



Lingual Syncretism: Language Features on the Relationship between Tradition and Religion in “*Motolobalango*” Coronation

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Abstract:

In various regions, we often find marriage processions that are guided by customary and Islamic laws that apply as ancestral heritage. Unfortunately, the pattern of syncretism between custom and Islam in marriage is rarely known by society in general. The aim of this research is to describe lingual syncretism in the Motolobalango tradition in Gorontalo. This research is oriented towards qualitative descriptive methods. The results of the research show that the syncretism of Motolobalango marriage customs is indicated in two forms, namely verbal language which appears in five representations of tuja'I speech acts in the form of: greeting, asking for permission, inviting, praising, requesting, and making non-verbal promises to cultural attributes in the form of aato dalalo, tonggu permata, pata potolongito, and yila-yilapito.

Keywords: Syncretism; Language Features; Motolobalango.

Abstrak:

Diberbagai daerah, seringkali ditemui prosesi perkawinan berpedoman pada hukum adat dan islam yang berlaku sebagai warisan leluhur. Sayangnya, pola sinkretisme antara adat dan islam dalam perkawinan jarang diketahui oleh masyarakat pada umumnya. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan sinkretisme lingual pada tradisi *Motolobalango* di Gorontalo. Penelitian ini berorientasi pada metode deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Sinkretisme adat perkawinan *Motolobalango* terindikasi melalui dua bentuk, yaitu bahasa verbal yang nampak pada 5 (lima) representasi tindak tutur tuja'I berupa: bersalam, memohon izin, mempersilahkan, memuji, meminta, dan berjanji dan non verbal pada atribut budaya berupa aato dalalo, tonggu permata, pata potolongito, dan yila-yilapito.

Kata-kata Kunci: Sinkretisme; Fitur-Fitur Bahasa; *Motolobalango*.

INTRODUCTION

The function of language is a very important means of interpersonal communication. The word communication comes from the word to communicate which means communicating a point of view.¹ This opinion is in line with the meaning of the word

¹ Rustono, *Pokok-Pokok Pragmatik* (Semarang: CV. IKIP Semarang, 1999).

common which means similarity. Communication thus means the transfer of information to achieve common meaning, understanding and interpretation between means of communication. The description above can be related to the function of language as a social identity among society. This is internalized in the traditions of the people in an area. In the Anthropological Dictionary by Ariyono Suyono and Aminuddin Siregar, the word tradition is equated with customs or practices of a religious magical nature from the daily life of indigenous peoples, which include norms, laws, cultural values and related rules. Creating rules or systems to cover all understandings of cultural systems that become social rules.² Meanwhile, according to Soerjono Soekanto in his book "Dictionary Sociology", the term tradition is defined as beliefs and customs that have been preserved from generation to generation.³

Not a few people claim that tradition is related to the elements of religion as a guide to life. This can also be reflected in the social institutions in an area. Tradition and religion are two things that are mutually related to each other.⁴ Thus, religious elements as a way of life are often manifested in the attributes of a tradition in a particular region. Gorontalo is one of the areas on the island of Sulawesi which has certain traditions which are reflected in social institutions.

Motolobalango is one of the proposing events during the traditional Gorontalo wedding procession. *Motolobalango* (proposing marriage) is a traditional Gorontalo marriage tradition that connects the man and the woman.⁵ However, the sacred value of the *Motolobalango* procession is often juxtaposed with cultural attributes in the form of certain objects that symbolize something related to the nature or character of a procession.

Like the cultural attributes of *Motolobalango* in the form of betel, areca nut, gambier, lime and tobacco. These cultural attributes symbolize something.⁶ For example, betel in cultural attributes symbolizes veins, meaning kinship relationships. This philosophy is based on the scope of religion which is a guide to human life. In other words, offerings in the form of betel are expected to be a symbol of establishing kinship or friendship between men and

² Suyono Ariyono and Siregar Aminuddin, *Kamus Antropologi*, vol. 4 (Jakarta: CV. Akademika Presindo, 1985).

