

## LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY IN FOOD-TALK IN LUBUKLINGGAU COMMUNITY

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### Abstract

This research aimed to determine the language use of Padang, Javanese and Lubuklinggau ethnic to show their identity in talking about food in Lubuklinggau community. The research was a descriptive qualitative research. The subject of this research was the informants from Padang, Javanese, and Lubuklinggau ethnic that live and has become the citizen in Lubuklinggau. It was done through social network or 'friend of friend' technique by Milroy and Milroy. The data collection techniques in this study were done through three techniques; they are Participation Observation, Recording and Noting Techniques. Some ethnographic interviews were also carried out to support the observational data. The result of this research showed three findings including, 1) pride to the food as the part of culture, 2) promoting foods to describe some cultural events, and 3) identifying power through taste. The research is highly expected to be the valuable reference for other researchers to conduct language research in Lubuklinggau.

**Keywords:** *language use, ethnicity, identity, food-talk, Lubuklinggau*

### INTRODUCTION

It is not a secret that what someone says may describe who the person is. Language and social and demographic factors have been interesting issues to discuss. Society has many things to tell and explore dealing with the language used in the community. Language also cannot be separated by the culture of language speakers as the part of the society. One of the most significant concerns in people's life is food. Food plays a vital role in daily life because without food people cannot survive (Ayeonomi, 2011: 50).

Food is an essential part of people's lives, and as such is much more than just a means of survival but also food can support the humans' social life. Beside, food is not only source of nutrition for human, but also plays various roles in daily life, beliefs, and socioeconomics. For example, through food, someone's economical and social status will be revealed (Carpenter, 2011).

According to Ma (2015: 195), food has many symbolic meanings, it not only express but also establish the relationship between people and their environment as well as between people and what they believe. Some previous research relate food with social factors such as gender, identity,

power, daily interaction, food production and the language structure (Counihan and Kaplan, 2013; Szatrowski, 2014). The research conducted in various places in different ethnicity and culture, too.

Identity is defined as distinctive features or symbols that have its meaning to be easily recognized, such as name (Joseph, 2004: 2). When people use a language, they do as individuals with social histories. Their histories are defined in part by their membership in a range of social groups into which people are born such as gender, social class, religion and race. One of many factors that influence the use of language to show identity is ethnicity. Ethnicity, on the other hand, has traditionally been defined in terms of characteristics such as common language, culture, and national origin (Quintana, 2007: 260). Dealing with food and language, as mentioned previously, what people say about food may reflect their identity including their ethnicity. For example, people say that they want to eat 'Chinese food' instead of 'noodle' but actually they just want to it noodle not all of Chinese food. This talk directly associates with special food from China with long appearance in a bowl. Probably, the speaker is a Chinese, Chinese descendent or he/she likes it because it is cheap and has a big portion. No one knows exactly the reason unless there is a further investigation.

Furthermore, for example, Korean is famous with *Kimchi*. It is fermented cabbage pickle with spicy taste. Japan also has a special food called *sushi*. It is made of rice and topped with raw fish and rolled in a dried seaweed. If Japanese is wellknown with the fresh food ingredients on the table, Koreans present the combination between raw and cooked ingredients. They also have different habit in selecting the ingredients, preparation and tradition (Brown and Brown, 2006). Through food, the countries are pretty famous nowadays. It makes people directly can guess whose food belongs to. It means *kimchi* and *sushi* are two nation identities which can promote the countries to the (Koike, 2014:166).

For a small city like Lubuklinggau, food and language can be the media to know how someone appreciates his culture as well as the language. Lubuklinggau is one of the municipalities in the province of South Sumatra and becomes a transit or meeting cities of various social, economic and cultural interests ([lubuklinggau.go.id](http://lubuklinggau.go.id)). *Col* language is native language which has become identity for origin society of Lubuklinggau. Lubuklinggau is a multiethnic city with many tribes who live in the place. They came from various regions such as, Javanese, Sundanese, Padang, Chinese, etc. The diversity has probably influenced the language, manner, customs, etc, as other local and foreign culture has blended in the city life. For this reason, the writer was interested to analyze language used by Padang, Javanese, and Lubuklinggau ethnics (three largest ethnics) in showing their identity towards food in Lubuklinggau.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the writer used descriptive qualitative research as research design. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This study discussed and analyzed how Padang, Javanese and Linggau Melayu ethnics used their language towards food that can show their identity in Lubuklinggau City.

