

# Language, Custom and Ethic in Malay Pantun

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**Abstract**—Pantun is well known as a Malay cultural heritage. Pantun in Malay used to convey various moral messages in the community. This study aims to explain the importance of language use, customary guarding and implementation of ethics in Malay pantun. This descriptive study somehow underlines its major findings as follows: (1) politeness and prudence in the use of language could be used as the basis of communication; (2) Society custom is the most important part in life of the Malays. Therefore, it needs to be continuously preserved; (3) implementing ethics is highly recommended because ethics is fundamental in Malay social intercourse. This study also reveals that pantun represents standard of Malay behavior in language use, including customary guarding and implementation of ethics.

**Keywords:** pantun, language, customs and ethics

## Introduction

A pantun is purposely created to convey certain messages in a rather unique way by using analogy, choice of words, diction and rhyme. Skills regarding reciting a pantun are in line with language skills. The existence of pantun in Malay community could be a mark that the Malays give special concern for language use and communication order with other people. The Malay people strongly believe in *budi bahasa* (politeness in speech). Raja Ali Haji in his work *Gurindam Duabelas Pasal Kelima* (the fifth article of a poem made up of 2 rhymed lines of equal length) says “*jika hendak mengenal orang berbangsa, lihat kepada budi dan bahasa*”. If you would like to know people of a nation, analyze the character and language of the nation. This statement emphasizes the importance of language use for communication.

Some of the meaningful messages contained in a pantun are customary and ethical messages. It is believed that a pantun contains spirit, emotions, wisdom, justice and politeness of the Malays (Siti Hajar Che Man, 2013). The existence of pantun is very important to understand ways of thinking of the Malays since the Malays are very familiar with pantuns. Tenas Effendy (2006: 5) said that a pantun is used by the Malays to convey moral message contains religious, cultural and social norms.

In the study of Malay literature, Hashim Awang (1994) proposed a Malay methodological theory. The theory discusses all aspects of human beings which consist of philosophy of life, beliefs and culture of Malay community. The life of the Malay is close to nature. The beauty of nature influences them to use the appropriate language and polite in context. The creation of a pantun by the Malays is one of evidences of the politeness in language used by the Malays (Za'ba, 1965: 219). Thus, a pantun could be categorized as a literary work that grows due to the creativity of the Malays.

Traditional Malay community extremely concerns with the politeness of language and language order in creation of a pantun (Noriah Taslim 2003). The existence of a pantun in Malay community also proves that the Malay literature is great and it contains wisdoms (Muhammad Haji Salleh 1999: 165).

The existence of pantuns in Malay community is closely related to ways of thinking and inner feelings of the Malays (R.J. Wilkinson and R.O. Winstedt, 1961: 111). Thus, the identity of the Malays can be recognized from their pantuns. Some of researches dealing with the Malay pantun (pantun) are: *A History of Classical Malay Literature*, (R. O. Winstedt and R.J. Wilkinson (1969) *Alam Pantun Melayu: Studies on the Malay Pantun* Rene Daillie (1990), *Malay Pantuns* (A. W. Hamilton, 1959),

Za'ba (1965) *Ilmu Mengarang Melayu, Langgam Sastera Lama* (Ghazali Dunia, 1969), *Puisi Melayu Tradisional Satu Pembicaraan Genre dan Fungsi* (Harun Mat Piah, 1989), *Kumpulan Pantun Melayu* (Zainal Abidin Bakar, 1992), *Using Pantuns in Greetings as a Tool to Promote Learners' Use of Metacognitive Strategies in Online ESL Learning* (Pauziah Mat Hassan, Nur Huslinda Che Mat, Nor Sukor Ali. 2012), and *Pantun Melayu: Bingkisan Permata* (Hasan Ahmad, 2007).

This study, in particular, aims to find out the messages of language, customs and ethics contained in Malay pantuns.

## **Method**

The method of this research is the qualitative descriptive analyst method. This method is used to express the concept of the language, customs and ethics contained in Malay pantuns. The Malay pantuns studied in this study are taken from a book entitled '*Pantun Melayu: Bingkisan Permata* (Hasan Ahmad, 2007) published by Yayasan Karyawan Kuala Lumpur.

## **Research Findings**

This present study sees pantunas a literary work that grows due to the creativity of the Malaysin using language, it consists of ethical messages, spirit, emotions, wisdom, justice and politenessusing analogy, choice of words, diction and, & rhyme. After analyzing the Malay pantuns written in the book, some messages dealing with the importance of politeness in language usage, customary guarding and implementation of ethics are found.

