

Environmental Messages as Found in Indonesian Folklore and Its Relation to Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract

Folklore is rich of values derived from local wisdom and local cultures. Certain folklores deliver narrative to respect and protect nature, either presented literally or symbolically. This study is aimed at identifying and describing Indonesian folklores which contain environmental messages, and investigating the English teachers' perception of Secondary Schools about the use of Indonesian folklores for their teaching language skills. The study uses qualitative approach focused on content analysis by using mainly documentation instrument. To deepen the analysis, the interview was used to find out whether these folklores are applicable and appropriate for foreign language classes. The result shows that there are 17 Indonesian folklores that present environmental messages either implicitly or explicitly. The messages found in the folklores are firstly, catastrophe happens because of human's greed and misconducts to nature, and secondly it is human himself who can prevent the disaster to happen. Used in foreign language classes, folklore can help the teacher to train the students' language and communication skills in reading, speaking and writing, at the same time it helps them to build awareness to the protection for the environment, enrich the cultural literacy, cultivate respectful behavior, and train their critical thinking ability.

Keywords: EFL Teachers' perceptions, Environmental messages, Foreign language teaching, Indonesian folklore

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Introduction

Nowadays, the exploration of natural resources and industrial development in the field of economics often lead to environmental damage. The anthropocentric behaviour which is said to be on the behalf the welfare proved to be unfavourable for the environment. The natural disaster, just to name a few, such as flood, draught, famine, and extreme weather condition, are not uncommon as they are shown almost every day on mass media. Indonesia, a nation which is rich in cultures, ethnicities and natural resources, lies in the equator surrounded by the ring of fire. The natural disaster caused by the evolution of nature, such as earth quakes and volcano eruptions have become 'friends ' for Indonesian people. However, when natural disasters are caused by human interference, the occurrences become unpredictable and unanticipated. The damage may deliver broader impacts not only to people but also to other ecological life.

To prevent this from happening, there should be real and integrated actions between the government and the community to raise awareness of the danger of human misconducts toward nature, to lessen the impact of the disaster if it occurs , and to build optimism to maintain life in sustainable manner. One way for doing this is through education. Education enables younger generation to be the agent of change. Through education, the young generation learns the value of respect and love , and learn that they should live side by side with their environment, and make them aware that they need nature to sustain life.

The responsibility for taking participation in environmental protection belongs not only to the government, environmentalists, scientists, and human right activists, but to language teachers as well. Cates (1990) believes that language teachers have at least two reasons of why they should care about global problems. The first reason is ethical reason, and the second reason is personal reason. He argues that the profession of being language teacher has moral responsibility for society to apply his specialty for taking participation in solving world problems. He strongly believes that it is not right for language teachers to focus only on their teaching of language and communication skills, but ignore the global problems that lay ahead. Therefore, incorporating global issues , such as environmental awareness , in language classes is strongly suggested because, after all, these issues are content-based and theme-based (Cates, 1990; Gursoy, 2010; Gursoy & Saglam, 2011).

As suggested by Cates (1990), the incorporation of global issues in language classes can take many forms, such as through the teaching methodology, course design, activities outside the classroom, and teaching materials. A type of instructional material which is rich in life values is folklore that includes legend, myths, and tales. Folklore is basically an oral tradition passed down from generation to generation that is rich in lessons of wisdom. It also offers, initiates, stimulates, and even mobilizes certain values of life . The moral values found in) folklores can be in the form of individual morality, social morality, moral divinity, and nature morality (Sukmawan, 2016). He further states that in relation to nature morality, folklore teaches that human being must seek balanced life with nature, in which human should make adjustment to the environment in a good and right way and consider nature as a source of life. The use of folklore as instructional materials can contribute to the shaping of sensitive mentality of young generation, not only to appreciate life but also to the efforts of rescuing and preserving the environment as well as triggering awareness of the potential catastrophe caused by human ignorance to the environment (Sukmawan, 2016).

Indonesia, as an archipelago nation, has thousands of folklores belongs to hundreds of tribes living in the islands. These folklores, if all are documented properly, can become valuable teaching resources for foreign language classes oriented to local culture and local wisdom. In its position as a literary work, Indonesian folklore has a set of literary characteristics and has a potential to be the object of literary criticism. In its function as a medium of representation attitude, outlook, and the public response to the surrounding environment, the Indonesian folklore potentially brings the idea of the environment, including the values of environmental wisdom. This is reasonable since Indonesian folklore developed and sourced from their natural environment.

