



**THE FORMS AND MEANINGS OF VERBAL EXPRESSIONS  
ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AS A SUPERNATURAL POWER  
IN MANGGARAI LANGUAGE  
(A CULTURAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS)**

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***Abstract***

This paper describes the forms and meanings of verbal expressions on the existence of God as a supernatural power, in the Manggarai language. The description is viewed from cultural linguistics as one of the new theoretical perspectives in cognitive linguistics exploring the relationship of language, culture and conceptualisation. This is a descriptive study. The sources of primary data were members of the Manggarai ethnic group, represented by four key informants. The methods of data collection data were observation, interview, focus group discussions and a documentary study. These methods were elaborated through the techniques of recording, elicitation and note taking. The procedures of data analysis were selection, transcription, selection, translation, analysis and presentation. The data was analyzed qualitatively by using the inductive method. The result of study shows that the forms and meanings of verbal expressions on the existence of God, as a supernatural power, in Manggarai language, are specific to the Manggarai culture, as they reflect the system of belief in local religion shared by the Manggarai people. The verbal expressions are (01) *Morin aguNgaran* (God as the Supreme), (02)



*JariaguDedek* (God as the Creator of universe), (03) *JariaguDading*(God as the Creator of human beings) and (04) *TanawaAwang eta, Burn awoKolep sale, Ulung le Wa'ing lau* (God as the Almighty).

**Keywords:** *form, meaning, verbal expression, God, Manggarai language*

## Introduction

Indonesia is a pluralistic country as its society is marked by a relatively high degree of diversity due to the existence of different ethnic groups. As every ethnic group has its own culture and language, Indonesia is known as a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual country. One of the ethnic groups is the Manggarai ethnic group; a social group residing in the land of Manggarai which occupies approximately one third of the length of the island of Flores in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (Erb, 1999). They are identified as members of a social group because they acquire common ways of viewing the world through interactions with other members of the same group. The views are reinforced through such institutions as family and other sites of socialization. Common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in the way they employ language, for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2010).

The land of Manggarai is densely peppered with mountains and, as such, the landscape of Manggarai has also given rise to a considerable variation in culture between areas (Erb, 1999). The variations in culture, between areas, in the landscape of Manggarai is mirrored in variations of the language that Manggarai people employ, in macro-interactional levels and in micro-interactional levels, in certain speech events and speech acts. This comes closest to the conception of Humboldt (Cassirer, 1987), that the differences between languages reflects the differences in the worldviews of their speakers (Foley, 1997). Referring to (Hasan, 1989), variation in language that members of Manggarai ethnic group employ can be categorized into

social variation and functional variation. In view of social variation in language they employ, according to (Verheijen, 1991), several dialects, in the land of Manggarai. One of the dialects is the central Manggarai dialect spoken by those living the central region of Manggarai. As the dialect is used as the lingua franca among members of the Manggarai ethnic group, it is regarded as the general language in the Manggarai region; known as Manggarai language. While in view of functional variation in language they employ, there are various kinds of registers in Manggarai language. The registers include, for instance, ritual speeches that Manggarai people employ in cultural domains. The forms and meanings of language they employ in the ritual speeches designate the conceptualisations of Manggarai people on the existence of God, ancestors and environmental spirits, as supernatural powers.

Bearing the matters stated above in minds, this study explores the relationship between Manggarai language, Manggarai culture and conceptualisation of Manggarai people as members of the Manggarai ethnic group. As the relationship is complex in nature, the study pays special attention to the forms and meanings of verbal expressions in the Manggarai language, designating the conceptualisation of Manggarai people on the existence of God as a supernatural power. The study is viewed from cultural linguistics, as one of the new theoretical perspectives in cognitive linguistics, exploring the relationship of language, culture and conceptualisation (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian & Palmer, 2007), along with the use of the dialogic ethnography approach and emic perspective (Bernstein, 1972; Spradley, Elizabeth, & Amirudin, 1997; Sudikan, 2001). We are interested in conducting this study because the forms and meanings of those verbal expressions are specific to Manggarai culture. They reflect a set of conceptualisations shared by members of the Manggarai people, as member of the Manggarai ethnic group, on the existence of God as a supernatural power. Another reason is that the conceptualisation of Manggarai people, on the existence of God as a supernatural power, as

reflected in the forms and meanings of those verbal expressions, are the integral part of their system of belief or local religion, before they came into contact with Catholics; Catholicism is the new religion shared by the majority of Manggarai people nowadays.

