

Meanings of Flora and Fauna Related Ecolexicon in the Karonese Proverbs

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Abstract. This article aims at finding out the meanings of flora and fauna related ecolexicon used in the Karonese proverbs. This is a descriptive qualitative study using ecolexicon used in the Karonese proverbs as the data. The data were collected using interviews involving seven informants who were native Karonese living in Kabanjahe with the predetermined criteria. The interviews were followed by the elicitation technique. The data were analyzed using an interactive model of data analysis. The results of data analysis show that ecolexical items related to flora and fauna were found in the Karonese proverbs. The choice of such ecolexicon completely depends on the availability of the plants and animals in the local environment. In conclusion, the Karonese proverbs utilizing flora and fauna related lexicon used in Kabanjahe have the following functions: (i) as the advice, (ii) as the warning, and (iii) as the reflection of the Karonese traditional culture.

Keywords: ecolexicon, Karonese, proverb, flora, fauna

1 Introduction

Historically the Karo tribe has its home territory in the mountainous region located in North Sumatra Province, precisely in Karo Regency and in the areas surrounding Mount Sinabung and Mount Sibayak. Therefore, Karonese people call their area as *Taneh Karo Simalem* [1] which can be interpreted as the fertile, cool, peaceful and prosperous Karo land.

The natural beauty found in Karo District makes them very familiar with the natural environment and also impacts on their livelihoods. In general, Karonese people grow rice in fields. In addition, livestock is also one of the livelihoods of the Karonese people, including buffalo, cattle, pigs, goats, chickens and ducks. Because of their closeness to the surrounding natural environment, there are many proverbs in Karonese culture using ecology-related lexicon (ecolexicon).

Proverbs are so cultural that every ethnic has its own proverbs reflecting their social and cultural life. In addition, proverbs also reflect the local wisdom applicable in certain culture [2]. Almost in the similar tone, Rong [3] argues that proverbs reveal culture diversity as they reflect different values and life attitudes of people in certain culture. In short, proverbs are cultural signposts in certain societies through which the members of societies communicate their beliefs, values and attitudes [4].

The cultural diversity in proverbs has attracted the attention of many researchers to conduct research involving proverbs in different languages or cultures. Parables, word choices, and meanings contained in proverbs vary in different cultures. Widyastuti [2], for

example, examined proverbs in Javanese using an ethnographic approach. In addition, Misnadin [5] examined the values contained in the Madurese proverbs that need to be maintained and instilled to develop positive values that are in line with the development of today's Madurese society. Besides, Harja [6] revealed the syntactic functions occupied by elements, types, and things related to plants in Indonesian proverbs. Furthermore, Hartati [7] examined the types, meanings and functions of the Maanyanese proverbs in South Barito District, Central Kalimantan Province with a semantic approach.

The previous studies mentioned above have similarities with this current study in terms of the data sources studied, i.e. proverbs. However, this present study has more in common with the study conducted by Harja [6], both studying proverbs from an ecolinguistics point of view. The difference is that Harja [6] focuses his study on the proverbial syntactic elements associated with plants in bahasa Indonesia, while this study examines the meanings contained in the ecolexicon used in Karonese proverbs. In addition, this study does not only study flora-related ecolexicon, but also the ecolexicon associated with animals (fauna).

The rationale elaborated above suggests the importance of studying proverbs from ecolinguistics point of view considering that proverbs are so cultural that each culture certainly has different proverbs and uses different ecolexicon in its proverbs. The selection of the ecolexicon used in each culture is determined by the appearance of nature or geographical location of the environment in which the culture lives and develops. This research only focuses on the ecolexicon that is related to flora and fauna used in the Karonese proverbs in Kabanjahe, Karo District. Specifically, this article aims at finding out the meanings of flora and fauna related ecolexicon used in the Karonese proverbs.

2 Method

This is a descriptive qualitative study using ecolexicon used in the Karonese proverbs as the data. The data were collected using interviews involving seven informants with the following predetermined criteria. The informants were 40 to 65 years old native Karonese people living in Kabanjahe who used Karonese language in their interaction. They did not suffer from speech impairment so that they were able to communicate properly. In addition, they had sufficient knowledge of Karonese language. The interviews were then followed by elicitation technique in order to get richer data. The data were analyzed using an interactive model of data analysis [8], including data collection, condensation, display and conclusion drawing/verification.

