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## Study of stages and ethnolinguistics of *tu'a eja* culture of keo ethnic, nagekeo tribe, flores, east nusa tenggara, Indonesia in efforts of local cultural wisdom preservation

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### ABSTRACT

Traditional marriage in Keo ethnic language are called *tu'a eja*. *Tu'a eja* procession with complete stages is form of respect for women who still maintain their chastity. This implies that *tu'a eja* teaches values and norms that regulates social interactions of younger generation. This is interesting to review, but data on stages and vocabulary meaning in *tu'a eja* process have not been found. This study aimed to determine the stages and vocabulary meanings of the process of *tu'a eja*. Type of this research was qualitative research used interview, observation and documentation used interactive analysis model Miles and Huberman. The results showed that there were 8 stages of traditional process of *tu'a eja*, namely: asking (*pai holo wini* or *tana ale*), engagement (*peu lako yongo*), family gathering (*tiwo ine weta ne'e ane ana*), delivery of *belis* (*tu ngawu*), giving mat and pillow (*ti'i te'e pati lani*), moving house (*nuka sa'o*), family separation (*wola ine weta ane ana*) and returning to visit origin place (*lalo la'e*). It is found that *tu'a eja* and its eight stages promote the dignity of women in the community and build an honorable interaction among family groups in Keo ethnic people. *Tu'a eja* culture needed to be preserved as local cultural wisdom in Nagekeo tribe, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara.



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## Introduction

One of Indonesian nation uniqueness is shown by the diversity of culture, ethnicity, language, and tradition. This is a nation's wealth that is not owned by other nations in any parts of the world. There are various ethnic cultures in Indonesia and each ethnic group is unique, one of which is in terms of marriage tradition (Ananta et al., 2018). Flores is one of the large islands in the province of East Nusa Tenggara. Flores Island has eight districts, namely: West Manggarai, Manggarai, East Manggarai, Ngada, Nagekeo, Ende, Sikka, East Flores (Ekman Brow, 2016). Local languages used in daily life is variety even though they are in the same tribe, including in ritual of marriage tradition process which is cultural heritage (Sunarti, 2016).

Culture is a super organic things because it is hereditary even though people are always changing due to births and deaths. Marriage is a very important event so that a traditional ceremony must be done so that marriage life is safe from all the marriage life test. Marriage ceremony is done with a process that is unique to certain ethnic groups using their traditional language. Implementation of the ceremony is also way of preserving culture in an ethnic or tribal (Syarifudin, 2018).

Ethnolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that can be used to study structure of the language or vocabulary of a particular ethnic community's language which is based on perspective and culture of people who use that language in order to reveal the ethnic culture. Ethnolinguistics can be used as instruments for analysing linguistic data that used to photograph, and uncover cultural phenomena of a particular ethnicity (Taa et al., 2020). Ethnolinguistics is the main study in this research with more focus on aspect of language and traditional marriage culture of Keo ethnic.

Keo ethnic is one of ethnic in Nagekeo tribe that located in Kotakeo village, Nangaroro sub-district, until now, they still inherit ancestral culture in their socio-cultural life practice. One of the interesting aspects to study is traditional marriage. Marriage in Keo ethnic culture called tu'a eja is unique tradition, consisting of several stages using traditional language. Tu'a eja procession aims to pay respect to women. The community establishes traditional assessments for women according to traditional values, norms, culture and traditions. Complete tu'a eja process is only dedicated to women who have not had a biological relationship with any man (Apu, 2021).

Traditional language usage in process of tu'a eja is the main communication instrument by involving a spokesperson as communicator. The communicator is usually a respected figure such as a tribal chief, traditional leader and the oldest person in the family. In the communication process of tu'a eja, there is a distinctive vocabulary or special language structure so that the interaction can be held properly involving several components, namely who is involved, how the message is, who receives it, the media used (Sulissusiawan, 2016).