## Framework

As mentioned earlier, the study is viewed from cultural linguistics as one of the theoretical perspectives in cognitive linguistics which explores the relationship between language, culture and conceptualisation (Palmer and Farzad, 2007; Palmer, 1996)(Palmer, 1996; Sharifian & Palmer, 2007). As it is a perspective of cognitive linguistics, the general assumption is that there is a close relationship between language, culture and cognition (Casson, 1981; Varenne et al., 1984). In cultural linguistics, however, language is mainly explored through the prism of culture to uncover the conceptualisation in the cognitive map or cultural knowledge of its speakers in viewing the world (Foley, 1997), for the reason that language they employ is the symbolic representation of culture they share (Bustan, 2008). As (Wardhaugh, 2011) pointed out, the culture of a people finds its reflection in the language they employ because they value certain things and do them in a certain way; they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do. Added to this, (Brown & Palincsar, 1987) set forth that culture is deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language - the means for communication among members of a culture - is the most visible and available expression of that culture (Wierzbicka, 2003).

If we turn to its definition, the basic concepts of cultural linguistics are language, culture and conceptualisation. As language can be defined differently, in the perspective of cultural linguistics, language is defined as a cultural activity and, at the same time, as an instrument for organizing other cultural domains. The basic reason for this is that language, used by a people as

members of a social group, is shaped not only by special and general innate potentials, but also by physical and sociocultural experiences through living together for years. Similar to language, as culture may also mean different things for different people, in the perspective of cultural linguistics, culture is defined as the source of conceptualisation of experience. Culture serves as a display which illustrates how they organize their ways of thinking about items, behaviors and beliefs or events in the cultural domain. The relationship between language and culture is reflected in their conceptualisation which refers to the way they conceptualise experiences in their minds (Sharifian & Palmer, 2007).

Cultural linguistics is a meaning-based approach (Geertz, 1973; Kövecses, 2009; Schneider, 1976) and, as such, it requires thick description. This is because determining the meaning of language in use requires attention to the identities and histories of participants and the previous history under interpretation as these are construed by the participants. Nevertheless, determining what is sufficient, pertinent and meaningful is often a matter of perspective and social position. The determination of meaning must be interpretive, taking into account speakers' and listeners' own construal. This is because language needs communities to live in which they develop and change through their use in the living of lives. This characteristically takes place in social context of culture (Gumperz, 1992; Sharifian & Palmer, 2007).

Cultural linguistics is also regarded as an emerging paradigm or model in cognitive linguistics as it builds on older traditions and contemporary theories in anthropological linguistics, but it draws most heavily on new development in cognitive linguistics as the most rapidly growing branch of linguistics. Cognitive linguistics can be tied to three traditional approaches that are central to anthropological linguistics. These include Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics or ethnoscience and the ethnography of communication. The use of these three approaches is synthesized in cultural linguistics (Palmer and Farzad, 2007)(Sharifian & Palmer,

2007). Therefore, in this light, cultural linguistics is regarded as identical to anthropological linguistics, in some respect, as the relationship between language and culture is also the main concern or interest of study in the field of anthropological linguistics (Foley, 1997).

