

Pointing Gestures and Verbal Acts: Linguistic Boundaries by Puor and Lamalera People in a Barter Market, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article highlights language practices by Puor and Lamalera people, in South Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, in a ‘barter market.’ While interacting in the market, Puor and Lamalera people prefer their own local languages, rather than Bahasa Indonesia, the lingua franca in a linguistically diverse Indonesia. Unavoidably, the use of these local languages in Indonesia is invoked through specific cultural assessments. In this barter market, speakers combine verbal acts and pointing gestures to supplement their linguistic repertoires and to convey message amplifiers that embody cultural meanings in their respective frames of reference and communicative events. The use of pointing gestures and verbal acts that build the linguistic repertoires becomes the main rule of interacting in the barter market, a social phenomenon which renders this market different from other ‘money’ markets.

The paper employs an ethnography of communication approach, through which to elicit and frame significant patterns and functions in these language practices. This article attempts to offer a unique perspective in the use of local languages in Indonesia, by presenting language as practice rather than as a linguistic system of sounds. As such, the categorization of language becomes blurred in that Puor and Lamalera linguistic repertoires shift as they are predicated on practice.

Keywords: *Diglossia, ethnography of communication, linguistic anthropology, gesture, verbal act*

Introduction

This article attempts to expose problematic relations between language and gesture through a description of Puor and Lamalera interactions in a barter market on the island of Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. In apparent contrast to the perspective of the anthropologist, Puor and Lamelera, as perhaps most other groups do, take language as a bounded system. They see their two languages as different to one another, while trading in the ‘barter market,’ a ritual routine in the current ‘money’ market climate.

Most often, the addressee can effectively understand the message of an addresser when both speak the same language. However, people interacting with different languages may yet have the ability to understand one another. Linguistic resources have been conventionally thought of as belonging to separate linguistic systems, grounded in dominant ideologies of language. These resources and subsequent practices may more fruitfully be understood as sets of resources called into play by social actors, under social and historical conditions which both constrain and render possible the social production of existing conventions and relations, as well as the production of new ones (Heller 2006, 167).

Heller (2007) notes that there can be no specific categorized language, as when language is practiced it is always in the process of production, and is inherently unfinished. Individuals build their linguistic repertoires through interaction (language in practice). We must move language away from its focus as a whole bounded unit of code and community, towards a more processual and materialist approach which privileges language as social practice, speakers as social actors, and boundaries as products of social action (Heller 2007, 1). A definition of language as practice also sees language more broadly, not simply as verbal action, but also as non-verbal actions such as gestures and expressions that are practiced in daily interaction. In our present case, Heller’s view of language as practice is more fitting for purposes of analysis than language as a system since the latter perspective does not pay sufficient attention to the non-verbal aspects of communication.

Mumford and Kita (2014) present a similar view when examining pointing gestures from a multidisciplinary viewpoint. Pointing gestures are significant in the exchange of information, contributing as building blocks in human communication. Following the work of such scholars as Sotaro Kita, John Haviland, Charles Goodwin, Elena Levy, and Susan Duncan, linguistic anthropology asks us to not focus only on the verbal aspect of language. To this, McNeill describes a theory of language that is “antireductionist, holistic, dialectical, and grounded in action and material experience” (2005, 4).

In this article we attempt to expose the relations between spoken language and gestures through a description of Puor and Lamalera interaction on the island of Lembata, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. In apparent contrast to the perspective of the anthropologist, Puor and Lamelera, as perhaps most other

groups, take language as bounded systems. They see themselves as having different languages from one another while trading in the 'barter market' as a routine rite in the midst of 'money' market nowadays. In addition to their own respective languages, the two groups have also been introduced to Bahasa Indonesia, which comprises another system. It is interesting to note that although this third language is used as a lingua franca in many other communicative events, it is absent in the barter market and is replaced by pointing gestures and verbal acts.

Communities are composed of individuals with differing linguistic abilities, thus allowing for the possibility of variation. Any variation is acknowledged as part of a community's shared language resource when the code that is applied becomes known. Among people with language differences, some form of cultural judgment regarding these differences is almost certain to emerge. The people of Lamalera and Puor have their own judgment of other dialects, which can be seen as symptoms of diglossia. Both Lamalera and Puor recognize the opposition between lurus and tarik dialects, with the former being the higher form. However, each group identifies itself as speakers of the lurus dialect, and considers the other as speakers of the lower tarik dialect. More will be said on this later, for it is perhaps one of the main reasons both groups insist on using their own language in their market interaction.

