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THE USE OF NSM AND CULTURAL SCRIPTS THEORY IN EXPLICATING THE CATEGORY OF MARAPU: A TRADITIONAL ANIMIST BELIEF OF SUMBANESE

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ABSTRACT

As the followers of Marapu keep on believing that the source of life comes from this god, they realized that Marapu has several categories according to its function. Due to the divisions of marapu, this research explains the meaning of each category and explicated them clearly to the cultural outsiders by using the theory of cultural scripts proposed by Anna Wierzbicka, particularly natural semantic metalanguage method. Several categories were analyzed as the sample of the research, namely High Deity, the spirit of ancestor, the spirit of death, the spirit of plant and animal magical power. The result shows that each category of the Marapu has its own main roles and meaning. High deity, for example, is regarded as the creator of everything and the protector. The spirit of the ancestor, on the other hand, plays a role as the mediator between human and the highest god. The spirit of the death only functions as the companion and the keeper of the land, while the spirit of the plant and animal's magical power functions as the mediator between Marapu and the men.

Keywords: Marapu, Cultural scripts, Belief, NSM, Animist

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that each speech community has its own specific culture. The culture may encode the way of speaking, social life, beliefs, norms and traditions. Swidler (1986: 273) agrees that culture consists of symbolic vehicles of meaning, such as belief, ritual practice, art forms, ceremonies, and other informal cultural practices. By means of semantic, it assists to bridge between language and culture to help the cultural outsiders understand. Goddard (2011: 11) supported this argument by claiming that cultural specific concepts reflect its speaker's culture and language plays a pivotal role to reveal the culture.

Take for example, cultural specific concept of Sumbanesse called Marapu. This traditional animist belief may be well known to people of East Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia, but it seems a new cultural concept for other provinces of this country or maybe to some other countries, such as Africa, Japan, and China. It is due to the fact that, this is not just like other belief systems but it is much more enriched with cultural and ritual values.

This traditional belief grows in the small island called Sumba which is geographically situated in the eastern part of Indonesia and belongs to East Nusa Tenggara province. With the area of 11, 153 km^2, the inhabitants of 656, 259 people are distributed and live in four local government districts, namely, West Sumba, Southwest Sumba, Central Sumba, and East Sumba (Wikipedia 2012). Interestingly, twenty five to thirty percent of the population is the followers of this well-known traditional animist belief (Wikipedia 2012). This local belief still exists until now and grows together with other Indonesian's religions such Christian, Moeslem, Hinduism, and Buddhist.

As the followers of Marapu keep on believing that the source of life comes from this god, they realized that Marapu has several categories according to its function. It is noted by Wellem (2004: 42) that Marapu is a belief towards highest divinity, the spirit of ancestor, the spirit of death, and magical power. Due to the divisions of Marapu, this essay is going to explain the meaning of each category and explicate them clearly to the cultural outsiders. The method which is going to be used in this essay is natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) and the theory of cultural scripts proposed by Anna Wierzbicka.

Wierzbicka claimed that NSM and the theory of cultural script are the adequate methodology that can have access to the concealed richness of meaning. It is due to the fact

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that NSM constitutes common focal point of natural language, meaning that the word of a particular culture may exist in other language with different semantic representation. Therefore, NSM really helps to state the meaning of a word of particular culture (Wierzbicka, 2003: 6-7). The other theory which is interrelated with NSM is the theory of cultural scripts. Wierzbicka, moreover, argues that cultural scripts can describe cultural norms and values from insider perspectives and present it in a simple natural metalanguage. Besides that, the theory of cultural scripts suggests the meaning using universal set of concepts that can be discovered in all language. In addition to that, cultural script is also simple to be comprehended and practical to be used. Unlike other approach, this theory lies on the real linguistics evidence (2006: 23-24). It means that it uses real linguistics phenomena which exist in a speech community.

