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AN ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE SONG LYRICS OF THE BONET DANCE IN THE SOUTH MIDDLE OF TIMOR REGENCY

Amon Bernabas Tenis

Amonbernabastenis1996@mail.ugm.ac.id

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University

Abstract

This study explores the ethnolinguistic significance of the Bonet dance lyrics within the Dawan community in the South Middle Timor Regency. The Bonet dance, an ancient traditional performance, holds cultural importance for the Dawan people, symbolizing unity, gratitude, respect, and resilience. By analyzing the metaphors and cultural symbols embedded in the lyrics, this research reveals how the Bonet dance preserves and reflects Dawan's values, beliefs, and social structures. The dance expresses key aspects such as the communal spirit, reverence for ancestors, spiritual gratitude, and connection to the land, making it a vital medium for cultural continuity. By examining the lyrics from an ethnolinguistic perspective, this study demonstrates how the Bonet dance contributes to sustaining cultural identity amidst modern influences, ensuring that essential Dawan principles are conveyed across generations.

Keywords: Bonet dance, Dawan culture, ethnolinguistics

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi signifikansi etnolinguistik lirik tarian Bonet dalam komunitas Dawan di Kabupaten Timor Tengah Selatan. Tarian Bonet, sebuah pertunjukan tradisional kuno, memiliki makna budaya yang penting bagi masyarakat Dawan, melambangkan persatuan, rasa syukur, penghormatan, dan ketangguhan. Melalui analisis metafora dan simbol budaya yang terkandung dalam liriknya, penelitian ini mengungkap bagaimana tarian Bonet melestarikan dan mencerminkan nilai-nilai, kepercayaan, dan struktur sosial masyarakat Dawan. Tarian ini mengekspresikan aspek kunci seperti semangat kebersamaan, penghormatan kepada leluhur, rasa syukur spiritual, dan keterhubungan dengan tanah, sehingga menjadi media vital bagi keberlanjutan budaya. Dengan mengkaji lirik dari perspektif etnolinguistik, studi ini menunjukkan bagaimana tarian Bonet berkontribusi dalam menjaga identitas budaya di tengah pengaruh modern, memastikan prinsip-prinsip penting Dawan diwariskan lintas generasi.

Kata Kunci: tarian Bonet, budaya Dawan, etnolinguistik

Background

Language is a hallmark of a nation's identity. Through language, we can understand the behavior and personality of its speakers. When discussing society, we inevitably touch on culture, for language expresses a community's cultural values. These values are often found in well-preserved traditions, such as dances, folklore, welcoming ceremonies, wedding customs, and more, Hielda et al., (2022). South Middle of Timor Regency is one of the regencies in East Nusa Tenggara Province, located in the middle of Timor Island. This area is rich in cultural heritage that remains preserved to this day. Malik (2017) argues that regions with strong local cultural capacity can harness this wealth to enhance the human role in creating local concepts, such as the traditional Bonet dance. Traditional dance is an expression of human creativity that showcases the beauty or elegance of a place, with the local community being the original owner of the culture. The Bonet dance is one of the traditional dances considered among the oldest in Timorese society, symbolizing the spirit and unity of the Dawan people. This dance integrates movement and vocal arts elements, rich in cultural meaning. It reflects the culture and way of life of the Dawan people in Timor (Timo et al., 2020). The Bonet dance has endured through the ages, even amidst the challenges posed by technological advancement, and it continues to be preserved by the indigenous people of Timor. The purpose of the Bonet dance is to strengthen social bonds within the Dawan community.

Initially, the Bonet dance was performed by the community to celebrate the harvest season, as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty for the blessings of crops such as corn, rice, beans, and tubers, as well as other plants that sustain the Dawan people for a full year until the next harvest season. This dance is also performed during traditional wedding ceremonies and other informal events. Furthermore, the Bonet dance can be performed during major, sacred events, such as the celebrations surrounding Indonesia's Independence Day every August. In this dance, there are songs or chants sung in call-and-response between the dance leader and the other dancers. These songs carry deep meanings and produce harmonious melodies when heard. The dance is performed with men and women standing alternately in a large circle, holding hands and singing together while circling the harvested crops. There are two key roles in the dance: the lead singer (apolin ne) and the responders (atutas). The lead singer can be one or more people, while the responders are all the Bonet dancers in the circle.

