

Power Representation on Sundanese Proverbs

Asep Saripudin *, Rosaria Mita Amalia **
(Padjadjaran University, Indonesia)

Abstract: This study examines the representation of power on a number of Sundanese proverbs. The objective is to analyze traditional views on the perceptions of power in Sundanese society and explore the interrelation between language, power and culture. The data for this study were collected from Rosidi (2005, 2010). The results showed that power is represented mostly in *neuter* and *noble* contexts. This study concludes that Sundanese proverbs depict that anybody can hold power, regardless their genders, social status and ages, as long as they have the supporting factors, i.e. wealth, nobility and knowledge.

Keywords: proverbs, Sundanese, power, representation, Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

1. Introduction

Sundanese (*Basa Sunda*, ‘language of Sunda’) is a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken by the Sundanese people. It is the second largest mother tongue of Indonesia, after the Javanese, with at least 42 million native speakers. It is spoken in almost all provinces of West Java and Banten as well as the western region of Central Java, in parts of Jakarta and other migration places of Sundanese in Indonesia and abroad.

Just like any other cultures of the world, Sundanese use their language to preserve and transmit their system of values and nobilities from generation to generation (Haviland, 1999:14), and the branch of language to do this is proverbs or sayings. By this, it is expected that their successors can take them as their grip in life.

Proverbs have been existing since ancient times, as far back as ancient Egypt about 2500 BC, yet their structures and meanings remain the same today. Djajasudarma states that the fixed rules of the structure and meaning of proverbs are intended to preserve the cultural values of the proverbs (Kodariah & Gunardi, 2015: 114). Karagiorgos states that the Greek Philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) considered proverbs a survival of an older wisdom (Njagi, 2013: 15).

* Asep Saripudin: Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia. E-mail: asepl7010@mail.unpad.ac.id.

** Rosaria Mita Amalia: Senior lecturer of English Linguistics, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Padjadjaran University, Indonesia. E-mail: rosaria.mita.amalia@unpad.ac.id.

Studies on proverbs in the area of gender and power are abundant. For instance, Rasul (2015:61) examined how power relationships of different genders are determined through linguistic choices in different languages/societies, in this case Urdu and English. He argues that 'Proverbs, as folk wisdom, present the way SHE is expected to be, not the way SHE actually is'. In regard to it, Rasul exemplifies Urdu proverbs *bhul gai chhwani bhul gai taat, khanay lagi ghyon ki roti sonay lagi khat* and *ganji kabutri, mehlon mein dayra* which actually means 'death of wife is equated with a small injury that is soon forgotten'. It indicates that the improvement of women in their economic and financial status after marriage is insignificant. Mubarak (2017) also looks at the frailty of women in Sundanese proverbs. He argues that 'Sundanese proverbs tend to present women in particular ways, most of which can be interpreted as derogatory, negative or subservient'. However, this study does not fully support this point.

On the other hand, Njagi (2013) looks at the use of African proverbs, with a focus on Ki-Embu language, to socially construct power relations between genders and between ages. She argues that in Embu cultural set-up wisdom comes from the elders. It is depicted in, for example, *Mūgi ni mūtare* which actually means 'a wise one has been counseled'. The proverb exerts the need for children to heed counsel from their parents and elders. Thus, it can be inferred that knowledge and age hold power—a point that this study supports.

People somehow pay much attention to power and dominance, and the authors personally believe that power is socially constructed and depicted in language. Unlike in African culture, proverbs in Sundanese society does not hold important position. One's position in society does not depend on his ability to use proverbs in his speech or in daily communication. However, through proverbs we can see the representation of power. In language-power relationship, proverbs acquire great significance. Therefore, this study examines the representation of power on a number of Sundanese proverbs. The objective is to analyze traditional views on the perceptions of power in Sundanese society and explore the interrelation between language, power and culture. It is a long-held view that language and culture are intertwined as Rosidi (2005:7) states that since proverbs are the mental and language wealth of a culture, people of the same cultural environment may understand proverbs though the meaning of each constructing lexicon differs from the meaning of the saying.

2. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is considered the best way to analyze social issues, especially ones shown in discourse. CDA emphasize one's capacity to produce and reproduce meaning. One is not considered a neutral subject that can freely interpret

Power Representation on Sundanese Proverbs

discourse according to his wisdom for discourse is closely related to and influenced by the power of social construction.

In CDA, language is considered a representation of certain subjects, themes and strategies. Budiwati (2011) cites six indispensable concepts of CDA.

(a) *Action*. A speaker or writer does not speak or write to interact with himself, but with others. Discourse is considered a means, for example, to influence, to debate, to persuade, etc. In addition, discourse is expressed in control and conscious.

(b) *Context*. CDA takes context into account, i.e. the background and other influencing factors. Discourse is influenced by two important contexts: (i) *participant*, the creator of discourse. Age, gender, education, social class, ethnic, religion, and other relevant contexts may influence the creation of discourse; (ii) *social setting* is an important context to comprehend a discourse.

(c) *History*. This is useful to understand why a discourse is created in a certain way, why a certain style is used, and other historical factors.

(d) *Power*. This is one of key concepts to reveal the relationship between discourse and society. CDA is not only limited to analyze the details of text or the structures of discourse, but also to relate discourse to certain power and condition in certain social, cultural, political, and economic conditions.

(e) *Ideology*. Text, speech and other forms of discourse represent or apply certain ideology. Classic theory states that ideology was built to reproduce and legitimate the domination of a group. It is implied that inherently the nature of ideology is social. It means that it has to be shared among people. However, it is used only among members of the group.

(f) *Representation*. This is the production of meaning or concept that we get from codes, such as language and picture. Representation connects the concept to language in order to make us refer to something in the real world.

3. The data

The discussion in this study is based on a number of selected proverbs that relate to power from written sources. The proverbs were collected from Rosidi (2005) and Rosidi (2010). The context of the proverbs varies, including gender, age, wealth and knowledge.

The authors then put the proverbs into several categories based on their understanding of the proverbs, formed as a result of native speaker competencies and prolonged contact with the language community. The categories are: 1) Neuter, depicting one's power in general; 2) Wealth; 3) Social status; 4) Age; 5) Knowledge; 6) Gender; and 7) Noble. Using critical discourse analysis approach, the authors aim to analyze traditional views on the perceptions of power in Sundanese society and explore the interrelation between language, power and

culture.

4. Findings and discussions

Out of about 1500 proverbs and idioms, the authors found twelve proverbs and idioms depicting those who are powerless, eleven depicting those who are powerful and eleven depicting the powerless versus the powerful, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. Overall findings

No.	Category	Gen.	Age	Wlth.	Nob.	Soc.	Neu.	Knw.	Ttl.
1.	Powerless	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	12
2.	Powerful	1	0	3	1	0	5	1	11
3.	Powerless vs. Powerful	2	0	1	6	0	1	1	11
Total		6	1	5	8	2	8	4	34

Based on the findings, the authors view that Sundanese tend to portray that generally anybody can be the powerless or the powerful. It is proven from the domination of *neuter* with eight proverbs. By *neuter* here the authors mean that there is no specific factor that defines one's powerless/powerful; it does not refer solely to gender, age, wealth, social status or noble, but it may to all of them.

(1) *Ambek nyedek tanaga midek*

anger intensified power off

Lit. 'One's anger is rising, but he has no power.'

