



Exploring The Cultural Tapestry Of Tanjung Balai: Unveiling Culinary Lexicon Through Ecolinguistics And Cognitive Anthropology

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Abstract: *This study aims to elucidate the cultural significance embedded within the culinary lexicon of the Tanjung Balai community. Leveraging the frameworks of ecolinguistics and cognitive anthropology, this research interprets the cultural values inherent in culinary lexicon. Through analysis, it was deduced that the Tanjung Balai culinary culture embodies multifaceted functions, encompassing cultural, social, and health dimensions. The cultural function serves to delineate the identity and distinctiveness of the community. Socially, it fosters notions of camaraderie, familial bonds, neighborhood cohesion, industriousness, environmental stewardship, etiquette, resilience, optimism, collaborative spirit, and unity. Additionally, the health function ascribes medicinal properties to ingredients, believed to promote well-being such as lactation, cardiovascular health, and overall bodily wellness. Furthermore, these culinary elements are purported to remedy various ailments including stomach ailments, cholesterol issues, stiffness, dental discomfort, and asthma.*

Keywords: *cultural tapestry; culinary; ecolinguistic; cognitive anthropology*

INTRODUCTION

The ecolexicon, or environmental lexicon, serves as a repository of cultural nuances and the natural richness of the environment, encompassing human, cultural, and communal dimensions. Typically, the ecolexicon of a society delineates its ecological and socio-cultural landscapes, reflecting both the state of the natural environment and the socio-cultural milieu. Communities possessing an ecolexicon are intimately acquainted with their ecological contexts, thereby revealing diverse layers of meaning through this lexicon (Steffensen, 2014).

Similarly, the conduct of a community mirrors its cultural ethos, intricately intertwined with its surroundings (Stibbe, 2015). Culture embodies the collective behavioral norms adopted by a society to address its myriad challenges. Traditionally, culture is perceived as proficient in resolving its members' issues. It encompasses any habitual practice that holds special significance for the community (Uyanne, 2014). In essence, culture emerges as a fundamental construct for comprehending individuals and societal groups, emanating from their collective interpretations and understanding of their environment (Spradley, 2016).

In relation to the origin of the name Tanjungbalai City, according to a widely believed story within the community, the word originated from the term "*balai*," which was located in a village around the tip of the cape, at the estuaries of the Silau River and the Asahan River. This "*balai*" was frequently visited by sailors, traders, and passersby due to its strategic location as a small trading port (Depdikbud, 2018). Over time, the village came to be known as Kampung Tanjung, commonly referred to as "*balai di Tanjung*" (the hall at Tanjung). This

Received: March 31, 2024; Accepted: April 22, 2024; Published: May 31, 2024

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"balai" served as the starting point for the development of Tanjungbalai City, which grew and flourished into a territory governed by a sultan. The first reigning sultan, Sultan Abdul Jalil, hailed from the Asahan Kingdom and ruled since 1620. Tanjungbalai City stands out with its icon "*Balayar Satujuan Batambat Satangkahan*," symbolizing the spirit of unity in achieving common goals. The Fountain Monument and Dolphin Statue in the city center signify its diversity. Situated between the Asahan River and the Silau River, the city covers an area of 6,052 hectares (60.52 km²) and boasts the longest bridge in North Sumatra Province (approximately 600 meters), connecting it to Sei Kepayang Village. Administratively, Tanjungbalai City is divided into 6 Districts and 31 Sub-districts. The largest district, Datuk Bandar, encompasses 2,249 hectares or about 37.16% of Tanjungbalai City's total area, while the smallest district, North Tanjungbalai, covers only 84 hectares or approximately 1.39%. Tanjungbalai City emerged from the division of Asahan Regency, hence it is not surprising that it is surrounded by the territory of Asahan Regency.

