THE NEED TO REVIVE *SATERA JONTAL* AN ENDANGERED SCRIPT IN SUMBAWA REGENCY

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ABSTRACT

This article argues for the need to revive satera jontal an endangered script or written language of Sumbawanese in Sumbawa Regency. This research aims to define and trace the historical as well as the current development of satera jontal, identify the causes of its turning into an endangered script, and discuss the techniques for its revitalization. The method of data collection has mainly relied on a literature survey. The position of the researchers as Sumbawanese serves as a confirmation to what the literature presents in the findings and discussion. This research is practically beneficial for the Sumbawanese community and government, and theoretically enriches language and literature research.

Keywords: satera jontal, endangered scripts, language revitalization

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini berargumen tentang perlunya menghidupkan kembali satera jontal atau bahasa tertulis orang Sumbawa, naskah yang terancam punah di Kabupaten Sumbawa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendefinisikan dan melacak sejarah serta perkembangan satera jontal saat ini, mengidentifikasi penyebabnya berubah menjadi naskah yang terancam punah, dan membahas teknik untuk revitalisasi. Metode pengumpulan data terutama mengandalkan survei literatur. Posisi peneliti sebagai orang Sumbawa berfungsi sebagai konfirmasi atas apa yang disajikan literatur dalam temuan dan diskusi. Penelitian ini secara praktis bermanfaat bagi masyarakat dan pemerintah daerah Sumbawa, dan secara teoritis memperkaya penelitian bahasa dan sastra.

Kata kunci: satera jontal, skrip yang terancam punah, revitalisasi bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Background

Human beings use language as a medium of communication both in spoken and written forms. Writing systems may have developed in the last five hundred years within a hundred millennia of language use (Comrie, Matthews & Polinsky, 1996). There are many writing systems, each of which brings its uniqueness. Many of them are in danger or even have been extinct. Fortunately, people have done great efforts to revive these languages known as the revitalization of endangered language projects.

Reviving endangered languages is one of the projects in the linguistic field. There are several successful language revitalizations around the world such as Yurok and Wampanoag (Native American languages), Cornish (Celtic language native), Kaurna (native Australian language), Maori (the native language of New Zealand) and Hebrew (Israel native language). Most of these revitalization projects focus on spoken languages rather than written scripts. Written scripts are very important to be revived because enormous benefits could be gained from them (Hinton, 2016). However, the research on reviving endangered scripts is very few.

There is no specific definition of the endangered script given by language death scholars. However, Brookes (2017), an artist who creates the endangered alphabet project, defines endangered alphabets as writing systems (letters, alphabets, syllables, and characters) that were used by various traditional cultures in

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the world, yet presently are no longer used at all, barely used, for example, only used by four or five people who know how to use them. This is in line with Stephen Wurm's statement in Crystal (2000) that a language becomes endangered if only young adults speak the language and the number of children who learn it is few or even none. Catapang (2014) points out that the youth having no interest in writing their local script.

Based on the definition above, *satera jontal,* a written script from the Sumbawanese language in West Nusa Tenggara province of Indonesia, is considered an endangered script. Almost no elderly and adults know how to read and write this script and the number of young people who learn it is very few. Moreover, there are two main reasons why the topic of reviving the Sumbawanese script is urgent. First, Sumbawanese people speak their traditional language *basa Samawa,* but most of them cannot read and write their script. Although today *basa Samawa* is still used in daily communication, nobody can guarantee that the future generation would use or even know the language. If this situation happens, most likely Sumbawanese people would not be able to trace their history and culture. Thus, reviving the *satera jontal* script is a smart alternative to prevent *basa Samawa* from extinction. Second, based on research on the literature about reviving endangered script, there are very few research projects on this topic. Linguists and scholars tend to research more about spoken rather than written language.

Formulation of the Problems

The problems associated with this research are formulated as: (1) what is the definition, function and development of the *satera jontal* of *basa Samawa*? (2) What are the causes of *satera jontal* becoming an endangered script so far? (3) What are the techniques to revive *satera jontal* so that it can function in the community?

