



**A LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CONTEXT IN THE SYMBOLS OF THE RITUAL
REBO BUNTUNG**

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ABSTRACT

Lombok island is a piece of paradise rich in tradition and culture. The practiced tradition that still exists in Lombok is *Rebo Bontong* Tradition; it is especially practiced by the people around the coastal area of Tanjung Menangis, Pringgabaya, East Lombok. In the present time, the development of modern technology has touched and influenced society, which has become a challenge for the community to maintain and preserve the existing values or culture. The tradition of *Rebo Bontong* in the past was different from what it is now. The previous tradition merely focused on worship without any entertainment elements in it; at the present, it is functioning as entertainment. Related to those notions, the problem arises are the current traditions and values of the *Rebo Bontong* ritual are eroded by the influence of modernization or are still the same. Therefore, this study aims to redefine the meaning of each value in the *Rebo Bontong* tradition as an effort to maintain the existence of traditional cultural meanings from generation to generation. This research is qualitative research using an ethnographic method approach that aims to study, describe, analyze and interpret the cultural patterns of an ethnic group in terms of behavior, beliefs, language, and shared views. This research was conducted at Ketapang Beach, Tanjung Menangis, Pringgabaya District, and East Lombok Regency. The results showed that the ritual symbolized the new meanings; they are (1) a symbol of intergenerational unity and (2) a symbol of environmental harmony and moral values as well as customs within the framework of religious culture. (3) Social symbols which are part of the social bond, social interaction media, and socialization media.

Keywords: language; Rebo Bontong; symbols; social

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known for its natural beauty and is rich in various cultures. The culture in each region has its uniqueness, and this becomes a characteristic of the cultural life of each community (Kogoya et al., 2020).

Communities in each region establish cultural patterns with one or several focuses, for example, the main value integrates all elements of culture into one cultural configuration. Cultural focuses can be in the form of religious, economic, or any socio-cultural values or

norms, as well as modern ideology, science, and technology. Culture is usually associated with human customs somehow these customs are a reflection of their behavior. Cultural values are an organized general conception, influencing behavior related to nature, and influencing human behavior with and with the environment and fellow human beings. (Resmini & Saina, 2021)

The traditional ceremony is one form of culture. A ceremony is a respected form of communication and it provides a living record of the ancestral heritage such as dances, songs, crafts, artifacts, and many more: that have been passed down from generation to generation. (Harrison et al., 2021). In traditional ceremonies, many community use symbols in the procession. Each used symbol contains its meaning based on the philosophical, religious, social, and traditional conceptions of culture. The symbols in these ceremonies can be represented in the form of a symbolic lexicon meaning or an object and action. Symbols have a very important function in society because through these symbolic meanings, people make them into their ideology of lives. It is hoped that the next generation still understands the value of traditional ceremonies entirely (Syarifuddin, 2015). According to Hymes (2012), the symbolic meaning contained in an object or situation believed by society can be categorized as a knowledge system (Lumempouw, 2021).

In Lombok society, traditional ceremonies or rituals are part of the life cycle rooted in customs. Accordingly, it is clear, the performance of traditional ceremonies is a positive phase in preserving a valuable culture, and it is useful for maintaining the ethnic group identity. (Dzofir, 2017). One of the traditions still preserved and conserved up to now by the Sasak people of Lombok is the *Rebo Bontong* tradition. The *Rebo Bontong* is a ritual in the form of a festival held regularly every year, this ritual grows and develops in the Sasak community, especially in the Pringgabaya Village community, East Lombok. The Sasak people generally believe that from Tuesday night up to Wednesday in the last week of the month of Safar, *Allah SWT* (God Almighty) sends down many calamities (disasters) to the world. The term *Rebo Bontong*, according to the Sasak language, *Rebo* means Wednesday,

while *Bontong* means the end of the last, hence *Rebo Bontong* means the last Wednesday in the month of Safar. The purpose of the ceremony is to eliminate disasters (Supatmiwati et al., 2021).

