

THE TORCH WAR TRADITION AS A MEDIA OF INTRODUCING LOCAL WISDOM FOR BIPA STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Torch War, as part of the Jepara culture, is a traditional ceremony held in the village of Tegalsambi, Tahunan, Jepara. Through cultural-based BIPA learning media, foreign students who learn Indonesia is expected to be closer to know about multiculturalism in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method through an anthropolinguistic approach to examine the culture and history of the Torch War as its object through an interview process through engaging, skilled, recorded and note-taking techniques. The result of the study found that through cultural portraits, BIPA students have insight into the culture and beliefs of the Javanese people, especially the people of Tegalsambi Village, Jepara through meaning of symbols used in Torch War ceremony. The offerings used in Torch War ceremony symbolized were buffalo head, Sega Golong, Tumpeng kuning, Kupat, or ketupat, Dekem or Inkung Ayam, Bubur abang Putih, Arang-arang Kambang, Jajan Pasar, Pisang Raja (Plantains), and Kembang. The sparks from the torch and symbols used in offerings are believed to avert harm and bring health. The symbols used in offering, BIPA students engages deeper existing local heritages and appreciating it as Indonesia's national wealth through values, such as tolerance, affection, mutual cooperation, andhap ashor, humanity, respect, etc.

Keywords: Torch War; Literature; Culture; BIPA; Diversity; Anthropolinguistics

BIPA has invited a number of foreign speakers to study Indonesian language since it was applied as lingua franca in and has developed to the present in the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program, especially in higher education (Irwan, Atmazaki, Indriyani, & A, 2020). Its existence in International scene is proven that many universities in Asian and European apply Indonesian language as a compulsory subject and an elective courses in America and Australia as well as some European and Asian. The position of Indonesian, according to Sudibyo from the UGM Indonesian Culture and Language Learning Service (Inculs), is in a strategic position as the spearhead of cultural diplomacy (Sucahyo, 2019).

This spirit has appeared since 1945 before the year of Indonesian independence. This is illustrated in the Indonesian Cultural Congress (KKI/Kongres Kebudayaan Indonesia) since the colonial period in 1909, the independence period in 1960 5 times, and during the reign of President Soeharto and the reforms in 1991, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018 (Purwantari, 2019). The cultural strategic agenda and resolutions are discussed in each congress considering the fading of the treasures of tradition in the wave of modernity.

For speakers of foreign languages, Indonesian is the easiest language to learn (Sari, Utama, & Utama, 2016) (Kusmiatun, 2018). In terms of pronunciation, Indonesian does not use

emphasis or tone. Besides, the reason for why Indonesian becomes a learning reference for foreigners is that they have a high desire to know and learn about Indonesian culture. Not only Indonesian culture, Indonesian culinary with its very strong spices has been worldwide. Celebrity chef from England Jamie Oliver elevates Indonesian culinary in his cooking with a modern appearance without changing the taste of authentic Indonesian cuisine (Agmasari, 2018). Various universities even opened Indonesian Language departments, and the University of Naples in Italy opened Indonesian Literature majors (Assidiq, 2018).

Learning Indonesian culture for foreign speakers is an integral part of the language of society to increase BIPA students' understanding of Indonesian based on local wisdom (Kariadi & Riyanton, 2020). Culture is an important part of the success of teaching BIPA (Kusmiatun, 2018). Knowledge of local wisdom can be found in folklore, proverbs, songs, folk games, tourism, and so on. Local wisdom contained in folklore can be used as a medium of cultural introduction for BIPA students (Yolferi, 2018). Local wisdom is important to be inserted in BIPA material since it provides insight, skills, and attitudes to learning in order to have knowledge of the surrounding environment and the needs of society in accordance with the norms so that the effective learning contextually gives opportunities for BIPA students to be able to solve problems faced (Anggraeni & Ratnaningsih, 2020).

