

Conference Paper

Cultural Values in Traditional Proverbs of *Pakpak*

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Abstract

This research aims to discuss social values and attitudes in *Pakpak* traditional proverbs related to flora, fauna and social relationship. As the discussion goes around the social phenomena and standing of *Pakpak* People in Indonesian cultural context, the paper is conducted by means of descriptive qualitative method on ninety traditional *Pakpak* proverbs collected from various printed and electronic sources. Proverbs are an important part in *Pakpak* social life, not only simply used in communication but also made as a guideline to maintain harmony among the members of the society. Once harmony is maintained, social life of any community could go through peace and happiness, uplifting the welfare as well as honor of the ethnic. The research results show that social values and attitudes are explained and taught using flora, fauna and social relationship, such as social status, discipline, responsibility, hard work, and good habits. The research is expected to be useful in the context of *Pakpak* culture learners to learn the socio-cultural values through meaningful expressions such as traditional proverbs.

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1. Introduction

Studying proverbs is compulsory for understanding the culture of a nation. Proverbs and sayings reflect cultural values widely accepted in the society and contain widely used and accepted evaluations of human behavior and actions or deeds in various situations and in different circumstances. Surrounding phenomena often become part of proverbs. This rich culturally loaded material should be included in a speech course. The knowledge of proverbs of the studied language leads to better understanding of culture and national identity.

Pakpak ethnic is one of ethnicities in Sumatra Island, Indonesia, dominated in North Sumatra and Aceh regencies: Dairi, *Pakpak* Bharat, Humbang Hasundutan, Tapanuli Tengah, Aceh Singkil and Subulussalam. All of those regencies are known by *Pakpak* people as *Tanoh Pakpak*, which is literally translated into “The Lands of *Pakpak* People”.

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Pakpak people speak in *Pakpak* Language in their daily communication and in their cultural practices. The language is recognized in five dialects based on their *Pakpak* lands (*Tanoh Pakpak*), namely: *Simsim*, *Keppas*, *Pegagan*, *Boang* and *Kelasan*, all of which they call as *Silima Suak*. The dialects are distinctively different, yet are basically the same that they can still understand each other even in a different dialect. *Pakpak* is registered as a part of *Batak* Subdivisions by anthropologists, although *Pakpak* people do not actually consider themselves as *Batak* but they prefer to think of themselves as an ethnic different from those *Batak* Subdivisions.

Pakpak people have many traditional proverbs which they use as their guidance in their social life and in their relation with nature. This research focuses on *Pakpak* traditional proverbs in term of their cultures that are related to flora, fauna and social relation language among *Pakpak* People. The proverbs are bestowed from generations to generations but today many *Pakpak* people especially the young ones do not actually know about their traditional proverbs or even the existence of them that they are unfamiliar with any of *Pakpak* proverbs. The trends of smart phones, various kinds of gadgets and the submersion of pop culture introduced to *Pakpak* people through social media and Television are basically the main causes of this estrangement of *Pakpak* traditional proverbs, which is upsetting. The elders of *Pakpak* ethnic are mostly the ones who are still familiar with their traditional proverbs and they still use them in their life as their guide lines in their social life and their relation with nature, regardless of their religion.

Traditional Proverbs of *Pakpak* ethnic are in *Pakpak* language using natural terms such as flora and fauna that are found in nature and terms that are used in *Pakpak* people's daily social relation. The terms are used to convey lessons of certain values, one of which is cultural values. This research aims to explain the cultural values in traditional proverbs of *Pakpak* categorized based on the terms used therein such as flora, fauna, and social relation terms among *Pakpak* people and to describe social values and social phenomena therein. The proverbs are then related to the *Pakpak* society and their ways of life to find how those traditional proverbs give guidance and lessons to them with cultural values for culture and language are inseparable that none of which they would come into existence without the other, hence it is possible to find cultural values through languages used in traditional proverbs of *Pakpak*.

2. Literature Review

Proverbs are fixed expressions that are not uncommon in human language and they contain educational values therein. The objective of moral education lies in the fact that it can develop shared feelings with others, and makes one committed to one's own personal responsibilities and actions (Campbell, 2008). Proverbs are flexible that they may come from a certain area and from a certain society with different kinds of origins of how they may come into existence. Proverbs are about the lives of the people associated with certain kinds of local wisdom and cultures. Proverbs may last with the people for a very long time. Brosh (2013: 3) explains:

“Proverbs manifest themselves in many different forms and can be applied to many different circumstances. They are varied in content, age, form, structure, kind, and origin. Some proverbs can apply to many people and many places; they are thus common to many cultures and have endured for a long time. Others that deal with aspects of daily life are applicable only to a given region or to a given situation or time”.