³ Soekanto and Soerjono, *Kamus Sosiologi* (Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, 1993), <https://oneresearch.id/Record/IOS13473.INLIS000000000005215>.

⁴ Abdullah Yusof and Kastolani, "Relasi Islam Dan Budaya Lokal: Studi Tentang Tradisi Nyadran," *Kontemplasi* 4, no. 1 (2016): 51–74. <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/67299-ID-relasi-islam-dan-budaya-lokal-studi-tent.pdf>

⁵ Mansoer Pateda, *Kamus Bahasa Gorontalo-Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2001).

⁶ Moch Zihad Islami and Yulia Rosdiana Putri, "Nilai-Nilai Filosofis Dalam Upacara Adat Mongubingo Pada Masyarakat Suku Gorontalo," *Jurnal Ilmu Budaya* 8, no. 2 (2020): 186–197.

women. Thus, the value of syncretism in the *Motolobalango* tradition is able to become a bridge of kinship between two parties who build a family relationship with each other.

Syncretism itself, means a combination of cultural values as customs with religious values so that they can be used as a guide for human life.^{7,8,9} For this reason, the syncretic values contained in the *Motolobalango* cultural content above are able to reflect the religious values that can shape the character identity of the Gorontalo people.

However, unfortunately, not many Gorontalo people know about this because it is hampered by current technological developments. For this reason, there is a need to revitalize Gorontalo traditions for millennials and Gorontalo society in general as pillars that can fortify the collapse of the cultural foundations of the Gorontalo region.

The importance of the syncretism of Gorontalo traditions in the *Motolobalango* ceremony means that this research needs to be carried out to maintain the existence of Gorontalo language and culture through social institutions.

METHOD

This research is oriented towards qualitative descriptive research methods to explain variables related to the researched problem. Descriptively, this research is related to behavioral social descriptions, events in an area or certain activities that are rooted. Meanwhile, the analysis of this research data is explained through patterns of exposure regarding the conditions or situations studied in narrative form, or not in the form of numbers and calculations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

The essence of the *Motolobalango* (Proposing Marriage) tradition for the people of Gorontalo

Botutihe & Daulima argue that the *Motolobalango* (proposing marriage) tradition is an event to inaugurate the results of discussions from the three previous customary stages,

⁷ Haris Danial et al., "The Language Features of the Coronation of 'Pohutu Momulanga' in Forming the Leadership Identity of the Gorontalo Community," *JIMAD: Jurnal Ilmiah Mutiara Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2023): 1–15, <https://jurnal.tiga-mutiara.com/index.php/jimad/article/view/78>.

⁸ Wawan Hernawan, Tatang Zakaria, and Aini Rohmah, "Sinkretisme Budaya Jawa Dan Islam Dalam Gamitan Seni Tradisional Janengan," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 4, no. 3 (2020): 161–176. <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/Religious/article/view/9444>

⁹ Ira Audia Agustina, Andryanto Wibisono, and Imam Santosa, "Analisa Sinkretisme Agama Dan Budaya Melalui Transformasi Elemen Visual Bernilai Sakral Pada Gereja Katolik Ganjuran," *Jurnal Desain Interior* 2, no. 2 (2017): 73. <https://iptek.its.ac.id/index.php/jdi/article/download/3544/2728>

within the family environment of both parties. There is no involvement of the government and sharia officials yet, nor are there any sounds that can be used.¹⁰ In the Gorontalo marriage tradition, *Motolobalango* is a continuation of the traditional procedure of Momatata Upilo'otawa (asking for firmness). Meanwhile, *Motolobalango* (proposing marriage) aims to establish kinship between both parties, both men and women.¹¹ In his description, motlobalango is one of the aspects that shows a close relationship between aspects of creation, appearance, performance targets, public perception, culture and religion.

