

THE MAINTENANCE OF KONJO LANGUAGE THROUGH MANTRAS AS TRADITIONAL MEDICINE OF “AMMATOA” INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

One of the indigenous communities that very strongly maintain traditions and preserve their local language in South Sulawesi Province is “Ammatoa” indigenous community. They still use traditional practices as the main medical system. Local knowledge of the community made the Konjo language famous as a spoken language in traditional medical practices called "mantras". The mantras are assumed to be an excellent aid for healing and maintaining the Konjo language. Social and Cultural dynamics, however, cause the mantras to experience development due to inter-ethnic contact and Islamic influence in traditional medicine. This also impacts the variation of language use in the mantras. Therefore, the interpretive phenomenology and in-depth interviews with a total of 6 informants were used to collect the data. It aims to examine the types of language used in healing mantras of “Ammatoa” indigenous community, to identify types of diseases which used Konjo language in the mantras, and to explore the healing mantras inheritance process. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The information gathered can be used to derive the following conclusions: 1. Besides using the Konjo language, the healing mantra incorporates Arabic (Holy Qur'an), Makassarese, Buginese and Bahasa (Indonesian language), 2. Healing mantras in the Konjo language are used to cure all diseases including natural, magic, religion related diseases, 3. The healing mantra inheritance process has been done in several ways. First, the healing mantra inheritance process is done by passing on the healer's knowledge to his child or other members of the family through daily communications. Second, the healing mantra successor is also chosen through inspiration that comes to the healer through dreams. It can be concluded that mantras in the traditional medicine of Ammatoa indigenous community can be used as one strategy of Konjo language maintenance. However, less interest of the younger generation to inherit the mantras and the erosion of traditional practices pose a significant threat to the continued use of Konjo language in mantras as a form of traditional medicine.

Keywords: Ammatoa, konjo, language maintenance, mantras, traditional medicine

INTRODUCTION

The Konjo language is a language spoken by the Ammatoa indigenous community, which resides in the Kajang Subdistrict, South Sulawesi Province of Indonesia (Ningsih, 2016). The Ammatoa people are known for their unique culture and way of life, which have been preserved for centuries (Sampean & Sjaf, 2021). However, in recent years, the Konjo language has been declining in usage and is now considered endangered (Ningsih & Zulkhaeriyah, 2021). One such effort to help maintain the language has been the use of Konjo mantras as a traditional therapeutic. The Ammatoa people have been using the mantras for various purposes, including healing, and maintaining the Konjo language. They believe that the power of the spoken word can bring about healing and transformation, and the use of the Konjo language in mantras or *baca-baca* (in Konjo language) reflects this belief. The mantras are recited by traditional healers, known as *Sandros*, who are highly respected members of the community.

People in Indonesia have long been aware of the custom of utilizing mantras as traditional medicine, especially in indigenous communities (Fitriani, 2018; Heriyanto et al., 2020; Hidayatullah, 2020). Mostly the communities have a deep understanding of the language which is used in the cultural context, and they use this knowledge to create powerful and effective mantras for healing (Lynch et al., 2018). Mantras are sacred utterances or phrases that are believed to have spiritual or healing powers (Mary Wilson, 1997). Mantras are also magical oral poems used by humans to achieve their goals in special ways (Fitriani, 2018). In addition to being referred to as "words of power," "influencing chants or mutterings," "sacred syllables, words or phrases," or "sacred thoughts," mantras include words, syllables, and sounds (Iyengar, 1965; Mary Wilson, 1997). Mantras frequently involve repeating or chanting, known as *japa* (Iyengar, 1965), which can be done aloud or silently (Lynch et al., 2018). Therefore, mantras are also considered as a form of oral literature, namely folk poetry, the sentences are not free form but bound (Danandjaja, 1991).