Actual. 'Depicting the state of someone who, though angry and wants to fight, is unable to do anything because the opponent is superior in every way.' (Rosidi, 2005:19)

(2) *Teu daya teu upaya*

no power no authority

Lit. 'no power, no authority'

Actual. 'One who has no power at all' (Rosidi, 2005:60)

(3) *Lain jalma joré-joré*

not person ordinary

Lit. 'Not an ordinary person'

Actual. 'Not an ordinary person' (Rosidi, 2005:91)

(4) *Lain si itu si éta*

not him her

Lit. 'Not an ordinary person'

Actual. 'Not an ordinary person' (Rosidi, 2005:147)

(5) *Lain lawan atah-atah*

not opponent easy

Power Representation on Sundanese Proverbs

Lit. 'Not an easy opponent'

Actual. 'Not an underdog' (Rosidi, 2010:18)

(6) *Lain jalma sabongbrong*

not person ordinary

Lit. 'Not an ordinary person'

Actual. 'Not an ordinary person' (Rosidi, 2010:143)

(7) *Ngahudangkeun macan turu, ngusik-ngusik ula mandi*

awaking tiger sleeping, disturbing snake mystical

Lit. 'Awaking a sleeping tiger, disturbing a mystical snake'

Actual. 'Doing something that will harm himself/herself, because he/she irritates one who is more powerful or fiercer' (Rosidi, 2005:113)

(8) *Iwak nangtang sujén*

fish challenge skewers

Lit. 'Fish challenges skewers.'

Actual. 'Against people who is far more powerful.' (Rosidi, 2010:75)

Here we can see that all the proverbs above do not state the background of the powerless/powerful, either it is women, men, elders, youths, rich men, poor men, nobles or commoners. They only state that a weaker party interacts with a stronger party. For example, if a noble meet a commoner, he may feel superior because he has everything, such as a good house, well-fortune, beautiful wife, nice vehicles. This points the noble is the powerful and the commoner is the powerless, but this condition is reversal as portrayed in the following proverb.

(9) *Jati kasilih ku junti*

teak defeated by dillenia

Lit. 'Teak got lost by dillenia.'

Actual. 'The nobles were defeated by the commoners; the natives were defeated by immigrants.' (Rosidi, 2005:87)

As far as the authors' concerned, life is like a spinning wheel—sometimes our life is at the top, sometimes at the bottom. So is the life of a noble. He may face his downfall, and turn into a commoner or worse. At this point, he may be inferior to the commoner. Thus, he is the powerless and the commoner is the powerful. Nevertheless, most Sundanese believe that the downfall of a noble would not be as bad as a commoner, as portrayed in the following proverb.

(10) *Sakuru-kuruning lembu*

as thin as possible cow

Lit. 'As thin as possible a cow'

Actual. 'The downfall of the noble or the rich will not as worse as that of the little people.'

(Rosidi, 2005:103)

In another case, say when he meets a higher noble, he may experience (1) where he can't do anything when the higher noble does something unpleasant to him because he at this point is inferior.

The proposition above is supported by the gendered proverbs. Though some studies, such as Mubarok (2017), often show that women often depicted powerless, especially in marital life, the findings of this study tell differently.

- (11) *Sumawonna dibawa ka caangna, najanka liang cocopét kudu milu*
let alone taken to brightside, even to wormhole should follow

Lit. 'Let alone taken to the brightside, even to a wormhole you should go.'

Actual. 'A moral message that indicates that a wife must be obedient to her husband, and must be together in joy and sorrow.' (Rosidi, 2005:109)

- (12) *Dulang tinandé*
tray fed

Lit. 'Fed tray.'

Actual. 'Refers to women in the past time whose fate depends on men who becomes their husbands, who must accept whatever their husbands' desires.' (Rosidi, 2005:64)

Here the authors see that (11) and (12) depict the submissiveness of women, but in a positive way. In Sundanese culture, a wife must obey her husband and be with him in any condition, joy and sorrow, for the sake of the well-being of their household, and it doesn't mean that a husband is legitimated to do anything as he wishes to his wife. This is due to most of Sundanese people are Muslim, and they are taught that a husband must treat a wife well.

- (13) *Piruruhan dika-tengah imahkeun* ^①
furnace put in the middle of the house

Lit. 'Like a furnace placed in the living room.'

Actual. 'An uneducated servant who is married by his employer.' (Rosidi, 2005:65)

- (14) *Nyalindung ka gelung*
take shelter to bun

Lit. 'Take shelter under a bun.'