Along with the times, modern technology has touched and influenced the community in Pringgabaya Village, it becomes a challenge for the community to maintain and preserve existing values or culture. Value is something good desirably, spiritedly, and considerably important by all humans as members of society such as worth (truth-values), beauty (aesthetic values), goodness (moral or ethical values), and religious (religious values) (Setiadi et al., 2006). However, the values that were originally a reference for society became unsound due to the influence of other cultures. The preceding *Rebo Bontong* tradition is different from the current one. The preceding tradition focused on worship without any entertainment elements in it. At the present, it is functioning as entertainment. To meet the demands of sponsors who support the implementation of the activity. While eroding traditions and cultural values due to modernization, this research is expected to be part of an effort to maintain the existence of traditional cultural meanings from generation to generation. Related to those notions, the problem arises are the current traditions and values of the *Rebo Bontong* ritual are eroded by the influence of modernization or are still the same. Therefore, this study aims to redefine the meaning of each value in the *Rebo Bontong* tradition as an effort to maintain the existence of traditional cultural meanings from generation to generation

METHOD

This research is qualitative research using an ethnographic method approach that aims to study, describe, analyze and interpret the cultural patterns of an ethnic group. Through an ethnographic approach, researchers are also encouraged to use their sensitivity to study and understand directly the ideologies, preferences, beliefs, norms, and culture held by society in terms of shared behavior, beliefs, language, and views (Krause, 2021). This research was conducted at Ketapang Beach, Tanjung Menangis, Pringgabaya District, East Lombok Regency. The research location is the place

where the traditional *Rebo Bontong* ritual was carried out. This is a potential place to collect data related to the ritual. Furthermore, according to the research objectives, the sample in this study was a traditional leader who knew in depth about the *Rebo Bontong* Ritual in East Lombok. The traditional figure referred to in this study is Lalu Wirahadi. Furthermore, the data from the interviews were compared with the data from the field survey during the *Rebo Bontong* ritual. The methods in collecting data are observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation method was an initial mapping of the research object to obtain a real picture of an event. The interview method was used to obtain primary data, namely the main data needed to answer the research problem. The interview technique used in this research is an in-depth interview. An in-depth interview is to obtain information for research purposes using question and answer while face-to-face between the interviewer and the informant. The documentation method is data collection by searching for documents related to research. Documents in this research can be in the form of pictures or photos and other documents that can help speed up the research process

Miles and Huberman's (2014) propose a technique of data analysis used in this research. Data analysis consists of three activities occurring simultaneously such as data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Moreover, data condensation refers to the process of selecting, centralizing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data appearing in field notes or transcripts using a document. Then, data display is a compressed and organized collection of information from which conclusions and actions can be drawn. The conclusion is verified as the analyst proceeds.

DISCUSSION

Redefining the Historical Meaning of *Rebo Bontong*

Tradition is repetitive activities in the same form. Tradition is a pattern of behavior or belief that is part of a culture and it becomes customs and beliefs for generations. Based on interview data from informants, it was revealed that *Rebo Bontong* was first carried out by the king of

Sandubaya. The first purpose was for asking permission and safety from the Ruler of the universe. It was when the king of Sandubaya brought his people to migrate from the port of Lombok to Pringgabaya precisely on the coast of *Tanjong Menangis* or Ketapang beach. It was because of the many disturbances by pirates against the royal community. The ritual to the universe Ruler for requesting permission and safety in opening a new land/village is the first time the *Rebo Bontong* tradition was carried out in Lombok. After the death of King Sandubaya, the people no longer carried out this tradition for about seven years. Then, disasters often occurred in Pringgabaya Village, the people of Pringgabaya village often suffered from diseases and disturbances from evil spirits. Based on the dream of one of the villagers, finally, the *Rebo Bontong* tradition was re-carried out and the purpose of eliminating disaster and diseases. Then the *Rebo Bontong* tradition that has existed since ancient times blends or adapts by adding religious elements to it. The *Rebo Bontong* tradition is a tradition to eliminate disaster, which reminds people to always be aware of their surroundings.

If the *Rebo Bontong* tradition is viewed from the perspective of functionalism theory, then *the Rebo Bontong* tradition can be considered as a social institution or social organization that functions as a forum or means for unifying community members with the same values or goals. By doing this tradition, the community gathers and carries out an activity based on mutual values. In addition, this tradition portrays the human effort to get closer to Allah SWT (God Almighty).

