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# Verbal Abuse of Cursing in Balinese Myths

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## Abstract

This article analysis forms of verbal abuse of cursing in myths of Balinese culture. The politeness of a language varies based on its speaker's culture. Things that are considered polite or not polite in one culture, often associated with something that is respected, sacred, taboo, and/or hidden, such as, beliefs of its ancestors, parents, supernatural beings, as well as body parts that were respected or hidden. Degrading, cursing, swearing, and mocking acts appeared to be the contrary of language politeness. Therefore, both politeness and verbal violence are closely related to the culture of its speakers. In relation to the Balinese culture, some verbal violence applied in some of the Balinese myths. The verbal violence found in myth can be grouped into two types, which were first in the form of threats and second, in the form of curse-shaped. Based on the data found, the verbal abuses of curses found in the myth were of difficult childbirth, child expulsion, misfortune, and picking up jewelry, and pregnancy.

**Keywords:** Verbal abuse, Cursing, Balinese language, Balinese myths

## Abstrak

### *Kekerasan Verbal dalam Mitos-Mitos Kutukan di Bali*

Artikel ini menganalisis bentuk-bentuk kekerasan verbal pada mitos-mitos kutukan dalam kebudayaan Bali. Kesopanan bahasa bervariasi berdasarkan budaya penuturnya. Hal-hal yang dianggap sopan atau tidak sopan dalam budaya, sering dikaitkan dengan sesuatu yang dihormati, sakral, tabu, dan tersembunyi, seperti kepercayaan, leluhur, orang tua, makhluk gaib, serta bagian tubuh yang dihormati atau disembunyikan. Tindakan merendahkan, mengutuk, bersumpah, dan mengejek merupakan kebalikan dari kesopanan bahasa. Oleh karena itu, baik kesopanan maupun kekerasan verbal pada hakikatnya

terkait erat dengan budaya penuturnya. Dalam kaitannya dengan budaya, beberapa kekerasan verbal diterapkan dalam beberapa mitos Bali. Kekerasan verbal yang ditemukan dalam mitos dapat dikelompokkan menjadi dua jenis, yang pertama dalam bentuk ancaman dan kedua, dalam bentuk kutukan. Berdasarkan data yang ditemukan, pelanggaran verbal dalam bentuk kutukan yang ditemukan dalam mitos Bali adalah sulit, pengusiran anak, kesialan, dan mengambil perhiasan, dan kehamilan.

**Kata Kunci:** kekerasan verbal, kutukan, bahasa Bali, Mitos di Bali

## 1. Introduction

Verbal abuse is closely related to the culture owned by every speech community. As a part of the society and culture, the way of the language spoken abusively can possibly appear everywhere, whether it is in the family, neighborhood, or schools. Mostly, this verbal abuse comes from such things as faith/ancestors, parents, spirit/ghosts, part of body that is highly respected or oppositely, must be hidden, and so on (Simpen, 2008). Kinds of verbal abuse, such as mocking, insulting, snorting, harassing, cursing, and threatening, in which for the long term future, can potentially give harmful impacts to the people, especially the children or the newer generation.

One of the cultures in Balinese community where some kinds of verbal abuse often appear is in the Balinese myths of cursing. There are several cursing myths believed by Balinese people that contain many verbal abuses inside (Simpen, 2011). In relation to the situation nowadays, the act of abusing people verbally has been considered as criminal as the physically abuse. Kinds like slander, berate, defame other or all kinds of language actions that make other people feel unhappy, can be criminalized. Therefore, this study is important to examine the extent of how Balinese myths are related to verbal violence and its people's characters.

In essence, the dynamics (the term compromise for change) of Balinese culture, as well as other cultures are natural. Therefore, the change was moderated by the Balinese (Pitana, 1994: 49–50). By referring to the above statement, it is clear that verbal violence in Balinese society is dynamic. When used to be closely associated with myth, now the verbal violence with myth is not too strict. That is, verbal violence is very dynamic. Not all verbal violence is closely related to myth.

In his article on “Mythologies” (translated by Nurhadi 2006), Barthes mentions that myth is a type of speech. Myth is not just any types; language needs special conditions to be a myth (Barthes in Nurhadi, 2006: 151). Furthermore, it is said that myth is a communication system that is a message. Myths cannot be objects, concepts, or ideas. Myth is the meaning of a form.

By looking at the concept of myth as proposed by Barthes, it is clear that the position of myth in Balinese society is still seen as a communication system. In Balinese society, myth is a very powerful communication system. Furthermore, the myth contained a very profound education. Society wraps up the values of education in a mystical message. This paper is, therefore, very relevant to the proposed of research topic.