The use of Konjo language in mantras of traditional medication practice is an important aspect of the Ammatoa indigenous community's cultural identity and heritage. It represents the community's language attitude and language ideology in a unique way of understanding and interacting with the world. It also reflects a deep connection to the land, the ancestors, and the spiritual realm. Juhannis et al. (2021) claim that the diseases of the Ammatoa indigenous community are caused by three things: (1) the causes of illness are varied, indicating that there are numerous determinants of health, either due to individual or environmental factors; (2) diseases can occur if people are not abiding by agreed-upon customary rules that have been passed down through generations or fail to follow their customary instructions, led by their community leader (3) Illnesses brought on by mystical or magical elements.

The Ammatoa indigenous community considers Konjo their heritage language, and they use it extensively in their customs, including the treatment of all diseases. Traditional medication in the Ammatoa indigenous community is rooted in the belief that all aspects of the human experience, including physical health, emotional well-being, and spiritual fulfillment, are interconnected (Abidah et al., 2021; Juhannis et al., 2021). This belief underpins the use of Konjo language in mantras as a form of traditional therapeutics and a vital part of the community's cultural survival and continuity.

Despite the importance of Konjo language in traditional medications and the cultural identity of the Ammatoa indigenous community, there are challenges to its preservation and promotion in the modern world. Social and Cultural dynamics, however, cause the mantras to experience development due to inter-ethnic contact and Islamic influence in the traditional medication of Ammatoa indigenous community. This also impacts the variation of language use in the healing mantras because mantras reflect the connection to the world and the spiritual forces. The Ammatoa community views their traditional practices are rooted in a deep respect for the environment and the world (Abidah et al., 2021; Ichwan et al., 2021). Moreover, the increasing influence of Western medication and the erosion of traditional practices pose a significant threat to the continued use of Konjo language in mantras as a form of traditional therapeutics.

The use of language in the healing mantras can be categorized as minority language maintenance and revitalization strategies. However, this has not been widely discussed by researchers. Language maintenance is studied from the aspect of language use in the realm of family, school, office, etc. (Ansó Ros et al., 2021; Sari, 2018; Stavans & Ashkenazi, 2022; Zou, 2020). Thus, the research on the maintenance of the Konjo language through mantras as traditional medicine within the Ammatoa indigenous community aligns with broader discussions on language preservation, indigenous knowledge systems, traditional healing practices, and cultural revitalization. The interconnectedness of language, culture, and health is recognized as a fundamental aspect of indigenous communities' well-being and cultural heritage. Understanding the challenges faced by these communities and exploring strategies for language and cultural preservation can contribute to the sustainability and resilience of indigenous languages and traditional practices. This is an interesting area of research that has received little attention in the linguistic field. Therefore, in this research we explore the types of language in mantras as a traditional medication of the Ammatoa indigenous community, we examine the types of diseases which use Konjo language in the healing mantras, and we also discuss the healing mantras inheritance process as the strategy of Konjo's language maintenance.

Basic functions of language include self-expression, communication, organization and adaptation to social integration in the environment or circumstances, and social control (Keraf, 2004). These functions are used in accordance with a person's needs. This research focuses on sociolinguistics literature that examines various language maintenance strategies in the setting of health context. In essence, the sociolinguistic perspective on language is concerned with "who speaks what language to whom, when, and to what end." Because of this, language functions can be viewed from a multitude of angles from the perspective of sociolinguistics, including speakers, listeners, themes, codes, and conversational intent (Chaer & Agustina, 2004).

Language maintenance is the process by which a language manages to maintain its vitality while demonstrating a strong degree of resistance in the face of pressure from the dominant languages (Batibo, 2005). Thus, our environment, including the ethnic areas nearby, has an impact on the language we use (Rabiah, 2012). According to Allport (1954), attitudes are learned inclinations that shape our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward individuals or objects. In other words, attitudes encompass cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. On the other hand, language ideologies serve as influential factors that give meaning to language and its usage in culturally specific ways for individuals. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic environment surrounding Ammatoa community's cultural heritage in traditional medication, we delve into the relevant language ideologies, which can be described as the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, intertwined with their

medical interests. Language ideology, according to Armstrong (2012), "can be viewed as the link between language ability on the one hand, and language use on the other," and it is a significant element in the preservation or extinction of a minority language. Additionally well-documented (Baker, 1992; Garrett, 2010) and regarded as an "important barometer, providing a climate of the language" (Baker & Jones, 1998) is the relationship between language attitudes and language use. Language ideologies are thought to play a significant role in shaping how a language is used in a certain context (Blommaert, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

