

TEACHING INDONESIAN CONCEPTS OF CULTURE THROUGH *PAMALI*

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ABSTRACT

Pamali teaches the young generations of Indonesia to behave and act decently according to where they live. This is a strong term that brings fear to Indonesians because it contains prohibitions and most often causes that cannot be logically accepted. This research aims to show international readers how Indonesians teach the next generations through *pamali* (forbidden acts) found in an Indonesian comic. In this research, cultural conceptualization by Sharifian which is supported by Sibarani in his anthropolinguistic theory was used. The research is conducted using the descriptive–qualitative method. The data on *pamali* utterances are taken from an Indonesian comic book. It is because there is a very limited written source for *pamali*. The research uses the categorization of the cultural concepts seen in the dictions used. This study aims to find the concept of Indonesian culture. The results revealed that the use of many kinds of word classes that can be interpreted to show the concept of life of Indonesians. The concept teaches us about the people of Indonesia, the food, the daily activities, the sacred symbols, as well as the environment of Indonesia.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural conceptualization, Language, Pamali, Teaching

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a South-East Asia country with rich cultures and diversity. Most international people know Bali, not knowing that it is only one region in a country namely Indonesia. Indonesia is one of the richest countries in terms of culture. One of the common cultures known by most Indonesians is the term *pamali*. This term refers to the acts that are forbidden to be done by some specific people or for people in general. However, the prohibition is not ordinary and logical because it is followed by some illogical reason. That is why Suarsa et. al., (2021) in their conference calls *pamali* as a ‘taboo’. When one does something, parents or older people may remind him/ her by saying in translation, “Don’t do that! It is *pamali* to do__.” In addition, *Pamali* has been believed by Indonesians since the life of their ancestors. Nowadays, people think that it is only a myth. It is because many of the effects said are irrelevant to the acts being forbidden. For example, people cannot eat in some manners because it will affect their marriage is considered illogical. Nevertheless, this culture has become a tradition and has always been taught until now. Culture according to Duranti (2009) is things that are learned, taught, educated, and maintained by using acts, language, and interactions. It means that even though *pamali* is seen as a myth, it is still a culture that

has become a tradition. It is still preserved because of its use for teaching decency, politeness, moral values, and the specific culture of that region.

In life, young people need to learn many things to understand the culture of where they live, to have decency, and even to avoid danger. Education is given by the elders to the young generations. It is given not only in the form of reading and writing but also in the form of values and norms. *Pamali* is one education given by the elders to maintain and preserve the culture as well as to keep living decently. Education can be found in many forms. It is supported by Sukisno (2021) that education is even available in the form of Javanese child-play songs.

According to Sharifian (2017), different cultures see differently in terms of their everyday life that is visible in the language they speak, the preference they choose, or the habit they frequently do. This study would like to see the forbidden acts in Indonesia as the cultural conceptualization of Indonesia in terms of the language used. It is what is known as Anthropolinguistic. Sibarani (2015) added that anthropolinguistics is a study of culture that investigates the use of language from the linguistic point of view. According to him, certain words used in a language can show how people see the world (Sharifian, 2017). In delivering *pamali*, some terms show the cultural concept of Indonesians. These concepts are the ones that are trying to be investigated by the researcher.

This can be seen from the previous studies related to *pamali*. From these examples, it is visible that some places have their specific *pamali* to bear in mind. The first study comes from the writing about the *pamali* in Kuta Village. This study investigates the kinds of *pamali* used by people living in Kuta Village in Bali (Rostiyati et al., 2023). The next study investigates *pamali* related to 'boats' of Bajo people from West Sulawesi, Indonesia (Uniwati, 2014). There was also this study investigating the sea ecology of the Tiworo region which is located also in Bajo (Said et al., 2020). Sulawesi has strict rules for *pamali*. It is seen from the third study of *pamali* which investigates *pamali* coming from West Sulawesi culture related to Islamic jurisprudence (Sadat & Yusuf, 2020). Other than that, there was a study related to the value and meaning of education of *pamali* of the people from Banjar of Barikin Village (Harpriyanti & Komalasari, 2018). In addition, a study related to cultural conceptualization has also been done by Andarab & Mahmoudi (2015). The study shows how the concept of the Iranian Language may interfere with English Learners' sense of studying and speaking English naturally. From all the previous studies above, there was little to no research related to finding the concepts of Indonesians' way of life through the language used in delivering *pamali*. Most research only studies the culture and its impact on society.