Puor and Lamalera People

The Puor are referred to as orang pedalaman (highland/inland people) by the Lamalera. They live on the slopes of the more mountainous areas. The majority work as horticulturalists, producing various natural harvests including a variety of bananas (lady finger, bugis and manis), tubers (wood, dry, starch), rice (red and black), areca nuts, corn, eggplants, avocados, rambutan, pineapples, papaya leaves and its flower, haleluya leaves, coconuts, bran, breadfruit, and palm wine. On the other hand, Lamalera is located on the coast facing the open sea of Sawu which borders the Indian Sea. This makes Lamalera a pathway for sea mammals, including whales, manta rays, and dolphins. The Lamalera are referred to as orang pesisir (coastal people) by the other groups because they live at the edge of the high seas and are very dependent on the sea. They usually exchange their catch and crops in the interaction space that they call the Barter Market. During my research in 2017, the Barter Market was only held at Lamalera, which became a temporary Barter Market after the conflict of land boundary between two tribes in Wulandoni. However, during my visit in the early of 2018, the Barter Market in Wulandoni was active again, and hence the Barter Market, which was previously only held on Thursday, is now also held on Wednesday at Lamalera and on Friday at Wulandoni. During their interactions in the Barter Market, they exchange goods. There is a common understanding that they know as a barter rule. However, these rules are not fixed, as often times they still negotiate during their interactions.

Negotiations and interactions in the barter market are carried out despite the language differences, such as in terms of the vocabulary and dialects of the people of Puor and Lamalera. With these language

barriers, in the context of the practice of buying and selling in the barter market, they prefer to use their own languages. The Puor speak the language of Puor and Lamalera in the language of Lamalera. Although there are language differences, both understand the message that is indeed delivered in the form of different languages. This language is called the language of the Barter Market. In terms of language, both belong to one language dialect family, namely Lemaholot Larantuka, which is further divided into the South Lembata and the Lamalera language dialects.

‘Lamaholot-Alor’ is used to refer to both a lingua franca and also to any of several Austronesian varieties spoken from eastern Flores to Alor. Alor [aol] is part of a chain which includes Lamaholot. The area around Larantuka is multiethnic, and some people have shifted to Malay [lrt]. Used as language of wider communication as an L2 by Adonara [adr], Alor [aol], Ile Ape [ila], Lamalera [lmr], Lamatuka [lmq], Levuka [lvu], Lewo Eleng [lwe], Lewotobi [lwt], South Lembata [lmf], West Lembata [lmj].²³ (Lewis, 2009) <http://wiki.verbix.com/Languages/Lamaholot> 33.

Even though they are in the same language family, they are quite different in terms of lexis. The language differences between these do not necessarily render Indonesian as the lingua franca when they interact, even though people of both have linguistic competence in the language. Both are able to speak Indonesian in other contexts, e.g., when meeting parents in the school, when doing transactions on the money market, or when meeting strangers (such as me). They use a combination of gesture and verbal act when they interact in the Barter Market. This is their repertoire in the context of the Barter Market. I will elaborate further in the next section.

With the existence of these language differences, the cultural assessment of language cannot be denied. People in South Lembata recognize the terms of Dialek Tarik and Dialek Lurus.

Dialek Tarik is a variation of language that has long sentences that resemble tones or songs. Dialek Lurus is a variation of language in the form of flat notes. There is an assumption and judgment that a Dialek Lurus is a dialect with a higher cultural assessment than Dialek Tarik. In the context of the of Puor and Lamalera Society, they both identify themselves using dialek Lurus. The Puor assess the language of Lamalera as having dialek Tarik, but the people of Lamalera also consider the people of Puor to have a dialect Tarik.

Pointing Gestures and Verbal Act As A Single Process

The Puor and Lamalera Society do not use many words or sentences in the context of the barter market, where some even use the context from the previous meeting in the interaction they are in (at the present time). At the least, their communication patterns are divided into two categories; when they say ‘yes,’ and say ‘no.’ In this communication, they not only deliver messages through verbal sentences and words, but there are gestures that become a unity in understanding the message. A sign gesture and expression of rejection are easier to identify (at least for me) than when they say yes. To say ‘yes,’ they raise their eyebrows with their face flat and they add certain movements, like a nod, or

immediately choose the item they like depending on the context in the conversation at that time. On the side, during the rejection process, they frown, wrinkle their eyes, shake their heads, or just let the other person go away. This pattern of rejection could continue until they reach an agreement.