Research Aim and Significance

This research aims to define and trace the historical as well as the current development of *satera jontal*, identify the causes of its turning into an endangered script, and discuss the techniques for its revitalization. This research is practically beneficial for the Sumbawanese community and theoretically enriches language and literature research.

METHOD

To respond to the research questions, the method of data collection has mainly relied on a literature survey. There are three types of literature used in the study. The first is those about *satera jontal* written by Sumbawanese teachers and cultural figures, while the second consists of journal articles or books about Sumbawanese language written by external or international authors. The third is references talking about the theories, experiences, and revitalization of endangered languages in other parts of the world. The position of the researchers as Sumbawanese who witness how Sumbawanese language functions and especially how *satera jontal* exists especially at present in the community often appears as confirmation to what the literature presents in the findings and discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Definition, Function and Development of Satera Jontal

Definition of Satera Jontal

Satera jontal can be defined as "palm leaf literature" or "palm leaf script" (Shiohara 2014, p.1). This script is known as *satera jontal* since the media for writing is palm leaf. Besides palm leaf, the sharp tip of a knife and cigarette ash play an important role in the writing process. The tip of the sharp knife functions as a pencil, to carve the script on the palm leaf, while the cigarette ash is used in the finishing process to make the carving appears through the black color from ash cigarette.

At the earlier stage of the writing system, humans use the writing system, not for recording spoken language. In Mesopotamia for example, the writing system was used for archiving the concept rather than the speech (Comrie, Matthews & Polinsky 1996). It is argued that small clay tokens used in Mesopotamia for agricultural purposes such as counting the grain quantities. These tokens were called plain tokens with smooth characteristics and had various shapes. Subsequently, Comrie, Matthews & Polinsky (1996) write that complex tokens which exhibit various shapes and mark on the surface were found in the Southern Mesopotamia now known as Iraq. It is predicted that stylus was used to write mark while the clay still dumb. Plain token shapes did not indicate which commodities were counted while in each complex token shape represented the commodity recorded. The development plain to complex tokens of ancient Mesopotamia may form an "intermediate precursor of humankind's earlier writing system" (p.165). Yet, it is claimed that the Near East or Southwest Asia was the home where humankind started the writing system.

Function of Satera Jontal

The use of s*atera jontal* changed from time to time. In the past, the function of this script was as a medium to exchange *lawas* or poems (Manca 1984). Also, Hijaz (2003) mentions that s*atera jontal* was used for keeping stories about the Sumbawanese royal family, *lawas pamuji* a kind of incantations for the mystical science and all kinds of advice for life (p.1). Nowadays, this written script does not seem to serve any function. In 2000, however, there was an effort to re-introduce s*atera jontal* through a seminar to the Sumbawanese community. The seminar held by Regional Employment Board and *Lonto Engal* Foundation (Hijaz, Gani & Hasanuddin 2002). This seminar was predicted to be a starting point for the re-use of s*atera jontal* in Sumbawa area. Since this script was reintroduced to the community and taught to the primary and secondary school, however, there are no remarkable changes in the use of this script. The customary legal institution of Sumbawa which is known as *Lembaga Adat Tana Samawa* did not use this script. In terms of making invitations, brochures, pamphlets, and advertisements about agendas in Sumbawa area, for example, *Lembaga Adat Tana Samawa* tend to use Latin script rather than *satera jontal*. Since *satera jontal* has never used as a medium for exchanging information for a long period, it is then perceivable that people do not know and understand how to read and write this script. Although people still do not know what *satera jontal* is, the local government had tried to re-introduce this script to the community particularly the young generation. For example, *satera jontal* is used to write the street names in Sumbawa town.

Development of Satera Jontal

Satera jontal is a traditional script of Sumbawanese people. This script is used in both regions of Sumbawanese island, West Sumbawa known as Taliwang and East Sumbawa called Sumbawa. Sumbawa is one of the regencies in West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. Even though several tribes inhibit Sumbawa island, the majority of the population is Sumbawanese called *tau Samawa*. The Sumbawanese people use their traditional language namely *basa Samawa*.