Folklore as literary works benefits language learners in many ways. It enriches the students' competence in linguistics and cultural awareness as well as introducing the students with real life context and triggering their personal involvement (Floris, 2004). Floris (2004) further argues that literature has its richness to be used in EFL classroom. Similarly, Rahimi (2014) also says that literature has an important role in helping the students to achieve its best. In addition, Babae & Yahya (2014) confirm that literature is an influential tool in foreign language teaching.

In relation to the research on the use of literature in language teaching, some researchers are interested to find out how literary work benefits learners. Setyowati (2016) analyzes the students' ability to write essays by using literary works. The result shows that many students are able to state their thesis in the introduction, although they are not able to develop their essay based on the thesis. Other finding also shows that only twenty five percent of the students that are able to restate their thesis in the conclusion and two thirds of them produce less than 250 words essay. Fabusuyi (2014) conducted a study focusing on the use of folktales for teaching German. He concludes that the use of folktales in foreign language classroom are practical and effective since they serve not only as authentic materials for language teaching, but also provide the cultural awareness and the value of appreciation for other individuals.

Unfortunately, not many researchers work in the area of environmental literature which focused on Indonesian folklore. However, few still can be found. Firstly, Sukmawan (2014) investigates the verbal folklore used by Arjuna Slope people in East Java. He finds out that the verbal folklore used by the community contains many apocalyptic ideas which are identifiable from the story of the giving names of certain places in the area, such as the name of the village, and the the name of the sacred sites in the region. Secondly, a study conducted by Kaltsum & Utami (2015) who explore the type of Indonesian folklore appropriates for teaching English to young learners. They use Javanese and Sumatran folklore under study and investigate the intrinsic elements of the folklore. The result of the research shows that *Lake Toba*, *Roro Jonggrang*, *Timun Mas*, *Malin Kundang*, and *Ande - Ande Lumut* are the folklores appropriate for young learners development since they contain religious, individual, and social values.

In relation to language teaching, the previous studies only see the use of folklore from the point of view of the students and in how folklore benefits them. Moreover, the previous researcher also only explores the values dealing with human to human relationship and human and self relationship. In this present research, the folklores studied are those that revolve around the origins of a place or the name of a particular area, such as mountains, lakes, swamps, water

spring, and hills. Nurcahyo (2014: 17-18) states that these sort of folklores are included in the geo-culture or geo-mythology because they attempt to associate the relevance of culture, myths, legends, folklore of an area with geological events. Within Indonesian context, there are many folklores featuring disastrous events caused by human behavior. A type of folklore that display the events of destruction of nature implicitly or explicitly can be called as apocalyptic literature (Thompson, 1997; Garrard, 2004). This present study, therefore, is aimed at investigating the Indonesian folklores that deliver environmental values either literally or symbolically, and how the English teachers perceive the use of folklore in their language classes.

Method

This research uses qualitative content analysis design as it attempts to describe objectively the apocalyptic literature represented by Indonesian folklore. The procedure of the research is to analyze the text content that results in descriptive data, that is in the form of words and sentences. The instrument used to analyze the data is mainly documentation. The researchers documented Indonesian folklore published in the collection of Indonesian folklore books. The data collection of the folklore took place in December 2016, and January 2017 for the interview. There were 60 Indonesian folklores from 16 Indonesian provinces. These narratives were published by Skylar Books entitled *Dongeng dan Cerita Rakyat Nusantara* written by Siregar in 2015 and published by Pustaka Agung Harapan Surabaya, entitled *Kumpulan Dongeng Binatang* written by Ikranegara (In press). The researchers synthesized Thompson (1997) and Garrard (2004) ideas to set up the indicators of apocalyptic literature, a type of literature that features environmental disaster. Simple codification was used to ease the researchers to analyze the data. Based on the list of indicators, the Indonesian folklores categorized in the apocalyptic literature were reduced into 17 folklore appropriate with the indicators.

To answer the research problem in relation to whether the folklore is relevant to be used for teaching foreign language, the researchers used interview. The researchers interviewed the English teachers in secondary school in Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia. There were six English teachers interviewed by the researchers by using semi guided interview. The questions on the interview ranges of whether the teachers have applied Indonesian folklore in their teaching of language skills, the reasons why they chose the story, its relation to environmental issue, the advantages of using them for language classes, and how they used them. Simple codification was used to analyze the data of the interview.