Oftentimes, the women of the Puor merchants are offered goods by 2-3 people from Lamalera. This is when the conversation will emerge, and traders from the inland compare goods with one another to reject or accept existing offers. There is an existent measure as an indicator of the exchange of goods in this transaction. All Lamalera and Puor people know that twelve pieces of corn can be exchanged with one munga / handful of salt, five bunches of vegetables can be exchanged with one fish, or one fish can be exchanged for tuber / sweet potato. When the market takes place, every mama from the inland will usually be approached by coastal people who offer their luggage. Usually, the merchants from Lamalera approach the merchants of the Puor by showing their fish and holding the goods they wants to exchange. The women as Puor merchants agree that they will take the fish given while looking at their goods to be exchanged. Below I present the conversation that emerged during an exchange

“Ema, ope ika” atau “ema, ope sia”
Mom, go buy the fish or Mom, go buy my salt

Case	Acceptance			
	F a c i a l expression	Gesture	Gloss	Addressee
1	Flat Face	Along with a flat facial expression, choosing 2 whales quickly and put these a bag. Then count 24 bananas. The counting movement is also unique, if there are 24 pieces in one then they will count it twice at once, so it is 12 x 2. Counting it twice at once with the thumb and forefinger on every 2 bananas with the same swing		Puor-Lamalera
2	Nod	Hand crossed above the knee in	Bidan from Wulandoni: pointing to the dragon fruit Mama Merry: 20	Wulandoni-Puor (Using B a h a s a

		a sitting position	(while nodding)	Indonesia)
			Bidan from Wulandoni: I will buy 2.	
3	Flat Face	Take 1 fish which he thinks is good. Count twice at once, so it is 6 x 2. Counting it twice at once with the thumb and forefinger on every 2 bananas with the same swing.		People of Luki
4	Take a look at the basin	Take 12 bananas and count it twice at once, so 6 x 2. Counting it twice at once with the thumb and forefinger on every 2 bananas with the same swing. When calculating it, he gazes into the fish's basin	Exchange fish with bananas (local language)	People of Lamalera
5	Flat face	Choosing 3 small dragon fruits	Ask the price, then give IDR 30.000, entrust the item to the merchant because there is no plastic. (Using Bahasa Indonesia)	Police office from Aceh (outsider)
Ignoring				
Case	F a c i a l expression	Gesture	Gloss	Addressee
1	Frown	Along with a frown expression ,they hold the fish, then release it. Then the fish	The fish merchants asked for 12 bananas but the fish was too small, the inland merchants only wanted to	Puor-Lamalera

		merchant leaves	give 6 of their fish	
2	Wrinkle the eyes	Silent and do not hold the fish	Want the fish, not the crackers	People of Harapan Beach
3	Shaking head	Stay put	The fish is too small	People of Luki
	Frown	Nodding head	Take	People of Lamalera
	Nodding head	Throwing face to the left while putting their hand on their face	Take	People of Lebala
	Frown	Hands on face	-	Puor-Lebala

Utterance Event 1

The first video is 53 seconds long, with an old man/grandfather (*nenek laki-laki*), an old woman/grandmother (*nenek perempuan*), and one mama. An old man carrying tobacco was given a bucket of fish by mama Lamalera, and then chose one half-dried fish, and offered tobacco as an exchange (in Puor Language). Mom from Lamalera gave a 'yes' sign by raising an eyebrow, and then the old woman gave the mama 2 baskets of tobacco. At the same moment, the old woman offered the whale skin. The old man refused by shaking his head and said "take" which means no. Then the old woman still insisted on showing the fish, after which, the old man responded by moving his hand.

(1) Pedagang Lamelera: Ema, ope ika

'Mom, buy fish'

Mom go buy my fish

[Merchant from Lamalera then shows a bucket containing fish from a distance]

(2) Mama Yashinta: Ma tai mene

'try bring here'

try bring it here, I wanna see[2]

[Mama Yashinta waved her hand towards P1]

[Then the Lamalera merchant approaches Mama Yashinta]

(3) Mama Yashinta: Mukor atau kevaror?
'corn or banana?'

Do you want to exchange it with corn or banana?

(4) Lamalera Merchants: Nakri kam op doi
No, want buy money'

Not with corn or banana, I want it to be exchanged with money instead

(5) Mama Yashinta: A....

'Ya..'

Utterance Event 2

(6) Mama Lia: 'Ina, Ina, ope ti neges fi
buy please goods me'

Ina, please go buy my goods

(7) Lamalera Merchant: Neges fi na gai ke
'goods me also hasn't sold'

But my goods also hasn't been sold yet

(8) Mama Lia: Ema, goi ika take? Go so ro moi sia
'mom have fish no? If not, I want to given salt

Mom, do you bring fish or not? Otherwise, I would take the salt.

Lamalera merchant: Aaa, pi

'yes, here'

yes, there is, here

note: Ina is a term to call a woman who is younger than the caller

Language Practice in Barter Transactions (Mama Ratih1)

Below I present the practice of language by Mama Ratih with women merchants from Lamalera. In this situation, Lamalera merchants have chosen a banana joint, and are negotiating to exchange fish in the bucket.

Image 3.4 Language Practice in Barter Transact

ions 2, Mama Ratih, fieldnote 2017

Gambar 3.4 A



MR : Nakri kurang e, go gut ketega ? It's not enough, where can I pick more ?

