Semantics Structure of Javanese Proverbs: A Natural Semantic Metalanguage Analysis

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Abstract

This study is aimed to investigate the explication of Javanese proverbs, and also to find the NSM semantic template pattern in Javanese language proverbs. This study integrates natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) into the semantic analysis to explain how the meaning of Javanese proverbs can be explained. In this study, the researcher uses a five-semantic template for English proverbs proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka. The findings of the study indicate that not all of the semantic template is fulfilled in Javanese Proverbs. It means that there is not any pattern of NSM semantic template in Javanese language. However, the application of NSM semantic templates in explaining proverbs meaning is not only worthwhile but also practical in explicating the Javanese proverbs.

Keywords: proverb; javanese language; natural semantic metalanguage

1. Introduction

There are different forms of words, one of them is proverbs. In general, proverb is a ubiquitous expression rooted in culture. According to Mieder (2004, xi), "Proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observations in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication". In semantic point of view, in particular, proverbs are seen as multi-words utterances yet they also "word-like" (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2014:184). Based on this view, it means that the meaning of a proverb is not composed of their constituent words meaning. Rather, a proverb possesses a certain specific meaning or "word-like" meaning.

Javanese language is rich of proverbs. The Javanese proverbs are considered to be rich in metaphorical expression. This expression was created in different forms such as clauses, groups or phrases whose meaning involves multi interpretation. It means that the explanation of the meaning could be treated as explaining metaphor or idioms. Number of scholars have conducted research on the meaning of Javanese proverbs. Nirmala (2013) explained the meaning of Javanese proverbs through the cognitive linguistic approach. Nirmala (2013) states that there are four levels of meaning the proverbs convey, i.e. literal, cognitive, literary, and cultural. Her research implies that Javanese proverbs can preserve human's experiences and habits that may lose in another decade due to social dynamicity and natural changes. Other research on Javanese proverbs mostly talks about the values the Javanese brings to the education learning. Setiadi and Herawati (2019) describe the forms of Javanese proverbs as part of local wisdom that contains character education values. Their findings show that the themes for Javanese proverbs include religious, nationalist, autonomous, mutual; voluntary cooperation, and integrity. This paper has a different approach

from what has been studied by Nirmala (2013) and Setiadi and Herawati (2019). This paper shows how the meaning of Javanese proverbs could be explicated through Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach.

Studies on the application of NSM to Javanese language is not a new thing either. Subiyanto (2008) explained the semantic components and structure of the non-agentive motion verbs (NAMVs) in Javanese language. The result shows that NAMVs can be classified based on the direction and quality of motion. Based on the direction of motion, NAMVs are composed of two semantics primes, MOVE and DO, whereas based on the quality of motion, NAMVs are composed of the semantic primes of HAPPEN and DO. Later on, Subiyanto (2011) also explored the semantic components and structure of event process verbs (EPVs) in Javanese by using NSM theory. The result shows that EPVs in Javanese language are composed of two semantic primes, which are HAPPEN and DO.

The focus of this paper is different to what Subiyanto (2008,2011) has done. This paper focus on the Javanese proverbs and how these proverbs could be explained through five-part semantic template for proverbs proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014). The use of semantic template for proverbs of NSM itself has been tried out by any scholars. Neale (2015), for example, examined the semantic meaning of English and Japanese proverbs. The findings of this investigation demonstrate that matching proverbs from different languages is a potentially problematic exercise. Similar research also conducted by Wu (2019). Wu (2019) investigated the similarities and differences between 'equivalent' proverbs in English and Chinese. The five-part semantic template from NSM was also integrated. The findings of the study indicate that it is not only worthwhile but also practical to carefully examine English and Chinese proverbs pairs.

Although many scholars have been studied the use of five semantic template in proverbs, none of those study has tried it out in Javanese language. Thus, this paper tries to examine the application of NSM semantic template proposed by Goddard and Wirzbicka (2014) in analyzing Javanese proverbs. Furthermore, this study is aimed to find the NSM semantic template pattern in Javanese language proverbs.

2. Research Method

This study examines Javanese proverbs as defined and provided by Pepak Basa Jawa (Nuraini, 2018) as the written data. For the spoken data, the researcher conducts a free interview with two Javanese native speakers with Pati dialect. As for the criteria of choosing the speaker, the researcher adapts the following criteria that has been used by Subiyanto (2011, 169): 1) the native speaker of Javanese language, 2) the informants are in the adequate age and has no senile dementia, 3) has a normal functioning speech organ, 4) has the adequate knowledge of Javanese language, 5) has the willingness and enough time in participating in the research. In getting the spoken data, the interview method was used. The researcher gave the chosen proverbs to the interviewees and wrote down the meaning of the proverbs given by them. After that, the researcher made any necessary elicitation from the data. The researcher also asked the interviewees to use given proverbs in a sentence(s).