Regarding to the simplicity and clarity of NSM and theory of cultural scripts, this research analyzed the categories of Marapu using both methodologies. The first part of the essay will explain the definition of Marapu and it is then followed by explicating each category. Finally, this essay is going to conclude the definition and the use of NSM and cultural script. This essay argues that the use of NSM and cultural scripts in explicating the categories of a traditional animist belief called Marapu provides a clear insight towards cultural outsider.

The meaning of Marapu

There are several debatable claims about the definition of Marapu. Ovlee argued that Marapu etymologically comes from the word *ma* and *rappu* of Sumba language. *Ma* definitely means "who" or "what" while *rappu* means respected, glorified or worshipped. Thus, Marapu is defined as the one who or which is respected, glorified or worshipped (cited in Wellem, 2004: 41). On the other hand, another scholar suggested different view about Marapu as something hidden or unseen (Yewangoe cited in Solihin 2009). Yewangoe also pointed out another etymology, suggesting that Marapu comes from the word *mera* and *appu* of Sumba language. *Mera* means similar while *appu* means ancestor so Marapu means similar to the ancestor (Yewangoe cited in Wellem, 2004: 41). However, Pos (cited in Wellem, 2004: 41) argued that Marapu is not a god but it is just a protection spirit of house and island. Alderwerelt, on the contrary, asserted that Marapu is a spirit which does bad things (cited in Wellem, 2004: 41). Despite all definitions, Nooteboom stated that Marapu is a magical spirit which appears in a variety of forms. He additionally explains that the word Marapu means pure, noble and magic. Because of the name, people should respect this god (cited in Wellem, 2004: 41)

In spite of the debatable definitions, the followers of this belief tend to over glory their ancestors even name them as omni creator and highest deity (Kapita, Wellem& Murni cited in Solihin 2009). In addition to that, they also created some instruments as their respect to Marapu. The instruments consist of spears, golden things, gongs, and swords. These things are going to used for worshiping each Marapu, consisting of highest divinity, the spirit of ancestor, the spirit of death, and the spirit of plant and animal's magical power.

Explicating the categories of Marapu using NSM and theory of cultural scripts

The history of Marapu begins with the belief of Sumbanese towards the highest divinity. Wellem (2004: 42) argues that originally these indigenous people do not know the name of this god, therefore they called it *pande peku tamu-pande nyura ngara*. This phrase can be translated as the highest god whose name is unknown. Later on, they know the name and started to call it *Anatala*. However, this name is a sacred name, meaning that cannot be spoken by ordinary people. It is believed that the people will experience bad things, such as sickness, lost, damage, earthquake or death if they speak or say this name. The striking thing is the name can only be spoken by traditional elder in a ritual belief ceremony called god communion (Pamangu Ndewa) which is held only once every eight years (Welem, 2004: 42). As matter of fact, the elder should say the name in the middle of the night and the voice is as same as someone who is whispering because it could not be heard by anybody else, except himself.

In addition, the followers of Marapu also name this highest divinity as *Hupu ina-Hupu Ama*. This phrase means mother and father. This parallel name does not indicate that there are two gods who are man and woman, the indigenous people however believe that there is only

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one god. This parallel name is used because of the behavior, character and ability of the god who acts like mother and father of everything or shortly the source of everything. This *Hupu ina-Hupu Ama* is believed to create the man, sky and earth. It is claimed by these followers that the god created everything with his hand, words, and concrete materials such as stone and clay. Besides that, god is the source of law and norms as well. The men should obey his norms and rules because everything can be seen and heard by him and nothing is hidden in front of him. He can see the sin of the men but he is merciful to forgive the sins (Wellem, 2004: 43).

The followers of Marapu believe the highest divinity lives in the sky. Some argue that he lives in the first layer which is called saved land and stone (Tana Manangu-Watu Manangu). Others, nonetheless, claim that he lives in the sixth layer which is called moon grave and yellow stone, the grave of horse statue, and the door of death statue (*Reti wula-Kulu Mbaya, Reti Annjara-Pindu Anatau)*. His place of living is secured by eight vicious dogs and eight bee hives. Even though these two opinions are distinctive, other scholar made a conclusion that this god lives in the highest place and he could not come to meet the men or on the other way round (Welem, 2004: 44).