Finding and Discussion

Indonesian Folklore with Environmental Messages

Based on the theory of Apocalyptic literature, it was found that there are 17 folklores that fulfill the criteria. The criteria of apocalyptic literature are synthesized from Thompson (2007) and Garrard (2004). Two stands out characteristics of this type of literature are firstly, the narrative has a crisis because the world is in catastrophe as a result of the destruction of nature in which the damage cannot be reversed and secondly, the story tells about the end of the world with the basic theme is the fight between the good and the evil.

Human Causes

Based on the data, the environmental messages found in folklores are classified into two, namely the cause and the prevention. Firstly, natural disaster can happen because of human's

greed, rage, stubbornness, and disobedience. There are 12 Indonesian folklores belong to this group. They are the folklores that come from North Sumatra (*The Origins of Lake Toba, Samosir Hill*), West Sumatra (*The Origin of Maninjau Island, Malin Kundang*), Riau (*The Legend of Senua Island, The Origin of Dumai*), Jambi (*The Origin of Negeri Lempur*), Bengkulu (*The Origin of Tes Lake, The Legend of Balai Stone*), West Java (*Sangkuriang, The origin of Cianjur*), and Bali (*Calon Arang*). In other words, the disaster happens because it is 'encouraged' by the character.

One of the examples of the narratives is *The Origin of Tes Lake* from Bengkulu. The story tells about a powerful man, named *The Bitter Tongue* who cut down trees in the forest to make paddy field. He threw away all the soil he shoveled to the river every day.

The Bitter Tongue started his job by cutting down the trees with his axe and cleared the bush with a machete. After that, he was soon plowing the vacant land, and threw the soil into *Air Ketahuan River*. (HC/*The Origin of Tes Lake*, p.50)

In the narrative, he had been reminded by the people and the elder of the *Kutei Donok Village* not to cut down the trees too many and not to throw the soil to the river because it would clog the stream and could drown the village. But he was so stubborn and ignorant because of his ambition to planting paddy as much as he can. In the end, the piling soil formed an island that stopped the flow of the river. Then the overflow water drowned the entire village.

The story of *Tes Lake* shows a clear message that excessive land conversion became the beginning of the emergence of environmental disaster. The human greed of wanting more have caused problems not only for himself, but also for other people. Human behavior becomes the central node of all mischief on the earth, including environmental damage.

The example of the narrative which symbolically deliver environmental message is the story of *Malin Kundang* from North Sumatra. This folklore is so famous that almost every Indonesian and Malayan are familiar with it. The story tells about a boy named *Malin Kundang* who lived with his old mother. They lived poorly until one day *Malin Kundang* decided to go on a sail, and saw a merchant's ship raided by a small band of pirates. He helped the merchant and defeated the pirates. As a sign of a thankfulness, the merchant asked *Malin Kundang* to sail with him. Years passed, and *Malin Kundang* became the merchant himself, had a beautiful wife, and a good life. One day, his ship anchored in his village. People recognized him and told *Malin's* mother. The poor lady went to see *Malin Kundang* because she missed him. But *Malin* denied her because he was ashamed of his old, poor and ugly mother. He expelled his mother from his ship and set a sail.

Malin pushed his mother and denied her. *Malin's* mother was very sad. She cried and prayed to God to turned his son into a stone. Thunderstorm came and the sea became angry. The huge wave wrecked and drowned the ship with all people in it, but it threw *Malin Kundang* away to an island. There, he turned into a stone. (HC/*Malin Kundang*, p.19)

In Indonesia, the figure of a mother is highly respected. The Indonesians called their home (country) as *Ibu Pertiwi* or the motherland. The values of respectfulness to a mother come

from Islamic teachings and cultural norms . Therefore, since in early childhood, kids are taught to respect their parents, especially their mother, and were forbidden to speak loud to them . For Minangkau people in North Sumatra, it is believed that God will get angry if the son/daughter makes the mother angry (Yusriwal , 2014). Reading at a glance, this story seems to have nothing to do with environmental messages. But, the world of literature works with symbols. Plant (1980) asserts that women have long been associated with nature because women and nature share many similar characteristics, such as having the traits of sensitivity , *submissiveness*, a giver and supporter of life in which both have two faces, one, submissive and nurturing; the other " wild and uncontrollable " as was the storms, droughts, earthquakes, hurricane, and other natural disasters.

If the narrative is analyzed further, Malin's mother can be symbolized as the motherland. When Malin treated his mother badly, nature became angry and disaster happened. The sea drowned his ship with every innocent person on board. In reality, that would happen if human treats the nature badly. The act of a person that damages the environment would affect other people . Those who are innocent would also suffer from one's misconducts.