Research related to ethnolinguistics has been carried out by several previous researchers. The results of research by Janah et al (2015) through a semiotic approach found several symbols of linguistic meaning and behavior conveyed by messengers in the traditional wedding procession of the Kutai Lawas community, Kedang Ipil Village. Sirait & Hidayat's (2015) research through ethnographic studies suggests that one of the things found is that there are varieties of language used in the procession of mangulosi traditional Batak marriages which have an impact on differences in the behavior of people who are married traditionally and not married traditionally. Another research conducted by Arifin & Rijal (2018) using the theory of denotative meaning to reveal the symbolic meaning of the mappasikarawa tradition of the Bugis in Sebatik Nunukan in a traditional wedding procession mentioning the sacred meaning of body parts which are closely related to life and daily activities. local community. In addition, there is another study that discusses the procession of the stages of traditional marriage and the language used in traditional weddings in Manggarai, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. The study mentioned the meaning of luggage and language expressions in the traditional procession in Manggarai (Sanjaya & Rahardi, 2021). Some of the studies above both examine the procession of the stages of traditional marriage and the language used and its meaning.

In this study, the researcher used qualitative method to investigate the stages and vocabulary or language structures used in tu'a eja as a traditional marriage process in Keo Ethnic in Nagekeo. This study focuses on the meaning of the traditional language which is conveyed through the dowry in the traditional marriage procession and its link with values of promoting the dignity of women in the community and building an honorable interaction among family groups in Keo ethnic people. The old culture of tu'a eja needs to be preserved in the midst of a fast-paced globalization, so that the wealth of local culture is still inherited, especially in elevating the dignity of women and has an implicit meaning in the teachings of values and norms in society, especially the younger generation.

## Method

The research was conducted in Keo ethnic group in the village of Kotakeo, Nangaroro sub-district, Nagekeo Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Keo ethnicity was chosen as the research location with consideration that the people from generation to generation still inherited tu'a eja culture. This research was a qualitative descriptive study, which aimed to examined the stages and meanings of vocabulary/structure of traditional language that used in tu'a eja based on ethnolinguistic studies. Village leader of Kotakeo gave permission for the interview and the respondents allowed the researcher to record it. The research was conducted based on the permit from the village head of Keo City number 581/PEM/KK/SKIP/150/VI/2022. Interviews were conducted after obtaining approval from each respondent.

The researcher also interviewed four respondents who had gone through the stages of the Keo ethnic from different villages to confirm the results of the traditional elders interviews. Position of researchers in qualitative research is as the main instrument as well as planner of data collection and ultimately reporting results of the research (Ferdianto & Yesino, 2019). At the time the research conducted, researcher first observed and then grouped the data about the stages and meanings of traditional vocabulary/language

structure of *tu'a eja* based on ethnolinguistic studies according to the problems that had been formulated. In this qualitative research, there were various ways to collect data, included observation, interviews, and document analysis.

The collected data then analysed using model from Miles and Huberman (Fadli, 2021) namely interactive analysis model. Stages of the model were as follows, (1) data collection. Data collection was carried out from the results of interviews, the results of documents regarding the stages and meanings of the vocabulary/language structure of the *Tu'a eja*. In obtaining the data, the interviewer asked several questions regarding the stages and language used in culture marriage of Keo ethnic marriage by conducting telephone interviews and recording them. The questions asked include; the meaning of *tu'a eja*, what are the benefits of *tu'a eja*, what are the stages in *tu'a eja*, what are the customary languages for each stage of the *tu'a eja* process, who has the right to undergo the traditional *tu'a eja* process in full, who is not allowed to undergo the incomplete *tu'a eja* process and what are the customary sanctions, which parties are involved in the *tu'a eja* process, what are the men's belongings and what is their meaning, what are the goods are given by the woman in return in the traditional marriage *tu'a eja* process and what it means. (2) Data reduction. Data reduction aimed to sharpening data, classifying data, directing data, discarding data that was not needed and grouping data in such a way that it could be verified in such a way and drawn final conclusions (3) Presentation data. Presentation of data aimed to found meaningful patterns and provided actions and possibility of drawn conclusions. In this study, presentation of data in the form of stages and meanings of vocabulary/language structure of *Tu'a eja* based on ethnolinguistic studies (4) Verification or drawing conclusions. After the steps above were completed, next thing to do was verified the conclusions during the research.

