

**DOCUMENTING LANGUAGES USING NATURAL SEMANTIC  
METALANGUAGE THEORY: A CASE STUDY OF ‘SEE’ AND ‘FALL’ IN  
KUPANG MALAY LANGUAGE**

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**ABSTRACT**

There are some approaches that can be applied to documenting local languages. One of them is an approach of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory. This paper aims to present a case study of a local language documentation – in this case, lexicosemantic documentation - using NSM as a brief example of documenting local language. The lexicons presented in this paper are verbs ‘see’ and ‘fall’ in Kupang Malay Language (KML). KML itself is a local language in East Nusa Tenggara Province- Indonesia (Latupeirissa, 2016a). Scientifically, this language is a creole language (Jacob and Grimes, 2003) that formed by local languages migration and diaspora (Latupeirissa, 2016b, 2017). Research data has been collected by combining two methods, namely: Documentation Method and Linguistic Field Research Method. For Documentation Method, researchers gained data from (1) KML Bible, (2) KML dictionary, and (3) *Tapaleuk Column* in *Pos Kupang* Newspaper. For Linguistic Field Research Method, researchers gained data through daily conversation and interview. Next, the researchers use paraphrase/explication technique to discuss the result. The result shows that lexicon ‘See’ has five different semantic meaning in KML. They are ‘lia’, ‘loti’, ‘malerok’, ‘maloi’ and ‘pe’e mata’, while lexicon ‘Fall’ has seven different semantic meaning in KML, namely ‘jato’, ‘rubu’, ‘malenggang’, ‘tikam mulu’, ‘tikam kapala’, ‘taroso’, ‘puku panta’.

**Key Words: Language Documentation, Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), Kupang Malay Language (KML), Verb ‘See’, Verb ‘Fall’.**

**I. Introduction**

Documenting local languages is important for preserving linguistic diversity and revitalizing local languages, as well cultural identity. It comprises the collection, processing and archiving of linguistic data – for example, lexicons/ word lists, texts, recordings of conversations, videos, etc. In other hand, documenting local languages is both crucial and central in the preservation, safeguarding, and revitalization. Therefore, we need to put our best effort in documenting various local languages. This paper presents a brief example of documenting a local

language using Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory. The local language that is going to be presented is Kupang Malay Language (KML).

KML is a local language in East Nusa Tenggara Province (Latupeirissa, 2017). East Nusa Tenggara itself is a province in Indonesia that is located nearby Timor Leste Country. Scientifically, KML is a creole language<sup>1</sup> (Jacob and Grimes, 2003: 2) that used by most people around capital city of East Nusa Tenggara Province (Latupeirissa, 2016a). It is counted as austronesian language (Blust, 1978, 1993; C. Grimes, 2000; C. Grimes et.al., 1997; B.F. Grimes, 2000).

Next, the focus of this documentation is lexicosemantic documentation for verbs 'see' and 'fall' that based on NSM. NSM is a theory introduced by Wierzbicka (1996) and its follower like Goddard (1996). The theory aims to explore meaning of word(s)<sup>2</sup>. Meaning that is explored by this theory covers lexical meaning, illocutionary meaning, and grammatical meaning.

## II. Method

Research data was collected by combining two methods namely Documentation Method and Linguistic Field Research Method. For Documentation Method, researchers gained data from (1) KML Bible, (2) KML Dictionary, and (3) *Tapaleuk Column* in *Pos Kupang* Newspaper. For Linguistic Field Research Method, researchers gained data through daily conversation and interview. Next, as the researchers are also the native speakers of KML, exploratory technique and introspection technique were also applied in gaining and analyzing data.

In following discussion, the researchers applied qualitative approach. The analysis is presented in the forms of words and sentences rather than numbers (Sudaryanto, 1993). Words and sentences are applied to display the NSM theory briefly while in documenting KML verbs of 'see' and 'fall', explanation through words and sentences are applied in paraphrase/ explication forms.