This research tries to provide an overview of Indonesian culture seen from the language used. It is important because the culture of *pamali* became nearly extinct caused of the development of technology. Nowadays, people are not aware that *pamali* is one reason for Indonesia's unique traditions and cultures. It is because, through *pamali* Indonesians are learning how to maintain the Indonesian way of life, preserve the environment, and even have high moral values and politeness. Thus, this research is expected to be able to show international readers how Indonesians teach the next generations through forbidding and prohibiting found in *pamali* (forbidden acts) found in an Indonesian comic. This way of prohibiting can even show the concepts of Indonesian culture.

B. METHOD

This study tries to investigate the concept of a particular group of people, in this term Indonesians. The theory of anthropolinguistic and cultural conceptualization was used to find the concept of Indonesians' way of life through the use of *Pamali*. The analysis was done using the descriptive-qualitative method. The data collected were the kinds of *pamali* (forbidden acts) found in an Indonesian comic. The data of this study are collected from a comic that brings up a humorous way of delivering *Pamali* and its effects. The title of the comic is '*Pamali: Segerombolan Komik Tentang Mitos dan Pantangan*'. The author of this comic called himself 'Norvan Pecandupagi.' The humor can be seen as the result of neglecting the '*pamali*'. This book was chosen because it compiles many kinds of *pamali* found in Indonesia. It is seemingly rare to see this many *pamali* compiled into a book. It is because *pamali* is delivered in the form of an utterance instead of a written text. This book gives a complete insight into *pamali* as the source of data. However, the kinds of *pamali* compiled in this book are still very little in terms of amount compared to the real amount of *pamali* shared in the whole of Indonesia because despite having similar concepts, some region has their specific *pamali* related to the geographical site they are located, the myth surrounding its culture, and many more. The data taken are only those sentences or phrases containing *pamali* and the humours provided in the comic were excluded.

The data were put into Microsoft Excel by excluding the humorous element in the comic because it was irrelevant to the present study. The data were categorized into word classes used in delivering *Pamali*. These word classes were interpreted in the Findings and Discussion section. Only the specific and rich-culture word classes are interpreted. The sentences or phrases were analyzed using the Leipzig Glossing Rule to make them more understandable to international readers. The analyses were eventually categorized based on the cultural concept of Indonesians' way of life that was reflected in the dictions used in delivering *pamali*.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the data, it is found that there are some categories of word classes used in delivering *pamali*. The data use word classes such as Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, Adverbs of Time, and Adverbs of Place. The categories can be interpreted as follows:

1. Verb

The verbs found from the data analysis are the most diverse compared to the others. In total, there are 56 verbs found from the *pamali* in the comic. It is expected because every deliverance of *Pamali* is always followed by a verb. It is because of the form of *pamali* itself that is mostly in the form of an imperative. Most *pamali* functioned as a command to do something and/ or prohibition not to do something. Furthermore, an imperative sentence always needs at least a verb. The verb 'eat' is the most common to appear in the data which appears 56 times. The many rules for the action 'eat' mean that Indonesian people value this action. There are many prohibitions such as 'must not move/ change places when eating, must not talk, must finish the food, and must not eat spicy/ hot food for a pregnant woman. The following is an example of *Pamali* using the verb 'eat':

Kamu	gak	boleh	makan	Malem- malem	<i>Pamali!</i>	Ntar	Kepala-mu	Gede!!
You	not	can	eat	RED – at night		later	Head- POSS:2SG	Big
“You must not eat at night! <i>Pamali!!</i> You will make your head big!!”								