Rahyono (2009: 3) defines wisdom as ‘something’ which comes from human intelligence that makes other people intelligent. Furthermore, Rahyono (2009:3) explains that wisdom comes from cognitive process and decision. Wisdom is fair and useful for every person who possesses it. Rahyono (2009: 5) also states about cultural wisdom. Rahyono defines cultural wisdom as every effort and its result is done by a community to give the community a meaning of humanity. Cultural wisdom is also used to make a humane social structure.

For learners who are not from *Pakpak* background, they can learn *Pakpak* cultures through *Pakpak* traditional proverbs as most of their proverbs are related to the ways of *Pakpak* people's lives in a society. Teachers in Indonesia may also use proverbs to teach students about some cultures of specific ethnicities in Indonesia. Brosh (2013: 2) explains:

“Understanding the foreign culture and developing intercultural competence comes from a variety of sources such as one's own cultural background, religion and life experience, media and especially language textbooks and school. In the classroom a wide range of educational techniques and practical strategies are available for the language instructor to lay the foundation for students to develop intercultural competence”.

Teaching a language cannot be separated from teaching the culture in that language. In fact, language is a part of one's culture. Proverbs can be used as a means to teach students not only about morals and lessons, but also a specific language used in the proverb that teachers should consider using proverbs as their teaching materials. In this case, *Pakpak* language can be learnt using proverbs to give the learners better understanding as the language is learnt through cultural approach with morals and lessons to learn. Adnan Zaid (2016: 2) explains:

“Proverbs contain a truth in few words that relate to everyday life having a universal value, and they can be remembered easily. Considering the good values of proverbs, a teacher may use proverbs to teach English as a foreign language as a lead-in activity prior to teaching language skills. It is a good way to consolidate the learning of vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, moral values, and the like”.

Native speakers learn the culture of their language without being conscious of it, but bilingual lexicographers and foreign language teachers should devote equal, if it is not greater, attention to non-conceptual meaning and sometimes their task is to introduce cultural codes. A cultural code is the unconscious meaning we apply to any object or abstract notion: a car, a type of food, a relationship, even a country in which we are raised. The combination of experience and its accompanying emotion create an imprint. Imprints vary from culture to culture; if we could decode elements of culture to discover the emotions and meaning attached to them, we could learn a great deal about the human behavior and how it varies across the planet. Elsa, Gulshat, Eva and Aigul (2017) explain:

“The importance of cultural codes is based on such aspects of communication as: socio-cultural behavior; sending and receiving messages; messages are encoded by senders and to be decoded by receivers; senders and receivers of messages are participants in the process; participants are socio-cultural beings and share a common code; messages are sent and received to achieve certain purposes”.

Processing of figurative language is examined here as providing insight into students' ability to go beyond the referential content of the linguistic message, on the one hand, and their familiarity with non-literal sayings as shedding light on the mental lexicon, on the other. As such, proverbs constitute means for investigating the interface of cognitively determined interpretive abilities with linguistic knowledge in later language development. Ruth and Dorit (2010: 2) say:

“Figurative language involves the ability to adopt a frame of mind that is capable of interpreting particular words or constructions beyond their initially available, basic or literal meaning”.

The meanings of proverbs can seldom be guessed from the meanings of the individual words which make up the proverbs. As explained by Akande and Mosobalaje (2014: 35) “Proverbs are, often, short value-laden expressions with multi-layered meanings that can be decoded only by those who possess a good mastery of the oral art and culture that produce them”. They are figurative and didactic expressions and embrace the inherited wisdom and experience of a people. They are reflective of a nation’s values, norms and morality and are used to bring across messages to guide, edify and admonish.

The meaning of proverbs, to a great extent, depends on the circumstance of use, the dexterity of the speaker (user), the iconic cultural and interpretative skills of the listener (audience), among other linguistic tropes which embody its aesthetics. A proverb may be used to show joy, to mourn, to praise, to indicate failure or to warn. So, apart from the literal and linguistic contexts, the social context of any proverb determines its suitability of use in a particular situation (Bashir and Idris-Amali, 2012: 495).