The kinship system in the Malay community in Tanjungbalai City follows a bilateral principle, where kinship relations are reckoned through both paternal and maternal lines. In terms of addressing male siblings, the practice differs from other regions. For instance, the term "*abah*" is equivalent to "*abang*," referring to the eldest male sibling. Meanwhile, the term for the eldest female sibling is "*kakak*." There are nine levels of addressing for both male and female siblings. The first child is usually addressed as "*Ulong*" or "*Uwong*," the second as "*ongah*" or "*angah*," the third as "*alang*," and so forth, until the eighth child is addressed as "*uncu*" or "*bungsu*." In the beginning, the influence of Hindu-Buddhist religion on the Malay community was significant across various aspects of life, including politics, economy, social, and intellectual realms. However, the indigenous beliefs of the Nusantara society, including the Malays, in animism and dynamism persisted (Sapir, 2012). Subsequent developments saw the introduction of other religions, which did not directly eradicate these beliefs, but the teachings of Hindu-Buddhist faith remained dominant in societal life (Rahardi, 2019).

The cultural acculturation process between the Malay and Batak Toba communities in Tanjungbalai is not solely based on the aforementioned factors but also due to several cultural similarities facilitating the acculturation process in this city (Dokhi, 2016). Firstly, both ethnic groups share a similar kinship system centered around patrilineal descent, where lineage is traced through the father's line. However, there are differences in some customs and traditions. Secondly, besides the similarities in kinship systems, there are also cultural resemblances between the Batak Toba and Malay cultures. For example, there are

expressions of pantun (traditional Malay poetry) in Malay culture and similar expressions in Batak Toba culture (Duranty, 2019). The mourning culture in the Batak Toba community has also been adopted by the Asahan Malay community in Tanjungbalai, known as Sinandong. Sinandong has become a highly esteemed art form among the Malay community, known as Sinandong Asahan. Thirdly, according to historical and anthropological research, it is believed that the ancestors of the Batak and Malay people originated from the hinterlands of India, and both are speakers of the Austronesian language (Foley, 2020).

The culinary ecorexicon domain stands as a reservoir revealing the cultural values of its custodians. As part of the Malay language environment vocabulary, studying the culinary ecorexicon endeavors to unveil the diverse spiritual and physical attributes of the community (Lier, 2016). Each lexicon entry denotes culinary references alongside requisite ingredients, encapsulating treasures harbored within the cognitive framework of each speaker. These entries hold social and cultural significance, articulating the richness of cultural values as manifestations of intangible local wisdom. Meanwhile, the culinary types are categorized as tangible cultural heritage, a heritage that perseveres in its conservation efforts despite occasional challenges.

The abundance of tangible cultural heritage enshrined within various ecorexicons is believed to harbor enduring cultural values, revered by the community to this day and serving diverse functions. The Tanjung Balai Society, renowned for its diverse culinary repertoire, acknowledges the multifaceted functions embedded within culinary traditions, encompassing social, cultural, and health dimensions. The multifarious nature of cultural diversity, across its varied functions, is elucidated within this discourse.

METHODS

Theoretical frameworks posit a close nexus between language, environment, and community within a given locale. It was posited that living languages are essentially products of human cognition, finding manifestation in the social interactions among its speakers. Spatial dimensions, particularly distinct environments such as bioregions and ecoregions, assume significance owing to their unique natural endowments (Aminuddin, 2019). It is from these natural surroundings that language, expressions, and distinct terminologies emerge (Chen, 2016).

The phenomenon of sub-ethnic or subcultural groups delineated by environmental factors underscores the intricate interplay between language, culture, and environment. The symbiotic relationship between humans and their surrounding milieu finds expression

through the lexicon employed. From a cognitive anthropological standpoint, the lexicon utilized reflects objects, events, and symbols crucial to activities within their milieu (Koentjaraningrat, 2019). Embedded within society's cultural fabric lies a reservoir of wisdom, derived from its intrinsic values. It was identified various facets of local wisdom, encompassing domains such as welfare, industriousness, discipline, education, health, collaborative endeavors, gender dynamics, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, peace, etiquette, integrity, social cohesion, harmonious conflict resolution, commitment, and positive outlook (Fill, 2001).