Local wisdom is formed as a cultural advantage owned by the local community in the form of ancestral heritage which is believed to have basic values of life and is passed down from generation to generation. This is where the strategic role of local wisdom in building the nation's civilization is in line with the norms of life based on Pancasila and this exists in the international sphere (Fitrian & Septiyani, 2021). As a part of KKI (*Komunitas Konservasi Indonesia*) 2018 that provide space for a diversity of cultural expressions, Jepara includes in an inclusive manner encouraging interaction to strengthen culture, protecting traditional cultural practices, significantly developing cultural wealth to strengthen Indonesia's position in the international arena, utilizing objects of cultural progress to improve people's welfare, advancing culture, institutional reform and cultural budgeting to support the cultural promotion agenda, and increase the government's role as a

facilitator for the promotion of culture (Disbuddki, 2019). As a cultural wealth possessed by Indonesia especially Jepara regency, the Torch War must be preserved through ceremonial conducted every year in Dzulhijjah month by people in Tegalsambil in order to obtain God's blessing and continue the cultural heritage of the ancestors.

Torch War, one of local wisdom in Jepara, as an aspect of local culture can be used as BIPA material for student creativity in raising the diversity of local Indonesian culture (Amin, 2021). This study uses a qualitative descriptive with Antropolinguistic theory approach both culture and language. This research has never been done before, but research on toponymy (Salehudin, Gunardi, & Indira, 2022), register (Dewi, Sibarani, & Pujiati, 2022), and the naming of Javanese people's *salametan* (Jannah, 2020; Jannah, 2020) has been done in previous study which has symbol of culture called anthropolinguistics. This study places language and culture as sustainable practice conveyed to improve BIPA students' language skills contextually in learning Indonesian culture. The material of BIPA enclosing Indonesian culture will invite BIPA students to deeper understanding culturally and contextually to the symbol used in cultural tradition.

Anthropolinguistic studies are used as an analytical knife in qualitative methods as theory of culture and linguistics symbolized. Linguistic anthropological studies on naming traditions show that there is a relationship between language, culture, and the cognition of speakers of languages in the lives that are produced in human life (Hough, 2016). The name of the torch war is described as an action event shown as part of a traditional ceremony (Wortham & Reyes, 2021). The naming of tradition shows that tradition is interpreted based on social conventions (Kumala, 2021). The symbol used is buffalo head, *Sega Golong*, *Tumpeng kuning*, *Kupat*, or *ketupat*, *Dekem* or *Inkung Ayam*, *Bubur abang Putih*, *Arang-arang Kambang*, *Jajan Pasar*, *Pisang Raja* (Plantains), and *Kembang* (Flower) (Amaliyah, 2019). The naming of tradition symbols illustrate that tradition is interpreted based on social conventions applied in Torch War (Kumala, 2021). The data collection was analyzed and presented descriptively.

METHOD

A linguistic anthropological approach as theory used combined both culture and linguistics. Anthropolinguistic studies are used as an analytical tool to examine the culture and history of the Torch War as its object through an interview process through engaging, skilled, recorded and note-taking techniques (Yusanto, 2019). Researchers are involved in conducting reference searches in local government libraries, conducting field research, conducting interviews, photo documentation, and taking notes (Ida, 2016). The engagement technique used in data collection was observation on 5 June 2023 in Tegalsambi Jepara by witnessing the traditional ceremony of the Torch War and photographing it. Then, it was continued interviews to Torch War player and cultural expert. Then, it was continued by taking a note as written data. The interview data obtained were about the tradition of Torch War, symbolized used to complete the tradition in Torch War, and the meaning of symbols.

The qualitative descriptive research method used in this study, through tracing local wisdom in Tegalsambi Jepara deals with the symbol used in Torch War. The hallmark of qualitative research is that the researcher becomes the research instrument itself (Sugiyono, 2010). The data analysis was conducted since the event took place until the end of the data collection process. To support the analysis, research informants who consist of key informants, expert informants, and ordinary informants are interviewed as the sources evidence of research. The key informant was government. The expert informant was sociocultural expert. The ordinary informants were visitors and Tegalsambi community. The role of key informant took control to supports other informants and to responsible for source evidence (Yin, 1996).

This reference provides additional knowledge of Jepara's cultural treasures as a form of preserving Jepara's culture in diversity literacy. The descriptive qualitative method describes in more depth and holistic understanding of the local culture of the Torch War tradition in Jepara. Linguistic anthropological studies analyze lexical meanings in linguistics and culture, especially in the torch war tradition. Relevant data analysis and data collection techniques are obtained from natural situation that relies on the truth on the side of empirical science

criteria that seek to explore an event that occurs (Komariah, 2009).