3. Research Method

This research basically employs qualitative descriptive to identify, to analyze and to explain phenomena and values in traditional *Pakpak* proverbs related to flora, fauna and social relation language in *Pakpak* language with the data of research of ninety *Pakpak* traditional proverbs collected from various electric sources, a book by Lister Berutu entitled “*Memahami 100 Perumpamaan Tradisional Pakpak di Sumatra Utara*” and some websites on Google. Mack (2011: 1) explains:

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research. In general terms, scientific research consists of an investigation that:

- seeks answers to a question
- systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question
- collects evidence
- produces findings that were not determined in advance
- produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study

Mack (2011: 1) adds, "Qualitative research shares these characteristics. Additionally, it seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations."

This research uses Fairclough (1995) critical linguistics framework. This framework will also be used as the approach in analyzing the data of this research. The data were analyzed using three steps. First, describing the data by disambiguating them based on the literal meanings of the data, assigning referent through word glossaries, and making enrichment to the clues of the data interpretation. Second, interpreting the implicative meanings of the data using the context of utterance created from the writer's experience as a *Pakpak* man himself and the interview of other *Pakpak* people. Third, explaining the relation between the data and the social situation of *Pakpak* community. The explanation is built by comparing the results of the interpretation with *Pakpak* community which are certain knowledge and experiences shared by the people.

4. Discussion

Taken from the analysis on the data of *Pakpak* traditional proverbs related to flora, fauna and social relation language in *Pakpak* language, here are the examples of cultural values described with the English translations to give us better understanding of what the proverbs say about. Each of the examples provided below is given explanation, especially in terms of cultural values.

Pakpak People are very familiar with areca trees, nuts and leaves. *Pakpak* farmers usually use the leaves as a bed plate on which they put their food as they like to feast among farmers using areca leaves as the bed plate after hard work in the *padi* field. It symbolizes harmony and togetherness among *Pakpak* people, regardless of their *suak*.

(1) "*Arin-arin bage mangan i opih*" which is translated into English, "every day is like eating on areca leave plate".

This proverb describes a person who is selfish with self-ego that they always ask help from friends or other people without giving any effort for self-improvement. The use of areca leaves in that proverb is to show the culture of feast among farmers that there is someone among them who gets in the group and eat with them as they will not tell the person to leave for it is culturally forbidden and is considered impolite that

it may ruin the harmony in the feast. The person will not be thrown out of the group, but it is rather inconvenient to have one.

Bamboos also common for *Pakpak* people for many uses which profit them in many ways such as for building material, furniture, kitchen tools, weapons as well as mystical uses. Ancient traditional People houses or they call them *sapo* always have bamboos planted around the house to protect them from evil forces and spirits and to give them better luck and fortune in their lives.

(2) "*Bage menaka buluh sikedekna itingkah*" which is translated into English, "cutting a bamboo in half the smaller end is trampled on".

Bamboos have different girth sizes on each end; one is bigger and one is smaller. To cut one bamboo into two pieces in a symmetrical size, the other end which is the smaller one must be kept in place by stepping a foot on it. *Pakpak* people use this technique every time they cut a bamboo in half. This proverb teaches that people in power such as leaders and high-status people must pay attention to the small and weak people and to give them advice and help whenever needed. Every *Pakpak* person is advised to be fair and justice with other people as a value of *Pakpak* culture.

Gingers are used by *Pakpak* people for many activities such as for cooking which gives strong taste and color, for medication and even for mystical practices. On certain occasions, gingers are used by some *Pakpak* people as a material to connect their physical world with the spirit world whether it is to call a spirit or to cast one out if it interferes with someone's life. Overall, gingers are mostly used for cooking as it gives unique taste in food which is considered delicious by *Pakpak* people.

(3) "*Bage bahing mbah-mbah tanoh*" which is translated into English, "like a ginger which carries dirt when it's pulled out".

This particular proverb is for a person who cannot easily adjust and to adapt to a surrounding or to a society that wherever he is, other people don't want to be around the person as he won't try to understand other people's feelings, thinking that he is the one who must be understood and not the other way around. *Pakpak* people live in a society as a whole that compassion, affection and harmony are the main important things in their culture. None of them are taught to live alone but to be with other people to make the society stronger and better. The use of the word ginger is to symbolize good taste of personality and the term dirt is to symbolize negative behavior within one's personality.