The data had collected through *participation observation, recording, and note taking techniques* by Mahsun (2012: 93). After the data were collected, the writer classified based on the setting and ethnic of the informants. Next, the writer identified the utterance of informant's conversation that were spoken an ethnic identity. The last, the writer concluded the result of study. subject of the research were the informants of Padang, Javanese, and Lubuklinggau ethnics in Lubuklinggau city. According to Djajasudarma (2010: 21), the number of informants can be determined based on the research interests themselves. In this study, the informant was taken more than one from every ethnic. It is depending on the researcher needs. In this research the informants consist: 3 Informants of Padang, 7 informants of Javanese, and 6 informants of Lubuklinggau.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **1. Findings**

The findings of this study deal with the result of the data analyzed. The following data included the transcript of utterances on the conversation of informants. The findings are: 1) pride to the food as the part of culture, 2) promoting foods to describe some cultural events, and 3) identifying power through taste

#### **a. Pride to the Food as the Part of Culture**

Food is one of popular thing because it broadcasted through social media which is it come from various state. Indirectly, food becomes an important tradition in several events. This case made food as a distinctive feature in every ethnic. Indonesia is a country with multilingual community where every ethnic has several distinct foods as their symbol. In the multilingual and multiethnic community, the language speakers may show different ways in speaking or treating others depend on the situation or participants of the conversation.

In a setting with speakers from other background, a speaker tends to show that he/she exist in that situation. He/she attempts to attract other's attention by acting or saying something. In the case of food-talk, promoting the food can be one of the ways to attract other's attention and identify oneself as happen in the following situation.

### Situation 1

Nurul : *aku tu yang seneng,, ini ni seneng kalo makanan lauk nyo seneng jengkol*

I think I like,, I like this food but to side dish of food, I like Jengkol

Researcher: *uyy,,*

: really,,

Nurul : *tapi beda... agak beda kalo aku nengok jengkol wong jawo tu yo dibersihi dulu direndam, kalo ibu aku langsung goreng bae.*

: but it is different...it is bit different when I see Jengkol cuisine that cooked by Javanese, they cleaned and then soaked it, but my mother immediately fries it.

The situation above happened in a Padangnese girl house at dinner attended by the researcher and another Padangnese girl. The identity that showed in this conversation happened when Nurul said she loved *Jengkol* ‘*seneng jengkol*’. *Jengkol* is kind of special food loved by most Indonesian people. However, in this situation, this food was related to the special menu in Padang cuisine such as *rendang jengkol* or *jengkol balado* which are popular with spicy and spices ingredients. She was also proud of the food that was cooked by her mother than *jengkol* cooked by other poeple. It showed from utterance ‘*beda*’ (different) that means it was more special if her mother cooked it. She also demeaned food from another ethnic as it was stated in her utterance ‘*beda kalo aku nengok jengkol wong jawo tu*’, it means that *jengkol* from Javanese was less special than *jengkol* was cooked by her mother as a Padangnese.

Another situation showed a different expression by a Padangnese in saying her displeasure to native Lubuklinggau cuisine *caluk* (fermented shrimp paste).

### Situation 2

Nurul : *terasi... dak nian aku terasi mati lah aku dak alak muntah aku ...*

shrimp paste...I do not like shrimp paste swear I hate it, I am going to throw up when I eat it first time...

The utterance above was expressed to show that this Padangnese girl dislike a special food from Lubuklinggau/Sumatran society because of the taste. She was not familiar to the taste that she thought it was peculiar. She even threw up when she consumed it. The utterance used the word 'muntah' or throw up which can be a bit harsh to be heard by other ethnics. The food-talk which uttered the displeasure can be corresponds to the previous talk that she identified herself as a Padangnese who has delicious *Rendang* and dislike *caluk/terasi* which taste peculiar. In this case of food-talk her self-identification must contain a comparison to the good things from her background and the 'bad' things from other's background. Therefore, the identification is clearly emphasized through saying a good thing about you and not good thing about others.