An interpretive phenomenology was used to examine how deeply the Konjo language is used in healing practice, including the use of Arabic language in mantras, types of diseases that are cured with the mantra, and healing mantra inheritance (Chan & Sigma Theta Tau International., 2010). The location of this research is in Tana Toa Village, Kajang District, Bulukumba Regency of South Sulawesi Province. This research was conducted from January to April 2023, with a total of 6 informants consisting of Indigenous Tribes Members, namely; the Tribe leader or Ammatoa (I1), Head of Tana Toa Village (I2), Cleric (I3), The Elder (I4), Traditional Healer (Sandro) (I5) dan ordinary stay-at-home parents (I6).

In-depth interviews were chosen due to their capabilities for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the informant's perception, viewpoints, and experience about the use of Konjo Language in their healing practice. Moreover, In-depth interviews allow the researcher to understand the wider context of Konjo language in Konjo's medical practice. Finally, an in-depth interview gives the researchers the flexibility to adapt the question according to the informant's responses and be able to explore an interesting aspect that arises during the interview.

The informant's recruitment is based on the researcher's visit to Tana Toa Village. As a tradition for a guest that visits the village, the researcher highly recommended visiting the tribe leader or Ammatoa first before doing research. The Ammatoa then was chosen as the first informants and followed by other informants recommended by the Ammatoa as the head of Tana Toa Village (*Kepala Desa*), Ammatoa Kajang Cleric, and The Elder. Another informant was chosen from the ordinary parents in the community.

The interview recording was verbatim transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were initially examined inductively, as advised by (Creswell, John W. and Creswell, 1994), to pinpoint the thematic categories that would serve as the cornerstone of the model created in this work. The goal of this research phase is to streamline the information before creating themes or groups by assembling relevant subjects and looking for relationships. Three categories emerged from in-depth qualitative analyses of the interview transcripts related to the preservation of language through mantras as a traditional therapeutic of Ammatoa, namely: types of languages in mantras, types of diseases using the Konjo language, and the healing mantras inheritance process.

ANALYSIS

Based on the thematic analysis, we found that there are three themes of Ammatoa indigenous community strategies in maintaining the Konjo language within traditional therapeutic context. The analysis of the research findings provides valuable insights into the significance of the Konjo language maintenance in mantras, the classification of diseases using the mantras, and the inheritance process of healing mantras within the Ammatoa indigenous community.

Theme 1: Types of Languages in Healing Mantras of Ammatoa Indigenous Community

The findings of this research indicate that the language used in the traditional healing mantras of the Ammatoa Kajang community is a mixture of various languages, including Konjo, Bugis, Makassar, Bugis, and Bahasa (Indonesian Malay). This aligns with the statement of Informant I1 L3, L5, L56, L58, L64, L73. However, despite the presence of these other languages, the Konjo language remains the dominant language used in the healing mantras or *baca-baca*. This aligns with the statements provided by the informants, where they emphasize the prevalent use of the Konjo language in the mantras (I1, L58, L73). This statement is further supported by statement I6 L122, which states that she heard that the mantras used during her visits to Sandro are mostly in the Konjo language. Other informants also give an explanation below:

"Pengobatan tradisional di masyarakat Ammatoa di Kajang ini terkenal dengan cara "baca-baca" yang juga bisa menjadi salah satu upaya pelestarian kearifan lokal yakni bahasa yang digunakan dalam "baca-baca" didominasi dengan bahasa Konjo walaupun di dalamnya biasanya juga dicampur dengan bahasa Arab, Bugis, Makassar, Melayu (Bahasa Indonesia), dan lain-lainnya." (I1, L73).