## Results and Discussion

### Overview of the Keo ethnicity

Keo ethnic group is located in southern part of Flores island and belongs to administrative area of Kotakeo village, Nangaroro sub-district, Nagekeo Regency, East Nusa Tenggara (Hilir, 2020). Area of Kotakeo Village is 40 km<sup>2</sup>, it is about 40 km from sub-district capital and 70 km from district capital. Total population was 912 people, which was 0.17% of total population of Nangaroro District (Kemendagri, 2021). According to the results of interview with traditional figure, Keo ethnic group is part of Kotakeo village which was formed as result of Keo ethnic migration from Keo Lama old village. Migration occurred in 1972 with several considerations, among others: settlement location was too narrow because it was flanked by a ravine so that it was not possible to developed along with population increased. Difficulty in accessed the transportation and availability of drinking water were also the reasons for Keo ethnic migration to stayed in a new location until now.

### *Tu'a eja* culture of Keo ethnicity

Keo ethnic people still inherits *tu'a eja* culture in traditional marriage process even though they had migrated from the old place, namely Keo Lama. *Tu'a eja* when interpreted literally means married relationship traditionally or can be interpreted as traditional marriage. *Tu'a eja* is also known by other ethnic groups in Nagekeo tribe and other tribes on Flores island such as Bajawa tribe in Ngada district (Bay, 2015) and Lio tribe in Ende district (Sudi & Rini, 2018) as well as the stages and traditional language in *tu'a eja* but because differences dialects existence in each ethnicity, study of the stages and vocabulary of *Tu'a eja* culture of Keo ethnicity was an interesting matter to studied in this paper. In other words, the stages and ethnolinguistics of *Tu'a eja* culture were the focus of this paper.

*Tu'a eja* process involves spokespeople from both men and women. The spokesperson according to Keo ethnicity is called *mosalaki* who acts as a communicator between the men and women. Process of *tu'a eja* was unique and consists of several stages and in communicating, *mosalaki* always uses traditional language. According to Sulissusiawan (2016) traditional language spoken in traditional process was an effective communication medium in kinship between the two parties because it has traditional and ethical values. In Keo ethnic culture, complete *tu'a eja* stage is only for women who have not had a biological relationship with any party, on the contrary, it does not apply to women who are already pregnant. The stages and communication of traditional language in *tu'a eja* was interesting to studied, besides being important to preserved local cultural wisdom, it also had a moral message for the younger generation because it instils the value of self-control in younger generation society.

### The stages and traditional language of *Tu'a eja* of Keo ethnic

*Tu'a eja* in Keo ethnic culture was ancestral tradition that continues to this day. Marriage in Keo ethnic is patrilineal where women follow their husbands on condition that they have previously passed *tu'a eja* process. According to Mr. Aloysius Ceme, the traditional elder who was interviewed said that if a man cannot do *tu'a eja*

*eja* process, his woman cannot move to follow him. He will work in woman's family's house until *tu'a eja* process was carried out. Based on the results of interview, it was explained that there were several stages and language used in *tu'a eja* as follows:

1. Ask (*Pai holo wini or tana ale*)

This stage is initial stage in *tu'a eja* process where there is communication between parents of the male and female parts and does not involve the bride and groom or extended family of both parts. Parents of the groom's part come to the bride's house to ask if there are any daughters in her house. If there are 3 girls in the house, then the man will ask with statement: "*ai he ne'e holo wini?*", translation: is there a girl in this house? Man's parents will again ask "*holo ke ta'a dake wunga, dake kisa atau dake sepu*" which means the woman who is meant is the eldest, middle or youngest child. If the woman meant is the third child, then woman's parents will call their child to be introduced to male family with statement: "*ma'a te anak kami ta'a ketiga de*", the mean is: this is our child number 3 which is meant. If it is as intended, it will continue until introduction of their two children. The man may come to the house of his woman either just to visit or start joining in women's family events.

