

Language and Identity in Ketepik Bulian Padi Played in Gambus Belitung: A Sociolinguistic Study

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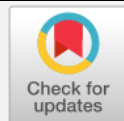
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ABSTRACT

Gambus and song lyrics complement each other, creating harmony while representing the history and cultural identity of their communities. This study aims to explore identity through diction choices, phonological processes, and musical notes in Gambus. These elements are assumed to reflect social relations and cultural identity. The sociolinguistic theory of isolect and identity theory are applied to analyze the lyrics and musical notes. This qualitative descriptive study employs library research using the song lyrics of Ketepik Belian Padi and the Gambus melody played by Sukino (a Gambus maestro) and his daughter, accessible at <https://youtu.be/wEJMsTUhY9c>. The research addresses two questions: (1) How is Ketepik Belian Padi in Gambus Belitung portrayed as a social identity? and (2) How is Ketepik Belian Padi in Gambus Belitung used as an element of social identity? The findings show that the identity of the people of East Belitung is deeply influenced by historical events and is preserved through these song lyrics.

Keywords: *Gambus Belitung; Ketepik Belian Padi; Language and Identity; Sociolinguistics; Song Lyrics*

1. Introduction

Belitung Island is part of the Bangka Belitung Archipelago Province which has a long history of colonial invasion because of the tin mining. The Dutch first colonized it in 1851 ([Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012](#)). The Belitung people could not manage their mining and had to witness their land being invaded by the colony and Chinese descendants who were recruited to work in the mining. In the 19th century, China came to Belitung, a miner left behind the local workers to work on their land.

Andrea Hirata, a novelist, brought up the dramatized story of the Belitung people's custom and their mining. He described the struggle of the Belitung people in every aspect of their lives such as education, social issues, and the exploitation of tin mining ([Kurniasari, 2011](#)). His story became popular as it was brought into cinema so that more people noticed the existence of Belitung and its social and cultural issues. Hirata stated that the Belitung people had lost their privilege to own their mining land as they got alienated from their land. Most people were not educated well as he told in his novel, that students and teachers were struggling to keep the institution going.

This history, both in fiction and non-fiction is worth observing how they form the identity of the Belitung people. One of the identity constructions is from the form of song lyrics and Gambus Belitung. They are assumed to have a deep meaning related to the history of their people. From its lyrics and its melody played in Gambus, it represents the identity of Belitung people related to their experiences in the past.

Gambus is known as a guitar that is used in a music show in Belitung. Gambus Belitung has a style compared to Dambus Bangka, which is another version of Gambus and Arabian guitar that is also called Gambus. The guitar styles differed among those three. Gambus Belitung had been started to be used in a paddy field to entertain the farmers. It assumes that the traditions are the combination of Zapin Malay and Arab involving the farmers who liked to dance while playing the musical instrument. However, Belitung people use Gambus for their use combined with other instruments such as accordion and percussion. It turns out that Gambus Belitung, at first, had a purpose for worshipping God. The song lyric strengthens the substance of Gambus's melody.

Poems and rhymes formed in song lyrics are the literary heritage that has been applied to many cultural attractions namely Gambus Belitung. It is distinct from Dambus Bangka in terms of the lyrics and the style of the guitars. Malay Gambus has existed since the arrival of Islam to the Riau area, and most likely, this Gambus is an incarnation of Gambus Arabic, which is called al-'ud (Oud) ([Putra, 2016](#)). This Arabic influence is inserted in the poem and rhymes' lyrics. Meanwhile, the Bangka's Dambus has been influenced by Malay culture.

A literary study in the realm of structuralism was also written by Siswanto, who uses the object of the Legend of Tanjung Ular Bangka Belitung, which produced a legend motif containing socio-cultural and economic information ([Siswanto, 2011](#)). Studies on mantras as oral literature have also been studied, which states that mantras in the Sungailiat Subdistrict have persuasion techniques ([Oktarina et al., 2018](#)). Furthermore, there is research that raises the subject of ethnic Arabs who entered the city of Muntok and allowed for an encounter between Malay and Arabic. Research conducted by Wijayanti et al. found that the Arab ethnic community still uses the use of Arabic. However, there has been a fusion of terms such as 'sinduk' (spoon), which is used by both languages, namely Arabic and Malay ([Wijayanti et al., 2020](#)).

A study titled *Gurindam Dua Belas Contribution Composition Raja Ali Haji (1808 – 1873 m)* ([Nurliana et al., 2022](#)) in enriching the treasures of Islam finds that the old reference can be

treasured to find the hidden meaning. It finds that the poem is part of the Islamic literature originally from Riau, Indonesia that represents the Islamic culture. Research about swearing as a part of cultural beliefs was conducted by Zhao titled “*Swearing in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties*” (Zhao, 2022). It tries to unravel the lexical items that are still used recently and become the identity of that society. In other words, the study of language and culture around the nation and world has many chances to unravel deeper.

The theory of Sociolinguistics is used to show the relation between the poems and their influence on society. It concerns identifying the social functions of language and its way of showing social meaning (Holmes, 2013; Trudgil, 2000; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Specifically, the speakers and their groups can form a social identity, as Kroskrity defines it as ‘the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories’ (Kroskrity, 2022). In this case, it is represented through the use of poems to express cultural identity. The poem, as a part of an artistic language, is considered as how language constructs the speaker’s identity.