## III. Findings and Discussion

On this section, the researchers present NSM theory briefly since the main purpose of this paper is to propose NSM as a means of local languages documentation. After that, the case study of lexicosemantic documentation for 'see' and 'fall', based on the data gained, will be presented under the explication technique of NSM.

Sudipa (2013), refers to Wierzbicka (1996), states that NSM combines philosophical and logical tradition.

*'.....according to Wierzbicka (1996:23), Natural Semantics Metalanguage theory combines the philosophical and logical tradition in the study of meaning with a typological approach to the study of language, and with broadly based empirical cross-linguistic investigations'* (Sudipa, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Most of creole languages are endangered language (Frank, 2007). Therefore, as a creole language, KML has to be documented.

<sup>2</sup> Further explanation of NSM is presented in discussion section.

Philosophical and logical tradition is important in linguistics, especially in semantics since the tradition can express or actualize what is meant by human mind through language (Koroh, 2015).

The NSM itself, is a decompositional approach based on fixed set of symbols and combinatorial rules (metagrammar). The meaning of a given word is explicated by ascribing to a composed semantic representation (metalinguistic explication). It is assumed that the entire meaning can be explicated through reductive paraphrase, that is to say an equivalent expression composed of semantic primes and molecules (words that have proven to be useful in the explication of many other words, like : *woman, eat, home, etc*).

The repertoire of semantic primes, that consists of 63 lexical units (see Table 1), is based on conceptual universal, not on universals of experiences, environment or culture. Wierzbicka (1996) stated that semantic primes are regarded not only as universals, but also as innate. Therefore, it is indefinable and known to us as a prior. The explication by means of NSM is assumed as the simplest possible and intuitively clear to everyone, no matter what the local language people speak (however, it must be noted here that semantic primes exists as meanings of lexical units, not lexemes). Once the principles of metagrammar are known, a simple verification of the definition is possible.

Goddard (2010) gives example of applying this theory using causative verbs 'killed' and 'broke' in English. Causative verb 'killed' and 'broke' in general linguistic are frequently analyzed as *cause to die (or cause to become not alive)* and *cause to become broken, respectively*. But, NSM explications are given below. Aside from the fact that NSM system recognizes *because* rather (than *cause*) as its basic exponent in the causal domain, it can be seen that the explications give a more articulated and nuanced account of the event structure. In both cases, the explications depict an action by the agent X with an immediate effect on the patient Y. In the case of *kill*, namely, something happening to the person Y's body.

A. Someone X killed someone Y:

Someone X did something to someone else Y

Because of this, something happened to Y at the same time

Because of this, something happened to Y's body

Because of this, after this Y was not living anymore.

For *break*, namely, X does something to Y as patient, therefore something happening to the thing Y.

B. Someone X broke something Y:

Someone X did something to something Y

Because of this, something happened to Y at the same time

It happened in one moment

Because of this, after this Y was not one thing anymore

People can think about it like this: 'it cannot be one thing anymore'.

(Gaddard, 2010)

In simple words, NSM helps researchers to describe lexicon(s) using language. This breaks concepts/ lexicons of KML down into combinations of simple concept/ words using small connection of semantic primes (Sudipa, 2013). Following is further examples of applying the NSM theory for 'see' and 'fall down' in KML. The brief example is a case study of lexicosemantic documentation of KML.

### 1. See

Based on data gained, there are five KML lexicons that refer to 'see' namely: 'lia', 'loti', 'malerok', 'maloi' and 'pe'e mata'. Following are explications of them.

#### 1.1. 'Lia'

'Lia' has similar meaning to 'see'. As 'see' can be described 'perceive with the eyes' (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/see>), 'lia', as mentioned before, can be described 'perceive with the eyes'. Some examples of how 'lia' is used in KML are as follows.