DISCUSSION

This section will present the results of the study including Jepara's local wisdom of Torch War and the meanings of symbols used in the Torch War ceremony. Local wisdom aspect is used to introduce BIPA students



Figure 1 Torch War (source: Suarabaru.id)

Torch War as Local Wisdom in Jepara

Local wisdom owned by communities in particular areas such as Jepara with its Torch War is possessed and built by Tegalsambi society through systems of ideas, actions, and results of humans' work in social life learned called culture. The relationship of nature, humans, and culture intertwined in one cultural triangulation. Human beings created their culture to cope with natural conditions their environment. Likewise, nature forms the humans' culture (Duryatmo, Sarwoprasodjo, Lubis, & Suhartijo). The data collections of Torch War ceremony were taken from observation, interview, note taking, and documentation. From observation, it was known that cultural traditions of the Tegalsambi community in Jepara have local wisdom embodied in the celebration of the Torch War. This tradition, as part of Jepara community culture, is a traditional ceremony that is routinely held every Pahing Monday, in the month of Dzulhijjah (INVESTIGASI, 2023) in the village of Tegalsambi, Tahunan, Jepara. As witness of the ceremony, researcher conducted interview to Torch War player, Eko Susianto. He said that it is called the Torch War because the torch is used as

a tool to attack each other by producing a very large splash. Susianto stated sparks from the torch are believed to avert harm and bring health (Susianto, 2023). Portraits of local wisdom through learning Indonesian will help foreign speakers to communicate with local residents. For foreign speakers living in Jepara, the tradition of Torch War helps students actualize themselves appropriately in understanding Indonesian culture. This celebration was visited by the people of Jepara and people outside Jepara. They are present to witness the sacred ceremony held only once a year. The Torch War tradition is attached as a frame of cultural heritage for the local community.

This local wisdom, which has been passed down from generation to generation, is based on oral stories (folklore) that have developed in the community. This tradition stems from the dispute between Ki Gemblong and Kiai Babadan as the Tegalsambi village icon. (Rosdiana, Perang Obor Tegalsambi Ingin Digelar Meriah, 2022). This story tells of a wealthy farmer known as Kiai Babadan who is in conflict with Ki Gemblong, a cowherd owned by Kiai Babadan. Kiai Babadan's cows looked thin and unkempt. It turned out that Ki Gemblong had never paid attention to Kiai Babadan's livestock; instead he was engrossed in catching fish in the river. Knowing this, Kiai Babadan angrily beat Ki Gemblong with a torch from a coconut frond. Ki Gemblong also did the same thing to repay him. The bigger the fire burned, the more it spread to the cattle pens. Miraculously, the livestock that were initially sick suddenly recovered. The local wisdom carried out through folklore becomes a material that can be used as integrative language material both language and culture in order to discover deeper meaning behind the folklore. The understanding of folklore will help BIPA students to understand Indonesian language contextually and authentically (Kusmiatun, Cerita Rakyat Indonesia Sebagai Materi Pembelajaran BIPA: Mengusung Masa Lalu Untuk Pembelajaran BIPA Masa Depan, 2018).

The Symbols Used In the Torch War Ceremony

Historically, the symbol meanings of Torch War are presented between religion and ancestral culture in pre-Islamic times. Initially, the Torch War was a tradition to expel evil spirits that brought calamity and disease to the local

community. It is said that initially this tradition was also told in the Legend of Jepara which said that at the beginning of that era, people believed in mystical existence. They believe that all the problems that occur can only be solved magically. They believe in the existence of supernatural powers personified in the form of objects. This belief is symbolized through sacred dances and prayers, or so-called *magi imitates* (Henri, 2022). It reflects a cultural phenomenon that contains art, values, and norms that symbolize the goodness of everyday life and religious facts that are believed by the local community. The symbols presented culturally gives an important aspect in learning Indonesian for foreign speakers abroad in learning BIPA because essentially learning Indonesian culture, BIPA students are intended to introduce Indonesian culture and avoid cultural conflicts that can hinder the smooth process of learning Indonesian (Ahsin, 2020).