Redefining the Lexicon Meaning in the *Rebo Bontong* Tradition

The relationship of language to the environment and religious activities refers to an ecolinguistic study written by Einar Haugen in 1970. Haugen states *ecology of language may be defined as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment* (Fill & Muhlhausler, 2001). The form of the lexicon resulting from the use of language that refers to an object shows the contact of language users with the natural environment. The use of the lexicon in language ecology reflects that there is human interaction with the environment. The

forms of the lexicon used in the *Rebo Bontong* tradition are several lexicons used in referring to various series of events in the traditional procession. One of the lexicons of processions or series of events in the *Rebo Bontong* Ritual is *Tetulaq Tamperan*. *Tetulaq tamperan* is a phrase derived from *tetulaq* and *tamperan*. The word *tetulaq* derived from:

the prefix [te-]	In Sasak language the prefix [te-] which is attached to a verb functions to form a passive verb
root <i>tulaq</i>	<i>tu.laq</i> v return to; <i>te.tu.lak.in</i> v (be) returned;
root <i>tamperan</i>	<i>tam.par.an</i> , <i>te.tam.par.an</i> n beach;

So literally, the meaning of *tetulaq tamperan* is to be returned to the sea. Following its meaning, the *tetulaq tamperan* is a procession centered on the beach where any community elements gather on Tanjung Menangis Beach, for giving offerings by floating the buffalo head into the sea. Besides the buffalo head, there are several supplementary offerings from agricultural products such as rice, fruits, betel leaves, chickens, and others. Then the buffalo head and all the offerings are floated out to sea by boat.

After floated the offerings, all the people who participated in the events bathed in the sea, this was believed to cast away the entire bad thing or negative attitudes, and create peace in social life. The *tetulaq Tamperan* ritual is related to nature, from the word *tamperan* which refers to a beach. This means that the people of Pringabaya appreciate nature in the *Tetulaq Tamperan* procession.

This ritual is a reflection of the soul of the Sasak people as part of a cultured and religious society. It is also part of the balance of self-image and the surrounding environment, which is arranged harmoniously by prioritizing local wisdom, so its existence is the potential as a cultural treasure containing moral messages and customs within the framework of religious culture. It is a wise effort in preserving and caring culture and language.

In addition to the main offering in the form of a buffalo head, there is also an additional offering called *Ongsongan*. *Ongsongan* is a

container made of bamboo and banana stems and it is wrapped with yellow cloth and decorated with a white umbrella. The people fill *ongsongan* with yellow rice and white rice, as well as seven eggs and seven kinds of traditional snacks, and seven kinds of fruit, which represent the community's crop or foodstuffs. In addition, *Ongsongan* is also filled with 44 pieces of *ketupat* (rice cake wrapped in coconut leaves) and 44 pieces of *tikel* (sticky rice wrapped in coconut leaves). This *ongsongan* will be floated along with the main offering, the buffalo head, into the sea; the symbolic meaning of this *ongsongan* is giving offerings to the guardians of the ocean and all the creatures in it.

This tradition leaves an important lexicon to relate to corresponding between humans and the natural environment (ecology). Indirectly, the *Rebo Bontong* and *Tetulaq Tamperan* events have cultural and language preservation functions.

Redefining the Meaning of objects and Actions in the Rebo Bontong

The *Rebo Bontong* tradition in Pringgabaya district is an acculturation of religious values and tale from their ancestors. The essence of *Rebo Bontong* is the ritual of eliminating disasters (all sorts of danger) and also the prayer of fishermen to have an abundant fish catch. This tradition has meaning as a form of gratitude for being prevented from disasters and a form of gratitude for the given fortune. for this reason, the people of Pringgabaya pray to Allah SWT for blessing and protecting the village from calamities. In general, every tradition or religious ceremony in a society always presents or uses symbols that have values, meanings, and messages closely related to the intention of the ceremony or tradition.

The symbols of meaning contained in the *Rebo Bontong* tradition have two categories, namely symbols in the form of objects and symbols in the form of actions. The first category is the meaning of symbols in the form of objects, they are (a) chicken eggs. here the egg is a symbol of the circle of life and teaches us to appreciate life, and be grateful to Allah SWT for the life given, even though our lives sometimes have ups and downs, or sick and healthy, or sad and happy.; (b) a pair of a hen

