



"Tema 6: Kebijakan, Rekayasa Sosial dan Pengembangan Perdesaan"

FUNCTION OF BANYUMAS PROVERBS

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Abstract

Indonesia is very rich with its culture as the result of the influence of its various ethnic culture. Culture itself is tightly related to language as a means of communication. As it is true that language is the mirror of a mind, and on the other hand, language is the symbolic guide to culture. Proverbs, as a form of language expression, are short, well-known, supposedly wise sayings, usually in simple language. Proverbs are expressions of culture that are passed from generation to generation. They are words of wisdom of culture- lessons that people of that culture want their children to learn and to live by. Javanese proverbs are considered rich with high philosophical and cultural values.

This research is aimed to identify the functions of Javanese proverbs, to figure out the local cultural values implied in Javanese proverbs and to describe their application in Javanese society nowadays. It employed a descriptive-qualitative approach to analyze the data in the form of lingual units. Ethnographic content analysis was employed to draw valid conclusion from the data analysis based on the context of real social setting.

The research findings show that Javanese proverbs function to advice, to admonish, and to satirize. Some of the local cultural values contained in Javanese proverbs are brotherhood, togetherness, patience, hard work, sincerity, politeness and peace. Nowadays, the local values implied in some Javanese proverbs are not relevant anymore because of the interference from other values resulted from the phenomena of multiculturalism and modernism.

Keywords: proverbs, local cultural values, Javanese language

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is very rich with its culture as the result of the influence of its various ethnic culture. Each culture has its uniqueness, reflecting different values of life. Therefore, it is common when discussing a specific community or ethnic group that the first question that arises is about their customs and traditions, lifestyle, and communication style.

Morgan (1999) asserts that culture refers to a set of practices, codes, and values that



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characterize a group. Another definition is provided by Goodenough, as cited in Wardaugh (1988), who sees culture as consisting of "anything that must be known or believed by someone in order to behave in a manner acceptable to its members." Jandt (2003) states that culture refers to the understanding of all experiences that guide an individual through life. All these cultural elements are learned through interaction with others in that culture. Furthermore, Gunarwan (2004) emphasizes that culture is related to a way of life. Since a way of life influences communication, it can be said that culture also determines how members of society communicate or express themselves.



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Discussing culture inevitably involves examining communication methods and media. When talking about communication media, the fundamental aspect to consider is language. This fact is inseparable from the role of language as a means of expressing the mirror of human thoughts, as stated by Dell Hymes (1974): "Language is the symbolic guide to culture." According to Newmark (1988: 96), culture is defined as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression. Therefore, language serves as a vessel and reflection of a culture. Through language, individuals can adapt to customs, behavior, social etiquette and effortlessly integrate themselves into various forms of society.

To meet their living needs, humans require language to express ideas, feelings, and desires to one another. According to Lakoff and Johnson (in Nurgiyantoro, 2007: 83), in everyday life, humans often use various forms of language styles to express different needs. Expressions are often more accurately conveyed through forms of language styles than literally. Language style is defined as a distinctive way of expressing thoughts through language that reveals the soul and personality of the author or language user (Keraf, 2007: 113). As known, language style encompasses all kinds of expressions that convey meanings different from their literal meanings, which can be in the form of words, phrases, or even larger syntactic units (Hoed, 1992: 15).

Language style is the utilization of linguistic richness, the use of specific varieties to achieve particular effects, the overall characteristics of the language of a group of literary writers, and a distinctive way of conveying thoughts and feelings, both orally and in writing. Language style employs beautiful language to enhance effects by introducing and comparing a specific object or concept with another that is more common. In short, the use of a particular language style can alter and evoke specific connotations of meaning.

Proverbs are one form of language style that takes the shape of traditional expressions or linguistic metaphors in the form of concise, brief, and simple sentences or word groups containing norms, values, advice, comparisons, analogies, principles, and behavioral rules. Proverbs were widely used in the daily lives of people in the past and were passed down from generation to generation. They were considered the easiest way to offer advice, warnings, or criticisms, as their content could be easily understood by those receiving the advice. Upon closer examination of their content and underlying meaning, proverbs offer valuable insights into the history, social context, and meaning of life during the times in which they originated.

In Javanese, the following proverb is very well-known even today.

(1) *Alon-alon waton kelakon*

The meaning of this proverb is "slowly but surely." Javanese society believes that one should be patient and not rush or hurry in doing something; what matters is that everything is accomplished well.