From the data above, it can be seen that the target is forbidden to eat at night because it is believed that the act can cause one’s head to turn big. At a glance, it can be found very illogical to be happening. It is not possible to make one’s head big only because of eating at night. However, this strategy can effectively make the target hesitant to do its act. It means that this way of prohibiting is effective in stopping someone from doing something. People will become hesitant to eat at night because they do not want to have big heads. Having a bigger head than any other person will make them look strange and, in the end, will become a target for gossip.

However, this prohibition exists because eating at night has been proven to be bad for one’s health. It can be seen from the previous research regarding eating at night (Striegel-Moore, et. al., 2010); (De Zwaan, et. al., 2006). People who have the habit of eating at night may get some health issues like obesity, diabetes, and even depression, etc. Hence, obeying this prohibition can maintain one’s health.

2. Noun

There are many nouns found in the analysis. There are 49 nouns found in the data. Most of the nouns are taken from the third person and used to refer to the agent who almost breaks the *pamali*. It can be seen from the sentence:

Bu,	<i>Pamali!</i>	Kalo	lagi	hamil	gak	boleh	makan	yang	pedes	-
VOC		if	PROG	pregnant	Not	Can	eat	PREP	RED	-
“Ma’am, <i>Pamali!</i> A woman being pregnant must not eat spicy foods”										

It should be remembered that imperative sentence has hidden object pronoun ‘you’ as the target of prohibition or command. In addition, from the sentence it can be seen that *pamali* is an imperative sentence that should not need a subject because the subject is considered as the second person singular pronoun ‘you’. However, there is a highlight of the ‘you’ in ‘you must not do’ by specifying what kind of ‘you’ is being mentioned. It is because *pamali* does not only refer to the ‘action (verbs)’ but also ‘the agent (noun/pronoun)’. It means that some people can do some acts (verb) if they are not included in specific kinds of person. For example, ordinary people can eat spicy foods, yet according to the example, a pregnant woman should not. As seen from the example above, the pronoun ‘you’ is specified as a woman (noun) who is being pregnant (adjective).

This prohibition is still related to eating. However, it is prohibited for specific persons, i.e., pregnant women. There are many prohibitions related to pregnant women because everybody is expecting a healthy mother and a healthy newborn. It means that many foods that may cause harm should be prohibited. This has been written in research that

spicy foods are only one example of food that is not good for the health of the pregnant woman (De Diego-Cordero et. al., 2021).

3. Adjective

The adjectives found in the data are somewhat rare. There are only 20 adjectives found. It is because adjectives are not obligatory in delivering *pamali*. It may only be used to scare the target speech because they will get some bad ‘character/ trait’ when they break the rule. One example can be seen as follows:

(N-)yapu	Harus	Bersih!	<i>Pamali!</i>	Kalo	Gak	bersih	Suami-nya	Brewokan!
VPR-sweep	Must	clean		if	Not	clean	Husband – POSS:3SG	bearded
“Sweeping must be done cleanly! <i>Pamali!</i> If it is not, the (your) husband will be bearded!”								

From the Gloss above, there are two kinds of adjectives used. They are ‘clean’ and ‘bearded’. These two adjectives are used to show contradictory sense and according to previous research, Goh & Trofimchuk (2022) explained that some Asian races have characteristics that are said to be ‘not masculine’ according to (Galinsky et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2012; Wilkins et al., 2011) because of the lacks of facial hair. (Espiritu, 1997; Iwamoto & Kaya, 2016) added that this characteristic makes Asian men look feminine. It means that it is uncommon for Indonesian (Asian) men to have a beard.

It is then used to show that this particular woman’s husband in the future will be someone who looks ‘not normal’ compared to other Indonesian men which must be caused by her habit of sweeping the floor not in a serious way. Even if there is rarely a bearded man in Indonesia, an Indonesian bearded man can shave instead of just letting their beard grow until he can be called a ‘bearded man’ which indicates that his beard is never or rarely trimmed. This also indicates that the husband of that woman also shows lazy characteristics in cleanliness because it takes a very long time for native Indonesians to grow a beard.

