

# The Local Wisdom of Humility in Manggarai Language: A Cultural Linguistic Analysis

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**ABSTRACT:** This study addresses the function of Manggarai language as the reflection of Manggarai culture shared by Manggarai society residing in the region of Manggarai that lies in the western part of the island of Flores, the Province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, as conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society regarding the local wisdom of humility as the quality or state of being humble or freedom from pride or arrogance, manifested in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language. The study is carried out on the basis of premise that the function of Manggarai language as the reflection of Manggarai culture designates the ways Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group view and make sense of the world. The ways are reflected in the forms and meanings of linguistic phenomena used in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai as the meanings stored in the forms of linguistic phenomena used designate the conceptualization of Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group regarding the local wisdom of humility as a cultural knowledge inherited from their ancestors. The local wisdom of humility implied in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language should be protected and maintained as it is one of the character education values that functions as the frame of reference for Manggarai society to always live in harmony in the context of living together.

**Keywords:** local wisdom, humility, Manggarai language, cultural linguistics

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is all agreed that there is no society on this earth living without culture because culture makes the lives of a society as a whole meaningful. The meaningfulness of culture can be seen in its function as an identity marker of a society as members of an ethnic group (Hall, 1997; Alshammari, 2018; Koentjaraningrat, 2004; Bustan, 2024; Bustan, 2025). Ochs (1988) pinpoints then that the function of culture as an identity marker of a society as members of an ethnic group has double dimensions because, in addition to being a sense of identity for them as members of an ethnic group, culture they share also functions as a symbol of identity differentiating them from those of other ethnic groups. It is worth noting that the function of culture as the identity marker of a society as members of an ethnic group is manifested in language they employ. The relationship of both language and culture belonging to a society as members of an ethnic group is symbiotic-reciprocal in nature because language exists in culture and culture exists in language (Hall, 1997; Birx, 2011; Alshammari, 2018; Bustan, 2025). In line with this conception, Koentjaraningrat (2004) propounds that a society is identified as members of an ethnic group because they are bound by the awareness of sharing the same culture and of speaking the same language. Therefore, in this light, language used by a society as members of an ethnic group is defined as the reflection of culture they share.

Bearing the matters stated above in minds, in general, this study explores the function of Manggarai language as the reflection of Manggarai culture shared by Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group residing in the region of Manggarai that lies in the western part of the island of Flores, in the Province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia (Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2024; Bustan, 2025). The function of Manggarai language as the reflection of Manggarai culture is so complex and pervasive that the study focuses on the conceptualization of Manggarai society regarding the local wisdom of humility, the quality or state of being humble or freedom from pride or arrogance, as reflected in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language (Bustan et al., 2017; Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2024; Bustan, 2025). The study is carried out on the basis of premise that the function of Manggarai language as the reflection of Manggarai culture designates the ways Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group view and make sense of the world (Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2024; Bustan, 2025). The ways they view and make sense of the world are reflected in the forms and meanings of linguistic phenomena they employ in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language. The meanings stored in the forms of linguistic phenomena used designate the conceptualization of Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group regarding the local wisdom of humility as one of the local wisdoms inherited from their ancestors. The local wisdom of humility implied in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language should be protected and maintained because it is one of the character education values in the curricula of Indonesian schools that functions as the frame of reference or blue print for Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group to always live in harmony in the context of living together (Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2025).

## II. FRAMEWORK

There are many different symbolic media of communication used by a society as members of a social group to fulfill their basic needs as human beings, but the most effective one is language (Hymes, 1974; Cassirer, 1987; Grice, 1987; Gumperz, 1992; Suriasumantri, 2001; Alshammari, 2018; Sihotang, 2018; Porat, 2022; Bria & Bustan, 2024; Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2025). The reason is clear and understandable that language used by a society as members of a social group aims not only to express their thoughts, ideas, feelings, and emotions, but also to convey their experiences in the world. The world involves both the factual world and the symbolic world which refers to the world in which object as the referent of language used is imaginative in nature as the object exists in their cognitions or minds (Cassirer, 1987; Grice, 1987; Suriasumantri, 2001; Bustan, 2005; Sihotang, 2018; Alshammari, 2018; Porat, 2022; Bria & Bustan, 2024). The views imply that language used by a society as members of a social group serves not only as the window of their world, but also the window into their cognitions or minds (Yu, 2007; Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2025). This come closest to the conception of Sharifian (2011) and Sharifian (2017) that both language and culture belonging to a society as members of a social group are closely related each other. The relationship is symbiotic-reciprocal in nature as language exists in culture or language in culture and culture exists in language or culture in language (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006; Cassirer, 1987; Alshammari, 2018; Bustan, 2025).