In the *Motolobalango* traditional procession, the conventions of old literary forms with their regularity of form are still reflected in regional rhymes, or what is known as tuja'I. Tuja'I in the implementation of Gorontalo traditional marriages contains the meaning of the values of a person's life system in the form of advice or messages that are spoken as a portrait of hopes for a person's attitudes and behavior patterns in acting and speaking.¹² In the *Motolobalango* ceremony, Tuja'I is read by traditional officials when picking up the bride and groom according to certain procedures.

In terms of its position and function, tuja'i plays a role in accompanying traditional processions, as a tool for traditional leaders to express intentions based on deliberation, and of course as advice for people.¹³ This advice is integrated with religious values which guide the lives of the people of Gorontalo.

***Motolobalango* Indigenous Lingual Syncretism**

Linguistic syncretism is a combination of custom and religion which forms the lifestyle of people in a particular area. Meanwhile, lingual is a unit of language, both verbal and non-verbal, based on certain cultural attributes. Likewise, the *Motolobalango* custom is a stage of the marriage procession that brings together the families of the man and the woman. This procession will of course be based on verbal and non-verbal language which is reflected in cultural attributes, which of course contains the syncretism of *Motolobalango* customs.

¹⁰ Rahman Taufiqrianto Dako and Soepomo Poedjosoedarmo, “Tindak Tutur Dalam Upacara Adat Meminang Di Masyarakat Gorontalo:: Sebuah Kajian Pragmatik,” 2005, <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/27953>.

¹¹ A U Dilo, “Analisa Syair Dan Syariah Adat Peminangan Gorontalo,” *Al-Minhaj: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2022): 1–11, <https://journal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/alminhaj/article/view/3474%0Ahttps://journal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/alminhaj/article/download/3474/1685>.

¹² Salmin Djakaria, “Tahuli Dan Tahuda: Tradisi Lisan Dan Pembentuk Karakter Bangsa Di Masyarakat Gorontalo,” *Patanjala* 9, no. 2 (2017): 147–162, <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/291968-tahuli-dan-tahuda-tradisi-lisan-dan-pemb-9e76d28f.pdf>.

¹³ Islami and Putri, “Nilai-Nilai Filosofis Dalam Upacara Adat Mongubingo Pada Masyarakat Suku Gorontalo.” <https://journal.unhas.ac.id/index.php/jib/article/download/10983/5675/33574>

Verbal language that reflects syncretism in *Motolobalango* customs

The verbal language reflected in the *Motolobalango* custom in question is Tuja'I which is used by customary holders at this stage. The following tuja'I speech which reflects syncretism can be reviewed pragmatically as follows.

Greetings

In the *Motolobalango* traditional procession, greetings have become the opening expression used by traditional leaders when opening a conversation, and this begins with the words Assalamualaikum warahma tullahi wabarakatuh. Implicitly, the meaning of this greeting can be linked to a reflection of syncretism in social life.

The syncretism that appears in the greetings can be linked to Gorontalo society's guidelines on the foundation of customs based on syara', syara' based on the Book of Allah. This means that all aspects of Gorontalo society's life are based on Islamic values.

Request Permission

Asking for permission is a speech act that appears in the tuja'i conveyed by traditional leaders. The statement of asking for permission can be seen in the following sentence: "*Amiyatiya motitalu ode ta hihadiriya. Wonu bolo maa mo'otapu permittedi amiyatiya maa motombilu molo'iyia*". It means: "The feet come facing the audience. If you get permission from the family present, your feet will ask permission to speak." The value of syncretism in the speech asking for permission is of course inseparable from the integration of ethical values in visiting. In Islam, this has been reflected in the QS. An-Nur (27) who wants everyone to ask permission from the occupants of the house first, before being allowed to enter and talk to the host. The context of the speech can also be related to etiquette or politeness in visiting so that it becomes a guideline for people when visiting other people's homes.

