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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Metaphors in *Melengkan* of the Gayo Language: An Ecolingistic Perspective

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Abstrak

Melengkan merupakan suatu bentuk ekspresi lisan tradisional yang dilakukan pada saat upacara pernikahan di komunitas Gayo Aceh, Indonesia, kaya akan bahasa metaforis. Penelitian ini menganalisis metafora-metafora yang terdapat dalam *Melengkan* dari perspektif Ekolinguistik. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana metafora mencerminkan nilai-nilai budaya dan kesadaran ekologis. penelitian ini mengidentifikasi serta menganalisis tiga domain metaforis utama dalam *melengkan* adat pernikahan Gayo: metafora berbasis alam**,** metafora hubungan sosial**,** dan metafora moral-etis**.** Metafora alam menggambarkan kesadaran ekologis, dengan unsur seperti pohon, sungai, awan, dan angin yang melambangkan harmoni, ketahanan, dan keseimbangan dalam kehidupan rumah tangga. Metafora sosial menekankan aspek komunal dari pernikahan, serta memperkuat nilai-nilai seperti kekerabatan, musyawarah, dan tanggung jawab kolektif. Sementara itu, metafora moral dan etis menegaskan pentingnya adat, integritas, serta kewajiban spiritual dalam institusi pernikahan. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa *melengkan* bukan hanya media ekspresi budaya, melainkan juga cerminan pandangan hidup ekologis masyarakat Gayo, di mana bahasa berperan dalam menjaga harmoni lingkungan dan sosial. Studi ini berkontribusi terhadap pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang bagaimana sastra lisan tradisional mengandung nilai-nilai ekologis dan memperkuat praktik budaya yang berkelanjutan melalui bahasa metaforis. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa *Melengkan* mewujudkan ekspresi yang melambangkan kerukunan sosial dan keterkaitan antara manusia dan alam. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa tradisi lisan lokal memainkan peran penting dalam melestarikan identitas budaya dan pengetahuan ekologis.

Key Word:
Melengkan, Gayo Language, Metaphor, Indigenous Culture, Ecological Wisdom

Abstract

Melengkan, a form of traditional oral expression performed during wedding ceremonies in the Gayo community of Aceh, Indonesia, is rich in metaphorical language. This study analyses the metaphors found in Melengkan from an Ecolinguistics perspective. Using a qualitative approach, the research examines how these metaphors reflect cultural values and ecological awareness. This research identifies and analyzes three dominant metaphorical domains found in Gayo marriage melengkan*: Nature-Based Metaphors**,** Social Relationship Metaphors**,** and Moral-Ethical Metaphors. Nature-based metaphors illustrate ecological awareness, portraying elements like trees, rivers, clouds, and wind as symbols of harmony, resilience, and balance in marital life. Social metaphors highlight the communal aspect of marriage, reinforcing values such as kinship, consensus, and collective responsibility. Moral and ethical metaphors emphasize adat (customary law), integrity, and spiritual obligations within the institution of marriage. The findings reveal that* melengkan *is not only a medium of cultural expression but also a reflection of the Gayo people's eco-centric worldview, where language serves to sustain both environmental and social harmony. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how traditional oral literature embodies ecological values and reinforces sustainable cultural practices through metaphorical language.The findings reveal that Melengkan embodies expressions that symbolize social harmony and the interconnection between humans and nature. This suggests that local oral traditions play a crucial role in preserving both cultural identity and ecological knowledge.*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a means of communication, but also a reflection of how a community perceives, interacts with, and relates to its surrounding environment. In traditional societies, language functions as a cultural repository, preserving indigenous knowledge, values, and ecological awareness. One such example is

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found in the Gayo ethnic group of Aceh, Indonesia, whose oral tradition known as *melengkan* plays a central role in ritual and cultural expressions. *Melengkan* is a stylized form of speech rich in metaphors, often performed in ceremonial contexts such as weddings, conflict resolutions, and community gatherings.*Melengkan* is a traditional speech delivered by Reje (village head) or someone appointed by Reje who has sufficient knowledge and understanding in this matter. melengkan is an oral literary art form used in some special ceremonies of the Gayo tribe. Melengkan style is rich in rhymes, terms, and qiyas. According to Pinan and Aman (2003), melengkan is deeply rooted in the Gayonese community as a form of communication for oral literature. Melengkan is regularly utilized to create analogies and to communicate profound implications particularly to donate counsel to a bride and bridegroom. it is talked by certain individuals particularly utilizing figures of speech known within the community. According to Melalatoa (1982), "melengkan adalah pidato secara adat dengan menggunakan kata pilihan dalam adat perkawinan" (melengkan is a customary speech by using selected words in a wedding ceremony).