### b. Promoting Foods to Describe Cultural Events

Essentially, food is a culture that was introduced in certain events from each country, city, ethnic or tribes. Thus, food is a form of ethnic identity. As mentioned previously, saying a menu may identify who the people are. The word *kimchi* identifies Korean, *Rendang* identifies Padangnese or Indonesian, *Pizza* identifies Italians, and so on.

Food names, frankly, may also refer to the certain events or situation in a cultural society. The certain events that found in the data there are 4 events that describe by the situational food. They are a family gathering, Mubarak day (religious), wedding celebration, and cultural ceremony.

#### Situation 3

Desi : *biasonyo kalo acara ngumpul-ngumpul cak itu ado, misal kayak lebaran kemaren kan misalnya ado ini cak wajik, getuk terus..... dominan manis kan biasonyo wong jawo kan, manis-manis cak itu, kayak kue jawo tu lah.*

Desi : usually if there is a gathering together like that, for example Mubarak yesterday there are foods like wajik, getuk .... The dominant sweet taste of the Javanese is usually, the food is sweet, such as the cake is Javanese

Desi is an Elementary school teacher in Lubuklinggau. She is a Javanese. In the conversation, she describes an event that her family always do. This utterance describes that *wajik* and *getuk* are situational food in certain event. In the excerpt, Desi stated when her family is gathering, it is a certain event which is the food of *wajik* and *getuk* are made and served. When she said "*acara ngumpul-ngumpul*", it proved that *wajik* and *getuk* are some of situational food from Javanese that served in family gathering. And then the expression of "*manis-manis cak itu*" stated

that there are many other foods with sweet taste that can be used as situational food in certain event.

Another food-talk identification happened to describe religious event of *Idul Fitri* or Mubarak day. It identifies the belief of certain culture. In this case, Amel as a moslem Padangnese girl usually celebrate the Mubarak day by serving the special food which identical with her ethnic.

#### Situation 4

Researcher : *ado ketan kau tok dirumah?*

: is there sticky rice in your house, tok?

Amel : *ado tapi lak abis. Ama aku galak buat ketan pake tape ketan hitam tu biasanya kalo lebaran.*

: there is it, but it is gone. My mom usually makes sticky rice with black sticky tape if Mubarak event

The habit in Padangnese family in celebrating a holy Mubarak day is by cooking and serving black sticky rice prepared by the women. In this case, Amel's grandmother is as someone who considered being a more experience cook in producing the special food.

The third event which identified by the food-talk is the wedding celebration. One of the informant is Desi, a Javanese woman.

#### Situation 5

Desi : *kalo acara nikahan tu banyak sebenarnya cuman yang lebih... kan milih kito yang nak apo be biasanya ado yang kayak gado-gado, bacem tempe dominan kayak gitu. Terus .*

: if on the wedding event there are many choices of food, we are free to choose anything ... but like gado-gado, tempe bacem is the most dominant.

She describes that *gado-gado* (tasty Javanese salad) and *bacem tempe* (sweetened tempe) are identical food that must be exist in a Javanese cultural ceremony including wedding ceremony and 7 month pregnancy ceremony as mentioned in situation 6 bellow.

### Situation 6

- Desi : *sebenarnya urap tu lebih cocok kan kayak 7 bulan, misal dio tu kan gek ado acara kayak tuker ni nah apo tu misal pake kain cocok apo idak gek misalno dio jual urap terus ado rujak nyo ado adatnyo nian ado acaranyo*  
: actually urap is more suitable cooked in a 7 month pregnant event such as the exchange of cloth is suitable or not, for example they sell urap there is also rujak. It's custom like that event.
- Researcher : *oh berarti itu adat yo nasi urap tu yo*  
: oh so it is the custom, the rice of urap right
- Desi : *he'e pake cak itu. Buat namo jugo misal abis lahiran kan buat namo bagi-bagi nasi samo tetanggo ado urap nyo ado teloknya kan cak itu.*  
: yes right, like that. To give the name when the baby was born is also sharing rice with neighbors and there is urap also the egg.

Another identical food in a Javanese cultural ceremony is *urap* (Javanese salad with coconut dressing). However, other ethnics also mention about their own identical food from their ethnic such as *Rendang* from Padang and *tempoyak* from Lubuklinggau.