Actual. 'A man who marry a very rich woman, and the necessities of his life are fulfilled by her so that he is afraid of her because he had no authority.' (Rosidi, 2005:143)

In (13) and (14), the case is on the contrary. Here a man is portrayed as the powerless when his condition is inferior to a woman in knowledge (13) and wealth (14). He is the one whose needs are fulfilled by his wife. Thus, he has no authority over his household and he

^① dika-tengah-keun = put in the middle, imah = house.

Power Representation on Sundanese Proverbs

has to subject to his wife. At this point, women are the powerful when they have knowledge and wealth. In addition, women are also considered stronger than men when it comes to handling the temptation to disobedience as depicted in the following proverb.

- (15) *Awéwé mah gedé bendunganana*
women Int. big weir power

Lit. 'Women have a big weir power.'

Actual. 'Women are stronger than men in facing the temptation to disobedience. (Rosidi, 2005:26)

However, the authors still found another proverb that depict the powerless of women.

- (16) *Jadi nyai-nyai juragan Kawasa*
being mistresses ruler

Lit. 'Being mistresses of a ruler.'

Actual. 'Being a mistress of a ruler.' (Rosidi, 2010:116)

Historically, proverb (16) is originated from the Dutch colonialism era in Indonesia. The proverb portrays a condition where some women lived together with some Dutch rulers like husband and wife but not in a marital bond. This is due to that the Dutch rulers came to Indonesia without their wives, so they took local women for the sake of their biological needs. This in turn made the women in powerless side because they couldn't ask for their rights as a spouse since *de jure* they were not wives.

As stated in the earlier paragraph, knowledge and wealth may be the factors of power. When one owns them, they will be the powerful side. On the contrary, if one is uneducated and poor, they will be the powerless.

- (17) *Jauh ka bedug*
far from drum

Lit. 'Far from drum'

Actual. 'One who is considered uneducated' (Rosidi, 2005:36)

- (18) *Teu nyaho alip bingkeng alip bingkeng acan*
not know 'alif curved 'alif curved at all

Lit. 'Not even know curved 'alif'

Actual. 'One who is illiterate as a result of being uneducated' (Rosidi, 2010:13)

- (19) *Mapatahan ngojay ka meri*
teaching swimming to duck

Lit. 'Teaching a duck how to swim'

Actual. 'Trying to teach the experts' (Rosidi, 2005:129)

- (20) *Saciduh metu saucap nyata*
a spit work a word real

Lit. 'A spit works, a word realizes.'

Asep Saripudin, Rosaria Mita Amalia

Actual. 'Depicting someone who is highly knowledgeable or a magic person who is not easily say something because it may come true in real life' (Rosidi, 2005:55)

Proverb (17) or (18) is usually used by Sundanese to apologize when they do something wrong as a result of their ignorance as in the following expression:

- (21) *Punten, da kumaha atuh nya, pun anak téh jauh ka bedug,*
sorry but how PA. Ya, my kid PA. far from drum (a religious instrument)
teu nyaho alip bingkeng alip bingkeng acan
don't know 'alif curved 'alif curved PA.
Lit. 'Sorry, but my kid is far from the drum, don't even know the curved alif.'
Actual. 'Pardon me, but my child is far from being educated.'

Proverb (19) is usually used to show the superiority of one who is expert in some fields. Sundanese usually add *ulah* 'don't' before the proverb as in the following expression:

- (22) *Ulah mapatahan ngojay ka meri!*
Don't advice swim to duck
Lit. "Don't teach duck how to swim."
Actual. 'Don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs!'

Meanwhile, proverb (20) depicts the superiority of one who has reach full knowledge that he tends to be a magic person because what he says will come true.