In Javanese society, proverbs are widely used to convey specific messages or values. These values are highly esteemed and noble, passed down through generations. The proverbs serve as guidance, advice, and admonitions. With the passage of time, culture and language evolve. The increasingly modern and diverse society experiences a shift in mindset and lifestyle. This shift also influences their attitudes toward and understanding of local cultural values. There is a shift in values from traditional to modern, affecting the application of local values that have been ingrained in daily life.

Values are defined as beliefs about how to behave and the ultimate goals individuals desire, serving as principles or standards in their lives. Formed through separate experiences, namely those derived from cultural, societal, and personal backgrounds encapsulated within an



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individual's psychological structure, values are enduring and stable. Therefore, values tend to persist, even though they may still be subject to change due to certain factors. One such factor is a change in the cultural value system to which an individual adheres (Danandjaja, 1985).

Based on the background above, ethnographic research in the field of understanding culture reflected in proverbs is crucial, particularly concerning the comprehension of individual personalities and local cultural values. The fundamental aspect supporting the importance of this proverbial research is the fact that Indonesia consists of thousands of ethnicities, each with its own distinctive proverbs laden with different cultural values. This diversity requires a deeper understanding, especially to grasp the intentions, meanings, and values encapsulated within them. This issue becomes even more relevant when considering the increasingly modern conditions of society today. Cultural values are confronted with contemporary life values. Are the values embedded in proverbs still relevant today? This question is intriguing and worth exploring as a problem in ethnographic research.

The scope of this research encompasses the proverbs found and used in the Javanese language, along with their accompanying meanings. Considering the vastness of the island of Java, the Javanese culture referred to in this study pertains to the culture found in Javanese-speaking regions. The objectives of this research are as follows:

- (1) To identify the functions of using Javanese proverbs;
- (2) To explore the local values within Javanese culture embedded in Javanese proverbs; and
- (3) To describe the application of Javanese proverbs in the contemporary Javanese society, which has become multicultural and modern.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with an ethnographic content analysis method. Qualitative methods refer to research procedures that generate descriptive data, such as oral and written words and observable behaviors (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). Referring to Subroto (1992: 7), in this context, the researcher records data in the form of linguistic units such as words, phrases, or sentences, which are Javanese proverbs.

This research employs the ethnographic content analysis model. According to Krippendorff (1998: 21), content analysis is a research technique for drawing valid conclusions from data in its context. Holsti (1969), as cited in Krippendorff (1998), states three main objectives of content analysis: drawing conclusions about the elements of communication, describing the characteristics of communication, and drawing conclusions about the effects of communication. On the other hand, ethnographic research focuses on culture using a real social setting. In general, ethnography refers to the description of people and their culture. Products of social interaction, for example, can become objects of reflexive research by examining features within a context understood based on other characteristics (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979).



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In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researchers themselves. In this case, researchers act as data collectors and data analysts and report the research findings. The technique employed is the observe-record-note method, which involves collecting both oral and written data. Subroto (1992: 41) states that the observe and note technique aims to record relevant data that aligns with the research objectives. The data is then documented with context or settings to gain a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic phenomena under study.

The data analysis is conducted using ethnographic content analysis. From the collected data, the first step involves gathering and classifying the Javanese proverbs. The second step is to identify the functions of using these proverbs in the Javanese language. The third step is to describe the meaning of each proverb. The final step is to present how these meanings are applied in contemporary Javanese society.

The establishment of data validity includes the degrees of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Moleong, 2004). In this research, data validity is achieved using credibility and confirmability. Credibility aims to ensure the authenticity of the data. To achieve a high level of data validity, the researcher conducts in-depth observations of the data. Additionally, the credibility of this research is ensured through peer checking and the comprehensiveness of references.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Indonesia is widely known as a nation consisting of approximately 300 ethnic groups, each with its own cultural identity (Koentjaraningrat in Warnaen, 2001). Every ethnic group has its specific proverbs that reflect local values. The phrases used often carry impressions with broad meanings and wise content.

After analyzing the proverbs in the Javanese language, the research findings based on the research objectives are presented as follows:

1. Functions of Javanese Proverbs

At least three functions were identified in Javanese proverbs, namely advising, admonishing, and satirizing.

a. Advising

Proverbs serve to advise wise life values aimed at creating a peaceful and good life. If the advised person follows the advice, they will experience something good in line with the message conveyed in the proverb.