The chosen proverbs were analyzed using Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). NSM, developed by linguist Anna Wierzbicka (1996) and Cliff Goddard (2002), is a unique method of linguistic analysis that involves using simple words to express more complex meanings. This technique avoids the complex terminology and abbreviations that is found in conventional dictionary. In addition, this technique also provides a tool for expressing meaning that transcends culturally specific metaphorical language such as that found in proverbs. The key point in using NSM is the concept of 'semantic primes' (as can be seen in table 1) Goddard calls "the irreducible semantic core of all-natural language" (2002, 7). These semantic primes are words that cannot be simplified further. Wierzbicka and Goddard use the term "reductive paraphrasing" (Goddard 2002, 7) to describe the process of using these words to express the meaning of a concept, and call the products of this process "semantic explications" (Wierzbicka 1996, 113). Semantic explications are made up of simple clauses constructed with semantic primes. By reducing proverbs to NSM semantic explications, we can express and compare their meanings using the same universal terminology.

The semantic explications are based on a five-part semantic template for proverbs that was originally developed by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014, 190). The five sections in this template describe what Goddard sees as the core characteristics of proverbs: 'traditionality', a 'recurrent situation', 'advice', 'analogy' and 'status as folk wisdom'. Goddard notes that 'traditionality' and 'status as folk wisdom' are qualities that all proverbs share (2014, 190). 'Traditionality' describes how users position a proverb as something that people have used over a long period of time, while 'status as folk wisdom' describes how a proverb communicates the common knowledge of a specific culture. As these qualities are common to all proverbs and therefore are not useful for distinguishing differences, they are omitted from the explications in this study.

Thus, the focus is on the other three sections of Goddard's template, which examines the content of proverbs. The second element, [b] recurrent situation, describes the real-life situation that a proverb warns against. For example, 'nandur pari jero' [translated into 'planting the rice deeply'] is that people are committing good deeds as hoping for goodness. The third, [c] advice, describes the moral lesson of a proverb. The advice of 'nandur pari jero' is that one should always try to do something good to other people if one hopes for a goodness. But it should be noted that some metaphorical proverbs, such as 'asu marani gebuk' [translated into 'a snake as to be beaten'], lack the advice element. The final content element [d] analogy, describes the metaphor contained in a proverb and what it stands for. In 'gagak nganggo lare merak' (translated into 'a crow wearing a peafowl feather'), a lower-class man acting as an upper-class is an analogy for representing someone who do not act in accordance with his social status. It is also an important point that the non-metaphorical, maxim-style proverbs, such as practice make perfect in English proverb, do not employ an analogy (Goddard and Wierzbicka, 2014: 193). In this template section, the methapors within the proverbs will be explicated so that they can be easily understood.

The proverbs explicated in this study was randomly chosen merely based on their well-known nature among Javanese speakers. The reason behind this decision is that the researcher hoped that the similar discussion on the explication of Javanese proverbs could be conducted in the future research.

3. Findings and Discussion

One of well-known Javanese values is their respect to upholding self-integrity. A well-known paribasan, as in (1a), in expressing and strengthening this value tells people to use polite speech as it represents their education and integrity. This paribasan advices people to pay attention on what we want to say, how we want to say it, and the specific sentences types, words, and sounds that best unite the what with the how. As a common knowledge in Javanese language, there are three speech levels indicating three types of sentences labelled with krama (the high level), madya (the middle), and ngoko (the basic) (Norwanto, 2016:56). Javanese people are obliged to pay respect on these speech levels in expressing their utterances. Their occurrences should conform to the social stances of the speaker toward the hearer. Superior speakers may use ngoko to address the inferior hearer and receive krama in return. Failed to do this, one will be assumed to be failed in achieving the social maintenance.

(1) Ajining dhiri dumunung aneng lathi.
    'Esteem depend on speech'
    [translation, Common Ground (CG)]

   [a]. for a long time before people in this place said these words at many times
         when they wanted to say something like this: - -   **[Traditionality]**

   [b]. it is often like this:
         [Recurrent Situation]
    someone wants to say something to someone else
    this someone can say many things
    at this time, this someone thinks like this:
    "I want to say something. I know many words. I should say good words to other people because I am someone below other people or above other people. I want other people to see me as someone good for what I have said"

   [c]. when it is like this, it is not good if this someone does not think like this any more
    it is good if this someone thinks like this before say something**[Proverbial advice]**