### **3.1. Language Use**

As mentioned above, the Malays are very concerned with the language in their life. They have high appreciation towardstheir language, and the language becomes one of the identitiesof the Malays. The importance of the language is affirmed in a pantun '*Anak Cina bertimbang ..../ Dari Makasar langsung ke Deli/ Hidup di dunia biar beradat/ Bahasa tidak terjual beli*. This pantun clearly affirms that regularity is required in this life. One of the regularities that needs to be preserved is the regularity in the use of language. Mistakes committed regarding the use of language on a regular basis will lead to a conflict. Inaccuracy in using a language in appropriate manner may trigger a conflict. The expression '*Bahasa tidak berjual beli*' shows the importance of language in the life of a community.

The importance of language that has been passed down from one generation to the next generation is also affirmed in another pantun '*Besarliah air Sungai Petai/ Batang pengangga 'rang patahkan/ Bukannya saya cerdik pandai/ Pusaka kata disembahkan*'. The phrase *Pusaka kata* means the importance of a language that is full of appropriateness like the language used in pantuns. The use of appropriate language will result in two-way communication that could build good relationships. The parties involved in such communication will feel appreciated if they use a language that is full of appropriateness. On the other hand, if we do not use appropriate language, we mayoffend the feelings of others.

Malay people believe that in language there is a sense to consider. We must not use a language arbitrarily because every word has a taste. In addition, the Malays are 'highly sensitive' to the language and the sensitivity makes the Malays more careful in choosing and using their language. The use of coatrack in pantuns could be a sign that the Malays are careful topick the dictionin order for them to convey a message. Using coatrackis considered more impressive than conveying the message directly. The Malay people strongly believe in the expression '*binatang tahan palu, manusia tahan kias*'. It means that by using a certain figurative language, one must understand that there is a satire message that is subtly conveyed to him. For Malays, satire has very profound meaning. In one verse of a pantun '*Baik-baik menggail tenggiri/ Jangan kena jembatan larang/ Baik-baik menghina diri/ Jangan muka disapu arang*', it is affirmed that people must not use a language that shows arrogance. Failure to use appropriate language can hurt the speaker or writer and it will harm the interaction with others. The Malaysdo not consider a language asthe static medium but a dynamic mediumused in expressing their thoughts. This consideration shows the importance of language so that the term 'politeness' in language then arises. Politenessin language indicates that human relation or human behavior is closely related to language use. The use of appropriatelanguage is highly recommended as expressed in the followingpantun '*Ambil pensel menulis surat/ Surat ditulis tujuh cerita/Barang cantik daya memikat/ Bahasa indah payung mahkota*'. This pantunshows us the high status of appropriate language in Malay community. The beauty of language could give a deeper meaning and could also represent the personality of the person that uses the language.

The importance of politeness inlanguage is also affirmed in the following pantun '*Anak teruna menanam betik/ Buah cempedak dalam raga/ Apalah guna berwajah cantik/ Kalau kurang budi bahasa*. This pantun contains very sharp satire tothose who use improperlanguage. A handsome/beautiful face is considered useless if he/sheignores the use of appropriate language in communication. Furthermore, there is also a pantunthat teases a person who neglects politeness in language as expressed in the following pantun '*Apa guna asam paya/ Kalau tidak menggulai ikan/ Apa guna lagak dan gaya/ Kalau bahasa tidak dihiraukan*. This pantunmakes slurring remarks to someonewho boasts about himself and someonewho ignorespoliteness in language. What he boasts about is useless if he does not use appropriate language in social intercourse.

### **3.2 Customary Guarding**

The Malays strongly uphold the custom because it contains noble values that have been inherited from generation to generation. The custom is purposely created to maintain good human relationships among human beings. Messages that encourage people to save the custom are expressed in Malay pantuns. In one verse of

pantun, it is clearly stated *Apalah tanda batang putat/Batang putat bersegi buahnya/ Apa tanda orang beradat/ Orang beradat tinggi maruahnyanya*. The pantun assures that there is a close relationship between customs and dignity. Malay people consider the importance of dignity in their life so that they will always uphold it. People who uphold the custom is categorized as people who has a high dignity.