Furthermore, the followers believe that they used to have direct relationship with god because they ever lived in the eight layer of the sky. Due to the dispute among men, god permitted the men to live on the earth. The permission created a boundary between the men and god to communicate. The only alternative way was using the Marapu spirit of death ancestor to communicate with god. God will answer the men through marapu and finally marapu will let the men know through the heart of chicken or pig (Welem, 2004: 45).

The cultural script of this high deity or *Hupu ina-Hupu Ama* can be explicated in the following natural semantic metalanguage.

X is a Hupu ina-Hupu Ama
a. X is a someone of one kind
b. This someone is not two
c. Not many people can say about this someone
d. This someone lives far from any other people
e. This someone lives above from place any other people live
f. This someone is not like any other people
g. Many people think about the people of this kind like this:
"This someone can do all things not like many people can do
  This someone did some things with words
  This someone did some things with some parts of body
  This someone did some things with some things
  This someone can see all things
  This someone can know all things
  This someone can hear all things

This someone does this thing like this when people do something bad:
"Someone y did something bad, because of this, this someone x feel something bad
  This someone x can do something bad to this someone y
  This someone x can not to do something bad to this someone y
This someone x do not want to think about this bad thing anymore".

The other category of Marapu is the belief towards the spirit of the ancestor. As the followers of Marapu rest their lives on the spirit of the ancestor, they often ask for life direction and protection from the Marapu. Interestingly, in this category of Marapu, it has stratifications which are divided into the almighty ancestor (Marapu ratu) and ordinary Marapu (Marapu). The almighty ancestor (Marapu ratu) is then carved up into the Marapu who came directly from heaven and the one who came to Sumba by boat. It is believed to descend other ordinary Marapu, comprising of big ancestor (Marapu bokulu) and small ancestor (Marapu pakahopi) (Wellem, 2004: 45).

As matter of fact, the belief towards this Marapu is highly related to the existence of each clan (kabihu). This means that each clan has its own Marapu which is historically descended from the clan. By the reason of this relation, ordinary Marapu can be called Marapu

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clan as well (Wellem, 2004: 46). Each Marapu certainly has different magical power and regarded as the mediator between men and god. In other words, this Marapu has a task to tell the query of the men to god and the answer will be given by god through Marapu (Wellem, 2004: 46). In order to respect this Marapu, the followers save some things like spears, gold, traditional musical instrument and tusk in the upper layer of the home. They believe that Marapu lives in this place. Nonetheless, these things can only be touched by the elder of the belief in traditional ritual ceremony.

To have clear understanding of this cultural script, it can be explicated in the following natural semantic metalanguage.

X is Marapu spirit of the ancestor
a. X lived a long time ago
b. When this x lived, x moved from above to below and lived with other people
c. When this x lived, x moved from far place to this place with something
d. After this, X died a long time ago
e. Because of this, many people think about x like this
   "X is not like any other people
   People cannot see x
   People cannot hear x
   People cannot touch x
   X can see people
   X can hear people
   X can touch people"
f. X has something to do many things
g. X lives in some things and in above place of people live
h. X can hear people say and say to other someone lives above from this x
i. This other someone is not two and can do all things
j. This other someone say to this x and this x say to people.

Notwithstanding the spirit of ancestor, the followers of Marapu also worship another category of Marapu which is called the spirit of the death. This spirit is believed to help and affect the followers' daily lives. This spirit is segregated into three sub-spirits which are the spirit of the land, the spirit of companion and the spirit of companion to travel to magical world (Wellem, 2004: 46). Let us turn our discussion into the first sub-spirit which is called the spirit of the land (Maramba Tana). This spirit is believed to help people who go for hunting or catching fish in the sea only if the people give an offering to it. Besides that, if someone wants to make a new rice field, this spirit should be moved to other place by conducting a ritual ceremony (Wellem, 2004: 46). In accounting for a clear understanding of this cultural script, it is explicated in the following natural semantic metalanguage.