Human Prevents

Secondly, the natural disasters are prevented from spreading wider because human has intention to stop the catastrophe . Some Indonesian folklores have a hero/heroine character that becomes the savior of others by defeating the evil and prevent disaster because he/she has power to do so. The folklores that belong to this category are *The Legend of Timun Mas and Ajisaka* (Central Java), *Si Kelingking* (Jambi), *The Legend of Bali Strait* (Bali), *The Legend of Gading Cempaka Princess* (Bengkulu), *Beru Dayang* (North Sumatra).

One of the example of the narrative in the second category is *Beru Dayang*, a folklore from North Sumatra. The folklore tells about an extreme drought and a famine that endanger human life. Two children found a strange plant which was the incarnation of *Beru Dayang*, a child who died of hunger. A voice told the king to plant the seeds and to take care of it to end the disaster. From the story, it can be seen that the value was transferred to the reader to always take care of the nature so that the same crisis would not repeat itself.

When the King and the people gathered around to see the fruit, suddenly a voice from the sky was heard, saying that the fruit was the incarnation of a boy, named *Beru Dayang*. The voice ordered the people to plant the seed of the fruit and to take care of it very carefully. ...If the request was carried out, the people would never starve. (HP/*Beru Dayang*, p.8).

Other well-known folklore in Indonesian context is the tale of *Timun Mas* or the Golden Cucumber from Central Java. The story is about an old widow who wanted to have a child. She prayed and a giant heard it . The giant had her magical cucumber seeds and said that a baby would come out from the cucumber. In the deal, the giant said that he would eat the child if it was a girl, but he would let the child alive if it was a boy. It turned out that the baby was a girl and she grew up into a beautiful one. She was named *Timun Mas* (The Golden Cucumber). The giant came to the widow's hut to eat the girl, but the widow asked *Timun Mas* to run away before the giant arrived at their hut.

"Timun Mas, I'm happier of you go. The giant will eat you alive if you stay. Here, take these with you. Use these whenever you are in danger."

The old widow gave *Timun Mas* some magical stuffs; cucumber seeds, needles, salt, and shrimp paste. (HP/*Timun Mas*, p.109)

In the narrative, it was told that whenever the giant almost caught her, *Timun Mas* threw each of the magical stuff. The cucumber seeds became a wide cucumber field, the needles became the bamboo forest, the salt became the sea and the shrimp paste became a quicksand. In the end, the giant was tired chasing, and drowned in the ocean of quicksand. This folklore is a survival narrative and full of symbolisms. The giant is the symbol of disaster, and the magical stuffs brought by *Timun Mas* are symbols of nature. When human befriended with nature, the disaster can be prevented if not minimized.

The environmental messages delivered by folklores either explicitly or implicitly show the importance of treating nature appropriately or maintain balanced relationship. Folklore which contains the beliefs system can help human to have decent attitudes to the environment that can play an important role in conservation practices (Schmonskey, 2012). Disaster happens because of two things. Firstly, it happens because of a change in natural phenomenon (natural disaster), and secondly because man made them as a result of human negligence (man-made disaster) (Adams, 2011). The man-made disaster, such as forest fires, draught, floods, and global warming are the natural response of the mother land because human should take responsibility for their actions. The only one that can prevent the man-made disaster is human himself by living in harmony with nature and start realizing that whatever human does to the environment, whether it is destructive or inventive, will affect other biological life.

The Relevance of Folklores in Language Classes

Six English teachers were interviewed by the researchers to find out their opinion of the relevance to using folklore in teaching English. The result shows that all of the teachers agree that the use of Indonesian folklores can be used to teach English especially for narrative genre.

" I think folklore can be used for teaching narrative . Yes, it's good because the students can appreciate their own culture " (Dt 1/Di/Q1)

" Sure can . Folklores are included in narrative text which have to be taught to the secondary level students ." (Dt2/Id/Q1)

" Yes Sure . Myth and legend are in the form of narrative . I think they are folklore too. I use it for writing materials ." (Dt 3/Ba/Q1)

When the teachers were asked how they applied folklore in their teaching to teach particular skills , they came up with different answers .

" I use folklore for teaching narrative reading . The students are familiar with the story , only that it is written in different language. " . (Dt 1/Di/Q2)

" I use Indonesian folklore for narrative speakin . In my class the students do retelling stories . I often use Malin Kundang, a folklore from West Sumatra. Well, sometimes I use Western folklore as well .". (Dt 4/An/Q2)

" I use folklore usually for writing skill ." (Dt 3/Ba/Q2)

For speaking activity, folklore can be presented only in pictures without words. The students tell the series of events illustrated with the series of pictures and retell them . Research shows that the use of Indonesian folklore pictures series can enhance the students' speaking ability in narrative text (Mirza , 2014). In her research, the students were given a set of picture series of Indonesian folklore, then they were asked to retell them.