- 1) *Lia itu buku dong ko ambe yang lu suka'*  
See det book PL Conj take det 2TG like  
See the books and take the one you like
- 2) *'Be son lia itu saboak'*  
1Sing no see det NAME  
I don't see the *saboak*
- 3) *'Jang pi sakola ko lia nona dong sa'*  
Do not go school Conj see girl PL PART  
Do not go to school just to see girls

Based on data above, the further explications are as follows.

Someone X sees someone or something Y:

Someone X *lia* someone or something Y

Someone X does something to someone or something Y

Because of this, something happened to someone or something X at the same time

Because of this, something X can see in her/ his mind about Y

Because of this, after this someone or something Y feel something good and bad.

#### 1.2. 'Loti'

'Loti' can be meant 'see carefully'. It is not only 'see' in ordinary way but it is a kind of serious action in perceiving someone or something seriously. The doer 'loti' someone or something means s/he focuses of seeing someone or something. Some examples of how 'loti' is used in KML are as follows.

- 4) *'Loti ko mangarti'*

See Conj Understand

See, so you can understand

- 5) *'Be su loti dar tadi ma son katumu ju ni'*  
 1Sing Modal see Conj Time Conj No find part  
 part  
 I have tried to see since sometimes ago but (I) haven't found it yet

- 6) *'Lu pi loti di galap bekin apa?'*  
 2 Sing go see Conj dark Conj QW  
 Why do you go to see in the darkness?

Based on data above, the further explications are as follows.

Someone X sees someone or something Y:

Someone X *loti* someone or something Y

Someone X does something to someone or something Y

Because of this, someone X can find or understand about someone or something Y

Because of this, after this someone or something Y can both be reacted and not reacted

Because of this, after this someone or something Y cannot be said as missing or unclear.

### 1.3. 'Malerok'

'Malerok' is a kind of seeing at glance to the right or to the left. This kind of activity has negative meaning in Kupang society. When we do it to someone, then s/he might be offended. Some examples of how 'malerok' is used in KML are as follows.

- 7) *'Lu malerok apa? Son lama be su papoko lu'*  
 2Sing see QW No long time 1Sing Prep  
 hit 2Sing

What are you seeing? I will punch you soon

- 8) *'Be son barani malerok pi dia o'.*  
 1Sing No brave see Conj 3Sing Part.  
 I have no courageous to see her.

- 9) *'Lu malerok pi datang tarus sa. Son lama mulu pica'*  
 2Sing see go come continue Part. No time mouth  
 broken  
 Just see around then you will get trouble.

- 10) *‘Be taku e. Te dia malerok datang sini tarus na’*  
 1Sing afraid Part. Part 3Sing see come here continue Part  
 I am afraid since he is keep looking at me.

Based on data above, the further explications are as follows.

Someone X sees someone Y  
 Someone X *malerok* someone Y  
 Someone X do something to someone Y  
 Because of this, someone Y will be afraid or angry at someone X.

#### 1.4. ‘Maloi’

‘*Maloi*’ is seeing someone or something in secret. This kind of activity means the doer perceives someone or something with eyes, but the one or the thing that is seen is not realized (at least for the first moment). Some examples of how ‘*maloi*’ is used in KML are as follows.

- 11) *‘Inga o, jang suka maloi orang mandi’*  
 Remember part. Not like see someone take a  
 bath  
 Remember to not see someone when she/ he is taking a bath
- 12) *‘Lu pi maloi ada barapa orang di muka do’*  
 2Sing go see QW people Conj front Part  
 Please see how many people (guests) are there in the living room
- 13) *‘Be pi maloi ambel lewat jandela do’*  
 1Sing go see Part Manner window Part  
 I will go to see through the window

Based on data above, the further explications are as follows.

Someone X sees someone or something Y:  
 Someone X *maloi* someone or something Y  
 Someone X does something to someone or something Y  
 Because of this, someone X see something to someone or something Y  
 Because of this, after this someone or something Y do not know what X do

#### 1.5. ‘Pe’e mata’

‘*Pe’e mata*’ means someone does not only see in general way, but s/he sees something or someone by opening eyes widely. This kind of seeing has semantic meaning that the doer is angry at somebody or something. Some examples of how ‘*Pe’e mata*’ is used in KML are as follows.

