

Semiotic Analysis of the Lelakaq Poetry of the Sasak Tribe as an Ethnolinguistic Study to Improve Students' Understanding of Concepts and Cultural Literacy

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Abstract

The Sasak people of Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara, are rich in oral traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. One of these traditions is Lelakaq, a form of traditional poetry that embodies cultural values, history, and local wisdom. The aim of this study is to conduct a semiotic analysis of Lelakaq as an ethnolinguistic inquiry and to explore its implementation in learning practices. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The participants included cultural leaders, community members, teachers, and students. Data collection instruments consisted of checklists, observation sheets, interview guidelines, and tests. Data were gathered by compiling Lelakaq poems from various sources, distributing response questionnaires, and conducting in-depth interviews to confirm and strengthen findings. In addition, tests were administered to evaluate students' conceptual understanding and cultural literacy. Data analysis applied Barthes' semiotic approach to the poems, narrative descriptive analysis for interviews and student responses, and simple statistical analysis for test results. The findings reveal that Lelakaq poetry of the Sasak community serves multiple functions: aesthetic, social, cultural, and educational. Semiotic analysis indicates that students found it easier to grasp denotative meanings compared to connotative ones, with an average score of 74.88 (Good category). Specifically, 32% of students achieved Excellent, 24% Good, 32% Fair, and 12% Poor. Triangulation of data highlights a generational gap in understanding cultural symbols, underscoring the need for creative strategies and integration of Lelakaq into learning processes to foster cultural literacy, strengthen local identity, and enhance conceptual comprehension.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Sasak people, who inhabit Lombok Island, West Nusa Tenggara, are rich in oral traditions passed down through generations. One important manifestation of this heritage is the *Lelakaq*, traditional poetry that contains cultural values, history and local wisdom [1]. *Lelakaq* not only functions as entertainment, but also as an effective means of informal education to convey moral and social messages to society [2]. However, along with modernization, the existence of *Lelakaq* is increasingly threatened. The younger generation shows less interest in cultural heritage, preferring popular culture [3,4]. As a result, the understanding of the meaning and value of *Lelakaq* declining, potentially eroding local cultural identity [5,6]. In fact, understanding local culture is very important to learn,

especially in schools, to provide reinforcement and cultural awareness to students [7,8], including an understanding of values, norms, traditions, language, customs, and cultural symbols [9,10]. Strengthening local cultural literacy in the world of education is increasingly emphasized in the Independent Curriculum which prioritizes the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile, including the dimensions of global diversity and mutual cooperation [11]. Local cultural literacy enables students to understand and appreciate their own cultural values, which are the basis for the formation of national character [12].

However, the process and its implementation often prioritize general knowledge over local wisdom, causing students to lack a deep appreciation of their own cultural heritage [13], providing relevant local insights to support learning [14], including using various media that contain local cultural narratives [15,16]. Also, various previous studies have revealed that Indonesian students' speaking skills, especially in the context of foreign language learning or in formal forums, are still relatively low [10]. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of a contextual learning approach and integration of local culture [17,18]. It was also found that the majority of students have not been able to identify local cultural values in the texts they study [19,20]. In Asta Cita 5 and 6, the government emphasizes the importance of strengthening superior human resources and developing a culture that reflects the nation's personality [21,22], while SDG 4.7 encourages education that values cultural diversity and local heritage [9,23]. Semiotic studies help reveal cultural symbols in oral tradition texts such as *Lelakaq* in more depth [24,25,26]. Thus, this approach supports the formation of a generation that is not only cognitively intelligent, but also aware of its cultural roots within the framework of sustainable local and global values [27,28]. Experts agree that language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as an aesthetic medium used to convey ideas, thoughts, and beauty [29,30]. In addition, literature also has a multi-interpretive nature through the use of beautiful and meaningful language [31]. One of the literary works is poetry. Poetry not only has aesthetic value, but also contains symbolic and cultural richness, which can be analyzed through a semiotic approach [32]. Poetry is also an inspiring art form and is present in various cultures and traditions [33].