X is a spirit of the land (Maramba Tana)
a. X is not like any other people
b. Many people think about x like this
   People cannot see x
   People cannot hear x
   People cannot touch x
   X can see people
   X can hear people
   X can touch people
c. if people want something to happen, they should give something to this x
d. if people want to do something in some place, they should move this x by doing something else

The second sub-spirit is called the spirit of companion (Yoga pangga-yora). This spirit is quite similar to the spirit of the land because it will only help the people who give it an offering. Generally, this spirit will act like companion or friend who accompanies the people to go for hunting, fishing, and trading. The purpose of its company is for succeeding the men's

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activities (Wellem, 2004: 46). This cultural script can be explicated in the following natural semantic metalanguage.

X is a spirit of companion (Yoga pangga-yora)
a. X is not like any other people
b. Many people think about x like this
   People cannot see x
   People cannot hear x
   People cannot touch x
   X can see people
   X can hear people
   X can touch people
c. this x moves when people move
d. if people want something to happen, they should give something to this x

The last sub-spirit is the spirit of companion to travel to magical world (Yora Patuna). This spirit is believed to bring people to the magical world for attaining magical power, richness, braveness, and magical anti body (Wellem, 2004: 47). When people have magical power, they can do many things for helping their selves or others. Sometimes, they also used it for doing bad things to others. This cultural script can be explicated in the following natural semantic metalanguage.

X is the spirit of companion to travel to magical world (Yora Patuna)
a. X is not like any other people
b. many people think about x like this
   People cannot see x
   People cannot hear x
   People cannot touch x
   X can see people
   X can hear people
   X can touch people
c. this x moves people to other place not like any other people live
d. when people in this place, they can have something much
e. when people in this place, they can have something to do something not like many people can do
f. when people in this place, they can have something to not feel something bad
g. when people in this place, they can have something to not feel anything when something bad touches their bodies.

The last category of this animist belief is the belief towards plants and animal's magical power. The followers of Marapu really believe that some plants like banyan tree and teak tree and animals such as chicken, horse and snake has magical power. Therefore, they call Marapu chicken or Marapu horse (Wellem, 2004: 47). This spirit plays a role to become a mediator between Marapu and the men. It is not surprising that to know the answer of men's query, the followers of Marapu always look at the heart of the animal or come to talk to the plants. This cultural script can be explicated in the following natural semantic metalanguage.

X is the spirit of the plants and animal's magical power
a. X is not people
b. Many people think about x like this
   People can see x
   People can hear x
   People can touch x
   X can see people
   X can hear people
   X can touch people
c. this x has something to do many things for people
d. because of this, people say to this something

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the categories of traditional animist belief have been explicated by natural semantic metalanguage and cultural scripts. Despite all debatable definitions of Marapu, the definition of Marapu can be summed up into the belief towards highest deity and other spirits. This definition then leads the category of Marapu into highest deity, spirit of the ancestor, spirit of the death and spirit of the plant and animal's magical power.

Each category of the Marapu has its own main roles and meaning. High deity, for example, is regarded as the creator of everything and the protector. The spirit of the ancestor, on the other hand, plays a role as the mediator between human and the highest god. The spirit of the death only functions as the companion and the keeper of the land, while the spirit of the plant and animal's magical power functions as the mediator between Marapu and the men.

It is found in all categories that NSM and cultural scripts give simple and clear understanding about the meaning and function of each category towards cultural outsiders. The enriched meaning which is encoded in each cultural script is best described by natural semantic metalanguage. Both methods show no meaning distortion but it provides clear insight towards cultural outsiders.

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