(1) *Ajining diri dumunung aneng lathi, ajining raga ana ing busana,*

The proverb above implies that an individual's honor lies in their words, and their physical honor is in the clothing they wear. "Ajining diri soko lathi" itself means that a person's self-worth is, in part, dependent on their mouth, speech, and language. Polite, articulate, sweet words that are appropriate for the situation will please others. On the other hand, dirty, vulgar, and rude words will hurt others' feelings. Therefore, in Javanese, there is a concept known as "unggah-ungguh," which emphasizes courtesy and politeness in language. When communicating with elders, the form of politeness used is "kromo inggil." Kromo inggil is commonly used in the environment of the Kraton Ngayogyakarta and the Sultanate of Sukoharjo. Meanwhile, the language used among peers is "ngoko," a popular dialect full of familiarity and harmony.

(2) *Sapa nandur bakal ngundhuh.*



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Literally, this proverb means "whoever sows will reap." It conveys the idea that whatever we do in this world will have corresponding consequences. On a deeper level, the proverb advises us that if we engage in wrongdoing, we will eventually face negative consequences. Essentially, this proverb aims to teach the law of balance, which in Indonesian might be equivalent to the proverb "siapa menabur angin akan menuai badai," meaning "whoever sows the wind will reap the storm."

b. Admonishing

Proverbs can be used to give a warning so that people do not do what is mentioned in the proverb. If people still do it, then something bad can happen.

(4) *Gusti Allahe dhuwit, nabine jarit.*

This Javanese proverb literally means, "One's god is money; one's prophet is the cloth." The proverb aims to depict and admonish individuals whose lives revolve solely around pursuing wealth, material possessions, luxury, and pleasures. Such individuals are willing to forsake everything, including ethics, morals, virtues, and so on, to attain these pursuits.

c. Satirizing

To satirize is an action taken to reprimand someone indirectly, with the hope that the person being satirized will understand.

(5) *Diwehi ati ngrogoh rempela*

The proverb above is intended to satirize individuals who have been helped or received kindness but expect or ask for more. Such individuals can be considered arrogant and ungrateful.

(6) *Nabok nyilih tangan*

The proverb "Nabok nyilih tangan" literally means "to strike using borrowed hands" and is used to indirectly satirize someone who causes harm to others, usually for a specific purpose, but makes it seem as if someone else is responsible. Practices like these often occur in politics, where, to maintain their image, those in power hesitate to eliminate their political opponents directly. Instead, they use the 'hands' of others. Such individuals are not considered honorable; it means that when they want to undermine, hurt, eliminate, kill, or make someone else disappear, they do not act directly but borrow someone else's hands to make it appear as if they are clean, good, and pure.

2. Values embedded in Javanese proverbs

In general, the Javanese community is one ethnic group that highly upholds, adheres to, and remains loyal to its cultural values. From the reality and this kind of fanaticism, the term "Javanism" (kejawen) emerges. The term "Javanism" prioritizes and emphasizes the traditional values within Javanese culture itself. These cultural values of Java have been able to introduce Java to a broader global context. The uniqueness and diversity of meanings implied in Javanese culture have captured the interest of many researchers and scholars worldwide, prompting them to understand and delve more into the details of Javanese culture.



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There are many proverbs in the Javanese language, each carrying cultural meanings and values. Local cultural values embedded in Javanese proverbs can be outlined as follows:

a. Brotherhood and Togetherness

(7) Mangan ora mangan ngumpul.

Proverb (7) reflects a strong sense of familial bonds. The implied meaning emphasizes togetherness regardless of circumstances, whether good or bad, whether there is food or not. This value is why, in Javanese society, large extended families are common, where children continue to live with their parents even after marriage. This practice often leads parents to be reluctant to let their children go far from home for an extended period. Being together brings a special kind of happiness for them.

(8) Tuna satak bathi sanak.

This Javanese proverb means "losing one tak (a unit of money/a handful of money) for the sake of a relative's gain." The proverb aims to teach that even in the world of trade, where the primary consideration is often seeking profit, for the Javanese, losing a certain amount of money is acceptable as long as they can still gain a "sedulur" or friend. In this context, a "friend" seems to carry more meaningful implications than just money and material wealth.

b. Patience and Perseverance

(9) Alon-alon waton kelakon

This deeply ingrained Javanese proverb is often used to caution individuals who are in a hurry. "It is okay to be slow as long as the goal is achieved." This saying is frequently the spirit of the Javanese people when undertaking tasks. It is believed that in everything one does, perseverance and patience are essential. Doing something at a slow pace is acceptable as long as the goal is eventually achieved, regardless of when that may be.

c. Hard work and Unyielding

(10) Rawe-rawe rantas malang-malang putung

This proverb has been famous since the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia and was used to ignite the spirit of the fighters, not to surrender. The value it carries is that anything hindering goals and objectives should be eliminated. We must work hard and be persistent in overcoming all obstacles to achieve our goals.

d. Exemplariness

(11) Ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa, tut wuri andayani.