So this research analyzes the semiotics of poetry of *Lelakaq* in Indonesian language subjects as an ethnolinguistic study to improve students' conceptual understanding and cultural literacy. Semiotic analysis will reveal hidden meanings in *Lelakaq*, such as symbols, metaphors, and myths [34]. Ethnolinguistic studies will explore the relationship between language, culture, and society [35]. In literary works, semiotics is used to analyze how signs and symbols form the meaning that the author wants to convey to convey messages implicitly [30,36]. This allows readers to understand the depth of meaning and hidden behind every word, phrase, and image used by the author [29,33,37]. Semiotic analysis is classified into two levels of meaning, namely denotation and connotation [38,39]. Denotation refers to the basic meaning that can be captured by the five senses, while connotation relates to cultural meaning that arises from social construction [40,41]. Barthes' theory also introduces the concept of the relationship between the signifier and the signified which is called as staggered *systems* which explains how the layered meaning in a text is formed [41].

This research is crucial because it integrates ethnolinguistics through semiotic analysis of the Sasak people's *Lelakaq* poetry to enhance students' conceptual understanding and cultural literacy. This will enable students to not only learn language but also understand the symbols, values, and cultural meanings inherent in oral traditions. This aligns with Asta Cita 5 and 6 and SDG 4.7, which emphasize the importance of quality, contextual education rooted in local wisdom.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, namely to analyze the process of interpretation, meaning, and understanding taken from words, visual symbols, and other verbal forms [42]. Because the research is semiotic analysis. It aims to understand the symbolic meaning and cultural values contained in the traditional poetry of the Sasak people as an ethnolinguistic study. The research subjects are traditional figures, the community, teachers and students of class VIII of SMPN 2 Tanjung, North Lombok, NTB. The research design can be seen in Figure 3 below:

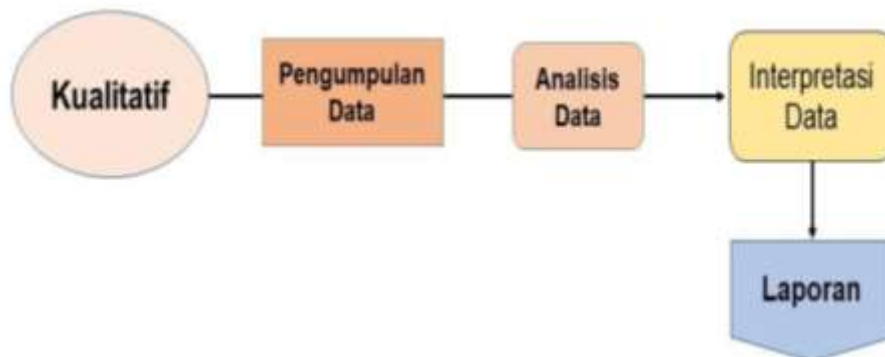


Figure 3.Descriptive Qualitative Research Design

a. Research Procedures

This research is divided into three stages: data collection, data analysis, and educational implementation. These stages are outlined in the flowchart in Figure 4. The detailed research steps are as follows:

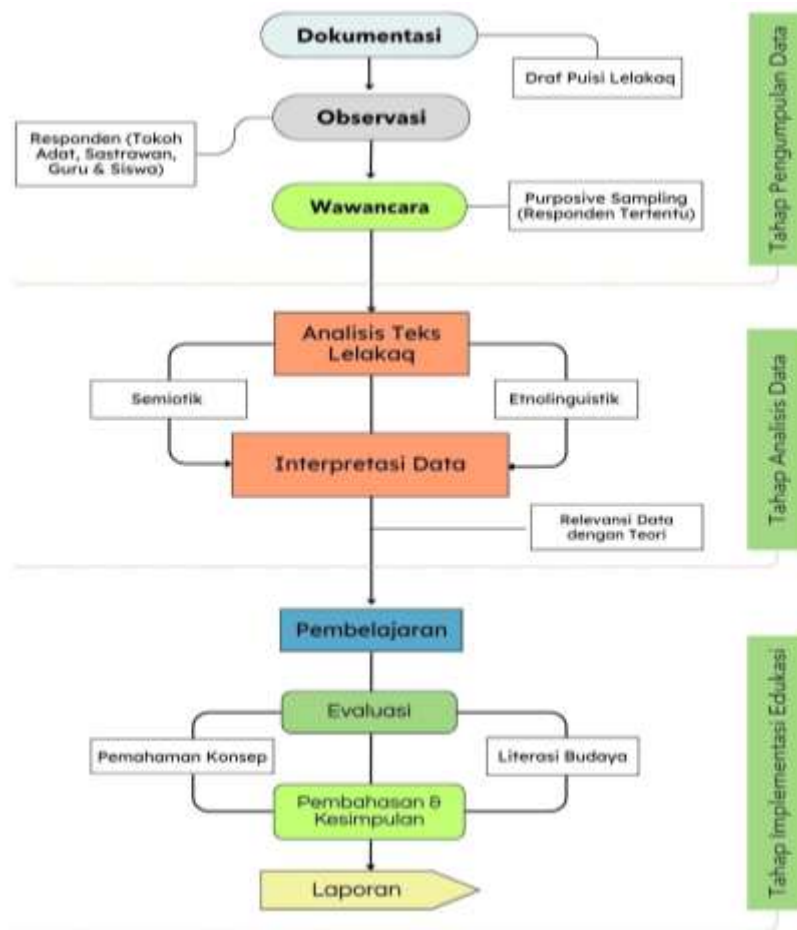


Figure 4. Descriptive Qualitative Research Flowchart.

b. Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study included checklists, observation sheets, interview guides, and tests. All instruments were declared valid and therefore suitable for use. Correct and appropriate use of instruments will produce consistent data [43]. A good instrument is one that measures what it is intended to measure [44].

c. Data Collection Techniques

The research data was obtained through a checklist to identify lelakaq poetry texts from various reliable sources. Ethnolinguistic data was obtained from a semiotic study conducted by distributing questionnaires and interviews with traditional leaders, community members, and students. Data on conceptual understanding and cultural literacy were obtained through tests administered to eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Tanjung, North Lombok.

d. Data Analysis Techniques

Several analyses were used to describe the research data obtained, as follows: (a) Semiotic Analysis: Using Barthes' approach (denotation, connotation) to examine the symbolic meaning in poetry of *lelakaq*; (b) Ethnolinguistic Analysis: Analyzing the relationship between language structure and local cultural meaning; (c) Descriptive Analysis of the results of student questionnaires and tests to determine the increase in understanding of concepts and cultural literacy. (d) Data triangulation is carried out to validate the results through comparisons between data sources (text, interviews, observations).

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The poetry of *Lelakaq* of the Sasak Lombok community is a form of oral literature that reflects semiotic, cultural, and social richness [5,6]. Semiotic theory emphasizes that signs are not only literal reality (denotation), but also carries a deeper meaning (connotation) related to ideology and culture [34,35,45]. In *Lelakaq*, words like “coconut,” “sampan,” or “turi leaf” not only refer to concrete objects, but also become symbols of resilience, life's journey, and simplicity *staggered systems of* Barthes proves that this kind of traditional poetry has layers of meaning that can be interpreted according to the cultural context of the Sasak people [41,46]. Therefore, studying...*Lelakaq* is not just about understanding rhyme and diction, but also about reading the symbols that connect humans to their environment. The following are the results of a semiotic analysis of poetry of *lelakaq* can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of the Poem Lelakaq (Barthes' Approach)