Melengkan is carried out by two Traditional leaders called "Pemalengkan" from each bride, so one person will represent the groom's family and another from the bride's family. Next they will both stand in the middle of the audience who attended the event and will begin this melengkan procession. Then the two will alternately convey words of advice to each other in the Gayo language that has many meanings in it. Each representative is usually given approximately 30 minutes to deliver the melengkan verses with the aim of providing information by a religious pemalengkan in the form of advice and guidance to the bride and groom to avoid conflict and to always be harmonious (harmonious) in running the household sakinah (tranquility) mawaddah (affection) and warahmah (Mercy). It was also added by Zain,et.al (2021) that the messages contained in the melengkan tradition, such as maintaining good relations, being dutiful to parents, honoring others, preserving marital harmony, and encouraging the creation of a harmonious and loving family (sakinah mawaddah warahmah). In Conclusion *Melengkan* is traditionally delivered by elders or ceremonial leaders and contains moral advice, blessings, and community values, often couched in metaphorical language. Its form and function are deeply embedded in Gayo oral tradition.

There are many previous studies have examined the *melengkan* tradition such as cultural values in the *melengkan* tradition that explained about the values of politeness, respect, speaking gently, hospitality, and steadfastness (Jaya & Daud, 2017), the ideology within the text of the *melengkan* ceremony emphasizes the meaning of interpersonally ideologies in the contexts of religion, democracy and sociocultural aspects (Ansari,2014). This research examines the metaphors contained in *Melengkan* through an ecolinguistic lens. Analyzing the connection between language and the environment (ecological and sociocultural), offers an insightful framework for understanding how the Gayo community expresses ecological knowledge, social values, and cultural principles via metaphorical language. In traditional Gayo culture, nature and the environment are not just physical areas but are intricately integrated into the cultural and linguistic aspects of everyday existence. Consequently, metaphors in *melengkan* function not only in aesthetic ways but also signify an ecological awareness. Ecolinguistics investigates how language contributes to ecological awareness and sustains or disrupts the relationships between humans and the environment (Stibbe, 2015). Through metaphor, ecolinguistics seeks to uncover hidden ideologies and environmental values in discourse

Metaphors in *melengkan* are not arbitrary linguistic devices; they are deeply embedded in the Gayo worldview and encode local ecological knowledge, social structures, and ethical norms. These metaphorical expressions serve as symbolic tools that reflect how the Gayo people understand their environment, construct social relationships, and preserve harmony between humans and nature. Thus, the study of metaphors in *melengkan* provides a valuable entry point for exploring the intricate relationship between language, culture, and ecology. This research adopts an ecolinguistic perspective, which views language as a dynamic system shaped by and shaping ecological relationships. Ecolinguistics, as proposed by scholars like Stibbe (2015) and Fill & Mühlhäusler (2001), emphasizes the role of language in sustaining or disrupting ecological balance. By analyzing the metaphors used in *melengkan*, this study seeks to uncover the ecological values and environmental consciousness embedded in the Gayo oral tradition. The purpose of this study is to identify, classify, and interpret the metaphorical expressions found in *melengkan* and to examine how these metaphors convey ecological and cultural meanings. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this research contributes to the understanding of how traditional language practices can serve as a form of ecological discourse and as a medium for preserving indigenous ecological wisdom.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected from transcripts and recordings of *melengkan* performances during wedding ceremonies in Takengon, Central Aceh. Metaphor analysis was conducted to identify ecological metaphors and interpret their meanings using an ecolinguistic

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framework. The metaphorical expressions were identified using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which categorizes metaphors into structural, orientational, and ontological types. These metaphors were then interpreted through the lens of ecolinguistics, particularly Stibbe's (2015) framework of stories-we-live-by, which includes beneficial, destructive, and ambivalent narratives about the environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study identified various metaphorical expressions embedded in *melengkan*, a traditional Gayo oral expression used during wedding ceremonies. These metaphors reflect not only aesthetic values and social norms but also deep ecological wisdom rooted in the Gayo people's interaction with their environment. Using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the metaphors were categorized into structural**,** orientational, and ontological types. Subsequently, they were analyzed through Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework of *stories-we-live-by*, which classifies linguistic narratives into beneficial**,** destructive, and ambivalent in relation to the environment.

The analysis revealed three dominant types of metaphors:

Nature-Based Metaphors:
"Rene beremer awan,
"The clouds gather in peace,
Kemile angin si laku,
The wind follows a gentle path,
Terbekat si kawen tangan,
Hands unite in sacred bond,
Lepah like rerayu."
Let no storm tear them apart."

This *melengkan* uses natural elements (clouds, wind, storm) as metaphors to symbolize the journey of marriage:
"Rene beremer awan" (The clouds gather in peace):
Clouds here represent the coming together of two souls. Peaceful gathering implies a union formed not in chaos, but with harmony and calm intent.
"Kemile angin si laku" (The wind follows a gentle path):
Wind signifies life's journey. A gentle wind suggests a hopeful and steady course in married life, free from violence or turbulence.
"Terbekat si kawen tangan" (Hands unite in sacred bond):
The act of holding hands is not just physical—it symbolizes trust, mutual commitment, and unity under customary and spiritual law.
"Lepah like rerayu" (Let no storm tear them apart):
A storm represents conflict or disruption. This line serves as a blessing that the couple will withstand all external pressures, just as nature endures.

Nature-based metaphors are common in Gayo orature. They tie human events—especially sacred ones like marriage—to the order and balance of the natural world. The environment is not just a backdrop; it reflects and guides human relationships.

