three types: explanatory meaning, psychological meaning, and social meaning. This study applies Cass' (2012) theory of pragmatic usage which focuses on the inferred meaning that the speakers and listeners perceive, referring to Karonese proverbs expressed by family members as the speakers and the married couple as the listeners.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1. Proverbs and pragmatic meaning in Karo language

Meaning is the basic unit of language. Every speaker who produces the language must have known the meaning. Language can be interpreted from the pragmatic meaning which is based on the user or context. It has been known that on the basis of the above points, pragmatic meaning can be viewed from four different contexts, such as physical context, linguistic context, social context and epistemic context. But which one is the prominent or commonly applicable in communication related to the wedding party will be presented below.

Proverb is the language which plays very important roles in different types of literary works. Proverb is a brief, simple, and popular saying, or a phrase that gives advice and moral lessons and it effectively embodies a common sense. The most important function of proverbs is to teach and educate the audience. They often contain an expert advisor with a role for educating the hearers on what they may face if they would do something. Hence, proverbs play a didactic role, as they play a universal role in teaching wisdom and sagacity to the common people. Since proverbs are usually metaphorical and indirect, they allow speaker or writer to express their message in a less harsh way.

In this research, the aim of using proverbs to be discussed is to give some advice to the couple in a wedding party so that they may become more mature and consequently they can survive in their family. At the time of giving advice, there will be a communication between the speaker and the couple. The hearer must listen and obey what has been conveyed by the speakers in the party.

The proverbs which are used in Karo language can be analyzed from its connotative meanings. The connotative meanings can be classified into: explanatory meaning, psychological meaning, and social meaning.

## 4.2. Explanatory meaning

Proverbs or phrases which carry wise words in Karo language can be semantically interpreted from the pragmatic meaning.

1. *Endi enta bagi surat bas ukat.* 'Give and take like scripts on the spoon (spoon made of bamboo).'

This Karonese proverb means that in this life we have to be charitable and humble, we should not always expect from others before giving something as the script postulated on the spoon. This proverb is always expressed by most speakers in the ceremony of Karonese wedding parties as it teaches good lessons to the couple so that they can adopt it in their life to come.

2. *Menang bas babah, talu bas perukuren.* 'Winning orally, loosing mentally.'

This proverb is also commonly uttered by various speakers in a wedding party to be directed to the bride and bridegroom. The proverb means that to win a dialogue or to give many comments is not necessary in this life as to dominate a dialogue does not imply that he is the winner as his may suffer finally. The most important thing is what you say must be something true and useful. Although you express only a few words, if they carry truth and advantages, you are the winner both orally and mentally as your expressions come from your heart.

3. *Ngkimbanggi amak ibabo lubang.* 'Spreading a mat on the hole.'

This proverb illustrates someone who serves other persons not sincerely. This proverb is also generally addressed to a newly married couple in a wedding party so that they can lead their life in polite, humble, and honest manners.

4. *Adi ngalo la rido, nggalar la rutang.* 'Receiving without credit, paying without debt.'

This proverb means that we can give something to someone but do not expect that it will be accepted in the future, and we pay or give something to a person sincerely though we do not have any debt to him. It may happen that sometimes you are given money by someone but you do not accept it, and you may pay or give something to someone although you do not have any debt.

## 4.3. Psychological meaning

Psychological meaning is the meaning of a sentence in which it denotes the psychological quality of someone.

1. *Bagi nande lah kam bas jabu.* 'Be as a mother (you should) in the family.'
2. *Bagi Bapa lah kam bas jabu* 'Be as a father (you should) in the family.'
3. *Bagi nande ras bapa kam bas jabu.* 'Be as a father and mother in the family''.

The above examples number (1) and (2) with the word *nande* 'mother' and *bapa* 'father', do not mean the real mother or father, but it signifies beyond its actual meaning. Those expressions can be expressed by a speaker who gives advice to someone in a family who has just recently got condolence in which one of their parent passes away. If the mother passes away, the speaker will say to the eldest sister or brother in a family so that she or he can behave or can replace the responsibility of their mother. And if their father passes away, the speaker will advise the eldest brother in the family so that he can behave or replace the duty or responsibility of their father in the family.

The example number (3) above with the word *nande ras bapa* 'mother and father' does not mean he or she become the father and mother, but she or he can behave or replace the responsibilities of their parents. She or he must be responsible for his or her younger brother or sister in the family. Such as, if any one of the younger brother or sister is still single or as a student, the eldest one must support or be responsible for his or her younger brother or younger sister until she or he will get married. The words *nande ras bapa* are used to show someone that has a psychological quality such as: glorious, flexible, educative, and not egoistic. Proverb number (3) can be used for the couple who just got married and his or her parents have already passed away and he or she is the eldest in the family. The couple can be advised to be responsible for their younger brother and sister.