Hijaz, Gani & Hasanuddin (2002) mention that s*atera jontal* is originated from the Buginese script known as the *lontara* script. Similarly, Shiohara (2014) concludes that s*atera jontal* is a byproduct of the Makassar cultural influence on Sumbawanese people. Shiohara's conclusion is based on the legend of the first Sultan of Sumbawa who originally from Makassar. Regarding the legend that the first Sultan of Sumbawa comes from Makassar, it can be speculated that the Buginese script brought and introduced by Makassar's people to Sumbawanese inhabitants. Therefore, as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, there is a similarity between the s*atera jontal* and the Buginese script.

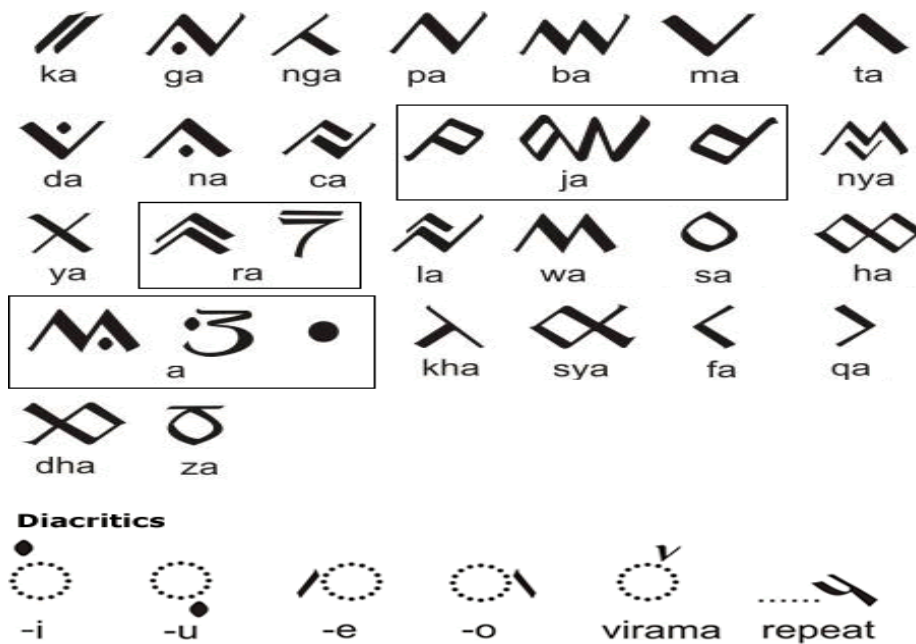**Figure 1 Buginese script or called *lontara* script**

Figure 2 *Satera jontal*

As mentioned above, Sumbawanese people or *tau Samawa* speak Sumbawanese language or *basa Samawa*. However, most Sumbawanese people do not know how to write *satera jontal*. People who care about this script try to introduce it to the Sumbawanese community through seminars and suggest the local government put *satera jontal* in the school curriculum and use it to teach the local content subject. Subsequently, to follow up on the previous seminar and input from those who are worried about the existence of *satera jontal,* the Sumbawa regency Educational Department (*Dinas Pendidikan Kabupaten Sumbawa)* published several books about this script. One of the books *Belajar Baca Tulis Satera Jontal* is used as subject material for teaching the local content subject at primary and secondary levels. However, not all primary and secondary schools in Sumbawa region use this book for teaching the local content subject because there are several choices of what a school wants to teach on this subject. For example, some schools opt to teach Sumbawa traditional food as teaching material for teaching the local content subject, and other schools choose teaching embroidery. Although *satera jontal* has been taught as a local content subject to elementary and secondary levels, young people still do not use it in their daily life. This may be because the students learn it because of the need for an exam not because they need or care about it.