However, as both language and culture are inextricably intertwined (Foley, 1997; Palinscar & Brown, 2012), according to Hymes (in Kupper and Jessica (2000:547-548), for the sake of analysis, the relationship can be viewed from three related perspectives: language as an element of culture, language as an index of culture and language as a symbol of culture. Apart from the use of language as an index and a symbol of culture, the use of language as the element of culture can be identified by looking at the two linguistic poles, forms and meanings, of verbal expressions that its speakers employ in cultural domains. The term 'form' and 'meaning' are identical with 'expression' and 'content' (Gleason, 1961), which are also similar to 'signifier' and signified in the terminology of Saussure ((Dugger, Francis, & Avery, 1978). The verbal expressions of language they employ in cultural domains have specific features in their forms and meanings, especially in view of the context of social situation and the context of culture in the language is embedded.

There have been many studies on Manggarai language, Manggarai culture and conceptualisation of Manggarai people, but none explores, in more depth, the forms and meanings of verbal expressions in Manggarai language reflecting the conceptualisation of Manggarai people, on the existence of God as a supernatural power, in view of cultural linguistics. Nevertheless, based on the results of previous studies done, there are several studies which directly and indirectly stimulate the writing of this study. The study of (Verheijen, 1991) on 'Manggarai dan Wujud Tertinggi', for instance, described briefly the conceptualisations shared by members of Manggarai people on the existence of God as supernatural power, besides the existence of ancestors and environmental spirits. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework and

approach to interpreting meanings were not clear. The study of (Erb, 1999), on the Manggaraians: a guide to traditional lifestyles, sketched out the conceptualisations of Manggaraians on the existence of God as a supernatural power, besides the existence of ancestors and environmental spirits. However, the conceptualisations are viewed from an anthropological perspective, as the dominant theme of the study dealt with the traditional house of the Manggarai ethnic group.

### **Methodology**

This study is descriptive as it describes the forms and meanings of verbal expressions, in Manggarai language, aimed at uncovering a set of conceptualisations, shared by members of Manggarai ethnic group, on the existence of God as a supernatural power. The description was based on data collected during the field research, conducted in Ruteng as the main location of research (Muhadjir, 1998:83-85)(Muhadjir, 1996). The data was obtained by using a dialogic-ethnographic approach, along with emic-perspective in the interpretation of the data (Bernstein, 1972; Foley, 1997; Hymes, 1964; Sharifian & Palmer, 2007; Spradley et al., 1997). The sources of primary data were members of the Manggarai ethnic group as the native speakers of the Manggarai language, especially those living in Ruteng as the main location of the study. However, for the purpose of this study, they were represented by four key informants, selected on the basis of a number of criteria proposed by (Faisal, 1990), (Spradley et al., 1997)and (Sudikan, 2001), as in the following: (1) they are the native speakers of Manggarai language, (2) they have pervasive knowledge on the forms and meanings of verbal expressions in Manggarai language reflecting the conceptualisations shared by members of the Manggarai ethnic group, on the existence of God as a supernatural power, (3) they are adult men and over 40 years old; and (4) they are in good health.

The methods of collecting primary data were observation, interview and focused-group discussions. The observation was done to have a general picture on the forms and meanings of verbal expressions in the Manggarai language, which reflect the conceptualisations shared by members of Manggarai ethnic group on the existence of God as a supernatural power. As the sources of data were the texts of ritual speeches, the observation implemented was participating observation. Based on the data of observation, I interviewed the key informants, aimed at distilling their insights on the forms and meanings of verbal expressions in the Manggarai language reflecting the conceptualisations shared by members of the Manggarai ethnic group in their cognitive map on the existence of God as a supernatural power. For the sake of data triangulation, focus-group discussion was carried out with the key informants and a number of supporting informants randomly selected. The techniques of data collection were recording, elicitation and note-taking. Other than those methods, a document study was carried out to collect secondary data. The documents used as the sources of reference were general documents (books) and special documents (scientific articles, results of research, paper). The procedures of data analysis were successively conducted through the following steps: selection, transcription, corpus selection, translation, analysis and presentation. The data was analyzed qualitatively by using the inductive method, meaning that the process of analysis was based on the data towards the theory and concepts dealing with the forms and meanings of verbal expressions on the existence of God as a supernatural power, in Manggarai language (Muhadjir, 1996)