“Kalo baca-baca tetap menggunakan ayat Al Quran seperti bismillah, sholawat dan syahadat karena mereka tetap percaya bahwa semuanya kesembuhan itu datangnya dari sang pencipta.” (I1L62).

This linguistic phenomenon can be attributed to the historical and cultural interactions among different communities and language groups in the South Sulawesi province. When speakers of different languages interact frequently and for a long time, language contact occurs, which allows linguistic elements from one language to be adopted and integrated into another (Zabrodska & Ivanova, 2021). In the case of the Ammatoa indigenous community, the presence of multiple languages in their healing mantras suggests the influence of neighboring communities and cultural exchange over time. In the past, the Second Ammatoa (the leader of Ammatoa indigenous community) and the King of Gowa (the leader of Makassar) had an agreement that the two tribes would never engage in hostilities and would cooperate to establish peaceful coexistence (Sambu, 2016). This is evidence that the Ammatoa Indigenous community consistently upholds positive relationships with other ethnic groups nearby including the Bugis tribe.

Furthermore, the use of Bahasa (Indonesian Malay) in the healing mantras points to the broader socio-cultural context in which the Ammatoa indigenous community exists in the country. Bahasa Indonesia, as the national language of Indonesia, serves as a lingua franca and a means of communication among various ethnic groups in the country. Its inclusion in the healing mantras may reflect the community's engagement with broader Indonesian society, as well as the influence of national language policies and education.

The incorporation of the Arabic language in the mantras is also noteworthy, particularly through the inclusion of quotes from the Holy Quran, such as *Basmala*, *Shahada*, and *Salawat*. This reflects the deep-rooted belief within the Ammatoa indigenous community that healing comes from the Creator, and therefore, they utilize these sacred Islamic verses in their mantras (I1, L62). The mantras in the traditional medical practices of the Ammatoa indigenous community serve as a means of establishing a connection between humans and the Creator. They are recited as rhythmic prayers and often involve blessings upon the prophets. The mantras accompany various ritual processes, such as blowing on the affected area by the Sandro, performing a bathing ritual, or conducting the *Sesajen* Ritual. These practices highlight the integral role of mantras in the healing rituals and overall traditional medical practices of the community (I1, L3, L5, L80, L131, L168, L172).

The findings suggest that the Ammatoa indigenous community has preserved their heritage language and cultural practices using mantras. Despite the influence of other languages and the inclusion of Arabic verses, the dominance of the Konjo language in the mantras reflects a conscious effort to maintain their linguistic heritage. The utilization of mantras as a medium for healing and connection to the Creator further underscores the significance of these practices in the community's belief system and cultural identity (Indarwati & Retni, 2015; Rinaldi et al., 2018).

These insights provide valuable knowledge regarding the role of mantras in the maintenance and preservation of the Konjo language, as well as the cultural practices of the Ammatoa indigenous community. The research highlights the importance of understanding the linguistic and cultural dynamics within traditional healing practices and how they contribute to the overall well-being and identity of indigenous communities. Such understanding can inform language preservation efforts and promote cultural sustainability among indigenous groups facing language loss and cultural erosion (Sampean & Sjaf, 2021).

Overall, the presence of language contact in the healing mantras of the Ammatoa indigenous community underscores the interconnectedness of languages and cultures in the region. It signifies the community's ability to adapt, borrow, and integrate linguistic elements from different languages, contributing to their traditional healing practices' linguistic richness and diversity (Whalen et al., 2016). This language contact phenomenon provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of language use and maintenance within indigenous communities, highlighting the cultural and linguistic interactions that shape their traditions.

Theme 2: Types of Diseases using Mantras of Konjo language

The second theme that emerged from the research pertains to the types of diseases addressed using mantras in the Konjo language within the traditional medicine practices of the Ammatoa indigenous community. The diseases are classified into three categories: (a) those caused by natural factors, (b) those caused by magic, and (c) those associated with supernatural beings or religious beliefs.