#### 4.4. Social meaning

Social meaning is a word or a sequence of words signifying the social status of someone which is different from its actual meaning or different from the connotative-referential meaning.

*Mehamad erkalimbubu.* 'Be polite to the brother of your mother's parents as well as your father or mother in law.' *Mehamad* means 'be polite', and *kalimbubu* means the brother of the mother's parents, as well as father or mother in law including brother in law or your wife's brother. In Karonese culture, *kalimbubu* can be said as the visible God. We must give respect to our *kalimbubu*. According to Karonese culture or belief, if we do not respect our *kalimbubu*, there will be a risk or sin from God to us, and we will not be prosperous later. That is why, when there is a party or gathering with

our *kalimbubu*, we always request their prayers to God so that we can get blessing or prosperity from the Almighty.

The three aspects of meaning of the proverbs which are addressed to the hearers covering explanatory, psychological and social meanings are called pragmatic meanings. The hearers are expected to do or understand what the speaker means. In Karo language, there are so many kinds of proverbs uttered in wedding parties with the goal to advise the married couple. Expressions of such advisory proverbs may take place according to three aspects: on the basis of place, social network, and belief.

#### 4.5. Place of living

Expressions of advisory proverbs may be conducted in various places. It is common in Karo high land but it is also possible to be conducted in Karo Jahe areas such as in Pancur Batu, Binjai, Delitua or in other places where some Karo people live. Such advice is generally conveyed in public halls or in the house of the mother's brother or the father in law, where there is a wedding party.

(a) *Usihlah bagi pergeluh bindoran*. 'Please, imitate like the life of a chameleon.' This proverb may have two points of meaning. It can be viewed from positive and negative meanings. From negative meaning, it portrays someone who does not have any principle. From the negative meaning, it means that someone must be able to adapt himself in any environment, condition or place.

(b) *Erendi enta kam pagi bas geluhndu*. 'You should give and take in your life.'

This proverb means that someone should not expect something from other people before he or she can give something to them wherever they live.

#### 4.6. Social network

Expressions of advisory proverbs are also based on social networks. People who have just got married may live or stay in a new place or region. The new family must be able to extend their networks, to create a new family, to build brotherhood, and even sometimes to adopt new parents. By this way they will be successful to lead a new life. The following Karonese advisory proverbs are also commonly expressed in wedding parties.

(a) *Bagi lau bas kaca kam pagi*. 'You must be like water in the glass in future.'

This proverb gives you advice to be polite to everyone and not to be a liar. By this way, you can be accepted by the people in your environment.



- (b) *Terbeluh kam bas geluhndu.* 'You must be able to adapt yourself in your life.'

This proverb means that you must be wise to adjust yourselves according to the place and condition in your life, not to create problems, and not to suspect other people wherever and whenever you live.

#### 4.7. Belief

Expressions of advisory proverbs are also based religious belief. The religion of a community much matters in the speech of a wedding party. Karonese proverbs related to religious aspects are also common to be expressed by some speakers in such a party as in the following.

- (a) *Bagi manuk, adi la cikais la man.* 'Like chickens, if they do not scrape, they will not get any food.'

This proverb means that we must work hard to get something and pray to God the Almighty Who gives us everything in life. By working hard and observing prayer, you will get a successful life.

- (b) *Adi enggo erjabu, ula bagi perturah sukat.* 'If you have got married, you should not be like the growth of taro.'

This proverb means that a married couple is advised not to be like a single boy or single girl any more and not to fall in love with another person any more.

- (c) *Labo terbiari jelma, peraten Dibatange situhuna.* 'Don't be afraid of human being, God's will disposes.'

This proverb implies an advice that we must believe in God, and not to be afraid of human; being, because God can protect us from any condition or danger and can give us fortune.

### 5. Conclusion

The pragmatic meanings of Karonese proverbs in Karo language are commonly used, particularly in the events of wedding parties addressed to the bride and bride groom of a newly married couple. Such ceremonies reflect the living culture in Karonese community. In Karonese wedding parties all sides of the families are compulsory to be given chances to deliver speech as to express happiness, hopes and expectation, prayers, as well as advice to the couple or even to all sides involved. Every speaker generally tries his best to use good sentences, wise words, and proverbs in their

speech. Several wise words and proverbs in Karo language have been adopted as data and the analysis are based on the pragmatic point of view involving explanatory meaning, psychological meaning, and social meaning. This study is based on Cass' (2012) theory of pragmatic usage which focuses on the inferred meaning that the speakers and listeners perceive, referring to Karonese proverbs delivered by the family members as the speakers and the married couple as the listeners. Among the three types of pragmatic meanings discussed in this research, the social meanings are found most significant and related to place of living, social networks, and belief.

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