A lot of fruits are red when they are ripe, such as water guavas which are common in *Pakpak* land. So, *Pakpak* people have the mindset that most fruits are considered ready to be picked and processed when they are reddish that mostly it is when the fruits taste sweet and fresh.

(4) "*bage mengambil buah mbara*" the meaning which is, "it's like tasting a red fruit".

This specific proverb is meant for people who always expect help from other people without giving any effort to get what he or she wants. This proverb teaches people to be independent without having to rely too much onto other people's hands. *Pakpak* people are educated to leave away to find lives in new lands that they must do things on their own while they are on their journey but it doesn't mean that they must always be alone as harmony is the key to a good life in *Pakpak* culture.

Pakpak people are known to be hunters and farmers. They hunt mostly pigs using dogs to sniff pigs' scents, to track them down and to chase them. They also use dogs to protect their farming lands from unwanted intruders and to protect their homes from thieves of people who mean harm to the family. Dogs are also their best and loyal friends in their daily lives.

(5) "*Ulang bage perdalan biang tonggal*" which is translated into English, "don't be like a walking male dog"

When a male dog is walking, he frequently stops, usually to approach a female dog that it takes him too long to reach his destination. This proverb is for teenage boys who start to find a lover. Young people are advised to be careful in their decision-making ability that they must not occupy themselves with girls but to set their dream to reach their bright future and to be successful in life and after that, they can get themselves busy with love and such.

Pakpak people are mostly Christians that for them pigs and hogs are their favorite animals for their diets and to be worshiped by some of them. Historically, *Pakpak* people started to eat pigs after the Dutch Colonialism. In the past, only the Dutch who ate pigs and after their colonialism was over, the locals started to eat pigs up until now. In many cultural practices such as wedding and harvest party, pigs are served as the main food for the guests or the participants. Some of them believe that eating pigs is good for their well-being.

(6) "*Bage wangkah tonggal mela mengambek*" which is translated into English, "like a hog that won't cry out loud".

It is known that a dying hog will not make a noise from its mouth even though it is in pain. This proverb is for people who have overwhelmed shyness for everything that even though they are having a desperate and rough life that they have a lot of life problems, they won't ask for help from their family or from other people because they are too shy to do that. *Pakpak* society is known to have strong relationship among themselves that they would take an interest in someone who is in a trouble and to help them any way they can.

Tortoises are basically caught by *Pakpak* people for food and the shells are used for artistic decoration nailed on walls so when a guest or a family member comes into the house, they will see the beauty of the house which makes the host happy and proud of it. Tortoises are shy animals and they are very hard to catch. It takes hard work to catch one and *Pakpak* people would feel really victorious, the feeling only they can describe, if they catch one tortoise.

(6) "*Ulang bage anak kerabang*" which is translated into English, "don't be like baby tortoises."

It is known that after hatching, baby tortoises find their own way that they do not walk side by side to find it all together. They do not even have any protection from any dangers that may come in their way which may bring them between life and death. This proverb is especially meant for parents who don't care about their children, abandon their children and who will not take responsibility for their children. In *Pakpak* culture, a child must be raised well. If the parents for some reasons are not capable of nurturing the child, an uncle or an aunt will take part in raising the child. An uncle and an aunt have the same status as parents to their niece and nephew in *Pakpak* culture. So, it is not uncommon for them to have grandchildren in their society.

Pakpak people are not only farmers for plants but they are also breeders for farming animals such as, chicken, ducks, goats, cows and oxen. They have their own philosophy about life related to fauna, especially they're closest fauna to them; farming animals. They basically interpret life based on what they see around them in their everyday lives.

(8) "*bage buk-buk ringarung*" the meaning of which is, "like the thick hair of forest goats"

This proverb is meant for people who have a lot of debts in a society or a village for having debts is a heavy burden to carry until it is paid. Just like hair, if you cut it, it will grow again and again. So, if you borrow some money from one person and repay it with money from another person, your debt won't be over. The proverb tells that it is better

not to have debts for you won't have a peaceful life with one. Just like other societies in Indonesia, *Pakpak* people are no different that when they struggle in poverty, they would borrow with a promise to pay it back.