The relationship of language and culture belonging to a society as members of a social group is manifested in conceptualization ascribed in their cognitive map as a collective memory bank containing a bulk of linguistic and cultural knowledge that functions as the source of reference for them in viewing and making sense of the world (Foley, 1997; Langacker, 1999; Maslova, 2004; Abdikalyk et al., 2016; Keshavarz & Noshadi, 2023; Bustan & Kabelen, 2023; Bustan et al., 2023; Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2025). The conceptualization is reflected in metaphorical expressions used in discourse (Bustan et al., 2017; Bustan & Semiun, 2019). In line with this, Kramsch (2001) declares that language is a symbolic system with the power to shape and create such cultural realities as norms, values, perceptions, and identities which are expressed through discourse as its vehicle (Grice, 1987; Kramsch, 2001; Bustan et al., 2017; Bustan & Semiun, 2019; Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2025). The view is in line with the idea that when a society as members of a social group interact with each other for particular purposes, to achieve the intended goals of their communications or interactions, they should produce particular discourses as assemblies of meanings related to particular subject matters under discussion. When the discourses present a conceptual framework within which significant subject matters are

discussed in their culture and the latent norms of conduct, discourses are defined as ideologies or worldviews (Kovecses, 2009; Fairclough, 2003). Along with the idea that culture is the worldview of a society as members of a social group (Boas, 1962), according to Geertz (1973) and Schneider (1976), discourse is a source of making meaning in a culture (Bustan & Semiun, 2019). The meaning in this sense is defined as cultural meaning which is equated with symbolic meaning based on the premise that language used by a society is the symbol of their culture designating the ways they view and make sense of the world (Sudikan, 2001; Bustan, 2025).

More specifically, according to Gumperz (1992), meaning as fundamental to language and culture is realized in a cultural discourse which refers to an umbrella term for any form of discourse taking place within cultural domain, the domain that contains a set of items, behaviors, and beliefs defined as belonging to the same category of things. The cultural discourse in this light serves as the vehicle for the representation of cultural conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of a society as members of a social group (Bustan & Semiun, 2019). As the significance of language as an essential instrument and component of culture is reflected in its linguistic structure (Langacker, 1999), cultural discourse can also be seen as a repository of meaning stored in the form of linguistic sign commonly shared by members of a culture (Kovecses, 2009). The form which is equated with signified is referred to as the physical feature of language used in a cultural discourse, while the meaning which is equated with signifier is referred to as the content stored in the form of language used (Foley, 1997; Piliang, 2008). The meaning refers to conceptual meaning which uncovers conceptualization of experience faced by the speakers of that language in viewing and making sense of the world (Foley, 1997; Bustan, 2005; Sharifian, 2011; Sharifian, 2017; Bustan & Semiun, 2019; Bustan et al., 2023; Bustan & Ludji, 2024).

### III. METHOD

In terms of its research design, this study is descriptive-qualitative as it aims to describe the local wisdom of humility in Manggarai language in accordance with conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai society, as reflected in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language (Faisal, 1990; Muhadjir, 1995; Foley, 1999; Afrizal, 2014; Sugyono, 2018; Yusuf, 2019; Moleong, 2021; Sugyono, 2022). The procedures of research were field research and library research. The field research was carried out to obtain the primary data dealing with conceptualization of Manggarai society regarding the local wisdom of humility in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language. The location of the field research was in the regency of Manggarai with the main location being in Ruteng town as the capital city of Manggarai regency. The sources of the data were Manggarai society residing in Ruteng town as the main location of the field research represented by 10 (ten) key informants selected on the basis of the ideal criteria put forward by Faisal (1990), Spradley (1997), Duranti (2001), and Sudikan (2001). The approach used to collect data was ethnography, especially dialogic ethnography (Bernstein, 1972; Hymes, 1974; Spradley, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993; Foley, 1997; Duranti, 2001). The method of data collection was in-depth interview which was then elaborated by the technique of recording, elicitation, and note-taking (Nusa Putra, 2011). The library research was aimed at obtaining the secondary data relevant to the main concern of study. The method of data collection was documentary study. The documents used as the sources of data were general references such as books and specific references such as research results, scientific articles, and papers. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively by inductive method as the process of analysis moved from the data to abstraction and concept/theory (Kaplan & Manners, 1999; Sudikan, 2001; Duranti, 2001). The concept/theory is local-ideographic in nature as it describes the local wisdom of humility in Manggarai language along with its function as the reflection of Manggarai culture on the basis of conceptualization ascribed in their cognitive map of Manggarai society, as reflected in the forms and meanings of linguistic phenomena they employ in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language.