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Findings**

The results of study show that there is a close relationship between the Manggarai language, Manggarai culture and conceptualisation of Manggarai people, as members of

Manggarai ethnic group. The relationship is realised in a number of verbal expressions in the Manggarai language that the Manggarai people employ in cultural domains to convey their system of belief. The forms and meanings of those verbal expressions are specific to the Manggarai culture as they reflect the conceptualisations of Manggarai people on the existence of God as a supernatural power before they came into contact with new religions, especially Catholics, as Catholicism is the new religion shared by the majority of Manggarai people nowadays. The corpus of data representing the forms and meanings of verbal expressions in the Manggarai language designating the system of belief in the local religion of Manggarai people, reflecting their conceptualisation on the existence of God as a supernatural power, are as follows:

(01) *Morin aguNgaran*;

(02) *JariaguDedek*;

(03) *JariaguDading*.

(04) *Tanawa, Awang eta, Bur awo, Kolep sale, Ulung le, Wa'inglau*;

## Discussion

As can be seen in data (01), the verbal expression *Morin aguNgaran* is a nominal phrase, containing two nominal phrases as its component parts, *Morin and Ngaran*, which are linked by using the function word *agu* 'and' as its coordinative conjunction. The nominal phrase *Morin* consists of the word (noun) *Mori* 'Owner' as Head (H) and the suffix *-n* 'his', the possessive form of third person singular *diba* 'his', as its Modifier (M). The nominal phrase *Ngaran* consists of the word (noun) *Ngara* 'Owner' as Head (H) and the suffix *-n* 'his', the possessive form of third person singular *diba* 'his', as its Modifier (M). Even though *Morin and Ngaran* are synonyms, the verbal expression *Morin aguNgaran* can't be changed its pattern into *Ngaran agu Morin* or *Morin Ngaran* with the omission of linking word or coordinative conjunction *agu*. This is because the

nominal phrase *Morin agu Ngaran* is a fixed form of verbal expression for ritual speech in the Manggarai language to describe the conceptualisation of Manggarai people on the existence God as a supernatural power. Referring to the content stored in its form, the verbal expression *Morin agu Ngaran* designates the conceptualisation of Manggarai people on the existence of God as the Supreme; he is a supernatural power who owns the universe. The use of suffix *-n* as the possessive form of third person singular *diba* 'his' reveals that, there is no other supernatural powers other than God as the Supreme who owns the universe. The conceptualisation is ascribed in their cognitive map or cultural knowledge by looking at natural phenomena, like earth, sky, sun, moon and river, which are regarded as the symbolic representation of God as the Supreme. This view supports the conception of (Verheijen, 1991) that Manggarai people are categorized as the followers of implicit-monotheism as they don't think reflexively on the existence of God as the Supreme.

As can be seen in data (02), the verbal expression *Jari agu Dedek* is a nominal phrase consisting of two words (deverbal nouns) as its component parts, *Jari* 'Creator' and *Dedek* 'Creator', which are linked by using the function word *agu* 'and' as its coordinative conjunction. Even though the word (deverbal noun) *Jari* and the word (deverbal noun) *Dedek* are synonyms in their meanings, the verbal expression *Jari agu Dedek* can't be changed its pattern into *Dedek agu Jari* or *Jari Dedek* with the omission of *agu* as its coordinative conjunction. This is because the verbal expression *Jari agu Dedek* is regarded as a fixed form of verbal expression for ritual speech in Manggarai language to name and describe the existence of God as a supernatural power. Based on the content stored in its form, the verbal expression *Jari agu Dedek* is a cultural text in Manggarai language indicating the conceptualisation of the Manggarai ethnic group on the existence of God as the Creator. It is conceptualised in the cognitive map or cultural knowledge of the Manggarai ethnic group that there is no other supernatural power creating universe,

except God as the Creator. The conceptualisation is ascribed in their cognitive map or cultural knowledge by looking at the unique features of natural phenomena like earth, sky, sun and river and, as such, it is believed that God is the only Creator of those natural phenomena.