The researchers also asked the teachers why they choose to use folklores in their classes. Most of them said that Indonesian folklores are rich in_moral values and cultural values. Furthermore, some of the folklores are rich in symbols that represent nature.

" Indonesian folklores are good for the students. They will not only learn the language, but also the moral value of the story . They should not forget themselves as being Indonesians, the root and the culture . Folklore can help them to preserve their identities ." (Dt 5/Id/Q3)

" Some Indonesian folklores talk about nature . We need environmental literature especially these days , when the issues of environmental problems are widely talked . We need to recall a type of literature that talks about environment so that the students can learn the value of being friendly with the nature ." (Dt 3/Ba/Q3)

" The students will be familiar with their own culture, and they will not feel being a stranger in their own community . Folklores give a lot of moral values, values to other people and values to the environment ." (Dt 4/An/Q3)

" I think the students will not only learn the language, but also the cultural and moral value found in the story . They can also appreciate their environment better if the folklores talk about environmental issues ." (Dt6/It/Q3)

The answer of the respondents shows that they are aware of the responsibilities to make the students appreciative to their own culture and identity, as well as aware of the environmental problems. This is line as suggested by Cates (1990), that teachers have moral and personal responsibilities to_solve global issues. As teaching materials folklore is rich in cultural values and some are rich in environmental values. Magliocco (1992) states that folklore is an ideal instruments for bridging the linguistics aspects and culture. She further states that the use of folklore in language teaching can broaden not only the language competence but also values, history, and other world issues knowledge.

Some teachers gave information how they used folklores in their language classes. The instruction used by teachers was a step by step procedure before they finally came to the targeted skill.

" This is how I do it. I give them the pictures related to the folklore, then I ask them to read the story. Then we discuss the structure before the students retell the story in their own words " (Dt 4/An/Q4)

" For teaching narrative readin , I often use folklore. But I use pictures to help students understand the story. I use picture series." (Dt1/Di/Q4)

"First, give students the model text, then we discuss its generic structure. The students are stimulated to mention other folklore they are familiar with. After that, they are instructed to make the narrative text in paragraphs." (Dt3/Ba/Q4)

The use of folklore in language class may utilize pictures as instructional aids. The use of picture series for narrative is considered appropriate because pictures series help the students to understand the events occur in the story better. Research has shown that the use of picture series can improve the students ' ability in narrative writing (Gutierrez, Puello & Garvis, 2015), in narrative reading (Fitriyaningsih, Sutarsyah, & Simanjuntak, 2013), and in narrative speaking (Windihastuti , 2013). The teacher also presents the model text before asking the students to write by using folklore. Through the use of model text, the students can identify the structure of genre and model it for their production. Setyowati & Widiati (2014) state that presenting the students with the model text is helpful for the student not only to get the idea of how the text is constructed that is the orientation, conflicts, and resolution, but also the diction, tenses, and phrases to connect the events . It can be concluded that to make folklore is effectively used in foreign language classes, the teacher should help the students with instructional aids, such as picture series, and present the model text before asking the students to produce one.

Conclusion

Folklores are rich of values. They are derived from the beliefs system of a particular community and region. Folklores help human to act accordingly with their surrounding preserving their culture and nature. In Indonesia, there are particular folklores which present environmental messages either literally, or symbolically. Some folklores use feminim word, such as mother to symbolize nature (earth). There are two messages brought by the folklore in the study, namely, human is basically the cause of the disaster because of the negligence and wrong treatment to nature, and human himself who can stop, or at least minimize, the disaster. The man-made dissaster can be stopped only if human lives side by side with nature, respect it, and use the resources accordingly, setting aside the basic human trait, that is greed and arrogance.

The folklore with ecological messages can be used for teaching language skills as a type of instructional materials. These folklores can cultivate a character to love, respect, and protect nature within individuals as well as sharpen their cultural literacy. To be used effectively in foreign language classes, the teachers need to use instructional media and present a step by step instruction to enable the learners maximize their communication skills.

This research however, has some limitations. This research does not cover in what way folklore benefits learners either in receptive skills or productive skills. The information whether folklore with ecological messages is able to increase the students environmental awareness as reflected on their language performance also remains unknown. Therefore, future researchers are

suggested to investigate those areas to have better understanding how folklores indeed help learners in learning and acquiring the foreign language.

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