4. Adverb of Time

There are four adverbs of time found in the analysis. They show particular times that something must not be done. It is seen from the following example:

Bu,	jangan	(Nge)-jait	Malem-malem	<i>Pamali</i>	ntar	rabun,	bu
VOC	PRO H	VPR-sew	RED-at night		later	Nearsighted	VOC
“Ma’am, do not sew at night! <i>Pamali!</i> It will make you nearsighted!”							

Pamali is a cultural heritage said by elders and delivered to the next generations. It indicates that *Pamali* has been around for a long time even before technology, for example, electricity. This sentence may sound irrelevant for now. However, this can be relevant decades ago when there was no electricity. Sewing at night can be dangerous for the agent because, in the dark, the agents may hurt themselves while or even after sewing because a

needle is a small item that may fall and hurt people later if it falls at that very moment in the dark. This *Pamali* teaches people to be careful. Doing detailed things in the dark such as reading can be bad for health as seen in the previous research by Bababekova et. al. (2011); and Antona et. al. (2018). This previous research shows examples of nowadays life with people working overtime in the dark while reading a hard copy or reading a text from a smartphone. Sewing is not a different thing since it also needs concentration and must be done with utmost care. Thus, sewing can also impact health if it is done in the dark similar to reading a book or reading from a smartphone.

5. Adverb of Place

There are only three adverbs of Place can be found in the data provided. One example can be seen in the following sentence:

Di	hutan	gak	boleh	teriak-teriak!	<i>Pamali!</i>	Ntar	kamu	Ke-surup-an!
LOC - in	forest	Not	can	RED - shout		later	2:SG	CONF- possessed
“In the forest, (one) must not shout! <i>Pamali!</i> You can be possessed!”								

From the example above, the adverb of time is in the adverbial phrase ‘in the forest’. According to the saying, it is *Pamali* to shout in the forest which may make people possessed by ghosts. This *Pamali* urges people to have decency in a place where there may be danger lurking. It does not necessarily mean ghosts. It can also be wild animals or people who live in the forest. Since *Pamali* is an ‘old saying’, there were many people who lived in the forest in ‘old times.’ The main point is that shouting or making a commotion in a forest must not be done because it will disturb whatever it is in that place.

In addition, some concepts can be implied from the use of those lexicons or phrases. These concepts can teach us about the way of life and the characteristics of Indonesia. The cultural concepts are as follows:

a. The People

Referring to the result of the analysis above, *Pamali* can be used to characterize most people of Indonesia. Though the data collected cannot represent 100% of the people of Indonesia, the researcher feels that they are sufficient to represent most Indonesians. According to the word classes analyzed before, the people of Indonesia can be conceptualized as people who ‘are careful in behaving, respect older people, maintain cleanliness, have high decency. It is reflected in many rules regarding many cultures that can be seen materialized in the habits, the arts, clothing, songs, etc. That is the reason why these cultures must be preserved (Asfina & Olivia, 2016).

b. The Food

Food has always been one culture favored by many. The kinds of Indonesian food can be seen through the data analyzed. The foods that can be found in Indonesia are rice, coconut water, pickled fruit, chicken feet, and spicy food. In addition, there is one datum that shows one every common cooking utensils in Indonesia that is (pestle and) mortar. This might not be common for houses in other countries to have pestle and mortar. However, Indonesian households mostly have these utensils which makes it a common culture that has a rule

surrounding it. Pestle and Mortar are commonly used to make *sambal*. The diversity of *sambal* (Surya & Tedjakusuma, 2022) is proof that pestle and mortar are cultural utensils that can be found in Indonesia.

c. The Daily activity

From the lexicons and phrases obtained from the data, some daily activities are common to Indonesians. The daily activities conceptualized in the lexicon show that Indonesians usually ‘gossip about others, fish because there are many rivers, drink coconut water, do arranged marriages, and usually pass through a cemetery because every small village has one. Furthermore, some habits have always been seen negatively in more than 1 data. They are ‘nibbling and whistling.’