In this study, the researcher focused on analyzing the song lyrics used in the Bonet dance from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Ethnolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and culture in a community. It seeks to understand how language reflects, shapes, and influences cultural aspects of a society. This study examined the song lyrics' messages and the use of language closely tied to tradition, customs, beliefs, and local cultural values.

Methodology

The method used in this research is qualitative. A qualitative method is a study used by someone who wants to analyze or describe an object like texts or song lyrics. The ethnolinguistic approach is highly appropriate since this study analyzes the relationship

between language and culture. Ethnolinguistics teaches how local wisdom is used as a concept in learning in a language context that is structured based on values constructed based on students' learning experiences. Medinal, at all, (2024). This means that in this research, the researcher used a qualitative method to explore how the song lyrics in the Bonet dance reflect and influence the cultural practices of the Dawan people in South Central Timor. Data will be collected through analyzing the song lyrics that were used in the 79th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Indonesia. From the data, the researcher will use Discourse Analysis to analyze the data. This discourse analysis will allow the researcher to see the language used in the song lyrics from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. You can focus on aspects such as; first, Lexical choices: Analysing words that reflect the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of the Dawan people. Second, Symbolism and metaphors: Identifying cultural symbols within the lyrics that may convey deeper meanings about harvest, unity, or social roles. Third, Pragmatics: Analyzing how the meaning of words or phrases changes depending on the context of the dance (e.g., a wedding versus a harvest celebration). And fourth, Sociolinguistic elements: Examining how the lyrics reflect the social structure and cultural practices of the community.

Result and Discussion

In this study, the data analyzed consists of song lyrics used in the Bonet dance performance to celebrate Indonesia's 79th Independence Day in South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. In the first part, the researcher translated the lyrics from the song used in the Bonet dance at the event from Dawan into Indonesian and English. In translating these song lyrics, the researcher was assisted by the songwriter, a native of South Middle Timor Regency, a Dawan speaker who often writes Dawan songs and frequently performs traditional speeches in Dawan. Below are the lyrics used in the Bonet dance for the celebration of Indonesia's 79th Independence Day:

The song lyrics in Dawanese:

Abison nee: *Ee lele o he, ema heta bonet bae, tahaket kuk bonet*

Atutas: *Oo ee, Tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin*

Ee lele o he, haim toti palamisi bae, he mi haket bonet

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele matuin

Ee lele o he, fun taub ahunut hitit kal nako kaes muti sin

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

Ee lele o he, sin sin makan hit muti, hiti mnatu amsa

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

Ee lele o he, hitit Makena ma atbeo, tis tan hit musu sin

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

Ee lele o he, hit tis mat beu musuh sin teki kenat ma klaot

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

Ee lele o he, hit tankuk ton bo hitum sio, em het pules Usi

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

Ee lele o he, natuin Uis Neno lektam ne, hit musuh sin an kal

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

Ee lele o he, kolo manu an malin, bi pah Indonesia

Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin
Ee lele o he, em het panat nai hit pah, teki lais manekat
Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin
Ee lele o he, Indonesia I hit pah, pah amu I mnatu
Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin
Ee lele o he, haim toti palamisi bae, hai mifena hai pah
Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin
Ee lele o he, hai hem tu ma he misop, Uis Neno neokan kit
Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin
Ee lele o he, an bi tu as iye bae, haim toti palmisi
Oo ee, tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin

The song Lyrics in English

Caller: *Let us raise the Bonet, raise the Bonet*

Responders: *For it is truly right, we will join together*

We ask for your permission, sir, to raise the Bonet

For it is truly right, we will join together

For in the past, we were defeated by the colonizers

For it is truly right, we will join together

They sought our silver and gold

For it is truly right, we will join together

We fought and defeated our enemies

For it is truly right, we will join together

We defeated our enemies with swords and arrows

For it is truly right, we will join together

We have reached 79 years; let us praise God

For it is truly right, we will join together

For by God's grace, our enemies were defeated

For it is truly right, we will join together

All the people are joyful on the land of Indonesia

For it is truly right, we will join together

Let us guard our land by loving one another

For it is truly right, we will join together

Indonesia is our land, a land filled with gold and silver

For it is truly right, we will join together

Allow us to build our nation

For it is truly right, we will join together

We will now end this Bonet dance; God bless us

For it is truly right, we will join together

This is our performance, thank you

For it is truly right, we will join together

The Bonet dance is performed by a group of two roles: the caller (*Abison nee*) and the responders (*atutas*). The *Abison nee* is responsible for singing the Bonet dance's initial