The value conveyed in this proverb is that anyone in a leading position should set a good example, those in the middle should encourage, and those at the back (followers or the people) should support by obeying the orders of their leaders.

e. Sincerity



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(12) Sepi ing pamrih rame ing gawe

There is a spirit highly valued by the Javanese community, which is the spirit of cooperation (gotong royong). In the spirit of cooperation, the principle of "sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe" should be emphasized. This proverb means that in collaborative work, sincerity is crucial; one should not cultivate the desire to be praised, boasted about, or flattered. The approach should be "sepi ing pamrih," meaning without expecting rewards, praises, or flattery, but it should be "rame ing gawe," enthusiastic in work and creativity.

f. Politeness and Courtesy

(13) Ajining diri dumunung aneng lathi, ajining raga ana ing busana.

Literally, this proverb means "the dignity of the self is in the mouth, and the presence is in the attire." The proverb aims to convey that if someone speaks and dresses indiscriminately in any place, their true self will not be respected by others. In essence, this proverb emphasizes the importance of behaving politely by respecting oneself in speech and attire that is appropriate for the occasion, the right place, and the suitable time.

g. Peacefulness

(14) Wani ngalah, luhur wekasane.

"Daring to yield will be glorious in the future" is the message conveyed in this proverb. While some may mock the proverb, interpreting it as a sign of not wanting to compete, being resigned, timid, weak, and so on, the true intention is that one should prioritize peace among fellow individuals. "Wani ngalah" essentially means that when there is a tense situation, people should be willing to relax their nerves or even withdraw themselves. Javanese society tends to avoid conflict or situations of confrontation with others. This concept has been deeply instilled in Javanese society since childhood.

3. Application of the Meanings Contained in Javanese Proverbs in Contemporary Society.

In proverbs, there is an implicit element of the cultural system of the community related to values, worldviews, norms, guidelines, and rules that serve as references for members of the community. As an oral literature, its development is strongly influenced by changes occurring in its supporting society. Every change in society is usually accompanied by the disappearance of proverbs that are no longer suitable for the altered conditions.

In this non-traditional era, many proverbs still retain their relevant values. This means that these values can still be applied and are even crucial to guide society back to its noble values. These proverbs are still needed to restrain the emergence of new values due to the currents of modernization and globalization. Some of these relevant proverbs can be seen in the following explanations.

(15) Becik ketitik ala ketara

This proverb means "the good will be revealed, and the bad will be exposed," whether sooner or later. Many examples, be they significant or minor, that have been concealed from the public eventually come to light, revealing the truth about who is right and who is wrong. This



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proverb remains relevant for application indefinitely.

(16) *Dijupuk iwake aja nganti butheg banyune.*

The proverb means "When taking the fish, do not muddy the water," remains highly relevant even today. This proverb broadly emphasizes that in pursuing solutions or making decisions, one should avoid causing additional problems or casualties.

Some Javanese proverbs may no longer be considered relevant when applied in the context of contemporary society. Here are some examples of proverbs whose application is deemed no longer relevant.

(17) *Mangan ora mangan ngumpul*

In an era filled with competition amidst the demands of a high cost of living, this proverb becomes challenging to apply. People tend to feel embarrassed about staying together with their families while they are unemployed or facing difficulties in life. The concept of togetherness no longer necessarily has to be manifested through physical gatherings. Nowadays, many young generations leave their families or villages to earn a living or establish new families. Telecommunication media also play a role, meaning communication among family members does not have to be done in close proximity but can be facilitated through phones or emails.

(18) *Mikul dhuwur, mendhem jero*

In Indonesian, this proverb translates to "carrying high, burying deep." It implies that the merits of a leader or parent should be highly regarded, while their faults should be concealed. Leaders or parents in the past were highly venerated and respected. People were very afraid, submissive, and obedient to their leaders, always following their wishes, whether right or wrong. Nowadays, society tends to be more open and outspoken, so when a leader, at any level, makes a mistake, people will try to protest against it. Therefore, there are now many demonstrations protesting against the policies of leaders who are perceived to be wrong.