### c. Identifying Power through Taste

Food usually has a variety of flavors that are typical to certain ethnic. The taste in certain ethnic cuisine that exists depends on the circumstances, situation and culture of origin. For example Javanese is identical to sweet and less spices food. On the contrary, spicy taste is identical to cuisine of Padang and Lubuklinggau ethnics (Sumatrans). Based on the data, the researcher found sweet taste with inferior power and spicy taste with superior power as quoted in situation 7 as follow.

### Situation 7

The conversation happened between Yulia and Hera as native Lubuklinggau:

- Yulia : *e'e ku dak seneng tu banyak, Itu tu yo banyak ini nyo banyak kecap nyo manis jadi kito kurang mie jawo*

- Yulia : yeah, I did not like it, that is a lot of soy sauce and it very sweet, so we do not prefer chicken noodle of Javanese
- Hera : *he'e enek minyak nyo terlalu banyak.*
- Hera : yes, nauseated taste because a lot of the oil

Yulia stated that she disliked food with more soya bean sauce. It came from the utterance *banyak kecap manis* (more soya bean sauce). It means that she hate sweet food. In this excerpt she also showed the inferior statement about sweet food which identical with Javanese ethnic. From the utterance *mie jawo* or Javanese noodle, it means food identically cooked by Javanese and it became inferior power in other ethnic assumption. Another example is presented in situation 8 bellow.

### Situation 8

In the other ethnic data, the spicy taste with superior power is also stated by Lubuklinggau informant. The utterance such as in the below:

- Peneliti : *apakah kamu suka makanan yang tidak pedas?*
- Researcher : do you like food that is not spicy?
- Lessi : *gak teman itu seperti **hambar gak pedas***
- Lessi : no, friend. It is bland taste if not spicy
- Peneliti : *makanan kamu pedas semua ya?*
- Researcher : is all of your food spicy?
- Lessi : *iya **gak ada cabe tu gak enak***
- Lessi : yes if there is no chili, it is not tasty

In the utterance, the researcher gave a question to informant about spicy taste, whether she likes the food without the spicy taste. Lessi as the informant said "*hambar gak pedas*", it means all of the food is tasteless if there is no spicy taste. Her statement showed that spicy taste is the taste that often she eats. This is a proud statement toward spicy taste on foods. She also stated "*gak ada cabe tu gak enak*", it gave symbol that chilli with spicy taste has superiority power. She stated and emphasized the word 'spicy' because she wanted to be acceptable as she was better in a certain case from others.



## 2. Discussions

Food has many symbolic meanings; it not only expresses but also establishes the relationship between people and their environment (Ma, 2015). Food in this study functions as subject to show identity based on ethnicity because according to Stajcic (2013) food is also an identity of a nation. It means that food is a marker of each ethnic.

Each group in the society has an identity which distinguishes them from other groups. That is, the people's way of life, set of beliefs and customs. One aspect of other cultural heritage or tradition is the type of food and plants they cultivate for their consumption (Ayoenomi, 2011: 50). It described that every ethnicity will protect their ethnic identity from other culture. For example, they gave the name of food with native language to defend their identity. Szatrowski (2014: 13) argued that "their use of loanwords as demarcation/ (negative) evaluation strategy to distance themselves from foreign food reinforced their food identity". This reason is also showed by Padang ethnic that living in Lubuklinggau. They were praising their food to defend their food identity. It happened in conversation when nurul said "*seneng jengkol*" which is it showed *jengkol* cuisine that often found in Padang society that usually people knew as *jengkol balado* as distinctive food of Padang. Praising their own food is a form of protection for their food by showing their identity through food talk.

Similar attitude was also presented by two African tribes Wolof and Eegima in Szatrowski's research (2014:13). Their use of loanwords as demarcation/ (negative) evaluation strategy to distance themselves from foreign food reinforced their food identity. This reason is also showed by Padang ethnic that living in Lubuklinggau. They were praising their food to defend their food identity.