If during this stage, the future bride is pregnant, the future groom will be sanctioned with the name "*waja*" with statement "*keso ine lagu ame ne'e lagu ka'e*" which means stepping over her parents and two older sisters. For this matter, the "*waja*" sanction will be imposed 3 buffaloes each for both parents and two older sisters. If the bride is daughter number 2, the "*waja*" sanction are 2 buffaloes for both parents and eldest sister and "*waja*" sanction 1 buffalo for both parents if the future bride is eldest daughter. This sanction is imposed on groom side with condition of bringing male and female buffalo depending on the ability of the male part and the agreement of both parts.

2. Engagement (*Peu lako yongo*)

At this stage, it is also an introduction to families of both parts. The man brings a male goat with long horns or "*yongo mosa*" as a sign that the woman will be a future wife, as well as a dog or "*lako*" to entertain the woman parts. On the other hand, the women entertain or "*pisi ti'i*" by serve pigs. At this banquet, a spokesperson or *mosalaki* from the woman's side will deliver a statement of traditional language by saying: "*wesa po'a wengi rua ngara you ta'a ana haki negha mona gha hai ana kami, la'a ne'e wai ga'e pesa or jodo ne'e wai ga'e ke barang barang ta'a miu edi siba pota. Bhola ngara ana kami wesa po'a wengi rua la'a ato jodo ne'e ana haki, pesa ke barang kami gelu walo*". The mean is: If in the future, the groom prefers another woman to be his wife, the goods delivered will be declared lost, in the meaning the woman part will not returned the goods. On the contrary, if in the future the woman chooses another man to be her husband, then the woman must return the delivery goods by the man.

3. Family gathering (*Tiwo ine weta nee ane ana*)

The men's preparation for the next traditional stage is a discussion within the family for further processes. The extended family (*ine weta ane ana*) is invited traditionally to discuss matters that need to be prepared until departure to the women's part in belis delivery (*tu ngawu*) with invitation in traditional language "*mai kita mutu tiwo mo'o la'a tu ngawu ana kita*." Translation: let's gather to prepare for our child's belis delivery. The man's family invites all his family who have the obligation to donate goods in the form of buffalo, cows, horses, goats, gold and traditional parang (*topo*). At this stage, a banquet with the family is held (*pisi ti'i ane ana*) before leaving for the woman's house. The family leave a message to the spokesperson or "*mosalaki*" about the ability of belis to be conveyed to the woman. The same thing was done by women part in welcoming arrival of the men. Even the family gatherings are carried out repeatedly so that the reception of special guests in *tu'a eja* (the male side) is carried out optimally.

4. Delivery of belis (*Tu ngawu*)

The men brought goods in the form of buffalo, cows, horses, goats, gold, traditional parang (*topo*) and spears (*bhuja*) to be handed over to the women. This stage is also known as *so topo seli ne'e bhuja*. The meaning is: carry parang and spears. A short traditional ritual at this stage is one male buffalo is placed in the front row with the aim of being used as a receipt or "*coe ae*" from the woman's side. "*Coe ae*" in traditional language means to be splashed with water on the face which is a symbol of woman accepting arrival of the man. The women have also prepared the return items in the form of sarongs, pork, rice. These items are given to the man according to the goods delivered. Pork is prepared to entertain *tu'a eja* and some is made into cut of meat to be carried with rice by all male families. Traditional sarongs are specially prepared for male relatives who bring buffalo, horses, cows or gold.