[Mama Ratih showing a surprised expression while laughing]

[Then the Lamalera merchant pointing to the vegetables she wanted to be exchanged with the fish again. While saying:]

PL: Krokofelor

Tuber leaves

Gambar 3.4 B



MR: Bo.. Kurange..Muaki... Muaki... Neme go maji

Really? It's not enough.. Maybe another time. I will give you more next time.

Don't, it's not enough. Next time you come to the market I will give you a bonus

[Mama Ratih saying it while raising her hand up and waving it to give a sign that the amount of the item is not enough.].

1 MR is the term used to refer to Mama Ratih, a merchant from Puor, while PL is a merchant from Lamalera.

In the table on the next page, the language practice will be explained in 3 languages, the first line is the language of Puor / Lamalera, the second line is the meaning of the local language in a literal meaning, and the third line is the interpretative meaning from me as a researcher to clarify the context and situation when the practice of the language took place.

<p>Gambar 3.4 C</p> 	<p>PL : A... Senare.. Yes, it's okay. Yes, no problem.</p> <p>[Then Mama Ratih and the Lamalera merchant handling the fish in the bucket together]</p> <p>[After Mama Ratih took the fish, the Lamalera merchant left.]</p>
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Linguistic Boundaries: Dialek Lurus versus Dialek Tarik

Lamalera and Puor communities have their cultural assessment towards other dialects, which I personally diagnosed as having diglossic symptoms. Dialect is a variation or style of language, which is used in certain populations within groups of people that have been determined (by culture) as part of the rules of the game that must be chosen or used in interaction (Gumperz 1997 in Saville-Troike 2003, p. 40). An assessment of the language commonly referred to as the Diglossia concept was originally introduced by Charles Ferguson in Ferguson (1959, 336). He defined diglossia as: "a relatively stable language situation in which [...] there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation."

With the existence of these language differences, a cultural assessment of language cannot be

denied. People in South Lembata recognize the terms of Dialek Tarik and Dialek Lurus. Dialek Tarik is a variation of language that has long sentences that resemble tones or songs. Dialek Lurus is a variation of language in the form of flat notes. There is an assumption and judgment that a Dialek Lurus is a dialect with a higher cultural assessment than Dialek Tarik. People in both communities identify themselves using dialek Lurus. Here, the Puor assess the language of Lamalera as having dialek Tarik, but the people of Lamalera also consider the people of Puor to have a dialect Tarik. Both of these communities assess their language as having a dialek Lurus, namely a dialect which is considered as having higher cultural assessment than Dialek Tarik. As Ferguson notes, one of the most important features of diglossia is the specialization of function for H and L. In one set of situations only H is appropriate and in another only L, with the two sets overlapping only very slightly. As an illustration, a sample listing of possible situations is given, with an indication of the variety normally used.’

This was revealed when I participated in activities carried out together by both the Puor and the Lamalera Society. When they were asked for opinions about the language of their neighbors, they always answered with sarcasm that indicated that they were mocking other dialects while imitating the dialects. When I attended the wedding at Lamalera, I had time to ask the moms about the language of the people of Puor. They answered that the language of Puor is a Dialek Tarik that has a singing tone. One of the moms suggested that “the language of the Puor is bongkre-bongkre,” while she imitated the typical dialect of Puor. This was followed by one of the other mamas who said “we understand they have language, we understand, but we have difficulty in using their language.” this suggests that they understand the language of the Puor, but are not able to speak that language. This is not only the case with the moms. Every informant I interviewed had the same cultural assessment of their neighbors.

However, the Puor community also has the same cultural assessment that the Lamalera language has a Dialek Tarik. This information was expressed by informants, who always assumed that the language of Lamalera has Dialek Tarik. Likewise, when I joined the garden farmers to visit the hills, they often mimicked the Lamalera dialect while conducting their planting activities. More so, they laughed while practicing the language, as did the informants from Lamalera.

Conclusion

The combination of verbal acts and pointing gestures as a repertoire conveyed as a message amplifier has various cultural meanings in a communicative event. The use of pointing gestures and verbal acts as a repertoire becomes the main rule of interacting in the barter market, which also can be seen as a social phenomena different to usual phenomena in a ‘money’ market. Communities are composed of individuals with differing linguistic abilities, thus allowing for the possibility of variation. Any variation is acknowledged as part of a community’s shared language resource when the code that is applied becomes known. Among people with language differences, some form of cultural judgment regarding these differences is almost certain to emerge. The people of Lamalera and Puor have their

own judgment of other dialects, which can be seen as diglossia. Both Lamalera and Puor communities recognize the opposition between lurus and tarik dialects, with the former being the higher form. However, each group identifies itself as speakers of the lurus dialect, and considers the other as speakers of the lower tarik dialect.

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