(19) *Alon-alon waton kelakon*

The implied goal of this proverb is not wrong because the ultimate objective is to achieve what is desired. The issue lies in the process of achieving it. "Slow is okay as long as the goal is achieved" seems questionable in its application today. People tend to agree more with the slogan "faster is better" for the sake of time, energy, and mental efficiency. Anything done more quickly is considered better, as the results will be felt sooner.

(20) *Wani ngalah, luhur wekasane.*

This proverb means that being willing to yield will bring honor in the future. Indeed, it is not easy and even extremely difficult and nearly impossible to adopt a yielding attitude, especially in an era where everything is measured by money, materialism, hedonism, and modernity like today. In this present time, "being willing to yield" is not always considered a good option. People are unwilling to give in easily, especially if they believe they are right. On the contrary, people strive to fight for their rights.

The spirit of cooperation, willingness, and sincerity in helping others has also diminished. People, especially in urban areas, tend to see everything in monetary terms. This individualistic



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spirit has shifted the noble spirit embodied in the following proverb.

(21) *Sepi ing pamrih rame ing gawe*

There are several developments in Javanese society causing the fading of the noble values contained in proverbs. Firstly, the phenomenon of a multicultural society in Indonesia is growing, leading to the formation of a multi-language and multi-value society. The tendency to form a multicultural society can result in a blend of cultural values. Differences in cultural values can lead to conflicts in daily interactions. Not everyone can easily accept, let alone absorb, the cultural values of others. The assimilation of these values can dilute the application of original values because, in social interactions, people are required to adapt to each other's values.

Secondly, there is the modernization occurring across all layers of Javanese society. The increased use of information technology can drive modernization, the influx of foreign cultures, the influence of the global market, and other factors. Changes in lifestyle and thinking patterns also influence how people evaluate and perceive things. Their mindset can shift from traditional to modern. The new values brought by the wave of modernization can displace the traditional values that have been ingrained in society.

The third reason is the linguistic phenomenon used by today's society, which is also experiencing 'modernization.' Nowadays, many new language slogans or expressions emerge that also contain certain principles or values. These principles or values can influence the local values that the community has held. Many young people are not aware of the richness of the proverbs in their language, let alone understand the meanings contained in them. They are more familiar with advertising slogans they see on television or other media.

Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, in a cultural speech titled "Straightening Out the Meaning of Javanese Cultural Values" at Graha Bakti Budaya Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta, on Tuesday (5/11), as quoted in the Sinar Harapan newspaper dated November 6, 2002, questioned, "How can we appreciate traditional culture if we do not protect it because local culture is now juxtaposed with global culture?". Whereas, in the past, the process of local culture interacting with the world's great traditions had given birth to the cultural diversity of the archipelago.

The shift in Javanese cultural values has significant implications, raising urgent issues in the cultural transformation of Indonesia. As a Javanese person, it would be naive to ignore and not care about one's own culture. Regardless, the values embedded in Javanese culture are considered one of the precious traditional heritages globally. The wisdom it holds is profound and magnificent. With its emphasis on harmony and tolerance, Javanese culture has historically served as a unifying force in the tumultuous and noisy political and religious life, full of conflicts, in Indonesia. Therefore, the noble values of Javanese culture are crucial to be preserved and passed down through generations, especially those that are still relevant in application.



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D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Proverbs serve as a tool for inheriting the noble cultural values of Javanese local culture from generation to generation, undergoing dynamic changes in its application. Across generations, proverbs function to provide advice, reprimands, and satire. The values embedded in these proverbs include family unity, patience, hard work, exemplary behavior, sincerity, courtesy, and peace.

Contemporary Javanese society has become multicultural and modern. It is heading towards globalization. In line with this, the application of cultural values embedded in proverbs has also changed. Some proverbs remain relevant, but others have become obsolete in the present context. Even though Javanese society is no longer as traditional as before, these values are still important to preserve and apply, especially in facing new values that enter and could potentially harm local culture and maintain the harmony and unity of society.

The results of this research emphasize the importance of preserving and appreciating Javanese proverbs along with their noble meanings as the heritage of the nation. The younger generation, in particular, who have adopted many new slogans and values, need to preserve the uniqueness of local values. These local values cannot be easily forgotten, given their significant role as pillars of regional and national life.

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