part, which the *atutas* then answer. In the lyrics above, the parts written in bold are those sung by the *Abison nee*, while the indented parts are those of the *atutas*. To understand the meaning or purpose of the song sung in the Bonet dance, attention can be focused on the *Abison nee*'s part, as it provides deeper insights into the ongoing situation. In contrast, the *atutas* (the responders), as reflected in the song lyrics, do not introduce changes since they are considered to support what the *abison nee* conveys simply.

Metaphors in the song lyrics reflect Dawan cultural beliefs and practices.

The use of metaphors in the Bonet dance lyrics reveals the rich cultural tapestry of the Dawan people, embedding their beliefs, values, and practices within poetic expressions. These metaphors are more than artistic elements; they carry cultural meanings that are essential for understanding the worldview of the Dawan community. By analyzing the metaphors used in the lyrics, we can discern how they serve to communicate deeper messages about unity, respect, gratitude, and resilience.

For instance, the recurring line, "tebes namneo lasi nan, haim tele ma mituin", translated as "*For it is truly right, we will join together,*" contains the metaphorical word "tele," which means "step." In this context, however, "tele" signifies "*follow*" or "*come together.*" This metaphor emphasizes the communal spirit and the collective nature of Dawan society, where individuals are expected to move together harmoniously for shared goals. The notion of "step" symbolizes progress and unity, reminding participants of the dance—and by extension, the community—to advance together.

Another example is the phrase, "kolo manu an malin, bi pah Indonesia," translated as "*All the people are joyful on the land of Indonesia.*" Here, "kolo" (birds) and "manu" (chickens) serve as metaphors for the diverse societies within Indonesia. These metaphors highlight the interconnectedness of all communities, likening people to flocks that coexist and thrive together. The imagery of birds and chickens portrays simplicity, harmony, and collective movement, which are foundational to the Dawan way of life.

Additionally, the lines "We fought and defeated our enemies" and "We defeated our enemies with swords and arrows" use traditional weaponry "swords and arrows"—as metaphors for resilience, courage, and the resourcefulness of ancestors. These references go beyond their literal meanings, invoking pride in heritage and the determination of the Dawan people to protect their land and culture. By embedding these metaphors into the lyrics, the song not only preserves historical memory but also reinforces the community's identity and values. Metaphors also play a role in expressing gratitude and faith. The line, "For by God's grace, our enemies were defeated," is deeply metaphorical, attributing victories not just to physical strength or strategy but to divine intervention. This metaphor highlights the community's reliance on faith as a cornerstone of their identity and reflects a worldview where spiritual beliefs are intrinsically linked to daily life and achievements. Finally, the phrase "Indonesia is our land, a land filled with gold and silver" uses "gold and silver" as a metaphor for prosperity and abundance. While these metals signify tangible wealth, they also symbolize the inherent value of Indonesia's natural and cultural resources. This metaphor encourages pride in the homeland while simultaneously reminding the community of their responsibility to protect and nurture it.

In essence, the metaphors within the Bonet dance lyrics are not just decorative language but carriers of profound cultural messages. They encapsulate the values of unity, respect, resilience, gratitude, and faith that define the Dawan people, ensuring that these principles are passed down through generations in an accessible and memorable form.

The cultural values and traditions of the Dawan people are reflected in the song lyrics

In the song lyrics, some sentences serve the cultural values of the Dawan people in Timor Island. Such as:

1. "Let us raise the Bonet, raise the Bonet"
This line invites the community to participate in the Bonet dance, symbolizing unity and togetherness. The phrase "raise the Bonet" signifies upholding and honoring cultural traditions.
2. "For it is truly right, we will join together"
The response highlights agreement and collective affirmation. It emphasizes the importance of communal harmony and shared values.
3. "We ask for your permission, sir, to raise the Bonet"
This reflects respect for authority or elders, a key value in Dawan culture. Seeking permission shows humility and reverence, especially when engaging in cultural practices.
4. "For in the past, we were defeated by the colonizers"
This line recalls a shared history of hardship under colonization, fostering a collective memory of struggle and resilience that strengthens community bonds.
5. "They sought our silver and gold"
Here, the lyrics acknowledge the historical exploitation of Indonesia's resources by colonizers. It serves as a reminder of the value of their land and the resilience needed to protect it.
6. "We fought and defeated our enemies"
This line highlights pride in overcoming adversity. It celebrates victory and the courage of ancestors, reinforcing a sense of national pride and strength.
7. "We defeated our enemies with swords and arrows"
By referencing traditional weapons, this line pays homage to ancestral heritage and the resourcefulness of the community in defending themselves.
8. "We have reached 79 years; let us praise God"
This line acknowledges 79 years of independence (if sung in a post-colonial context). It conveys gratitude toward God for freedom and longevity, valuing faith as a source of strength.
9. "For by God's grace, our enemies were defeated"
Emphasizing divine intervention, this line reflects a belief in God's role in their victories, underscoring faith as central to their worldview and achievements.
10. "All the people are joyful on the land of Indonesia"
This expresses collective happiness and pride in their land. It portrays unity across diverse groups within Indonesia, highlighting national solidarity.

11. "Let us guard our land by loving one another"
This line urges the community to protect the land through mutual love and cooperation. It emphasizes a communal approach to maintaining peace and unity.
12. "Indonesia is our land, a land filled with gold and silver"
This highlights the natural wealth of Indonesia, reinforcing pride in their land's resources and beauty.
13. "Allow us to build our nation"
This line seeks the freedom to develop and nurture the country, emphasizing self-determination and the desire for progress.
14. "We will now end this Bonet dance; God bless us"
The closing of the Bonet dance is a respectful end to the celebration, with a prayer for divine blessings, reflecting humility and reverence.
15. "This is our performance, thank you"
A polite and gracious closure, showing gratitude and respect for the audience, embodying humility and hospitality.

These cultural values, expressed through the Bonet dance lyrics, illustrate the holistic nature of the Dawan worldview, where spirituality, respect, pride in heritage, and community unity are tightly interwoven. The lyrics act as a repository for these values, ensuring that the Dawan people's traditions, beliefs, and social principles endure across generations. Through the dance, participants not only perform but also embody these values, creating a living, dynamic connection to their cultural identity.

Bonet dance contributes to maintaining cultural identity among the Dawan people

Besides the cultural values served in the song lyrics, the researcher also found that Bonet's song contributes to maintaining the Dawan people's cultural identity. This song was written by the oldest people who know more about People's identities. His name is Yoksan Tennis. He is a songwriter who was born and grew up in the South Middle of Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara province, Indonesia. He started to write traditional song lyrics in the 1970s. Dawan people's cultural identity is shown in the lyrics, such as:

1. "Celebrating Unity and Togetherness". Repeated phrases like "For it is truly right, we will join together" emphasize the importance of community unity. By encouraging collective participation in the Bonet dance, the song nurtures a sense of belonging and strengthens bonds among the Dawan people, fostering a shared identity.
2. "Honouring Ancestral Struggles and Triumphs". References to past conflicts, such as "For in the past, we were defeated by the colonizers" and "We fought and defeated our enemies," help preserve historical memory. By remembering and celebrating their ancestors' resilience, the Dawan people honor their heritage, instilling pride and determination in future generations to safeguard their identity.
3. "Expressing Gratitude and Faith". Lines like "For by God's grace, our enemies were defeated" reflect a strong spiritual connection, highlighting the Dawan community's reliance on faith as part of their identity. Gratitude for freedom and

divine intervention links cultural traditions with spiritual beliefs, preserving a holistic cultural identity that includes both history and faith.

4. "Respect for Elders and Authority". The line "We ask for your permission, sir, to raise the Bonet" demonstrates respect for authority figures, a key cultural value among the Dawan. Seeking permission before dancing acknowledges the wisdom of elders, reinforcing respect as a fundamental part of the Dawan identity.
5. "Appreciating Natural and Cultural Wealth". Statements like "Indonesia is our land, a land filled with gold and silver" promote pride in the land's natural resources. By valuing and recognizing these resources, the song connects Dawan's identity to their environment, encouraging the preservation of their heritage and homeland.
6. "Commitment to Building and Protecting the Nation". Lines such as "Allow us to build our nation" reflect a proactive stance toward the future. This commitment to the country's development showcases the Dawan people's dedication to contributing to Indonesia's growth while retaining their unique cultural identity.
7. "Gratitude and Humility in Performance". The closing lines, "We will now end this Bonet dance; God bless us" and "This is our performance, thank you," demonstrate gratitude, humility, and respect, values central to Dawan's social conduct. By concluding the dance in this manner, the song conveys these virtues, reinforcing a respectful and humble identity.