Furthermore, in related to the theory used in this research, there are two theories applied and both have some connections to one another. First is the theory that is related to politeness (Kitamura, 2000) and second is the theory of language and power (Fairclough, 1991). The use of language and power theory is based on people who can do verbal violence are most likely people who have the power to do so. Therefore, the verbal violence is usually carried out by people who are higher than others. For example, teachers against their students, parents to their children, husbands to wives, sons to their sisters, to their daughters-in-law, or superiors to their subordinates.

The verbal violence is also a very contrary to language theory. Sudaryanto (2000: 22–26) mentions language humanizes humans.

In this case, language can make human being reasonable, a tool to work together, and to be a neighbor. Through language, human dignity and honor could be maintained, and all communities fit in the same position. On the opposite, any forms of verbal violences do not maintain human dignity and honor because the position between speakers hierarchically are very different. There is no crossing of the function of language, but what happens is the reverse function of language, namely the removal of the language functions that destroy the human dignity.

## 2. Method

This research used three methods with its techniques. They were methods and techniques of data collection, data analysis, and analysis presentation. The primary data of this research was the myths believed by the people and occurred in their everyday life. This research collected the data from two sources. The primary source was from the observation and interview from the Balinese people that were familiar with the myths, while secondary source was collected from written sources such as books of myths, manuscripts, and such kind. The primary data collection is assisted by the recording technique, while the secondary data obtained by note-taking technique. Afterwards, the data of the myths were analyzed in an inductive and deductive way.

In the data analysis, it applied the deductive and inductive methods, and assisted by synthetic analytical techniques. The results of analysis were presented through formal and informal methods. The informal method was in the form of words and sentences.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 *The Myth of Difficulty in Childbirth*

In Balinese, there is a believing that difficulty in childbirth labor caused by the evil forces of Balinese mythological figure called *leak* (leyak). Other believing are commonly caused by curses or a

profane oaths. One of the most feared oaths or curses in Balinese believing is the oath or curses that coming from the mother in-laws to their pregnant daughter-in-laws. Therefore, the daughter-in-law who is pregnant must not have a conflict or quarrel with her mother-in-law.

The conflict between the daughter in law and her mother-in-law seems to have been very common. When the conflict is forced to occur and at the same time the daughter-in-law is pregnant, the following verbal violence often occurs.

- (1) *Madak nyai pang kéweh ngelekadang*  
 ‘Semoga 2PS supaya susah melahirkan’  
 ‘Saya doakan agar kau susah melahirkan’  
 ‘I wish you will have a difficulty in (your) childbirth (labor)’

When the curse has been verbally stated, it can cause the daughter-in-law to suffering from an extremely painful childbirth laboring (*nyakit*) for days. Nonetheless, there is a way to cure the curse. As it is stated in Balinese believing, “*baanga nginem yeh tungkak*” (drink the washing heel water), which means the curse can be cured by drinking the washing water of her mother-in-law’ feet (to be particular, the “heel” part). This way is believed by the Balinese people as a way to make the laboring progress smoothly and also to make the relationship between both daughter and mother-in-laws recovered.

### 3.2 *The Myth of Child Expulsion*

The Balinese Hindu society regards the child as an invaluable treasure because the child (especially the boy) is the heir and successor of the clan. Children are also considered as a means of penance for the parents. Therefore, the presence of children is also expected to scent and glorify their parents. In this connection comes the term, such as ‘*putra suputra*’ (son is the most important of all).

In relation to the violence of parents against children, there is

a myth that it is severely tabooed to physically abuse the children using kitchen utensils such as spoons, *supit* (made from bamboo), *kepanang* (large wooden spoons), *siyut* (small-sized wooden spoon), plates, and *kikiyan* (coconut grated). If the above tools are used, it is believed that the offended child will run away from home and never want to return. Such verbally statement, especially occur in a state of anger that mom or dad drove his son out of the house by saying the following words.

(2) *Megedi cai/nyai uli dini de buin mulih.*  
*'Pergi 2PS dari sini jangan lagi pulang'*  
*'pergi kau dari sini jangan kembali lagi'*  
 'Go away from here and don't come back!'

A legendary example can be found in the story of Sangkuriang, the folklore from West Java. It is said, Dayangsumbi, Sangkuriang's mother was angry as Sangkuriang killed her favorite animal. The mother hit Sangkuriang's head with a spoon until it caused a severe wound, then Sangkuriang was expelled from the house. Sangkuriang never returned home and almost married his biological mother, before finally recognized by his mother.