Moreover, according to Hijaz (2003), there are three versions of *satera jontal: a. Satera jontal ano Rawi* (West Sumbawa version). *b. Satera jontal ano siop* (East Sumbawa version). *c. Satera jontal* new version. *satera jontal ano Rawi* is used by Taliwangnese people in the west part of Sumbawa while *satera jontal ano siop* used by people who inhibit around the east Sumbawa area. Taliwang is another name for the West Sumbawa. The Taliwangnese language and Sumbawanese language are slightly different. Thus, this situation might cause the *satera jontal* between these regions are different. Another version of *satera jontal* which called *satera jontal* new version is a form of development to complete the two previous versions. This new version is then used in *satera jontal* coursebook for teaching the local content subject. The new version is called a complete version since several sounds that do not exist in the two other versions (fa, kha, sya, qa, za and da) are developed in the *satera jontal* new version (Hijaz, A. 2003). According to Hijaz, Gani & Hasanuddin (2002, p.4), there are five reasons for the use of the new version of *satera jontal*. First, the latest version has been broadly socialized. Second, each script represents one sound. Third, it is easy to be re-read. The fourth reason is the diacritics are still kept. Lastly, in the future, it can be adapted to technology such as computer technology.

B. The Causes of Satera Jontal Endangerment

There is limited information about how *satera jontal* has turned to be endangered. Manca (1984) stated that s*atera jontal* was demolished by the Dutch colonial. Its non-presence in the community continued up to the Indonesian independence new order era in 1999. What has occurred with *satera jontal*,

however, may be explained by a larger research project in the Indonesian context. Widodo and Fardhani (2013, p. 133) point out that six factors contribute to language endangerment or extinction in Indonesia: (1) negative attitudes toward indigenous languages, (2) prestige regarding socioeconomic status, (3) language preference, (4) the imposition of Bahasa Indonesia, (5) socio-economic status, socio-political status, and privilege, and (6) natural disaster.

In detail, Widodo and Fardhani (2013, p.133) explain that many Indonesian people do not use traditional languages because these languages are perceived as ugly, out of date, and distressful." Indeed, Sugiharto as cited in Widodo and Fardhani (2013) mention that these languages are deemed as the languages of uneducated and poor people. In a related vein, there is a perception that using national language would upgrade the status and prestige. This perception seems to be the main reason why many Indonesian do not use the local language. Furthermore, parents do not introduce and teach their children the local languages. This situation makes the language seriously threatened. Thus, the main cause of language being endangered or even extinct is the parents' attitude. Parents might consider that by starting to speak the national language at home, their children would acquire this language easier. By doing this, the parents assume that their children would get access to both economic and education in the future. The fourth factor that contributes to language death is the imposition of Bahasa Indonesia as the language of nationalism and patriotism. It is believed that to be true nationalists and patriots, Indonesian people have to use Bahasa Indonesia in all contexts to promote unity and solidarity. Indonesia is a country that has diverse races, religious tribes, and hundreds of traditional languages. This is what makes Indonesia different from other countries and we should be proud of that.

Another factor that causes indigenous languages in Indonesia to become endangered seems the strongest factor among others. This might be because the government and political elites play an important role in the imposition of Bahasa Indonesia over the local language, indoctrination through education and language policy (Widodo & Fardhani 2013). In this situation, Indonesian people cannot choose or refuse because it is related to the policy that applied to the whole area of Indonesia. Although natural disaster has been mentioned as the sixth factor that contributes to the language endangerment and extinction, there is no explanation given by Widodo and Fardhani about how this factor causes indigenous languages in Indonesia to become endangered. However, this might be true with *satera jontal* as part written Sumbawanese language as in Sumbawa island in1815 the Mount of Tambora erupted causing not only the destruction of much of Sumbawanese civilization but also a global climate change including the loss of summer and depression in Europe which was far away from the natural disaster location (Wirakusumah dan Rachmat, 2007).

C. The Need and Techniques for Revitalization of Satera Jontal

Humankind interacts with others through languages. A language functions as a means of interaction and represents signs in particular societies and cultures (Widodo & Fardhani 2013). The symbols are unique and make the communities and cultures different from others. In terms of written form, the scripts of community A might be different from B, and vice versa. All people have the same right to use, keep and spread their languages in both spoken and written form as it is guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted in 1948 at the foundation of the United Nations, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Regarding this, reviving endangered languages both spoken and written should be supported to respect the linguistic right of human beings.

Reviving endangered script is our shared responsibility, not the linguists. As the owners of the scripts, Sumbawanese should know the importance of the scripts. Yet, from the explanation presented in the previous part, the script's owners should be responsible for what happens with the language. Thus, to make the script revitalization project successful, support from the language owners is indispensable. Three questions need to be explored about reviving endangered script: (1) what is the importance of reviving such scripts in the era of globalization? (2) Is it possible to revive the script? (3) What technique is used for reviving the script?