Welcome

The speech act of inviting is one of the utterances made to a speech partner to invite another person to talk or enter the house. Usually this is conveyed with the word *toduwolo* (please). To refine the speech of the interlocutor, the speaker conveys the objective subtly with the following sentence: "*Watiya, odelo taheliyonto, anu ito maa mohulito, amiyatiya maa hitiinga wawu hitiminge wawu mololimo olanto wawu mongowutatunto deilo woluwo lo umaa banta-bantala olanto wolo mongowutatunto*" It means: "I, as you said, if you say anything, my feet are ready to listen and accept you and your brothers and sisters to convey what is in their hearts." The speech above is a subtle speech delivered by a traditional leader who invited the interlocutor to speak. This means the speaker has received approval to speak.

If related to syncretism, this speech still reflects etiquette in visiting, which is of course oriented towards the approval of other people to act.

Praise

Praising is one of the expressions made by the speaker towards the speech partner as a form of praise for what the speech partner has achieved. The speech of praise shown in Tuja'i is done by saying *Allhamdulillah* (all praise be to Allah). This form of flattery is a form of gratitude for the blessings given by the Creator. This can be seen in the following tuja'I. "*Alhamdulillah amiyatiya ma lo tapu dalalo u polengotalo. Bo amiyatiya o hihile mohabari to woolota lo mongowutatunto...*" It means: "Alhamdulillah, we have found a way to improve the conversation, but please ask...". In writing, the form of praise in the tuja'I context also appears in the tuja'I sentences conveyed by the following traditional holders.

"*Thank you wawu du'a popotaluwanto mola ode oliyo eya. Tiyo eya taa lopowali mayi olanto..*" It means: "We give thanks and reverence to Allah. He is the God who made...". The expression of gratitude seen above is part of the praise which still contains Islamic elements in it. This means that the content of praise is syncretistic but is based on religious values.

Request

Asking is one of the utterances made at tuja'I, which is carried out by traditional leaders in the form of subtle metaphors for the interlocutor. Pay attention to the following speech.

"*Woluwo u mowali potitalumayi lamiyatiya ode olanto wolo mongowutantunto, potala bolo mowali ramati olanto taa ihilasi*" It means: "There is something we want from you and your brothers, hopefully it will be a blessing for those of us who are sincere." The context of the request contained in the tuja'I above is reflected in the request for willingness to convey something sincerely. The basis of sincerity in asking becomes a subtle stereotype of the content of the speech. This can also be related to syncretism where the ethical basis for asking is reflected in subtle language without having to offend other people.

Promise

Promising is a speech that is used as the foundation for the *Motolobalango* stage. The value of the agreement is oriented towards consensus between both parties regarding the marriage plans that have been discussed together. Tuja'i promised that it appears in the following speech.

Watiya wawu ito

Tola ngobotu layito

Ma pilutu lo pito

Lalango de molonito

Bo totonula u mayilulito

Asali dila pomungkiri ito

It means:

Me and dad

Like a whole fish

When burned it smells delicious

However, what has been agreed

You should not deny it

The context of tuja'I above is pantun language conveyed by traditional leaders to warn the interlocutor of the promise that has been made and cannot be denied. This is reflected in the Al-Quran in surah Al-Nahl (91) which explains that everything that is promised must of course be kept. Implicitly, the context of syncretism appears in the metaphor in the sentence tola ngobotu layito (like a whole fish). The conceptual mapping of this metaphor appears in the relationship scheme = *Tola ngobotu* (A fish). Implicitly, a close relationship depends on the words spoken. If you make a promise, you should keep those words, but if those words are broken it will certainly damage the relationship that has been built.

Thus, syncretism in the verbal language of *Motolobalango* can be reflected through the speech acts of tuja'I which have been represented through the speech acts of greeting, asking permission, inviting, praising, requesting and promising.