Diseases caused by natural factors are attributed to changes in nature or interactions with the natural environment. Examples include flu, cough, fever, skin itching, and chickenpox. These illnesses are believed

to result from freezing weather events or bacterial infections (I5, L26; I5, L28). Moreover, common diseases caused by natural factors such as *Rammusu* or shivering (I6, L507), *Hambang* or fever (I6, L513), *Moreh* or cough (I6, L513), *Katungrapala* or skin itching (I6, L515), and *puru* or chickenpox (I6, L519). In treating diseases caused by natural factors, the Ammatoa indigenous community relies on remedies derived from nature itself, primarily medicinal plants found in their customary area. The mantras recited for these diseases are prayers to Allah SWT, as the community believes in the power of the owner of the medicinal plants, which is God (I1, L11, L24).

The second category of diseases is attributed to magic and is defined as illnesses sent by humans through witchcraft. These diseases are often physically invisible and are believed to be inflicted by individuals who have harnessed the power of evil spirits. Examples of sorcery-related diseases mentioned include *Doti* or black magic or voodoo (I5, L30). The treatment of diseases caused by magic may involve specific mantras aimed at countering the effects of witchcraft or appeasing the supernatural forces associated with the illness (I5, L35).

The third category encompasses diseases associated with supernatural beings or related to the religious and spiritual beliefs of the Ammatoa indigenous people. These diseases are believed to originate from forces beyond human control or the influence of supernatural entities. Failure to follow the principles of *Pasang Ri Kajang* or the instructions from Kajang is also seen as a cause of these illnesses. Possession by spirits is considered a prominent sign of diseases caused by supernatural beings, categorized as *Kasamperoang* where spirits take over the patient's soul, characterized by arrogance and speaking in a heavy voice like an old person (I5, L32) and *Kajakkallang* where village spirits possess an individual's soul, resulting in confusion and disorientation (I5, L32). Symptoms of possession include speaking in a heavy voice like an old person or experiencing confusion and disorientation. Vomiting, known as *Kacocoekan* is also believed to be a symptom of diseases caused by supernatural beings (I6, L389).

The classification of diseases into these three categories reflects the Ammatoa indigenous community's holistic understanding of health and illness, encompassing natural, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions. Fitriani (2018) found that Lebak community in Banten also uses mantras in treating these diseases which highlights the community's belief in the power of prayers and their connection to the divine. It demonstrates the community's rich knowledge of their environment, their spiritual practices, and their cultural beliefs surrounding health and healing.

Understanding the several types of diseases addressed through mantras in the Konjo language provides valuable insights into the traditional medical practices of the Ammatoa indigenous community. It underscores the importance of considering cultural, spiritual, and supernatural dimensions in healthcare and the potential for integrating traditional healing methods with modern medical practices (Coderey, 2021). Furthermore, this knowledge contributes to the preservation of the Konjo language and cultural heritage, as well as informs discussions on indigenous healthcare systems and the significance of language in traditional medicine.

Theme 3: The Healing Mantra's Inheritance Process

The third theme that emerged from the research revolves around the inheritance process of healing mantras and its significance in the maintenance of the Konjo language within the Ammatoa indigenous community. In the traditional medicine practices, the mantra is considered a sacred medium of connection between *Sandro* (traditional healer) and the supreme creator. *Sandro* is responsible for reciting the mantras silently during the healing process, emphasizing the need for them to memorize the mantras by heart. It is strictly forbidden for *Sandro* to write down the mantras, as doing so would render them ineffective in the healing process. This oral transmission of knowledge and the restriction on writing ensures the preservation of the Konjo language within the healing practices (I1, L3; I6, L419).

The Ammatoa indigenous community only use oral mantras in their traditional therapeutics and the mantras are restricted to be written. The knowledge and skills of a *Sandro* can only be passed down to their direct bloodline descendants. The designated inheritor must willingly accept the responsibilities and skills, as rejecting the inheritance is believed to bring misfortune to the individual in the future. The moment a *Sandro* receives a divine revelation of their impending death, they feel the urgency to pass down their abilities to ensure the continuity of the tradition (I5, L67, I6, L242).