As time went on, the belief in magic faded a bit because people embraced religion and believed that God would help with problems. When Islam was presented by Sunan Kalijaga, the bearer of good news, the traditions of the pre-Islamic era were not completely eliminated, but were accompanied by symbols and prayers according to Islamic teachings. The *syiar* symbol that is carried out is in the form of two wooden swords and a *bedhug* left by Sunan Kalijaga. (Rosdiana & Saefudin, 2018). This broadcast continues to promote persuasive teachings (Rosdiana, Potret Kearifan Lokal Islam Tradisi Perang Obor, 2022). This procession of Islamic symbols is carried out by parading four heirlooms, namely two *Gendir Gampang Dari* swords, a statue, and a Dabol drum. These four heirlooms are believed to be the legacy of Sunan Kalijaga which must be guarded by Kabayan Tegalsambi. Meanwhile, the symbol of the two wooden swords is believed to be the wood chips used to build the Demak mosque. Since Sunan Kalijaga came to Jepara, Islamic teaching is applied as reflection that humans should close to God. It becomes an interesting approach to learn by BIPA students due to literature and culture are two things that cannot be separated to deliver meaningful BIPA, i.e. it motivates BIPA students, the material is authentic, it contains educative values, it leads BIPA students in understanding other cultures, it stimulates language acquisition, it develops the way to interpret Indonesian language contextually, it gives pleasure, it expands language awareness,

and it encourages BIPA students to express opinions and feelings (Farikah, Baihaqi, & Sari, 2017).

As one of the local wisdoms in Jepara, the Torch War combines the "Kejawen" culture as a cultural heritage with Islamic studies (syncretism) after the arrival of Islam in Jepara. It is connected with oral literature *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi* which combining Javanese myth through song lyrics to Javanese values applied in daily activities (Sunardi, 2021). The meaning of the myth *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi* conveyed by Sunan Kalijaga means safety as symbolic culture in Torch War ceremony. The culture symbols address to offerings in Torch War (Amaliyah, 2019) as followed:

1. Buffalo head as symbol of gratitude and has a meaning as reinforcements repellent;
2. *Sega Golong* means determination to successfully achieve hopes and ambitions;
3. *Tumpeng kuning*, from its shape vertically means to describe the human relationship with his god. The lower part is widened symbolizes the human relationship with each other;
4. *Kupat*, or *ketupat*, conveys the meaning of apologizing for something all mistakes;
5. *Dekem* or *Ingkung Ayam* is a symbol for behavior surrender to the power of God;
6. *Bubur abang Putih* (red and white porridge) has a meaning as a symbol for respecting the origin of human self-genesis consisting of red (mother element) and white (father element);
7. *Arang-arang Kambang*, consisting of *cengkaruk ura* and *cengkaruk rambut gimbal* which have a meaning to respect *Mbau Rekso* (supernatural guard) of *Kali Wiso* is *Mbah Tunggal Wulung*.
8. *Jajan Pasar* (Snack Market) consists of 5 (five) types that describe the day of Javanese weton namely Pon, Wage, Kliwon, Legi and Pahing.
9. *Pisang Raja* (Plantains), symbolizing the hope of being given honor, authority and wisdom in living life like a king.
10. *Kembang* (Flower) has a meaning as the embodiment of devotion to the ancestors (*pepunden*) with the aim of keeping them away.

The next generations who have inherited this local wisdom consider that the tradition that is

always carried out is sacred and true for the local community in the Tegalsambi Jepara village area. Thus, integrated cultural and religious values can be seen from the procession starting from the intersection of Tegalsambi Village towards the Teluk Awur beach, Jepara. Tunggak said through interview conducted that puppet performances enlivened the day before until late at night, played by 50 selected and voluntary players, taken from the surrounding community (Tunggak, Players participated in Torch War, 2023). The process of Torch War tradition is a phenomenon that BIPA students learn as illustration representation of cultural content in BIPA material.