14) *Jang pe'e lu pung mata bagitu. Lu kira be taku'?*  
 Do Not see 2Sing Poss eyes det. 2Sing think 1Sing afraid  
 Don't see me (look at me) like that. Do you think I am afraid ?

15) *Baptua ada pe'e mata deng katong. Diam su'!*  
 3Sing Part see Conj 1Pl. Silent Part  
 He is seeing (looking at) us. Be silent!

16) *Be pe'e mata deng dong ko dong diam'*  
 1Sing see conj 3Pl conj 3Pl silent  
 I see them so they are not talking anymore.

Based on data above, the further explications are as follows.

Someone X sees someone or something Y:

Someone X *pe'e mata* at someone or something Y

Someone X does something to someone or something Y

Because of this, someone Y knows that someone X is angry at Y

Because of this, after this someone or something Y might be afraid or gets angry.

## 2. *Fall*

Based on data gained, there are 7 (seven) KML lexicons that semantically refer to 'fall' namely: '*jato*', '*rubu*', '*malenggang*', '*tikam mulu*', '*tikam kapala*', '*taroso*', '*puku panta*'. Following are explications of them.

### 2.1. '*Jato*'

'*Jato*' has the same semantic meaning as 'fall'. It is the general lexicon to describe 'falling down' in KML. It means 'suddenly go down onto the ground or towards the ground unintentionally'. Some examples of how '*jato*' is used in KML are as follows.

17) *Bibit saparu yang laen jato di tampa baduri'.*  
 'Seed some prep another fall prep place thorn'.  
 Some seeds fell among thorns.

18) *Ma lu musti ati-ati, ko lu jang jato'*  
 'Prep 2Sing must be careful, part 2sing not fall'  
 'You must be careful, so you will not fall.

Based on data above, the further explications are as follows.

Someone or something X falls at someone or something Y:

Someone or something X *jato* at someone or something Y

Someone or something X does something to someone or something Y

Because of this, someone X gets hurted or impacted because of something Y

Because of this, after this someone or something Y might be broken, so is someone X

## 2.2. 'Rubu'

'Rubu' is the synonym of 'jato' (see 2.1). This is also used in general way of expressing 'falling down'. The direction of 'rubu' itself can be forward, backward, to the right side, or to the left side. Following data shows how 'rubu' is used in KML.

19) 'Itu pohon su rubu'  
 Det tree already fall  
 That tree has fallen down.

20) 'Ana kici dong rubu samua'  
 Kids Part fall all  
 All kids fall down.

21) 'Tyson su rubu'  
 Name already fall  
 Tyson has fallen down.

Based on data above, the further explications are displayed as follows.

Someone or something X falls down

Someone or something X *rubu* caused by, or not caused by someone or something Y

Someone or something X experiences *rubu*

Because of this, someone or something X can be broken or hurted

Because of this, someone or something Y can be impacted or not be impacted by someone or something X

## 2.3. 'Malenggang'

'Malenggang' can be meant falling backward. When someone *malenggang*, he/ she falls to special direction, that is backward. Someone who experiences this is not falling forward or sideward. The use of 'malenggang' in KML are displayed following.

22) 'Katong son tau te dong samua su malenggang di sana'  
 1pl not know part 2pl all already fall prep there  
 We didn't know that all of them have fallen down there.

Based on data above, the explications are displayed as follows.

Someone or something X falls down at someone or something Y

Someone or something X *malenggang* at someone or something Y

Someone or something X *malenggang* toward someone or something Y at the back



Someone or something Y has no contribution to someone or something X  
Someone or something X' head or backside touches someone or something Y

Because of this, someone or something X' head or backside can be broken or hurted because of someone or something Y.