Non-Verbal Language that reflects Syncretism in *Motolobalango* customs

Non-verbal language that reflects syncretism can be shown through cultural attributes that are handed over by men to women. These cultural attributes can be described below

1. Betel, symbolizing veins, means kinship relationships
2. Areca nut, symbolizing meat, means perfection
3. Gambir, symbolizing blood, means spirit
4. Lime, symbolizing bones, means strength
5. Tobacco, symbolizing hair, means feelings of sincerity.
6. *Tapahula* (place of cultural attributes), meaning implementation of customs
7. Silk-like fabric, meaning the readiness of the wedding clothes

8. *Toyunga bilalanga* or oversized umbrella, means traditional glory.¹⁴

Apart from the various attributes above, several other attributes provided at the *Motolobalango* event, including:

- *Aato dalalo* = opener of the way. This means that in this traditional proposal ceremony, the *aato dalalo* must be handed over first. If the *aato dalalo* has been accepted then talks can continue. *Aato dalalo* itself means opener of the way. *Aato dalalo* as a symbol to open the way consisting of: (a). Five types of betel nut (tobacco, betel, betel nut, gambier, and lime), (b). 10 catties, (c). Tonggu are all wrapped in beautiful cloth and then covered with umbrellas.
- *Tonggu* = a symbol to express a desire to unite ideas or a symbol to propose.
- Jewel = girl. In traditional proposing ceremonies, speakers rarely mention the prospective bride's name directly, but often use the symbols of jewels and diamonds for the girl. This object is considered a precious stone that has a high selling value. So, to refer to the two objects (gems and diamonds) that are stored, words such as *unti-unti* (locked), *wonu-wonu* to'otutuwa (fragrant) are often used.
- *Pata campurolito* = strands of agreement. For example, *mopulo pata campurolito* (ten pieces of agreement). This means that the prospective groom will give ten million for wedding expenses. One piece means one million.
- *Vila-yilapito* = that follows. For example... *tuwawu yila-yilapito*... (one who follows). This means that the prospective groom will give one cow (*yila-yilapito*) as a symbol of something that follows. Apart from the words *yila-yilapito*, there is a word that is often used as a symbol for the animal (cow) that will be given, namely *ukoli-koliyo'o* (which moves). Then we will also explain the condition of this cow, with the words *tungeliyo moluyito* (sharp horns), *wawaiyo motidito* (fat body).¹⁵

From the description above, a common thread can be drawn that the values of syncretism can be reflected in the cultural attributes of *Motolobalango*, such as betel which symbolizes kinship. Islamically, kinship values can be linked to family values. Because in Gorontalo society, kinship relationships are part of the foundation of the Islamic religion which prioritizes kinship to work together to solve problems.

Another concept of syncretism at the *Motolobalango* event is also found in the traditional symbol of *Aato Dalalo* where cultural attributes in the form of betel, areca nut,

¹⁴ Dilo, “Analisa Syair Dan Syariah Adat Peminangan Gorontalo.”

¹⁵ Dako and Poedjosoedarmo, “Tindak Tuter Dalam Upacara Adat Meminang Di Masyarakat Gorontalo:: Sebuah Kajian Pragmatik.”

gambier, tobacco and lime are five symbols to pave the way for whether the men will come to the women's house or not. Gorontalo people indirectly open a conversation by stating something directly, but the ethical values of speaking can take precedence through these symbols. If these attributes are well received by the woman, the man will start the conversation.

DISCUSSION

Syncretism is a combination of societal beliefs, in this case customs, with Islamic values. This form of syncretism is actually not taboo for society in general. Because most people have the same mindset about certain traditional processes which have sacred potential based on Islamic values.

In Gorontalo, this syncretism is visible at weddings, especially at marriage ceremonies (*tolobalango*). This event is a sacred event carried out by the people of Gorontalo when they are about to hold a wedding. Terminologically, Islam views *Motolobalango* as equivalent to *khitbah*, namely proposing marriage.¹⁶ When related to the perspective of Gorontalo customs in general, Gorontalo customs have a certain sacredness, which is reflected in several things, including: First, placing importance on family relationships, cooperation and deliberation. Second, stick to religion, but be friendly. Third, there is a strong influence of custom in life behavior, because the principle of "custom is based on *syarak*, *syarak* is based on the book of Allah" applies. Third, likes to think critically even though it displays a pattern of simplicity. Fourth, like to respect and appreciate people, on the basis that respect for people means respect for yourself and does not conflict with religion.^{17,18}

The explanation above can indirectly be attributed to the traditional process of *Motolobalango* (proposing marriage) that Islamic values will not be completely separated from Gorontalo traditions. In fact, these Islamic values are the foundation of life for the people of Gorontalo to carry out Islamic law as expected in Gorontalo customs.