In one of *Pakpak* wedding ceremonies, there is a custom that is called *Tangis Beru si Jahe* where the mother of the groom gives her daughter some food, called *nakan pangendotangis* while giving some words of advice before she leaves her parents with her husband. It is known to *Pakpak* society that the culture of crying indicates the expression of sadness which is important to let someone they love know how important they are in their life. Again, it is about harmony within *Pakpak* society.

(9) "*Ulang bage urupen si tangis*" which is translated into English, "don't be like a crying servant".

A person who is crying in sadness usually affects other people who listen and makes them cry as well. The act of crying is contagious that it naturally signals people's emotion to cry as well and working in a society needs to be done the same that when someone sees or hears people are working for the collective good, the person must join and help them. In *Pakpak* culture, it is common to join and cry among a mourning family to show the feeling of condolences, to give them positive support and to make them feel accompanied in their grief. The proverb is specifically meant for people who always act like a boss, yet they won't get involved or give a helping hand for something that needs to be done together.

The elders in *Pakpak* society like to advice the young ones to do good and to be sure of what they will do in the future as a young generation. They love to collect all the young ones in a room or outside of a house and have them sit together and listen to an elder's story full of lessons and wisdom with a hope that they will take the lessons and apply it in their lives.

(10) "*Tendo lot pemaen, lojang lot ayaken*" which is translated into English, "stopping means there is to wait, running means there is to seize".

Everywhere on Earth, young people tend to be hurry in getting or being something before the time actually comes. This proverb is meant for *Pakpak* youth to be more tactful and careful in making life plans and not to be careless or being too quick in taking an action before knowing what the consequences will be to avoid negative outcomes for their future that they must be successful and make their parents and society proud of them.

Ancient *Pakpak* people make a living in a forest by harvesting coconuts, rubber tree, and other plants that are found in a forest or planted in a certain land. *Pakpak* people pick certain fruits from the top of a tree by climbing it and some of them like to sing while climbing a tree, this act of singing while climbing is called *odong-odong* in *Pakpak* language, which is a kind of *Pakpak* song, which indicates that climbing is a part of their tradition.

- (11) “Ndates penangkihen, ndates ma mula ndabuh” which is translated into English, “the higher someone climbs, the further he may fall”

It is a fact that if someone climbs something very high, the distance between the person and the ground triggers certain feelings such as fear of death, the desire to get what is up there and the curiosity of what is up there. It also determines how much pain and damage in the body if the person falls. This proverb is meant for people who are in a high status in a society to be more responsible and to be more tolerant with other people as it is not advised in *Pakpak* culture to be a selfish person with no good social relation and responsibility in a society.

If the British have a saying about scratching one’s back like “you scratch my back and I scratch yours”, *Pakpak* people also have a proverb about scratching back. It is known that when we feel itchy on our back, we feel really uncomfortable with it that the only way to feel better is to have it scratched by someone. We even feel good when someone does that to our back.

- (12) “*kubettoh kin nggatel gurungmu*” the meaning of which is, “only if I knew you back was itchy”.

This proverb is meant for people who won’t be honest to other people of what they want or what they need that other people don’t exactly know of what’s in their head. This situation is when a person needs something from other people, but he or she won’t tell which makes other people know nothing about it. As a result, he or she doesn’t get anything at all. In *Pakpak* culture, being shy all the time is not advised and it is avoided when one is willing to fit in a society. To be open up and to be nice with other people is highly advised in *Pakpak* culture.

5. Conclusion

People’s ways of life and proverbs are inseparable and are related to each other. The speakers of a traditional language need proverbs as a means to express and transfer good intentions, advices, lessons in a relatable and understandable way. Various

aspects of daily activities which have been known by the people become inspirations to make proverbs. *Pakpak* people are associated with flora, fauna as one of the most important aspects in their daily lives. By using words related to flora, fauna and social relation language in *Pakpak* language, they have made traditional proverbs comparing the floral, faunal and casual attitudes and behaviours of nature to the human. *Pakpak* people are agrarians who are close to natural, agriculture, animals and trees of which the morals are related to the people's daily lives. The qualities of social wisdom, values and attitudes are taught and explained using flora, fauna and social relation language in *Pakpak* language, such as the value of social status, discipline, being responsible, being hardworking, and good habits.

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