   [d].   - - -   **[Proverbial Analogy]**

   [e]. many people live for a long time
         [Status as folk wisdom]
    because of this, these people can know many things
    this is one of these things
    it can be good for someone if this someone thinks about this at some time

For Javanese people, lacks of verbal caution in making utterances is believed to cause calamity upon themselves. The proverbial analogy, as in (2), gives the emphasized on the need for verbal caution in making utterances. One should remember their social stances before saying something to someone else. The proverbial analogy, as in (2), gives the illustration on how house-geckos could bring harm to their life if they make their chuck-chuck-chuck sound barking too loud or too often. By doing so, the house-geckos could invite their predator to haunt them because they will inform their precise location to their predators. In this Javanese proverb, there is not any direct proverbial advice. Thus, the explication is as follows:

(2) *Tekek mati ing ulone*
'a house gecko is dead because of its sound'
[translation, *CG*]

   [a]. for a long time before people in this place said these words at many times when they wanted
       to say something like this: - -   **[Traditionality]**
   [b]. it is often like this:
         for some time, someone says something to someone else or other people
         it can be something very big   **[Recurrent Situation]**
         this someone does not think about it well before
         afterwards something very bad happens to this someone because of this
   [c]. because of this, it is not good for someone if this someone says something
         when this someone has not thought about it very well before **[Proverbial advice]**
   [d]. it is like this: **[Proverbial Analogy]**
        everyone knows that a house-gecko* could make* loud* sound*
        when this house-gecko* make* too loud* sound*, very bad thing could happen to him
   [e]. many people live for a long time
        because of this, these people can know many things **[Status as folk wisdom]**
        this is one of these things
        it can be good for someone if this someone thinks about this at some time

In some Javanese proverbs, the [d] proverbial analogy was not provided in the content explication. Hence, it gives the strong advice to someone to believe in upholding justice or goodness since whatever one does, whether it is goodness or evil, will be prevailed in the end. The [b] recurrent situation starts with someone does something good or bad. This someone should think that the thing he does will have consequences. When someone thinks this way, this someone will do something in caution.

(3) *Becik ketitik, ala ketara*
'goodness will prevail, evil will be seen'
[translation, *CG*]
   [a]. –   **[Traditionality]**
   [b]. it is often like this: **[Recurrent] Situation**
        at a moment someone does something good or bad
        after that, other people will know the thing this someone has done
        because of this, this someone should think the thing he does
   [c]. when someone wants to do something good or bad   **[Proverbial advice]**
        it is good if this someone thinks the thing this someone wants to do
        after some time, other people will know what this someone has done
   [d]. - -   **[Proverbial Analogy]**
   [e]. –   **[Status as folk wisdom]**

In other Javanese proverbs, the [c] proverbial advice could be missing. In Javanese proverb, as in (4), an analogy describes how sometime people could fight for something that is very simple. In this proverb, dogs were portrayed to fight with its kin just for getting their food.

(4) *Asu rebutan balung*
'Dogs fight each other for food'
[translation, *CG*]
   [a]. –   **[Traditionality]**
   [b]. it is often like this: **[Recurrent Situation]**
        for some time, someone wants something
        to have this something, this someone does something bad to someone else

this someone else also wants the same thing this someone wants

[c]. –   **[Proverbial advice]**

[d]. it is like this:

      two dogs fight* for something   **[Proverbial Analogy]**

      this something is a very small thing for the dogs*

      because of this, they do bad things to other

[e]. –   **[Status as folk wisdom]**

After this exegesis of the meanings of these few Javanese proverbs, the value of the paraphrase technique should be clearer. It also justified to concluded that the meaning expressed through a five-part semantic template for proverb in NSM approach is pretty simple and pretty obvious.

4. Conclusion

This research showed that the Javanese proverbs have a determined semantic content. This determined semantic content could be explained and articulated by paraphrasing it under NSM methodology. The five-part semantic template for proverb meaning as proposed by Goddard and Wierzbicka was used. From the semantic explication, some Javanese proverbs do not have the [c] proverbial advice just as found in 'asu rebutan balung'. Some of the Javanese proverbs in the other hand, provide the direct [d] proverbial analogy as in 'becik ketitik, ala ketara' and in 'ajining dhiri dumunung aneng lathi'. Some proverbs also indicate to provide both [c] proverbial advice and [d] proverbial analogy as in tekek mati ing ulone. These findings show that there is no semantic pattern based on NSM five proverb semantic template in Javanese proverbs. However, further research on the application of NSM five proverb semantic template could be carried out since the data of Javanese proverbs in this research is limited. Last but not the least, the other Javanese proverbs such as saloka, bebasan, sanepan, cangriman, parikan, and many more could be used as the data of the research as a comparison data.

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