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

##### Result

Referring to the conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of the Manggarai society, it is found out that the local wisdom of humility in Manggarai language is reflected in the following metaphorical expression: *Neka conga bail boto poka bokak, neka tengguk bail boko kepu tengu* “Don’t look up too high so your neck doesn’t get cut, don’t bow too low so your neck doesn’t get cut.” The forms and meanings of linguistic phenomena used in the metaphorical expression are unique and specific in some respect to Manggarai culture as the parent culture in which Manggarai language is embedded. The unique and specific features are reflected in the choice of words and the ways the words are expressed that contain beautiful forms inviting sensory pleasures when the metaphorical expression is spoken and listened to. The meanings stored in the forms of linguistic phenomena used in the metaphorical expression designate the conceptualization ascribed in the cognitive map of Manggarai society on the local wisdom of humility as one of the local wisdoms inherited from their ancestors that should be protected and maintained as it is closely related to character education value implied in the curricula of Indonesian schools (Bustan et al., 2017; Bustan & Ludji, 2024; Bustan, 2024; Bustan, 2025).

##### Discussion

As seen in its surface structure, *Neka conga bail boto poka bokak, neka tengguk bail boko kepu tengu* “Don’t look up too high so your neck doesn’t get cut, don’t bow too low so your neck doesn’t get cut”, the metaphorical expression appears in the form of a sentence. The sentence is an imperative sentence of request type as it conveys request to Manggarai society regarding the local wisdom of humility in Manggarai language as one of the local wisdoms inherited from their ancestors. While in view of its component parts, the metaphorical expression appears in the form of a compound sentence made up of two independent clauses or complete sentences. The two independent clauses or complete sentences serving as its component parts are as follows: (01) *Neka conga bail boto poka bokak* “Don’t look up too high so your neck doesn’t get cut” and (02) *Neka tengguk bail boto kepu tengu* “Don’t bow too low so your neck doesn’t get cut.” The relationship of the two independent clauses forms an asyndeton construction as it is not linked by using the coordinating conjunction *agu* ‘and’ or *ko* ‘or’ as a lexical-cohesive device. The coordinating conjunction is eliminated in order to maintain the rhythm when the sentence is spoken and listened to as the number of words in the two independent clauses is the same as six and the number of syllables for each word is the same as two.

The independent clause (01), *Neka conga bail boto poka bokak* “Don’t look up too high so your neck doesn’t get cut”, appears in the form of a compound-complex sentence made up of two clauses as its component parts. The two clauses serving as its component parts are as follows: (a) *Neka conga bail* “Don’t look up too high” is the main clause and (b) *boto poka bokak* “so your neck doesn’t get cut” as the subordinate clause as it cannot stand alone as a complete sentence or its meaning depends on the main clause in which it is embedded. The two clauses appear in the negative forms indicated by two kinds of negative markers, including the word (function word) *neka* ‘not’ which distributes preceding the word (verb) *conga* ‘look up’ in the verbal phrase *conga bail* ‘look up too high’ and the word (function word) *boto* ‘in order not’ which distributes preceding the word (verb) *poka* ‘cut’ in the verbal phrase *poka bokak* ‘cut off neck’. The word *bail* ‘too’ is an adverb of manner in Manggarai language used primarily to indicate more than needed that means excessively or more than enough so that it is used for emphasis that connotes negative meaning.

As aforementioned, the choice of words and the ways the words are expressed reflect beautiful forms that invite sensory pleasure when the independent clause is spoken and listened to. The beautiful forms of linguistic phenomena are characterized by phonological and syntactic parallelism. The phonological parallelism reflecting beautiful form is indicated by the asymmetrical assonance of phonemes /o/-/a/ in the word (verb) *conga* ‘look up’, the word (verb) *poka* ‘cut’, and the word (noun) *bokak* ‘neck’. While the syntactic parallelism is indicated

in the following features or characteristics: (1) the number of words both in the main clause and in the subordinate clause is the same as three and (2) the number of syllables for each word is the same as two as well.