### 3.3 *The Myth of Misfortune*

The Balinese Hindu community believes that what is acceptable in life in present days is the result of past acts. This concept is commonly called as the Law of Karma. It is actually very simple. If we want a good luck, then we must do our best to think, say, and do good. Therefore, whatever happen, we must look inside ourselves to find the answer. Unfortunately, many of us are looking for the reasons outside not inside. As a result, we never stop blaming others.

In Balinese society, the view that ill fortune, misfortune, lack of fortune, and accidents is believed to be caused by the curse, or the prayers of those who hate or dislike us. We never seek the cause why

people hate us. The act of *ngolok-ngolok* ‘deceive/defraud’, *ngelamit* ‘stealing’, *degag* ‘being rude/arrogant’ and other actions that are not good, often encourage the victim to condemn the perpetrator. The following is the example of a verbal violence that is commonly stated by the victim.

(3) *Dumadak iba sing nemu rahayu.*

*‘Semoga 2PS tidak menemui keselamatan’*

*‘Semoga kamu (kata ganti kasar) tidak mendapatkan keselamatan’*

*‘I hope you (impolite type of personal pronoun) are not given salvation (dead)’*

The above example is very often heard in Balinese society because the victim feels very upset and angry. Prayer and curse is usually done while hitting the edge of the Balinese ‘*bale*’ pavilion (*notog waton*) by fist or *penotokan* ‘pounder betel’. This myth is very powerful and until now still trusted by the people in Bali.

### 3.4 The Myth of Picking up Gold/Jewelry

Ever since a very long time ago, Balinese people have believed that picking up or even stealing gold was a taboo. The myth says that whoever pick anyone else’s gold (*emas*) or even steal them, will be dead soon (*ngemasin* ‘quickly dies’). The verbal form of the prayers or curses from the victim is as followed.

(4) *Nyen je ngemaling emas tiange apang enggal ngemasin*

*Siapa saja mencuri emas 1PS-DEF supaya cepat mati’*

*Semoga yang mencuri emas saya cepat meninggal.*

*“Wish that the one who steal my gold died”*

In Balinese society, gold are considered as a very expensive and valuable thing. Therefore, many of us who accidentally find them in the street are tempted to pick them up. If we do not do that, surely someone else will pick them up. Then, what about the myth of *ngemasin* which means quickly dies? Apparently, the Balinese people have the way to deal with it, which is by redeeming



the gold with some money and putting the money in the same spot where they find the gold, while uttering, “*Ne tiang meli barang puniki aji...tiang tusing nuduk barange ene* ‘I buy this gold with this money (mentioning the amount of money) and I claim not collecting it for free’. By doing that, it is believed that you will be free from the picking gold curse.

### 3.5 *The Myth of Pregnancy*

This type of myth is often applied in order to threat or scare of the future possibility. Some examples found are as follow:

- (5) *Sing dadi mecukur yen kurenane sedeng beling*  
*‘Tidak boleh potong rambut kalau istri sedang hamil’*  
 You cannot cut your hair if your wife is pregnant
- (6) *Sing dadi naar be gerita yen sedeng beling*  
*‘Tidak boleh makan gurita kalau sedang hamil’*  
 You can’t eat octopus if you are pregnant
- (7) *Sing dadi mula turus yen kurenane sedeng beling*  
*‘Tidak boleh menanam pohon kalau istri sedang hamil’*  
 You can’t plant trees if your wife is pregnant

The three examples above are the myth that contains the verbal violence of threats or scares. Example (a) is a threat to the husband to not shave his hair if his wife is pregnant because it is feared that later she will give birth to a hairless child. This myth is actually more psychological for the wife because the neat hair of her husband may attract many women. Example (b) is also a threat because eating octopus meat is feared that the placenta will wrap around the baby and this is very dangerous for the baby’s safety. Example (c) is more metaphorical because planting trees is identical to having a husband and wife. The age of the womb that is still susceptible is not recommended to relate in order not to experience a miscarriage.

#### 4. Conclusion

Myth is a language in different versions. Myth is the way in which our ancestors communicate with the next generation. The real myth contains advice that is packed in insinuations, threats, and possibly a curse. Based on the data, it was found that the verbal violence or abuse was closely related to the growing myths in Balinese society. Even so, those verbal and mythical abuses actually serve to shape the character of Balinese society. The myth of hard labor taught us that the daughter-in-law should respect and truly devote to their mother-in-law.

In conclusion, the existence of verbal violence, especially in the form of a curse, actually educates the society that the bad things must not be done so that the curse will not be thrown verbally. That is why the verbal violence is wrapped in mythical packaging, so that the new generation can understand and apply the good side of it in their everyday life.

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