3 Results and Discussion

Based on the data analysis, it was found that all of the proverbs in Karonese language contain advices to its people to become better creatures. To realize such intention, the Karonese proverbs often use ecolexicon reflecting the environment of Karo land. Furthermore, the findings also show that both flora and fauna-related ecolexicons were used in the Karonese proverbs. The word '*cekala*' (torch ginger) in (1) is one of the examples of the use of flora-related ecolexicon used in the Karonese proverb.

(1) *Bagi cekala pekepar lau* (Like a torch ginger tree on the side of two rivers)

Cekala is one of the trees commonly found in the riverbanks throughout the Karonese land, which is the reason why this ecorexicon is used in the Karonese proverb. The meaning contained in the proverb in (1) describes a closeness between the leaves of different torch ginger trees. They grow side by side, they can touch each other, but they cannot be united because they are separated by the river flow. This certainly likens human real life where it often seems that two people are very close, but they cannot be tied by a marriage bond. In bahasa Indonesia, such situation is described in the proverb “Like oil and water”. The choice of oil and water as the parables is motivated by the fact that Indonesia is rich of oil, and most of the areas in Indonesia are sea areas. The other Karonese proverb using flora-related ecorexicon is provided in (2).

(2) *Cio teruh buluh duri* (Taking shelter under a thorny bamboo tree)

The Karonese ecorexicon used in the proverb in (3) is bamboo, particularly a thorny bamboo. The proverb can be interpreted as the effort of finding a better place to lean results in a more painful place. This proverb gives advice to the Karonese people that whatever thought to be good must not always give something good to a person because humans are often deceived by the seduction of others who do not necessarily bring good for them. The use of bamboo as the parable is motivated by the fact that bamboo is one of the well-known plants by Karonese people. Karonese people recognize ten lexical items related to bamboos (*buluh*): *buluh belangke* (a bamboo with long and big segments), *buluh belin* (a big, thick and solid bamboo), *buluh cina* (a bamboo as small as a pencil), *buluh duri* (a thorny bamboo), *buluh awar* (a good looking bamboo for its yellow strip), *buluh kai* (a yellow bamboo with green strip), *buluh kayan* (a bamboo with short segments), *buluh kerapat* (a thin bamboo with relatively long segments), *buluh laga* (a bamboo with straight thin segments), and *buluh rires* (a bamboo used to make a traditional food called rires or lemang) [9], [10]. This is the evidence why bamboo is chosen as the parable in the proverb in (2). In addition, most of bamboos growing well in Karo land are thorny that can represent an unpleasant place to sit on. The other use of bamboo in the Karonese proverb is shown in the proverb in (3).

(3) *Pinter bagi balembang kupantar* (Straight like bamboos)

The ecorexicon bamboo in (3) describes one of the kinds of bamboos found in Karo land. As mentioned earlier, there are many kinds of bamboos growing well in Karo land, and the one used in the proverb in (3) is the long and straight bamboo. This proverb advises Karonese people to be honest or to run their lives orderly just like bamboos which are long and straight. Human’s life is like a long journey, and a good man is always on the right way until reaching his final destination. The other Karonese proverb using ecorexicon “bamboo” can also be seen in (4).

(4) *Bagi singelulus bangkar* (Like drying dry bamboos near the fire)

The meaning of the proverb in (4) contains an advice in order to avoid futile actions. The proverb describes that the bamboo is already dry, so it does not need to be dried anymore. Almost all of cultures encourage their people to avoid uselessness through their proverbs, by they use different parables. In Javanese culture, for example, the proverb uses a deer (fauna-related ecorexicon) as the parable of describing uselessness as in the proverb “*Nututi kidang lumayu*” which means “Running after the deer”. It is commonly known that deer is a fast runner and it is impossible to offset its running. Therefore, running after the deer describes useless efforts. In Indonesian culture, doing uselessness is reflected through the use of ecorexicon *biji* (seed) as in “*Tertanam di biji hampa*” (An empty seed is planted) (see [11]). This proverb describes the useless effort as an empty seed will never grow.

In addition to flora-related ecorexicon, the Karonese proverbs also use fauna-related ecorexicon as in (5).