No	Theme/Advice	Lelakaq Text (Brief)	Denotation (Literal Meaning)	Connotation (Symbolic/Cultural Meaning)
1	Don't offend others	A damaged coconut is difficult to bear fruit; a disappointed heart is difficult to become good again.	A broken coconut doesn't bear fruit; a broken heart is hard to heal.	Hurting others leaves deep wounds; the moral message is to protect the feelings of others.
2	Listen to people	Lizard under the tree; a roll of thread; advice is ignored	Animals (lizards), balls of thread, people who don't listen to advice	Stubborn children will make mistakes; it is important to listen to parents/teachers.
3	Life's regrets	Turi leaves, unripe mangosteen; people crying at the grave	Cooked turi leaves; raw mangosteen; people crying in graves	Regret at the end is useless; religious teachings about the importance of worship during life
4	Worship (Prayer)	Fruits with onions; parents are reminded	Fruit and onions; parents are reminded to pray/recite the Koran	Even when you are old, don't abandon worship; the importance of spiritual consistency throughout life
5	Respect your parents	Go to Selong; buy mangoes; be diligent in worship but rebel against your parents	Daily activities (bathing, buying mangoes); people who are diligent in worship	Worship is useless without respect for parents; Sasak cultural hierarchy of values: parents are more important
6	Study diligently	Go to Jarian market; look for grass for feed; study hard	Foraging activity; studying diligently	Studying hard brings good luck; a symbol of education as a path to the future
7	Farewell at the boarding school	Dark night in Penujak; palm leaves as a place of study; children saying goodbye	Evening atmosphere; palm leaves used for writing; child says goodbye to mother	Mother's permission is important in seeking knowledge; education is a journey with sacrifices
8	Be careful on the way	Going fishing with a new boat; read a prayer before leaving	Fishing activities; new boat; prayer before leaving	Every journey should be accompanied by prayer; safety depends on caution and spirituality.

Language structure of *Lelakaq* of the table above is very simple, full of rhythm, and close to local nature. As previously emphasized by researchers, language is part of a social

practice that reflects the cultural identity of its speakers [10,46]. Thus, *Lelakaq* not only serves an aesthetic function, but also serves as a means of transmitting moral, religious, and social values. Oral literature plays an important role in strengthening cultural identity while also serving as an educational medium [9,47]. In the Sasak context, the natural metaphors used demonstrate the connectedness of humans to their environment, and make language an instrument for maintaining social harmony.

Meanwhile, based on the results of interviews with traditional figures, the community and academics, this position is increasingly strengthened of *Lelakaq*. The results of the in-depth interviews are described as follows:

Traditional figures of *Sasak* confirm that;

"Lelakaq is an oral tradition derived from the word lakaq (to say/to utter), and serves as a means of conveying moral messages, advice, satire, and even social criticism. For them, lelakaq is a cultural identity that must be passed down, even though its popularity has declined in the modern era."

Community leaders believe that;

"Lelakaq is a form of entertainment steeped in meaning. It appears in social contexts such as weddings, celebrations, communal work, and everyday conversation. However, younger generations are increasingly using it, raising concerns that this tradition is being eroded by the dominance of digital pop culture."

Academics and teachers see that;

"Lelakaq is an oral literature with great potential for adaptation in the world of education. Its aesthetic values (rhyme, diction, rhythm), ethics (advice, manners), and culture (Sasak identity) make it relevant as learning material based on local wisdom."

Traditional figures emphasize its function as a noble heritage and subtle social control. The general public views it as meaningful entertainment, often present at celebrations or in everyday conversation. Academics highlight the relevance of *Lelakaq* in language learning and cultural literacy. The theory of ethnography of speaking emphasizes that oral tradition has an important normative and communicative function in social life [48]. This is in line with previous research which found that Balinese oral tradition functions as a social glue as well as a means of moral education [49]. Thus, the position of *Lelakaq* can be understood as a multi-purpose medium: aesthetic, social, cultural, and educational.