#### 2.4. 'Tikam mulu'

'Tikam mulu' means falling down forward. The one who falls down forward or the one who 'tikam mulu' will have his/ her mouth broken or his/ her face or front parts hurted. Following are some examples of how it is used in KML.

23) 'Mamtua tikam mulu ko mulu pica'  
2sing falls down so mouth broken  
She falls down and hurts her mouth

24) 'Kalo son ati- ati lu pasti tikam mulu'  
If not careful 2sing sure fall down  
If you are not careful, you will fall down for sure.

Based on data above, the explications are displayed as follows.

Someone or something X falls down at someone or something Y  
Someone or something X *tikam mulu* at someone or something Y  
Someone or something X *tikam mulu* towards something Y in front  
Someone or something X experiences it because of something else  
Someone or something Y has no contribution to someone or something X  
Someone or something X' mouth or front parts of him/ her/ it touches something Y  
Because of this, someone or something X' head or mouth or front parts of him/ her/ it can be broken or hurted because of someone or something Y.

#### 2.5. 'Tikam kapala'

'Tikam kapala' has several meaning in KML. The one that relates to semantic meaning of this research is 'falling down to any direction'. The one who falls down in 'tikam kapala' will have his/ her head swollen or broken. In other words, no matter the direction is, the one who experiences it will have swollen or broken head. Following are some examples of how it is used in KML.

25) 'Gara- gara tikam kapala, itu ana pung kapala su bangka'  
Because of fall down, det kid poss head already swollen  
Because of falling down, the kid has got swollen head

26) 'Dia tikam kapala dari atas motor'  
2sing fell down from on motorbike

He fell down from a motorbike

Based on data above, the explications of '*tikam kapala*' are as follows.

Someone or something X falls down from someone or something Y  
 Someone or something X *tikam kapala* from someone or something Y  
 Someone or something X experiences this because of, or not because of someone or something Y  
 Because of this, someone or something X's head will be swollen or broken  
 Because of this, someone or something Y can be impacted, or not be impacted by X

#### 2.6. '*Taroso*'

'*Taroso*' is KML lexicon that has similar semantic meaning to fall down. However, this kind of falling down is followed by another thing, that is 'dragged along'. Someone who experiences '*taroso*' is not only fall down, but also slipped/ dragged along. Following data shows how '*taroso*' is used in KML.

27) '*Beta taroso kamaren*'

1Sing fall yesterday  
 I fell down yesterday

28) '*Di situ licin te bae-bae taroso*'

Prep there slippery Part careful fall and dragged along  
 It's slippery there. Be careful, you can fall and slip.

Further explications are as follows.

Someone X falls in something Y  
 Someone X *taroso* in something Y  
 Someone X *taroso* because of something Y  
 Because of this, something X is hurted or broken

#### 2.7. '*Puku Panta*'

'*Puku Panta*' can be meant 'falling down backward'. The variation of this verb is '*tapuku panta*'. This kind of falling down has no effect to the head of the one who experiences it. When someone '*puku panta*', his/ her bottom will be hurted. Following shows how '*puku panta*' is used in KML.

29) '*Ade manangis gara-gara puku panta di lante*'

2Sing cry caused fall down Prep floor  
 My brother cries since he fell down on the floor

30) '*Be pung calana kotor ko tadi tapuku panta na*'

1Sing pants dirty Part last fell down Part  
 My pants are dirty for I fell down just now

Based on data above, the explications of '*puku panta*' are as follows.

Someone X falls in something Y

Someone X *puku panta* in something Y

Someone X *puku panta* so his/ her bottom touches something Y

Because of this, something X' bottom is hurted or broken

#### **IV. Conclusion**

It has been shown that verbs '*see*' and '*fall*' as parts of KML (as a local language in East Nusa Tenggara) have different semantics meaning. They have been presented using an approach of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory. As the conclusion, explication technique is quite simple to be applied in language documentation. Therefore, researchers simply propose this approach as a means in documenting local languages. In other hand, the researchers suggest to the language teachers so they may teach their students to do explications that based on NSM theory.

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