The independent clause (02), *Neka tengguk bail boto kepu tengu* “Don’t bow too low so your neck doesn’t get cut”, appears in the form of a compound-complex sentence made up of two clauses as its component parts. The two clauses serving as its component parts are as follows: (a) *Neka tengguk bail* “Don’t bow too low” is the main clause and (b) *boto kepu tengu* “so your neck doesn’t get cut” as the subordinate clause as it cannot stand alone as a complete sentence or its meaning depends on the main clause in which it is embedded. The two clauses appear in the negative forms indicated by using the negative markers of Manggarai language, including *neka* ‘not’ which distributes preceding the word (verb) *tengguk* ‘bow’ in the verbal phrase *tengguk bail* ‘bow too low’ and *boto* ‘in order not’ which distributes preceding the word (verb) *kepu* ‘cut’ in the verbal phrase *kepu tengu* ‘cut off neck’. The word *bail* ‘too’ is an adverb of manner in Manggarai language used primarily to indicate more than needed that means excessively or more than enough so that it is used for emphasis that connotes negative meaning.

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The meanings stored in the forms of linguistic phenomena used in the metaphorical expression designate the conceptualization of Manggarai society regarding the local wisdom of humility as one of the local wisdoms inherited from their ancestors. It is conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society, there are two patterns of behavior that should be taken into account in regard to the local wisdom of humility in order to live in harmony with their fellow men in the context of living together. The first is that it is forbidden for them to act and behave too proudly and arrogantly so that people don’t hate you, as reflected in the independent clause (01), *Neka conga bail boto poka bokak* “Don’t look up too high so your neck doesn’t get cut.” This is because, in the conceptualization of Manggarai society, arrogance is defined as an offensive display of superiority, overbearing pride, or an exaggerated sense of self-importance, of characterized by treating others with contempt. It involves an inflated estimation of one’s own abilities or worth, often resulting in rude behavior and a lack of humility. The second is that it is forbidden for them to act and behave too humbly so that people look down on you as you show low self-esteem so that people take it for granted. In other words, don’t think oneself inferior to others, as reflected in the independent clause (02), *Neka tengguk bail boto kepu tengu* “Don’t bow too low so your neck doesn’t get cut” in the sense that one should keep the quality of having a modest, accurate view of one’s own importance, achievements, and limitations. The local wisdom of humility implied in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language should be protected and maintained because it is one of the character education values in the curriculum of Indonesian school that functions as one of the frames of reference for Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group to always live in harmony with their fellow men in the context of living together.

## V. CONCLUSION

The local wisdom of humility in Manggarai language is reflected in the metaphorical expression, *Neka conga bail boto poka bokak, neka tengguk bail boto kepu tengu* “Don’t look up too high so your neck doesn’t get cut, don’t bow too low so your neck doesn’t get cut.” The forms and meanings of linguistic phenomena used are unique and specific to Manggarai culture as the parent culture in which Manggarai language is embedded. The unique and specific features are reflected in the choice of words and the ways the words are expressed that

contain beautiful forms inviting sensory pleasures when the metaphorical expression is spoken and listened to. The meanings stored in the forms of linguistic phenomena designate the conceptualization of Manggarai society on the local wisdom of humility as one of the local wisdoms inherited from their ancestors that should be protected and maintained as it is closely related to character education value. As conceptualized in the cognitive map of Manggarai society, two patterns of behavior that should be taken into account in regard to the local wisdom of humility in order to live in harmony with their fellow men in the context of living together are as follows: (1) not to act and behave too proudly and arrogantly so that people don't hate you and (2) not to act and behave too humbly so that people look down on you as you show low self-esteem so that people take it for granted. In other words, don't think oneself superior and don't think oneself inferior to others and keep the quality of having a modest, accurate view of one's own importance, achievements, and limitations. As such, the local wisdom of humility implied in the metaphorical expression of Manggarai language should be protected and maintained because it is one of the character education values in the curricula of Indonesian schools that functions as one of the frames of reference for Manggarai society as members of Manggarai ethnic group to always live in harmony with their fellow men in the context of living together.

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