¹⁶ Taviv Mopangga and Kasim Yahiji, "Prosesi Adat *Motolobalango* Dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam," *As-Syams* 1, no. 2 (2020): 68–95, <https://ejournal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/AS-SYAMS/article/view/185>.

¹⁷ Sance A. Lamusu, "Kearifan Lokal Dalam Sastra Lisan Tuja'I Pada Upacara Adat Pinangan Masyarakat Gorontalo," *Litera* 19, no. 3 (2020): 505–520. <https://xjournals.com/collections/journals/TableofContent?qt=Anttvxhvtlcoi0Jyp/AyQe/S9g+2w/WFinDIomlBWp0I3Sv2FA>

¹⁸ Rahman Taufiqriyanto Dako, Suhandano, and Anna Marie Watie, "Philosophical Values in Traditional Procession of '*Motolobalango*' in Gorontalo Society," *Jurnal Arts & Humanities* 06, no. 04 (2017): 14–26. <https://theartsjournal.org/index.php/site/article/view/1147>

Basically, the reflection of *Motolobalango* customs can be linked to the cultural order and traditions of Gorontalo ancestors which continue to be passed on to future generations. Gorontalo's customs are not only reflected in the cultural heritage of the Fellowship of the 5 royal families or Duluwo Limo Lo Pohalaa, but are also formed from external cultural influences such as Malay, Arabic and Chinese. Of these many influences, it is the influence of Arabic culture that influences the behavior patterns of the people of Gorontalo.

For this reason, it is not wrong if *Motolobalango* customs as a whole have been integrated with elements of the Islamic religion, so that the entire *Motolobalango* series is indicated by Islamic religious values.

CONCLUSION

The reality of carrying out the traditional process of *Motolobalango* (wooing) is a traditional procession that has high sacred values that are integrated with Islamic values. This is known as syncretism. Syncretism in *Motolobalango* marriage customs has been indicated in two forms, namely verbal and non-verbal language. A reflection of the syncretism of verbal language in the *Motolobalango* custom can be reflected through the tuja'I speech delivered by the customary holders. Some reflections of the syncretism of *Motolobalango* customs can be seen in the 5 (five) representations of tuja'I speech acts, including: greeting, asking for permission, inviting, praising, requesting, and promising. Meanwhile, a reflection of non-verbal language syncretism is reflected in the cultural attributes used in the *Motolobalango* traditional procession. These attributes have meanings that are integrated with Islamic values. Cultural attributes that reflect syncretism values are aato dalalo (there is betel, lime, tobacco, areca nut, gambier, toyunga, tapahula, a type of silk cloth), tonggu gem, pata potolongito, and yila-yilapito. Thus, it is hoped that this research will provide an illustration for the people of Gorontalo so that they can carry out traditional marriage processions, especially *Motolobalango*, by paying attention to the Islamic values therein. Because sometimes people often ignore traditional processions by prioritizing ancient values in them. In addition, it is hoped that this research can provide additional inspiration to explore speech acts and other cultural attributes that reflect syncretism in *Motolobalango* marriage customs.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The contribution of this research addresses to Linguistics and culture study in which covered the concept of local wisdom. In specific, learning this article could be beneficial for understanding the *Motolobalango* as the local content of Gorontalo.

FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDATION

For the further research, it is recommended to cultural scope which could be schematically oriented to semiotics as the focus, or taking verbal and nonverbal relations on the object of research.

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