The exploration of cultural values within the culinary eolexicon entails content analysis. Each entry within the culinary lexicon undergoes meticulous examination, with particular emphasis on interpretation and description. This analysis establishes connections between lexicons and their respective environments, encompassing both natural and sociocultural realms (Cresswel, 2018). Consequently, the cultural wisdom inherent in each Malay culinary variant, alongside the lexicon delineating its basic ingredients, is gleaned through comprehensive interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cuisine, a cornerstone of community identity, transcends mere sustenance, embodying profound cultural significance and values reflective of communal ethos. Culinary traditions epitomize the local ethos, encapsulating environmental characteristics and customary practices, while also delineating modes of representation, consumption, and production. Culinary offerings symbolize communal resilience, imbued with multifaceted meanings. For instance, certain foods are deemed indispensable at specific events, rituals, or ceremonies, serving as integral components of communal celebrations. For instance, the Batak community features *ikan mas arsik* as a ceremonial delicacy during weddings, while Javanese customs dictate the inclusion of *nasi tumpeng* in various festive rites.

Beyond its cultural import, cuisine also serves vital social functions, fostering interpersonal bonds among individuals. Communal dining occasions, such as breakfast or dinner gatherings, epitomize familial intimacy, fostering harmony within kinship networks (Lal et al., 2023). Additionally, culinary exchanges among neighbors serve to enhance social cohesion and neighborly rapport. Furthermore, culinary traditions harbor inherent health benefits, rooted in community lore and traditional wisdom (Wurianto, 2018). This knowledge, transmitted both formally and informally, underscores the symbiotic relationship between dietary practices and well-being. For instance, Malay customs dictate the inclusion of *anyang*

as a staple fare during Ramadan. However, such dietary choices may be contraindicated for individuals with gastric ailments. Additionally, *kalapo* (*cocos nucifera*), another common ingredient, is believed to mitigate rheumatic symptoms and double as a hair tonic among the Malay populace.

Moreover, the medicinal properties attributed to *daun buas-buas*, known scientifically as *Premna serratifolia*, further elevate its stature in Malay culinary lore, particularly among the Malay populace of North Sumatra. Believed to possess therapeutic benefits, consumption of *daun buas-buas* is purported to alleviate gastrointestinal issues and hypertension, while concurrently imparting a sense of vitality (Widayati, 2017). Coupled with *Katumbur* (*Coriandrum sativum*), these leaves are revered for their rejuvenating properties, revitalizing the body and mind. Notably, the inclusion of *jantung pisang* confers analgesic properties, offering relief from headaches, while select leaves function as remedies for indigestion and cardiac issues—*daun pagago* and *daun sikontut* being noteworthy examples.

At Tanjung Balai Malay community gatherings, a culinary delight that takes center stage is *gule ayam bumbu putih*. This aromatic chicken stew, infused with rich spices, is a customary offering at festivities, circumcision ceremonies, serving not only as a culinary indulgence but also as a conduit for fostering camaraderie and goodwill among attendees. *Kombang loyang*, symbolizes the blossoming of a flower. Just as flowers grow and emit fragrance, this symbolism is mirrored in the *Kombang Loyang* cake. Its presentation carries a profound message, signifying the continuous prosperity of the household and the enduring fragrance of life amidst challenges. Additionally, *Kombang Loyang* serves as a representation of the fragrant blossoms within both the nuclear family and the wider community.

The extensive lexicon of kitchen herbs within Tanjung Balai culinary culture underscores its distinctiveness. This aligns with the concept articulated by some experts highlighting the reciprocal influence between humans as users of language and the environment as the backdrop for linguistic expression (Haugen, 2019). The culinary ecolexicon of the Tanjung Balai Society, situated on the East Coast of North Sumatra, embodies cultural values categorized into three main functions: cultural, social, and health functions.

CONCLUSION

The Culinary ecolexicon of the Tanjung Balai society, encompassing dishes like *anyang*, *jantung pisang*, and *kombang loyang*, serves various functions: cultural, social, and health-related. The cultural functions serve to portray the unique identity and characteristics

of Malay society. Social functions encompass fostering brotherhood, familial and neighborly harmony, diligent work ethic, environmental stewardship, courtesy, patience, optimism, cooperation, and unity. Health functions are attributed to the ingredients, believed to promote well-being, including lactation support, heart health, overall bodily wellness, and remedying ailments such as stomachaches, back pain, hypertension, high cholesterol, stiffness, toothaches, and asthma.

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