The importance of reviving endangered languages

Arguments made against the reclamation of moribund languages are that these languages are worthless. These arguments, however, are undoubtedly untrue since the experts of endangered language present the importance of these languages. Crystal (2000), for example, asserts that people should care about languages for five fundamental reasons.

"Human beings need diversity". It is explained that the theory of diversity is not only applied to the ecosystem but also languages. Languages, cultures, arts, and activities are important aspects of the ecosystem. The equilibrium depends on these aspects. Also, human beings cannot live homogenously because it provokes danger to their existence. Yet, it is insisted that the loss of genetic diversity in the linguistic world would give more bad impact on humankind rather than the loss of genetic diversity (p. 32-35).

"Languages are identity". Crystal quotes Welsh proverb to emphasize the importance of languages "a nation without a language is a nation without a heart" (p. 36). This is true since we can recognize people by the languages they speak. The languages that people use represent their identity such as nation, region, etc. For example, Bahasa Indonesia is recognized as the language of Indonesia.

"Languages are historical archives". Both spoken and written languages would enable people to trace back the history. Grammar and vocabulary that are used could express the past event. "Languages as the pedigree of nations. Pedigree refers to ancestry, lineage or descendant". For example, we know the history of a language through analysing their words origin, who brought them, how they are brought, what are their meanings, etc. This is simply a small part of history that can be gain from languages. There is more mammoth insight about history that can be gained from languages (p. 41).

"Languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge". Crystal (2000) points out that languages are sources for humans to gain and pass knowledge. The more people learn other languages; the more insight they gain. Emerson in Crystal (2000) illustrates that only poor and ridiculous people who bring nothing from the country they visit because it is a great chance to learn the knowledge through learning the languages. Knowledge can be passed, gained and exchange through languages (p. 44-50).

"Languages are interesting in themselves". The isolation of a language makes them differ from other languages. The isolation may have developed features that do not exist and found in any other language. In addition, all languages are important, beautiful, useful, unique, and interesting because they carry their functions (grammar, phonology, and lexical). If a language dies, one uniqueness would disappear from the world's surface. It cannot be imagined if many languages die, what will happen to the world diversity (pp.54-58).

The reasons above suggest that reviving endangered scripts is important because they are treasures of insightful knowledge and history. Furthermore, endangered scripts are a symbol or identity of culture and nation. The last reason is that each script has uniqueness. In detail, Alwasilah and Nazara in Widodo and Fardhani (2013, p. 135) concludes that indigenous languages should be preserved because they are "tools for (1) transmitting heritage cultures, (2) embodying ethnic identity and pride, (3) communicating within the same community, (4) promoting indigenous rights and values, and (5) enriching national cultures."

Reviving Scripts is Possible

It might be argued that reviving a threatened script is expensive. To some extent, this may be true; however, there are some alternative solutions to address funding problems. According to Crystal in Ferreira (2013), fundraising is an alternative way to succeed in the revitalization project. This solution would break the doubt about the possibility of reviving scripts. Furthermore, several successful endangered revitalization projects can be viewed as a good way to tackle the funding problem. For example, Brookes (2017), the creator of the "endangered alphabet project", started the idea to raise the money to support his reviving project. Surprisingly, this man is not a linguist who should pay more attention to dying scripts. Brookes works as an artist and uses his talent to revive the endangered scripts. This suggests that revitalizing an endangered language is not only to do with people with special expertise in languages such as linguists or by those in the government. It seems that desire, intention concern, and positive attitude generate people to enable these scripts to exist. Thus, everybody should contribute to revitalizing endangered languages. Another example of a successful reviving project is the revitalization of Mangyan scripts in Mindoro, Philippine. Japan International Cooperation Agency had made this reviving was possible (Catapang, 2014). As a result, "the National Museum declared the Mangyan scripts as National Cultural Treasures" (p. 10).

Besides desire, intention, concern, and positive attitude, one point should be underlined is supporting from those who have power would enable the reviving project is possible.