and a rooster, which is a symbol of balance and it also represents a couple of humans; (c) *wafaq water*, this water is used as a healing medium for treatment to avoid harm or disturbances from spirits; (d) Myrrh. Myrrh is a fragrance that is believed to give scent (luster) in people's lives and provide prosperity; (e) cigarettes wrapped in white yarn. This cigarette is a symbol of social connection and friendship and also as a connector with the ancestors; (f) Betel leaf. Betel leaf is a symbol of the heart because its heart-shaped like leaves, which means that in this life do not envy what other people have, and stay humble because we always need the help of others and we must grateful to Allah SWT for the fortune we earned; (g) Betel nut. Betel nut is a symbol of integrity, we must always be straight (honest) just like a straight trunk of a betel palm so that we can be useful to many people; (h) Tobacco, is a symbol of life, the plant symbolizes the world where humans live and the leaves are humans themselves, if the leaves turned yellow, it is ready to be cropped; it means that human time has run out (died). in the reapen period (drying), we can learn and evaluate ourselves as mature as tobacco leaves; (i) rice. this symbolizes hope and peace, for rice is the source of life, The hope in carrying out this Rebo Bontong Tradition is a secured and safe life; (j) ketupat, this symbolizes a sense of mutuality, as we mutually continue to preserve the culture or value of our ancestors.

The second category is the meaning of symbols in the form of actions, they are: (a) giving offering, In the Rebo Bontong tradition, it begins with a good deed or giving an offering. The purpose of giving an offering is to eliminate calamities or keep away disasters or dangers that will occur. In addition, giving offerings is also a form of gratitude to God for the fortune given; (b) Praying, Praying is a means of communicating with Allah swt which aims to express wishes, and ask for help and protection from Him. And in the Rebo Bontong tradition, prayer is never separated from each implementation of the tradition itself. This prayer aims to ask to eliminate harm or calamity that occurred so that we get the guidance, safety, and peace of mind; (c) Washing hair or Bathing together, these actions symbolize an act of cleansing the soul from negative

influences or evil spirits. This is done after the ritual is complete.

Redefining the Meaning of Social Values in the Rebo Bontong

Humans make an effort to fulfill their needs by relying on their own strength and relying on their natural surroundings. Culture is born because of the human desire to fulfill the needs of life. Apart from needs, culture then develops in the form of behavior, kinship systems, religion, myths, and so on. The next generation is expected to be able to maintain the values of life and prevailing norms(Esten, 2013).

According to Tallcot Person theory in Prasetya, et al, he said that social functions are all activities directed to fulfill the needs related to the system that connected one another. (Prasetya et al., 2021). The community of Pringgabaya carries out the *Rebo Bontong* tradition of their own accord; because the tradition has a social function and positive values they agreed. With its function and its social context, the *Rebo Bontong* tradition functions to support and maintain collective culture. Therefore, Rebo Bontong tradition has a social function for the community, because the actions taken by the community are based on the impulse of willingness to stay on agreed values and norms.

The social functions in the *Rebo Bontong* tradition include: (a) The *Rebo Bontong* tradition functions as social glue because the process of its implementation involves the entire community in Pringgabaya. The social meaning obtained is teamwork; this is needed for well-organized activities to achieve common goals; (b) The Rebo Bontong tradition functions as a medium of social interaction, with this tradition the Pringgabaya community interacts with other communities outside the Pringgabaya village to enliven the event. The community or group is not only attached to their group, but they can open themselves up. This can increase knowledge and benefit the group; (c) The Rebo Bontong tradition functions as a medium of socialization and social gathering. The implementation of the Rebo Bontong tradition creates a strong social bond between generations because the implementation of the Rebo Bontong tradition involves all elements of

Pringgabaya society, including children, teenagers, youths, and elders. This is an effort to prepare the next generation to carry on the tradition. Regeneration in an organization is necessary, to continue the organization's mission so that the planned vision can be achieved.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that: *First*, the Historical Meaning of *Rebo Bontong* has changed. Now *Rebo Bontong*, from the perspective of functionalism theory, can be considered as a social institution or social organization that has a function as a forum or means for unifying community members with the same values or goals. By doing this tradition, the community gathers and carries out an activity based on mutual values. in addition, this tradition portrays the human effort to get closer to Allah SWT (God Almighty). *Second*, the lexicon meaning of *Rebo Bontong* tradition is a reflection of the Sasak people's soul toward the surrounding ecology. This shows that the ecological environment affects the culture and language used in a society, so its existence is the potential as an effort to preserve culture and language. *Third*, the meaning of social functions, then *Rebo Bontong* tradition is part of the social glue, social interaction media, and socialization media.

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