Food is a language we use to convey to others and to ourselves who we are. This has also been shown by Javanese ethics. In the data of Javanese conversation, the researcher also found the praising toward their food by mentioning *urap*, *tempe bacem*, and other sweet food. Moreover, according to Szatrowski (2014: 12), Japanese speakers co-created concepts related to familiar food to reinforce their shared identity, and shared and blended individual perceptions and experiences eating similar foods at personal/ social events to consolidate their group identity. It means that to protect their identity is not just praising their food but also demeaning other food. Demeaning food from other ethnic groups is a way to show their ethnic identity. As found in the result that native Lubuklinggau express their dislike to Javanese food *mi ayam Jawa* (Javanese chicken noodle) because of the ingredients. In contrast, Javanese stated that they dislike *tempoyak* (fermented durian sauce) because it smells rotten. In this situation, the two ethnics attempted to identify themselves in the conversation because they wanted to be seen. Therefore, the inferior or ironic

statements were expressed on purposes. However, this attitude is good for maintaining the language and culture because of the positive attitude toward their own culture.

In second result of finding, the researcher found that the speakers identified themselves by mentioning and describing certain foods which correspond to certain events. When someone thinks of, or mentions the food, the first thing that usually comes to mind is: where does it come from and how does it taste, and what is the story behind it? Giving the answers to these questions, people usually refer to the cultural context (Stajcic, 2013). Thus, people used food to identify certain events that are usually happening in their culture. Stajcic (2013) stated “food is also an identity of a nation”. This made each cuisine show its ethnic identity, it is also can show through its taste, like ethnic Javanese in Indonesia The situational food is showed by Desi. She said that there are some distinctive snacks of Javanese that serve in the event when their family is gathering. She stated “*acara ngumpul-ngumpul*” means that when their families sit together in certain situation. She added her utterance with stated “*wajik, getuk*” as situational food which is often served when the event of family gathering. It is also supported by Almarico’s explanation about Spain culture that the entire family gathers together to eat pasta and enjoy each other’s company at nana’s (grandmother’s) house (Almarico, 2014: 5). This situation represents a warm and intimate relationship among the family members while enjoying foods. Therefore, the food description indirectly can present the habit and the relationship among people.

On the other hands, food is at the center of every important event in our lives, such as birthdays, weddings, holidays and funerals. Within ritual contexts, food often ‘Stands in’ for expressions of life, love, happiness or grief (Stajcic, 2013: 13). According to Kwon (2017: 1), “every ethnic group around the world has their own traditional ethnic foods, with unique and distinctive flavors and tastes”. A speaker can share his/her experience to others about certain events such as religious event (Mubarak Day), and cultural events (wedding, pregnancy ceremony, family gathering) through the food they consume. Trying to promote her/his culture or habit to others who are considered to be outsiders, someone is usually mentioning and describing the food in certain important events in their cultural and religious background. However, there is a pride reflected in the food-talk. Moreover, it can also become the way to strengthen the social bound among the speakers from different ethnic background in ones speech event.

Furthermore, nowadays, interest in these traditional tastes is growing. Every food that is cooked will produce a variety of flavors. Each cuisine made several distinctive taste depending on the conditions, traditions, and regional culture that created by them. It is also showed in other data from Lubuklinggau conversation, the researcher found that when a native Lubuklinggau informant stated “*dak seneng*” or dislike a food. From the utterance “*mie jawo*” means a pretty sweet noodle.

So she did not really praise the chicken noodles that made by the Javanese. This showed that the sweet taste is very inclined towards Javanese ethnicity and also has an inferiority power in her perspective. Spicy food is also has superiority power for Lubuklinggau ethnic in Lubuklinggau city. Ma, Song, Sun, & For instance, Lessi said "*hambar gak pedas*" that proved the spicy taste has important role of each taste of food. It is similar to Kwon's statement that 'taste' is a key factor when we choose what to eat (Kwon, 2017). It showed that Lessi is better to choose the food that contained chili with spicy taste. It proved when she stated that the food with no chili is tasteless. This is also showed the superiority power of spicy taste in Lubuklinggau ethnic.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

What you eat is what your are. The statement has become the foundation in this research. The description of certain food in form of food-talk can mark someone's identity. In the case of ethnicity and food-talk, there are three forms of identification such as 1) pride to the food as the part of culture, 2) promoting foods to describe some cultural events and 3) identifying power through taste. Each ethnic tries to describe their ethnic background through the special food identically from their ethnics. The food is related to the pride, cultural events and the power. It happens because their existence wants to be accepted by others and shows that they are better than others. The result presents a positive attitude toward a local or regional culture as well as language use that the informants are proud as ethnic members.

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