Techniques Used to Revive Scripts

Several techniques can be used to revitalized the endangered scripts. One of the possible techniques for reviving the script is a promotion. Promoting technique can be done through artwork exhibition as what Brookes" project has done (2017). This technique is interesting because people are unconsciously attracted to see the script through beautiful products of artwork. It is expected that this technique could encourage people's interest to learn and use endangered scripts. In my point of view, this idea is excellent because the scripts are attached to the stuff that people might meet every day such as cushion, mug, table, and shopping bag.

Re-introduction is the second technique that may succeed to bring back the endangered scripts. This technique can be done through teaching how to read and write the scripts in a formal institution such as in schools and a non-formal context such as in an open learning class within the community. The subject of the teaching is all people who inhabit such an area where the script is used but the youth are the most targeted learners as they play an important role in the existence of a language. In supporting this technique, the script textbooks should be provided to guide not only the teachers but also the students. For instance, Catapang (2014) mentions that Postma, a Dutch missionary priest who works as an anthropologist and linguist, wrote a book as a source for teaching Mangyan script which is called "Primer".

Another technique is practice. This technique should be applied after the re-introduction technique, or they can be run at the same time. In short, the theoretical technique combined with the practical technique would enable students easier in learning the new knowledge of writing scripts. Students can practice using their script through painting and carving. For example, the collaboration technique is applied in Mindoro, the Philippines. Students learn the theory of how to write and read the Mangyan script and carve it on bamboo (Pitogo, 2015). This technique seems effective since the students mostly enjoy learning by doing.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Satera jontal should be revitalized because of four main reasons. First, it contains the historical and cultural value of Sumbawa regency. Second, the existence of *satera jontal* is a part of diversity. Furthermore, it is a source of knowledge. And lastly, *satera jontal* is unique. In addition, there are provided techniques of scripts revitalization that make *satera jontal* is possible to revive. However, the effort to revitalize the scripts would be useless without support and collaboration from six key elements: central and local governments, Center for Language Preservation and Maintenance (CLRPM), schools, communities, and individuals and families as well (Widodo and Fardhani, 2013, pp. 136-138).

First, central and local governments play a pivotal role in indigenous language revitalization, preservation, and maintenance. Languages become die, extinct, and endanger could be a result of the governments that do not give legal support such as make clear policies about revitalization, preservation, and maintenance. Thus, the Indonesian government should include the issue of indigenous language revitalization, preservation, and maintenance which is a part of linguistic right in the 1945 constitution, education act, local government regulation, and law. In terms of the education act, the government should create a special curriculum for teaching native languages both spoken and written languages. In addition, the government should make clear the policy of allowing bilingual, national, and local languages, at school (p. 136).

Second, Center for Language Revitalization, Preservation, and Maintenance established in each area or province of Indonesia should manage, serve, and promote the indigenous languages. This language center is expected to help the central and local governments in implementing the language revitalization, preservation, and maintenance programs. The language center should conduct seminars, workshops, conferences regularly to promote the native languages. Giving short-term training to the youth is required to instill and strengthen a sense of belonging to their native languages (p.37).

Third, schools are the right places for promoting indigenous languages. At school, teachers should allow, help, encourage, facilitate, and motivate students to use their local languages both in spoken and written form. Students must feel safe when they use their languages and schools must guarantee it.

Furthermore, teachers should speak bilingual or multilingual because they are role models. The most basic that schools have to do is to set the curriculum for teaching indigenous languages and create teaching materials that can entice students" interest to learn their native languages (p. 137).

Fourth, encouraging the community to use their languages is not an easy task in this era of globalization particularly in using the local scripts. In this respect, using the community indigenous language as a medium of communication in the traditional ceremony or social gathering is a good way to promote the use of this language. In respect of the use of local scripts, the local customary institutions should start to use the local script for correspondence within the community. In doing so, the letters can be written in both local and Latin scripts (p.138).

Fifth, individuals and families are the core of the success of language revitalization, preservation, and maintenance. Home is the first place for human beings to learn languages. People use the language that their parents introduce. Parents play a momentous role to pass the native languages to the children. Thus, parents should be encouraged to use their indigenous languages at home to maintain the existence of their languages.

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