It cannot be denied that Indonesia is a country with the most Muslim population. Moreover, with this data taken from mostly Sundanese/ Javanese culture with also the most Muslim populated region, the cultures can be explained with some Islamic knowledge. It is believed that whistling is inappropriate because it imitates the rituals done by idol worshippers in the past. In addition, nibbling is also seen as inappropriate to be done because nibbling is a habit done by children. Children who do not be taught to stop nibbling will keep doing that even until they grow up. This can even be seen in a children's book that teaches about bad habits that need to be stopped (Berenstain & Berenstain, 2013).

d. The Sacred symbols

Learning about *Pamali* teaches us about the symbols regarded as sacred by Indonesians. The sacred symbols seen from the data are “older people, virginity, pregnancy, cemetery, gravestone, forest, rice, and cat. They are included in the concept of sacred symbols because they have unique characteristics with rules related to decency surrounding them. The word ‘virginity’ is a strong word used for unmarried girls. It is because virginity is seen as proof of a respectable, dignified, and proud woman (Mindiono, 2022).

There are many *pamali* related to unmarried girls because Indonesians are taking care of unmarried girls well because they need to be ready to become mothers who will take care of their children. In doing so, they need to have high morality, decency, and politeness that are taught since young (not yet married). Research says that Southeast Asians value virginity over everything (Hunjan & Towson, 2007). It can be implied that girls are taught to keep their virginity so that they can maintain their pride, dignity, and respect as Indonesian women in the future.

e. The Environment

Looking at the lexicon or phrases used in the data, one can see the environment and geographical area of Indonesia. From the data analyzed, it is visible that the *pamali* seen in the comic belongs to the people who live in lowland areas. The area is also characterized as having forests and rivers. It is not in the middle of the forest because there are words like ‘hitting a cat’ (in a car accident), meaning that there is a road in that area. It can be inferred that the environment belongs to rural areas.

D. CONCLUSION

Pamali is seen to have some characteristics. It can be seen that the words used in delivering *pamali* can show how Indonesians use common words using their conceptualization of Indonesian culture. It can be seen from the verb 'eat' which should not be a unique cultural word, yet it has a different concept of what international people may have in mind. There are even words that are commonly used in Indonesia, yet quite rare to be used internationally such as pestle and mortar. The analysis has shown some characteristics of the words used. The characteristics can be found linguistically in the dictions used as seen in the word classes. From the categorization of word classes, there are 49 nouns, 20 adjectives, 56 verbs, 4 adverbs of time, and 3 adverbs of places found. In addition, it also shows that Indonesian people have some characteristics shown from the concept depicted in the use of language. From the choice of diction used in the *Pamali* sentences, some concepts can be concluded. Those concepts show the culture of Indonesian people, food, daily activity, symbols that are regarded as sacred, and even the geographical features or the environment. The findings show that it is clear that studying certain cultures can have implications for how people of that culture live. However, it should be understood that this comic alone cannot represent Indonesia as a whole because this comic is highly influenced by the Sundanese language. It can be inferred that this study represents Indonesia, especially in the Sundanese or Javanese region. It can also represent many regions in Indonesia. Nevertheless, there are specific places such as East and West Nusa Tenggara and the island of Papua that have many distinctive features that need to be studied distinctively to find the uniqueness of Indonesia from those specific regions.

In addition, this research is expected to be useful for future related research regarding language and culture. Moreover, the preservation of the cultural richness of Indonesia should be done continuously to prevent the extinction of the cultural abundance of Indonesia. In addition, the development of technology is expected to be used to record as many cultural aspects of Indonesia so that it can even teach international readers the concepts of politeness, decency, courtesy, and way of life of Indonesians.

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