- (23) *Gunung pananggeuhan*
mountain mainstay
Lit. 'A mainstay mountain.'
Actual. 'Someone rich and powerful to count on whenever you face difficulty. (Rosidi, 2010:60)
- (24) *Cécéndét mandé kiara, cileuncang mandé sagara*
groundcherry imitate filicium, puddle imitate river
Lit. 'Groundcherry imitates filicium, puddle imitates river.'
Actual. 'The poor who wants to rival the rich or the noble.' (Rosidi, 2005:53)

- (25) *Hunyor mandéan gunung*
anthill imitate mountain
Lit. 'The anthill imitates the mountain.'
Actual. 'The small against the great, the poor against the rich, the weak against the strong.' (Rosidi, 2005:81)

- (26) *Luhur kuta gedé dunya*
high wall big world
Lit. 'High wall big world'

Actual. 'Rich and very influential' (Rosidi, 2010:57)

Proverb (23) depicts that one who is rich and powerful can be relied on to help you when

Power Representation on Sundanese Proverbs

you face difficulty. Meanwhile proverb (24) and (25) portray poor people who want to rival the rich or the noble. Proverb (26) clearly states that becoming a rich man makes one very influential in his society. Thus, it can be inferred that those who has knowledge and wealth hold power.

Social status also determines power. But it is usually still related to wealth and nobility as shown in the following proverbs.

(27) *Cacing* *cau*

worm banana

Lit. 'Banana worm.'

Actual. 'The little people who are never taken into account; a member of an organization who is considered unimportant.' (Rosidi, 2005:49)

(28) *Cacah* *kuricakan*

people small

Lit. 'Small people.'

Actual. 'The poor; the little people who are never taken into account' (Rosidi, 2010:38)

(29) *Sireum* *gé* *ditincak-tincak* *teuing* *mah* *ngégél*

ant even trampled on often Int. bite

Lit. 'Even ants, when they're often trampled on, will bite.'

Actual. 'Even the little people will fight if they are insulted repeatedly. (Rosidi, 2010:150)

Surprisingly, considering the cultural life of Sundanese where youth must put their respect and obedience to those who is older than them, age becomes the least depicted factor of power in Sundanese proverbs. This may be due to that this study took data from books that acquired proverbs from written sources, in this case modern literature works, whereas the origin of proverbs is oral traditional. The authors only found the following proverb.

(30) *Budak* *bau* *jaringao*

child smell sweet flag

Lit. 'A child whose smell like a sweet flag.'

Actual. 'One who has not been taken into account or is considered immature or underdog.' (Rosidi, 2005:87)

Proverb (30) clearly portrays that one who is immature, usually from children to teenagers to young adults, is not taken into account when, for example, deciding something important for the family or society. However, sometimes a young man is not considered *budak bau jaringao* if the elders see him have enough wisdom. This proverb is also used to insult an opponent if he is viewed as an underdog as in the following expression:

(31) *Alah aing mah moal sieun ku si Usep!*

Int. I PA. will not afraid by Art. person's name

Asep Saripudin, Rosaria Mita Amalia

Pira ge budak bau jaringao
only that kid smell plant's name

Lit. 'Ah, I'm not afraid of Usep! He's only a kid that smell like jaringao.'

Actual. 'Ah, I'm not afraid of Usep! He's just an underdog.'

The other significant factor of power in Sundanese culture is nobility. This is proven with the domination of *noble* with eight proverbs, including proverbs (9) and (24).

(32) *Ulah sok campelak ka ménak*
do not dare to fight to noble

Lit. 'Don't you dare to fight a noble.'

Actual. 'Do not fight the noble if you don't want to get any trouble.' (Rosidi, 2010:40)

(33) *Hurip gusti, waras abdi*
prosper noble, sane me

Lit. 'If the nobles are prospered, I will be in a good shape.'

Actual. 'If the nobles are prospered, so will the people.' (Rosidi, 2010:61)

(34) *Kapurba-kawisésa*
controlled

Lit. 'Controlled by the nobles'

Actual. 'One who is in the control of others so that he/she has no power' (Rosidi, 2010:135)

(35) *Piit ngeundeuk-ngeundeuk pasir*
sparrow shakes hill

Lit. 'The sparrow shakes the hill.'