However, the recent situation within the Ammatoa indigenous community indicates a decline in the number of *Sandro* and the willingness of the younger generation to continue the family legacy. Many *Sandro* have passed away, and their offspring have chosen not to carry on the role. One of the reasons for this lack of interest is the challenge of memorizing the intricate spells required to become a *Sandro*. The

younger generation, especially those who have received higher education, often choose careers aligned with their educational backgrounds and reside outside the customary area of Ammatoa in Kajang. This cultural shift and pursuit of alternative paths contribute to the diminishing number of individuals willing to take on the role of *Sandro* (I5, L344). It is notable that Informant 5 expresses no concern about this situation, as access to modern medical services is available within the community. This suggests that the availability of modern healthcare alternatives has influenced the choices made by the younger generation, who may perceive traditional healing practices as less practical or relevant in contemporary times (I5, L560, L563).

The discussion of the inheritance process of healing mantras highlights the challenges faced in maintaining the Konjo language and the traditional healing practices within the Ammatoa indigenous community. The decline in the number of *sandro* and the decreasing interest among the younger generation raise concerns about the future of the language and the cultural practices associated with it. The impact of education, changing societal dynamics, and access to modern medical services play significant roles in shaping individuals' career choices and the continuity of traditional healing practices.

The findings of this study highlight the significance of taking proactive steps to address these issues and support the maintenance and revitalization of the Konjo language within the indigenous Ammatoa community. It highlights the significance of acknowledging the cultural worth and importance of traditional healing methods and finding ways to connect traditional and modern medical systems (Indarwati & Retni, 2015). By working together, the community, educational institutions, and healthcare providers can potentially find solutions to guarantee the longevity of the Konjo language, preserve its cultural heritage, and incorporate traditional healing practices into modern healthcare models.

CONCLUSIONS

This research explored the maintenance of the Konjo language through the utilization of mantras as traditional medicine within the Ammatoa Kajang indigenous community. The findings revealed several important aspects of the language and its role in the community's healing practices. Firstly, it was found that the language used in the healing mantras of the Ammatoa Kajang community is a mixture of various languages, including Konjo, Bugis, Makassar, Bugis, and Bahasa. However, the Konjo language remains the dominant language used in the mantras, with Arabic quotes from the Holy Quran also incorporated. This linguistic diversity displays the cultural richness and influences present within the community. Secondly, the research shed light on the different types of diseases addressed through mantras in the Konjo language. Diseases were classified into those caused by natural factors, magic, and supernatural beings or religious beliefs. The understanding of these disease categories reflects the community's holistic approach to health and healing, integrating natural, spiritual, and metaphysical dimensions.

Furthermore, the research explored the inheritance process of healing mantras and its significance in the maintenance of the Konjo language. It was found that the transmission of knowledge and skills of a *Sandro* (traditional healer) can only be passed down to direct bloodline descendants. However, the declining number of *Sandro* and the lack of interest among the younger generation pose challenges to the preservation of the language and traditional healing practices. Factors such as education, career choices, and access to modern medical services have influenced the community's shifting dynamics and perceptions.

In light of these findings, it is crucial to recognize the importance of maintaining and revitalizing the Konjo language within the Ammatoa indigenous community. Efforts should be made to address the challenges faced in the inheritance of healing mantras and the diminishing interest among the younger generation. Collaborative initiatives between the community, educational institutions, and healthcare providers can play a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of the language and the integration of traditional healing practices with modern healthcare frameworks.

Maintaining the Konjo language not only safeguards the cultural heritage of the Ammatoa indigenous community but also contributes to the broader efforts of preserving indigenous languages and promoting cultural diversity. By recognizing the value of traditional knowledge and embracing the interconnectedness of language, culture, and healing, we can foster a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to healthcare that respects and integrates traditional practices. In conclusion, the maintenance of the Konjo language through mantras as traditional medicine within the Ammatoa indigenous community in Kajang represents a vital cultural and linguistic heritage that should be safeguarded and celebrated for the benefit of the community and future generations.

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