In addition, the learning outcomes at SMPN 2 obtained, the average student score reached 74.88 (Good category), with a distribution of 32% Very Good, 24% Good, 32% Sufficient, and 12% Less, this data can be seen in Figure 1. This finding shows that the majority of students still focus on literal understanding, while the ability to interpret symbolic meaning is only mastered by a small portion. This finding is consistent with the results of research that found that junior high school students in West Java find it easier to understand the literal content of Sundanese pantun texts than their philosophical meaning [50]. Similar things are also supported by the results of other studies that emphasize that cultural literacy requires cross-contextual understanding that cannot be obtained only from reading texts, but also from social interactions and cultural reflections [17,18,51]. Therefore, *Lelakaq* needs to be positioned not only as an aesthetic text, but also as a means of cultural dialogue.

Persentase Literasi Budaya Siswa Kelas VIII (N=25)

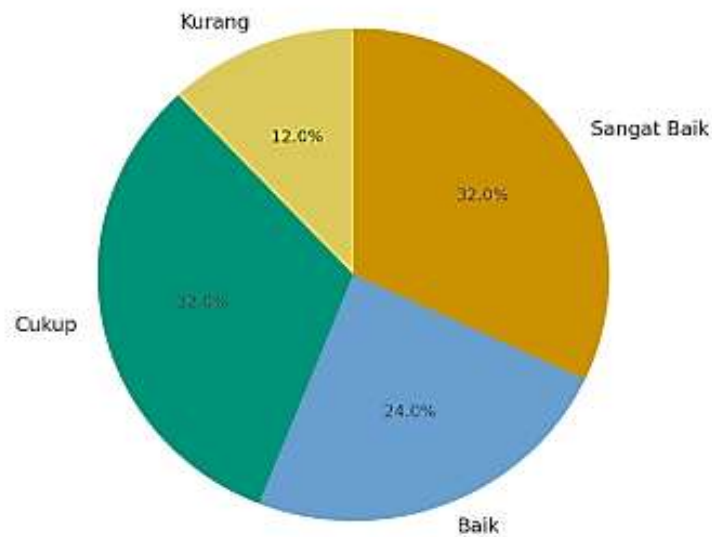


Figure 1. Percentage of Student Scores for Understanding of Concepts and Cultural Literacy

The questionnaire results showed strong student support for culture-based learning through *Lelakaq*. Most respondents expressed happiness and motivation, and 100% even hoped this model would be implemented in other subjects, as seen in Figure 2. This fact shows that cultural integration in learning can increase student participation. Multicultural education provides a great opportunity to increase student engagement because the learning material is closer to their social reality [23,52]. Other research has found that *culturally responsive teaching* also supports this finding, emphasizing that local culture-based education strengthens the connection between students' experiences and academic knowledge [53]. Thus, *Lelakaq* can be seen as a bridge between local cultural literacy and modern academic literacy.