The Torch War is considered to have the magic of imitating the form of a torch. The symbol of the torch is considered a weapon that can drive away enemies in the form of humans, animals or evil spirits. Initially, this torch was able to drive away diseases that were suffered by both pets and the people of Tegalsambi. The torch used comes from a roll of two or three dried coconut fronds and the inside is filled with dried banana leaves (*klaras*) (Rosdiana, Perang Obor Tegalsambi Digelar, Edy Sujatmiko: Telah Jadi Aset Budaya Nasional, 2022). The cultural perspective symbolized enables the understanding of the meaning of cultural heritage symbol believed bring blessings by people in Tegalsambi Jepara. The symbol representation illustrates multiculturalism semantically as an aim of BIPA to introduce Indonesian Javanese culture that has cultural heritage that must be preserved (Putri, Islami, Shohihuzzihni, & Farida, 2022).

Based on oral traditions (folklore) circulating in the Tegalsambi community, the children and grandchildren of Kiai Babadan and Ki Gemblong remember these two figures. Two of those characters are popular as involved in torch war ceremony. Knowing cultural values is important because the knowledge learned from this legendary story will affect BIPA students' ability to adjust Indonesian society (Rahaya & Sahidillah, 2022). The uniqueness of Javanese culture, especially the tradition of Torch War as Jepara culture, encourages BIPA students to adapt during their process residing in Jepara as well nurturing attraction to make visitation for other people around the world (Saddhono, 2016). By Indonesian language as a tool to communicate, foreign society engages deeper existing local heritages and appreciating it as Indonesia's national wealth, such as the life

values possessed by people in Tegalsambi with their tolerance, affection, mutual cooperation, *andhap ashor*, humanity, respect, etc (Diskominfo, 2023). Besides, BIPA students will reflect their own culture by learning and understanding Indonesian culture as cross-cultural understanding effort of imagining the concrete forms of the Indonesian language and culture as well as norm values to be applied in everyday life (Yulianeta, Halimah, Moriyama, Shinta, & Amandangi, 2021).

CONCLUSION

As one of the local wisdoms in Jepara, the Torch War combines the "Kejawen" culture as an ancestral culture with Islamic studies (syncretism) after Islam arrived in Jepara. Tegalsambi society who have inherited this local wisdom consider that the tradition that is always carried out is sacred and true for the local community in the Tegal Sambi Jepara Village area. The cultural integration and religious values can be seen from the procession starting from the intersection of Tegalsambi Village towards the Teluk Awur beach, Jepara. The Torch War tradition as an introduction to local culture can be used as a media for introducing local wisdom-based culture in BIPA learning from the tradition through Torch War ceremony held every year the month of Dzulhijjah. Through cultural portraits as a medium for cultural introduction, BIPA students have insight into the culture and beliefs of the Javanese people, especially the people of Tegalsambi Village, Jepara through meaning of symbols used in Torch War ceremony. The offerings used for Torch War ceremony symbolized with meaning believed by people in

Tegalsambi village. The offerings were buffalo head, *Sega Golong*, *Tumpeng kuning*, *Kupat*, or *ketupat*, *Dekem* or *Inkung Ayam*, *Bubur abang Putih*, *Arang-arang Kambang*, *Jajan Pasar*, *Pisang Raja* (Plantains), and *Kembang*. Besides, through the symbols used, culturally BIPA students engages deeper existing local heritages and appreciating it as Indonesia's national wealth through values, such as the life values possessed by people in Tegalsambi with their tolerance, affection, mutual cooperation, *andhap ashor*, humanity, respect, etc. It becomes an interesting approach to learn by BIPA students due to literature and culture are two things that cannot be separated to deliver meaningful BIPA, i.e. it motivates BIPA students, the material is authentic, it contains educative values, it leads BIPA students in understand other cultures, it stimulates language acquisition, it develops the way to interpret Indonesian language contextually, it gives pleasure, it expands language awareness, and it encourages BIPA students to express opinions and feelings. References to local wisdom of Jepara as an introduction to foreign speakers who learn Indonesian through photo documentation, descriptive data from articles, and the cultural phenomenon of the torch war tradition add to knowledge of Jepara's cultural treasures as a form of preserving Jepara culture in literacy diversity wrapped in the characteristics of Nusantara Islam.

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