Similar to data (02), the verbal expression or data (03) *Jari agu Dading* is a nominal phrase consisting of two words (deverbal nouns) as its component parts, *Jari* 'Creator' and *Dading* 'Birth' which refers to 'Creator', which are linked by the function word (linking word) *agu* 'and' as its coordinative conjunction. Even though the word (deverbal noun) *Jari* and the word (deverbal noun) *Dedeke* are synonyms, the nominal phrase *Jari agu Dading* can't be changed its pattern into *Dading agu Jari* or *Jari Dedeke* with the omission of *agu* as its coordinative conjunction. This is because the nominal phrase *Jari agu Dading* is a fixed form of verbal expression for ritual speech in the Manggarai language to describe the existence of God as a supernatural power. Based on the content stored in its form, the verbal expression *Jari agu Dading* is a cultural text in the Manggarai language designating the conceptualisation of the Manggarai ethnic group on the existence of God as the Creator. As the word (deverbal noun) *Dading* 'Birth' refers to 'Creator', it is conceptualised in the cognitive map or cultural knowledge of the Manggarai people that the verbal expression *Jari agu Dading* designates the existence of God as the Creator of human beings.

As can be seen in data (04), the verbal expression *Tana wa, Awang eta, Par Awo, Kolep sale, Ulung le, Wa'ing lau* is a nominal phrase appearing in serial form containing three nominal phrases as its component parts. The three nominal phrases as its component parts are as follows: (a) *Tana wa, Awang eta*, (b) *Par awo, Kolep sale*, and (c) *Ulung le, Wa'ing lau*. The nominal phrase *Tana wa, Awang Eta* consists of two nominal phrases as its component parts, *Tana wa* and *Awang eta*, appearing as an asyndeton construction as they are not linked by using the function word (linking word) *agu* 'and' as its coordinative conjunction. The nominal phrase *Tana wa* consists of the word (noun) *Tana* 'Earth' as Head (H) and the function word (adverb of place or locative

marker) *wa* ‘down’ as its Modifier (M). The nominal phrase *Awang eta* consists of the word (noun) *Awang* ‘Sky’ as Head (H) and the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *eta* ‘above’ as its Modifier (M). These two nominal phrases appear in binary opposition in their meanings as the word (noun) *Tana* is the opposite meaning of the word (noun) *Awang* and the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *wa* is the opposite meaning of (adverb of place or locative marker) *eta*. Nevertheless, the nominal phrase *Tana wa, Awang eta* can’t be changed its pattern into *Awang eta, Tana wa* because it is a fixed form of verbal expression for ritual speech in Manggarai language to describe the existence of God as a supernatural power.

The nominal phrase *Bur awo, Kolep sale* consists of two nominal phrases as its component parts, *Bur awo* and *Kolep sale*, appearing in asyndeton construction as they are not linked by the function word *agu* ‘and’ as its coordinative conjunction. The nominal phrase *Bur awo* consists of the word (deverbal noun) *Bur* ‘Rise’ as Head (H) and the function word (adverb of place) *awo* ‘east’ as locative marker serving as its Modifier (M). The nominal phrase *Kolep sale* consists the word (deverbal noun) *Kolep* ‘Set’ as Head (H) and the function word (adverb of place) *sale* ‘west’ as locative serving its Modifier (M). These two nominal phrases appear in binary opposition as the word (deverbal noun) *Bur* is the opposite of word (deverbal noun) *Kolep* and the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *awo* is the opposite of the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *sale*. Nevertheless, the nominal phrase *Bur awo, Kole sale* can’t be changed its pattern into *Kolep sale, Bur awo* because it is a fixed form of verbal expression for ritual speech in Manggarai language. The verbal expression *Bur awo, Kolep sale* refers to the sun which rises in the east and sets in the west.