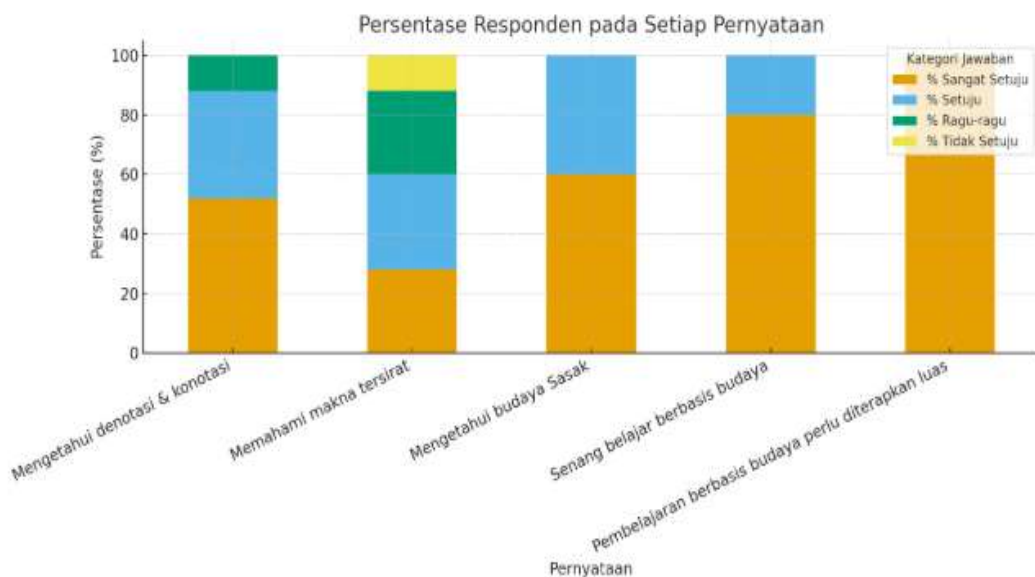


Figure 2. Percentage of Student Response Results to Learning

Although positive responses dominate, there are serious challenges in understanding semiotics, particularly connotative meaning. Data shows that approximately 40% of students still have difficulty interpreting symbolic meaning in *Lelakaq* is in line with Barthes' theory that connotation is closely related to cultural experiences that not all students have [25,26,45]. Other research shows that students more easily understand literal meanings than symbolic ones in local literature learning [54]. In other words, students grasp the denotative level more quickly, but require intensive guidance to understand connotation. In an educational context, this indicates the need for more creative pedagogical strategies, for example by using close *reading* methods or interpretive discussions based on local cultural context [28,55].

Data triangulation shows the consistency of results from three sources: poetry texts of *Lelakaq*, interviews with figures, and student test results. From the text side, *Lelakaq* clearly rich in symbolic meaning; from the interview side, community leaders consider the connotative aspect as the core of the tradition; while from the students' side, understanding of the connotative aspect is still weak. This indicates the existence of a cultural *gap between* the younger generation and the oral traditions they have inherited. The digitalization trend has caused a decline in interest in oral traditions among the younger generation[56]. Therefore, local wisdom-based learning needs to be intensified through a transdisciplinary approach combining literature, history, art, and technology to keep traditions alive and relevant to current developments. Thus, it can be emphasized that poetry learning *Lelakaq* not only provides linguistic benefits, but also strengthens students' cultural literacy, local identity, and critical thinking skills. This is in line with previous research which confirms that integrating local wisdom into the curriculum improves critical literacy while fostering a sense of cultural ownership [47]. Therefore, *Lelakaq must* be seen as a holistic educational instrument: it teaches language, instills moral values, strengthens identity, and prepares young people to live in cultural diversity.

4. CONCLUSION

Studying the *Lelakaq* poetry of the Sasak people of Lombok proves that this oral literature functions as a medium for cultural literacy, character education, and strengthening local identity. Furthermore, poetry of *Lelakaq* has been proven to have multi-purpose functions: aesthetic, social, cultural, and educational. Semiotic analysis shows that students understand denotative meanings more easily than connotative ones, with average scores of 74.88 (Good category), 32% (Very Good), 24% (Good), 32% (Sufficient), and 12% (Poor). Data triangulation revealed a generational gap in understanding cultural symbols, so creative strategies and integration are needed in the learning process to foster literacy, local identity, and improve conceptual understanding. Therefore, strategic steps need to be taken so that the values contained therein can be effectively passed on to the younger generation. Through planned teaching, students can learn to understand denotative meanings while being trained to interpret more complex connotative meanings. The use of strategies such as *close reading*, contextual discussions, and the use of digital media can help students better grasp cultural symbols and meanings. Involving practitioners such as traditional leaders, artists, and community members is essential. Their presence in learning will provide an authentic feel and strengthen students' connection to their cultural roots. This way, learning takes place not only in the classroom but also connects to real life.

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