Social Relationship Metaphors:
"Bele guru ni kenini,
"With advice from elders we begin,
Mupakat rukun ken peng,
Harmony agreed upon by kin,
Teriyem ni urum dini,
This moment is not ours alone,
Menikah tembok si geng."
Marriage is the wall that holds the clan."

This *melengkan* emphasizes marriage as a social institution involving many parties, not just the bride and groom:
"Bele guru ni kenini" (With advice from elders we begin):
Shows the importance of guidance from elders in Gayo society. Marriage must be rooted in collective wisdom.

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"Mupakat rukun ken peng" (Harmony agreed upon by kin):
Highlights consensus—family unity and agreement are essential before marriage proceeds. The term *mupakat* indicates social deliberation.
"Teriyem ni urum dini" (This moment is not ours alone):
Marriage is a communal celebration. The couple shares their union with their families, neighbors, and community.
"Menikah tembok si geng" (Marriage is the wall that holds the clan):
The metaphor of a wall signifies structural stability. A good marriage strengthens not only a household but an entire lineage (*si geng* = extended family or clan).

In Gayo tradition, marriage strengthens alliances between families. Social acceptance, deliberation, and public celebration are not formalities—they are fundamental to making the union legitimate and respected.

Moral and Ethical Metaphors:

"Pitu hukum si kebel,
"The seven laws are unsheathed
Beber urum je urume,
Words must match one's deeds,
Tempa ni adat si tel,
Forged by tradition's anvil,
Menikah kene kereme."

Marriage carries sacred creed."

This *melengkan* embeds moral and ethical values into the marriage context, reminding the couple of their spiritual and social obligations:
"Pitu hukum si kebel" (The seven laws are unsheathed):
Refers to adat law, often grouped in symbolic numbers like "seven," representing completeness. These rules guide behavior in marriage.
"Beber urum je urume" (Words must match one's deeds):
This is a call to integrity. Marriage vows are not just ceremonial—they must be lived daily through ethical conduct.
"Tempa ni adat si tel" (Forged by tradition's anvil):
Marriage is shaped by customary law and collective memory, not individual whim. The phrase implies strength and legitimacy through cultural processes.
"Menikah kene kereme" (Marriage carries sacred creed):
The union is not a personal contract, but a moral covenant that carries spiritual, ethical, and communal weight.

Ethics and moral duty are tightly woven into Gayo customs. The idea of *kereme* (sanctity/sacredness) elevates marriage to a spiritual obligation that must honor God (*Allah*), elders, and ancestral laws.

Ecological Values in *Melengkan*

These metaphors illustrate how profoundly ecological values are ingrained in Gayo culture. Nature is viewed not as distinct from human existence but instead as a part of it. By using metaphors, natural elements are given human qualities and moral significance, transforming the landscape into a societal moral compass. From an ecolinguistic viewpoint, these metaphors correspond with positive narratives stories that encourage coexistence with nature and sustainability. For example, patience compared to a flourishing tree illustrates endurance and forward-thinking, while the metaphor of rich soil representing a virtuous individual highlights the relationship between moral value and the earth's productivity.

The language in *melengkan* frequently incorporates imagery from nature, such as rice fields, rivers, and forests. These metaphors reflect the Gayo people's intimate relationship with their environment and convey moral guidance grounded in ecological balance. For instance, agricultural metaphors are used to discuss social roles and responsibilities, emphasizing interdependence and harmony. Melengkan thus serves as an artistic and environmental expression, promoting sustainable principles through generations.

CONCLUSION

The *melengkan*, a traditional poetic expression in the Gayo language, is not just a cultural embellishment in marriage ceremonies; it acts as a vibrant reflection of the Gayo people's perspective, firmly grounded in ecological consciousness, social structure, and ethical principles. From the perspective of ecolinguistics, the

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metaphors used in *melengkan* illustrate complex connections among language, culture, and environment. Nature based metaphors in *melengkan* embody an ecological awareness, with natural elements like wind, trees, clouds, and rivers representing harmony, resilience, and the interconnections of life. These metaphors illustrate not only emotional and relational conditions but also highlight the Gayo community's respectful and interconnected relationship with nature. Social relationship metaphors express the communal aspect of marriage, highlighting values like consensus, family ties, and social duty. They view marriage not simply as a private agreement, but as a societal institution that strengthens family and community ties emphasizing the ecological and social aspects of language utilization. Moral and Ethical Metaphors serve as cultural instruments for strengthening traditional laws (adat), moral duties, and spiritual values. These metaphors reinforce the sanctity of marriage as a holy, rule-governed agreement, directing the actions of people within the broader ethical framework of Gayo culture. From an ecolinguistic viewpoint, *melengkan* goes beyond just depicting the world. it contributes to forming a perspective in which humanity, community, and the environment are intricately intertwined. The metaphors used are cognitive reflections of an identity rooted in environmental and social contexts, providing significant perspectives on sustainable, ethical living. Therefore, *melengkan* serves not just as a linguistic artifact but also as a vessel for ecological knowledge and the continuity of culture.

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