(5) *Bagi biang la rikur* (Like a dog without a tail)

In Karonese culture, *biang* (dogs) are easily found. They are utilized to guard their houses and fields. In addition, they also bring their dogs for hunting. This indicates that dogs are helpful to them. However, some Karonese people cut the dog's tail, resulting in erratic movements. Moreover, such movements often cause unrest to the society. Thus, the proverb in (5) contains an advice for Karonese people to keep their behavior by not disturbing other people. In other words, they should avoid themselves from being trouble makers in their society. If this proverb is understood well and applied in human's social interactions, many social unrests taking place currently can certainly be avoided. The other use of fauna-related ecolexicon used in the Karonese proverb can be seen in (6).

(6) *Bagi peraruh itik* (Like ducks incubating their eggs)

Itik (duck) is one of the popular livestock in Karonese society because many Karonese people earn their living from duck farming. One of the duck's habits is its reluctant to incubate its eggs. The proverb in (6) means that Karonese people should not follow such duck's bad behavior which is less responsible to its eggs. A good person should be responsible for whatever he/she has done. This is corresponding to English well known quote "No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible" [12] that describes irresponsible person as a snowflake which, of course, never feels responsible for its slides. The use of ecolexicon "snowflake" in this quote reflects the local environment where the quote is produced.

The other Karonese proverb which almost has the similar meaning with the proverb in (6) can be seen in (7).

(7) *Bagi peridi katak* (Like a bathing frog)

Unlike the proverb in (6) which uses duck, the proverb in (7) uses frog as the ecolexicon which is well recognized by Karonese people. A bathing frog describes careless bathing, so the proverb describes the person who works carelessly. The proverb advises Karonese people not to stop their work until it is completely done.

Another animal which has a frequent contact with Karonese people in Kabanjahe is *kerbo* (buffalo). In Karonese culture, buffalo has an important role in traditional ceremonies such as in death ceremony. In addition, buffalo horn is usually used as the home decoration. They believe that buffalo horn can serve as a repellent for bad luck and show their social status in their society [13]. The use of buffalo (fauna-related ecolexicon) in the Karonese proverb is provided in (8).

(8) *Nimai kerbo mombak man bengkau merdang* (Waiting for the buffalo to be washed away)

The proverb in (8) means "waiting for something impossible". Buffaloes are known as the animal with the ability of swimming, so it is impossible to wait for buffaloes to be washed away.

The results of data analysis indicate that the choice of ecolexicon in proverbs completely depends on the availability of the plants and animals in the local environment. The more the ecolexicon is used in the proverb the more vital role it has in the society. Bamboo, for example, is frequently used in the Karonese proverbs as it has a frequent contact with Karonese people living in Kabanjahe. Bamboos are used as the tool for Karonese traditional games, source of living (e.g. the raw materials of local handicrafts, the materials for cooking local dishes), and building materials [14]. Besides, the results of data analysis show that the use of ecolexicon in Karonese proverbs reflects the natural wealth of Karo land with rich diversity of plants and animals.

4 Conclusions

The findings reveal that many Karonese proverbs use ecolexicon as the parables, particularly flora and fauna related ecolexicon. One of the factors leading to the frequent use of proverbs is the geography of Karo land where Karonese people live. They live in a mountainous area rich of flora and fauna diversity. The more frequent the plants or animals have contact with Karonese people living in Kabanjahe, the more frequent they are used as the parables in the Karonese proverbs. In addition, the use of ecolexicon in the Karonese proverbs contains its natural characteristics. For example, the use of bamboos which is known for their thorn and long segments are reflected in the proverbs; similarly, the use of buffalo for its ability in swimming is also reflected in the proverb. The choice of such flora and fauna lexicon is also motivated by the effort to make the proverbs easily understood by the local people as they can see the appearance and the characteristics of the plants and animals by themselves and try to relate them to the words used in the proverbs. In general, the Karonese proverbs utilizing flora and fauna related lexicon used in Kabanjahe have the following functions: (i) as the advice, (ii) as the warning, and (iii) as the reflection of the Karonese traditional culture.

The results of this study contribute a lot to both Karonese language maintenance and local culture preservation. Several ecolexical items used in the Karonese proverbs are no longer known by today's Karonese young generation due to a variety of factors, such as education, ecological changes, and modernization. Through studies on Karonese ecolexicon in various linguistic fields, it is expected that Karonese ecolexicon can be maintained and passed down to the next generation. In terms of culture, most of Karonese young generation does not appreciate the existence of proverbs, resulting in a number of behavior deviations. A culture of mutual respect and mutual help is getting faded. So, by extensively publishing articles, papers, or books highlighting the Karonese ancestral culture, it is expected that the Karonese young generations know their cultural values, practice it, and preserve it.

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