Malay pantuns illustrate that Malay custom is passed down from generation to generation, as it is stated in one of the Malay pantuns '*Berek-berek turun ke semak/ Dari semak turun ke padi/ Dari nenek turun ke mamak/ Dari mamak turun ke kami*'.

The process of inheriting the custom is done continuously and Malay people believe that there is an obligation for a generation to keep it alive. The process is an appreciation given by the Malays on the values of wisdom contained in Malay culture. Although a custom is created by humans with the potential creativity they have, it must be in accordance with the provisions set by Allah. Custom must not be contradictory to the Quran as stated in the following pantun: *Bertuah lebat pohon mempelam/Rasanya manis dimakan sedap/Bersebarlah adat seluruh alam/ Adat pusaka berpedoman kitab*. The suitability of custom with the Qur'an is a central principle for the Malays in implementing customs.

In another pantun '*Kalau tak ada dalam pukut/ Cubalah cari dalam tengkalah/ Kalau tak ada di dalam adat/Cobalah cari di dalam syarak*', the relationship of custom and Islamic laws is affirmed. The pantun implies that the custom as a human creation has limitations so that if there is a provision that is not regulated in custom, it should be referred to Islamic laws. It shows how wise Malay people look at custom and Islamic law relationship. Custom and Islamic law must have zero conflict. Custom is part of human creativity that is relatively true, while an Islamic law is the creation of Allah that is absolutely true. Another pantun '*Kalau jagung kulitnya putih/ Tidak berbunga masa berbuah/ Di laut Temenggung, di darat Perpatih/Adat berpunca kitap Allah*' affirms that the position of Quran is higher than custom. Whatever the Malay custom is, either Temenggung (minister) or Perpatih (chief), the highest law is a law that refers to Quran.

### 3.3 Implementation of Ethics

Malay pantuns also deal with behavioral ethics in community. Saving ethics in behaving is an important part of the Malays' life. There are standard values that Malays believe in their social intercourse. The Malay pantun '*Batu kecubung warna ungu/ Ditatah berlian batu bermutu/ Adat Melayu menyambut tamu/ Hamparkan tikar lebarkan pintu*' deals with the ethics of Malay in welcoming guests. Welcoming guests warmly is one of the ethics in social intercourse of the Malays. The sentence '*Hamparkan tikar lebarkan pintu*' (Spread out the mat and open the door widely) means that the Malays should welcome guests sincerely and warmly. A visit is seen as an obligation to strengthen the ties of friendship with other human beings. The ethics of welcoming guests also implies an open attitude that Malay people have.

In appreciating a person, the Malays are accustomed to making an offering to guests. The offer is given with performance of an offering dance. This custom is based on the value of the reward given to someone. In a pantun, it is stated '*Bukan lebah sebarang lebah/ Lebah bersarang di pohon semangka/ Bukan sembah sebarang sembah/ Sembah dengan adat pusaka*'. The pantun contains messages on how the Malay make an offering based on the custom and tradition of Malay that is continuously passed from one generation to present generation.

The ethic of offerings made by the Malays is stated in another pantun '*Lapun-melapun ke Inderagiri/ Singgah sebentar ke Batipuh/ Ampun hamba tegak berdiri/Wujudnya duduk dengan bersimpuh*'. This pantun describes the respect shown by someone by apologizing and showing sense of humility. Apology and sense of humility do not really mean apologizing and decreasing dignity but it intends to show respect to someone. That is the special ethic that Malay people should show to honor others.

In daily life, the Malays often deal with disagreements and disputes. If these are not wisely settled, it will lead to a certain conflict that ended in hostilities. To overcome disagreements and disputes, an ethic implemented as it describe in the following pantun '*Bila sampai ke laut gading/ Belokkan perahu mencari selat/ Jika bertikai dalam berunding/ Eloklah balik kepada adat*'. The suggestion referring to Malay custom is the best way to reconcile the two parties since it leads on how to respect other people's view.

## Conclusion

The existence of pantuns in a Malay community proves that the Malays concern with language skills and use it on their daily basis. The Malays use pantuns to express thoughts, ideas, messages, advice, and instruction. Malay pantuns are the identity of Malays. To understand the nature of Malay, it need us to learn the Malay pantuns as well since, it contains a variety of noble values which representing the principles of the Malay. In addition, Malay pantuns affirm the politeness used in language. Therefore, the needs to maintain the customs and to implement ethics that have been inherited by the Malays it will be the duty of Malay community.

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