5. Provision of mats and pillows (*Ti'i te'e pati lani*)  
The time has come for the relationship of the two prospective brides to be inaugurated traditionally. The traditional Keo ethnic marriage is called "*ti'i te'e pati lani*" which states that the woman's family approves the marriage of the woman with the woman's choice after going through several previous stages. The meaning of giving mats and pillows by women is symbol of parents sincerity giving their children to the man and his families. At this stage there will be additional duties for the men if the woman is already pregnant because it will be sanctioned. The traditional sanction "*waja*" with the traditional name of *keso te'e laga lani* in the form of a buffalo is imposed on the male side.
6. Moving house (*Nuka sa'o*)  
*Nuka sa'o* is the traditional stage of a woman leaving her parent's house and families to go to man's house. Girls wearing traditional clothes equipped with gold earrings (*wea*) and small baskets (*ipe*) to store betel and areca nut go out of her house and forbidden to looking back. Accompanied by man's extended family, the woman leaves her parents and extended family sadly. However, from the woman's side, several people are also sent to accompanied her to man's house. The escort will be entertained and stay overnight if they are far away and are given travel wages (*bhago taga*) in the form of meat or money. Traditionally, if the escort are not entertained, the escort is given a goat to serve as side dish after arriving at the man's house.
7. Family separation (*Wola ine weta ane ana*)  
After all the stages are carried out, then the big family of male part holds a banquet as form of thanksgiving. Relatives who have participated in giving buffalo, horses, cows, goats and gold are given thank you note in the form of traditional sarongs, mats, pillows and baskets (*ipe*) or baskets filled with meat and rice.
8. Return to visit the place of origin (*Lalo la'e*)  
Few days after the bride and groom are at the man's house, they return to visit the woman's parents' house or *lalo la'e*. Purpose of this stage is to please both parents that their daughter will stay in the man's house and visit her parents occasionally.

The traditional stages in the Keo ethnic group are incomplete for pregnant women because they do not through the first traditional stage process, namely asking (*Pai holo wini or tana ale*) and stage 2 engagement (*Peu lako yongo*). According to the informant, process of *tu'a eja* with the stages and traditional language used actually teaches about values, manners and norms in cultural life that have been inherited by the ancestors. Likewise, the traditional sanctions given at certain stages due to violations by the bride and groom actually teach that there are rules in social life that are binding through the expression of traditional language. This is in accordance with Ahmad Asif Sardari's (2018) opinion, traditional marriages have sacred values that are widespread, dignified, holy, mutually respecting and have social values that united the families of brides and groom who are attached with traditional language speech. Another opinion says that process of implementing traditional marriages requires traditional language as the main communication instruments<sup>[15]</sup>. On the other hand, traditional marriage is seen as tradition that has virtuous values and form of respect for women, which is also a binder of family relations, brotherhood or symbols to unite men and women as husband and wife (Lede et al., 2018).

Based on the description above, it could be said that process of *tu'a eja* with the stages and traditional language expressed had a broad meaning and needed to preserved in this era. Development of the era which demanded that younger generation tended to use united language, Indonesian language and even foreign languages were worried to threaten the preservation of local culture and languages, including *tu'a eja* culture and Keo ethnic language. Through this paper, it was hoped that it could be medium of information for readers, especially the younger generation regarding the stages of *tu'a eja* culture and traditional language used in effort to preserved local culture. According to Kemendikbud (2016), local wisdom is the uniqueness of certain ethnic groups that are not found in other ethnic groups. *Tu'a eja* culture is a local cultural wisdom that needed to be studied, this is in line with the opinion of Brata (2016) which said that local cultural wisdom was an essential thing that needed to be studied or explored in effort to maintained national identity in the current era of globalization.

## Conclusion

*Tu'a eja* culture of Keo ethnic has eight stages and its meaning at each stage. This qualitative research find that eight stages consist of asking (*pai holo wini or tana ale*), engagement (*peu lako yongo*), family gathering (*tiwo ine weta ne'e ane ana*), delivery of belis (*tu ngawu*), giving mat and pillow (*ti'i te'e pati lani*), moving house (*nuka sa'o*), family separation (*wola ine weta ane ana*) and returning to visit origin place (*lalo la'e*). Those eight stages have the same function to express of promoting the dignity of women in the community and building an honorable interaction among family groups in Keo ethnic people.

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