The nominal phrase *Ulung le, Wa’ing lau* consists of two nominal phrases as its component parts, *Ulung le* and *Wa’ing lau*, linked by the function word (linking word) *agu* ‘and’ as its coordinative conjunction. The nominal phrase *Ulung le* consists the word (noun) *Ulung* ‘Head’

which refers to upper course of a river as Head (H) and the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *le* ‘north’ as its Modifier (M). The nominal phrase *Wa’ing lau* consists of the word (noun) *Wa’ing* ‘Foot’ which refers to the lower course of a river as Head (H) and the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *lau* ‘south’ as its Modifier (M). These two nominal phrases appear in binary opposition as the word (noun) *Ulung* is the opposite of the word (noun) *Wa’ing* and the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *le* ‘north’ is the opposite of the function word (adverb of place or locative marker) *lau* ‘south’. Nevertheless, the nominal phrase *Ulung le, Wa’ing lau* can’t be changed its pattern into *Wa’ing lau, Ulung le* because it is a fixed form of verbal expression for ritual speech in the Manggarai language to describe the existence of God as a supernatural power.

Referring to the contents stored in the forms of those nominal phrases, the verbal expression *Tana wa, Awang eta, Bur Awo, Kolep sale, Ulung le, Wa’ing lau* is a cultural text in the Manggarai language which reflects the conceptualisations of the Manggarai people on the existence of God as the Almighty. As conceptualised in the cognitive map or cultural knowledge of Manggarai people, God is the Almighty of the earth (*Tana wa*) up to the sky (*Awang eta*), from the east (*Bur awo*) up to the west (*Kolep sale*) and from the north (*Ulung le*) up to the south (*Wa’ing lau*). As mentioned earlier, the conceptualisation is ascribed in their cognitive map or cultural knowledge by looking at the unique features of natural phenomena like earth, sky, sun and river. These natural phenomena are the symbolic representation of God as the Almighty in the Manggarai language.

## Conclusion

There is a close relationship between the Manggarai language, the Manggarai culture and conceptualisation of the Manggarai people, as reflected in the forms and meanings of verbal

expressions in the Manggarai language that members of the Manggarai people employ in ritual speeches designating a set of conceptualisations in their cognitive map on the existence of God as a supernatural power. The forms and meanings of verbal expressions in the Manggarai language reflecting the conceptualisations shared by members of the Manggarai people, on the existence of God as a supernatural power, are as follows: (01) *Morin agu Ngaram* reflecting the conceptualisation of the Manggarai people on the existence of God as the Supreme, (02) *Jari agu Dedek* reflecting the conceptualisation of the Manggarai people on the existence of God as the Creator of the universe, (03) *Jari agu Dading* reflecting the conceptualisation of the Manggarai people on the existence of God as the Creator of human beings and (04) *Tanawa, Awang eta, Parawo Kolep sale, Ulung le, Wa'ing lau* reflecting the conceptualisation of the Manggarai people on the existence of God as the Almighty. The study might be beneficial (1) to enrich the conceptions and insights on the relationship between language, culture and conceptualisation in the theory of cultural linguistics of Palmer and Farzad and Palmer, the theory of language, culture and cognition of Casson, the theory of anthropological linguistics of Foley, the theory of language and culture of Kramersch, the theory of sociolinguistics of Wardaugh, Gumperz and Bernstein, the theory of culture of Schneider and Geertz; (2) to enhance understanding on the role of register as a functional variation in language employed by members of a social group in cultural domains which reflect variations in culture they share; (3) to promote the significance of the dialogic ethnography approach and emic perspective as the new dimension of ethnographic approaches in the study of culture proposed by Spradley; and (4) to inspire other researchers who are interested in exploring, in more depth, the functional variations in the Manggarai language, with special reference to the forms and meanings of verbal expressions and registers, that members of the Manggarai people, employ which reflect a considerable variation in culture between areas in the land of Manggarai which is densely peppered with mountains.

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