Actual. 'Depicting inequality, for example a poor man wants to marry a noble woman' (Rosidi, 2005:133)

(36) *Pacikrak ngalawan merak, bonténg ngalawan kadu*
bar-winged prinia against peacock, cucumber against durian

Lit. 'The bar-winged prinia against the peacock, the cucumber against durian.'

Actual. 'Against powerful people with higher dignity' (Rosidi, 2010:107)

The occurrence of *noble* proverbs like above has a historical background. Long time ago Sundanese Land (Tatar Sunda) was ruled by the nobles because the form of their government was kingdom. The prominent Sundanese kingdom is Padjadjaran with Prabu Siliwangi as the most popular king. Even modern Sundanese still admire the greatness of the king and the kingdom. This may be the reason why Sundanese commoners in the past time made up proverb (32) that clearly portrays that if you're not a noble, please don't bother the nobles because they can do harm to you. In addition, most Sundanese still view that a commoner is not a match for a noble in many aspects, as depicted in proverbs (35) and (36).

Kaum ménak 'the nobles' in the past time called themselves *gusti* 'king', while those

Power Representation on Sundanese Proverbs

who serve them, including their people, were called *abdi* ‘servant.’ Proverb (33) depicts that the prosperity of the nobles determines that of people. If the well-being of the nobles is good, so is of the people. Besides *gusti*, the nobles are also called *purba* and *wisesa*. As a result, when one is under the control of a powerful party, most Sundanese depict his/her condition as proverb (34) which literary means ‘under the control of the nobles (past rulers).’

Though today Sunda Land, in this case West Java and Banten, is not a kingdom anymore, but a part of Indonesia, and the nobles no longer exist, it doesn’t mean that the *noble* proverbs are not relevant anymore. This is due to the fact modern Sundanese still see those who holds important positions in the government as the nobles, as depicted in the following proverb.

(37) *Hayang ngarebut payung*

wanting to seize umbrella

Lit. ‘Wanting to seize the umbrella’

Actual. ‘Wanting to seize higher office or position’ (Rosidi, 2010:126)

5. Conclusion

Considering the findings and discussions, the authors conclude that Sundanese proverbs depict that anybody can hold power, regardless their gender, social status and age. However, the uneducated ones are never considered to be powerful. The supporting factors of power are nobility, wealth and knowledge. Nobility has a long, strong historical background because Sunda Land was a kingdom. In gender context, though many studies show that women are powerless, especially in marital life, this study shows that women may have a powerful position in marriage as long as they have wealth and knowledge.

Abbreviations

Actual.	actual meaning
Art.	article
CDA	critical discourse analysis
Int.	interjection
Lit.	literal meaning
PA	partical asserting

References

- Budiwati, T. R. 2011. Representation of Gender in Indonesian and English Idioms: Critical discourse analysis [J]. *Kawistara*, 1 (3):298-310.
- Haviland, W. A. 1999. *Cultural Anthropology* (Ninth Edition) [M]. Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Kodariah, S. & G. Gunardi. 2015. Local Wisdom Values in Sundanese Proverbs: Semiotic Study [J]. *Patanjala*, 7 (1):113-130.

Asep Saripudin, Rosaria Mita Amalia

- Mubarok, Y. 2017. Representation of Women in the Sundanese Proverbs [J]. *IJASOS-International E-Journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, 3(7): 205-213.
- Njagi, T. W. 2013. *Power Relations – A case study of proverbs in Ki-Embu* [D]. Unpublished MA Dissertation. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.
- Rasul, S. 2015. Gender and Power Relationship in the Language of Proverbs: Image of a woman [J]. *Frontier Women University (FWU) Journal of Social Sciences*, 9 (2):53-62.
- Rosidi, A. 2005. *Idioms & Proverbs: The treasure of sundanese language* (Vol. 1) [M]. Bandung: Kiblat Buku Utama.
- Rosidi, A. 2010. *Idioms & Proverbs: The treasure of sundanese language* (Vol. 2) [M]. Bandung: Kiblat Buku Utama.