The Bonet dance is more than a performance; it is a cultural practice that actively preserves and reinforces the identity of the Dawan people. Each element of the Bonet dance, from the lyrics to the choreography, embodies the values, beliefs, and social structures of the Dawan community, ensuring that these aspects of cultural identity are passed down through generations. Firstly, by encouraging the celebration of unity and togetherness, the Bonet dance reinforces a sense of belonging within the community. The lyrics, which repeatedly call for collective participation, strengthen social cohesion. By participating in the dance, community members affirm their commitment to each other and their shared identity. This repeated expression of unity acts as a reminder of the community's interdependence, a core aspect of Dawan's social life.

Additionally, by honoring ancestral struggles and triumphs, the Bonet dance serves as a living memorial to the resilience of the Dawan people. The lyrics reference past conflicts and victories, which instill pride and a sense of duty to uphold the strength demonstrated by previous generations. This connection to history not only fosters pride but also imbues younger generations with a sense of purpose in continuing their heritage. The dance also plays a critical role in expressing gratitude and faith. Spirituality is central to Dawan culture, and the Bonet dance integrates expressions of gratitude for blessings and divine support. By invoking these sentiments, the dance preserves a strong spiritual identity, reminding participants of the cultural importance of faith. This shared spiritual expression unifies the community around common beliefs and reinforces a sense of collective identity.

Furthermore, by showing respect for elders and authority, the Bonet dance upholds a cultural value that is foundational in Dawan society. Seeking permission from elders before dancing reflects a structure of respect that is integral to Dawan interactions. This

deference to authority reinforces social harmony, reminding each participant of the hierarchy and wisdom that guide their community. The lyrics' references to appreciating natural and cultural wealth emphasize the Dawan people's deep connection to their land. By celebrating Indonesia's natural resources, the dance underscores the cultural identity rooted in self-sufficiency and respect for the environment. This awareness of the land's value fosters a commitment to conservation and emphasizes the Dawan people's role as stewards of their homeland, an identity marker that binds them closely to their natural surroundings.

Lastly, the Bonet dance emphasizes a commitment to building and protecting the nation. Phrases like "Allow us to build our nation" reflect a dedication to progress and development, encouraging a proactive approach to community and national growth. This sense of responsibility toward the future promotes an identity rooted not only in tradition but also in aspirations for continued cultural resilience and adaptation. In sum, the Bonet dance serves as a cultural vessel, enabling the Dawan people to celebrate, reinforce, and transmit their identity in ways that remain vibrant and relevant. This traditional performance fosters a shared understanding of who they are as a people, linking the past, present, and future in a continuous expression of cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The Bonet dance and accompanying song lyrics serve as a cultural pillar for the Dawan people of Timor Tengah Selatan, preserving their values, history, and communal identity. The Dawan people celebrate unity, resilience, and gratitude through metaphors and cultural symbols embedded in the lyrics. These lyrics honor the struggles against colonization, express pride in Indonesia's independence, and reinforce values such as respect for elders, faith in God, and appreciation for the land's natural resources. This ethnolinguistic analysis shows that Bonet dance lyrics act as a conduit for cultural knowledge, allowing Dawan culture to endure in the face of modernity. By reinforcing values of cooperation, respect, and commitment to heritage, the Bonet dance contributes significantly to sustaining the cultural identity of the Dawan community.

This study underscores the importance of preserving cultural expressions like the Bonet dance. The lyrics reflect a deep connection to the land, a history of shared struggle, and an enduring commitment to social harmony, emphasizing the role of traditional art in uniting the community. Analyzing these expressions, we understand how language and performance reinforce cultural identity and values. This study contributes to the broader field of ethnolinguistics by highlighting how traditional performance can sustain community identity, provide continuity of historical knowledge, and support a society's spiritual and moral framework.

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