Moreover, identities are fluid. A person can represent not only their gender but also their affiliation to the society. For example, a person can be a male, a father, a husband, a politician, a resident in a certain society, or a member of a certain organization. Specifically, as a member of a certain group of society a person’s identity can be mingled with the rest of the members to show the characteristics. The speech community is attached as it is defined as:

“...reflects what people do and know when they interact with one another. It assumes that when people come together through discursive practices, they behave as though they operate within a shared set of norms, local knowledge, beliefs, and values. It means that they are aware of these things and capable of knowing when they are being adhered to and when the values of the community are being ignored...it is fundamental in understanding identity and representation of ideology” (Morgan & Clarke, 2011).

It shows that speakers with the same speech community share the same values and beliefs so that they can represent the whole characteristics. It is similar to what Gumperz and Dill say that the speech community represents the permanent group that is bounded by face-to-face contact, modern nations divisible into smaller subregions, or even occupational associations or neighborhood gangs (Gumperz & Dill, 1971).

2. Literature Review

The study of language and identity is part of the study of sociolinguistics. It explains how membership assignments are made and how language is used to ‘create, embrace, resist, or alter group boundaries. It shows that rhymes sung in a musical ensemble in Belitung society convey the meaning to its people compared to the society which does not include poems to be their representation of the life values. Language and interaction become specific since this explains how language is used to negotiate relationships, actions, and events in daily life (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

Translanguaging within educational settings can enhance poetic expression related to language and identity among Australian students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Dutton & Rushton, 2021). Translanguaging is used mostly in the educational environment to accommodate students with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds by allowing them to use the language that they are experts in. One of the means is using poetry to

bring the language up rather than making it isolated. It is part of the effort to develop students' identities based on the form of poetry that they exhibit.

The form of language can be through mantras, poems, and song lyrics, which are called figurative language (Swarniti, 2022). As it is studied earlier, mantras can be part of the cultural background of a particular society to show identity. Poems and song lyrics bring figurative language that is not unusual or solely rhapsodical. As Roberts & Kreuz state, 'it is an omnipresent piece of oral and written discourse' (Roberts & Kreuz, 1994). This figurative language that can be found everywhere (both in oral and written form) is also part of social identity, such as in Belitung, which has poem and song lyrics as their daily language to express feeling and sometimes prayer.

Since sociological perspectives are prominent, the theory of social identity, including language, culture, and musical practice, is used to claim a certain community identity (Benet-Martínez, 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 2000). A multicultural community has formed a strong community identity through shared languages and music. In addition to strengthening the collective identity, language is used to maintain tradition and cultural heritage in the era of modernism (Lamont & Hargreaves, 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 2000). To compromise, the theory of symbolic interaction (Morrison, 1936) is used, stating that individuals create meanings by using symbolic interaction among them. Mead is supported by Geertz, who studies the cultural symbol (Geertz, 1979), stating that local cultural practice is a meaningful symbol to maintain the local identity and to differentiate them from other identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Previous studies show that language can be so attached to people. The use of mantras, pantun, poems, and song lyrics is to preserve and develop cultural behavior (Nurhayati, 2016). It means understanding culture as a system of ritual value through language can help to develop the strong character of a particular culture. Furthermore, this study would like to elaborate on the form of language, that is, poems and song lyrics to represent social identity. It becomes the attachment of its people to Belitung's customs and culture.

Those studies have achieved findings that are unraveling identity in a certain society. The identity is represented through cultural literary works such as folktales, poems, and other written and oral works. Society uses them as a way of life and as a reminder of their ancestors. The works can be played during a certain season as a means to socialize with their people.

Therefore, this research aims to elaborate the language and social identity influences into the poems and rhymes used in the Gambus musical tradition in Belitung Island. The authors try to characterize the types and elements of Gambus. The object is one of the songs titled 'Ketepik Bulian Padi' sung by Sukino and his daughter. Thus, there are two research questions in this research, namely (1) How is a song lyric titled "Ketepik Bulian Padi" described? and (2) How is 'Ketepik Bulian Padi' used to represent social identity?

3. Research Methodology

This is qualitative research with a library study method. As Creswell states, "...it is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014). The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation.

The data were collected through the digital media named YouTube. The content is a song titled 'Ketepik Bulian Padi' sung by Sukirno and his daughter using a Gambus instrument. The data were the song lyrics by finding the metaphorical meanings and musical rhyming. The data were analyzed using the sociolinguistic theory, that is, identity and language and sociological perspective on social and cultural identity. Moreover, the authors matched them with the historical and social backgrounds of the Belitung people by having secondary sources. The data, then, were presented in tables and discussions.

4. Results and Discussion

Ketepik Belian Padi is a poem consisting of eight stanzas. Each stanza mostly has four lines that are the repetition of the previous lines. The rhyming does not follow the standardized ABAB. The first third stanza is implied to be the hook, and the rest are the core of the poem. It is read or sung with a very slow tempo and expressed in lamenting. The melody is played at a slow pace. The lexicon used in the poem is as stated in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Lexicon of Sadness

No	Lexicon of Sadness	Frequency of Emergence
1	Hina/despicable	4
2	Badai/storm	4
3	Mati/dead	2
4	Air mata/tears	2
5	Mengembara/wandering	2
6	Tengah laut/middle of the sea	2
7	Tak tertahankan/unbearable	2

Table 2. Lexicon of Fortitude

No	Lexicon of Fortitude	Frequency of Emergence
1	Hati/heart	2
2	Tuhan /God	2
3	Kapal/ship	2
4	Hal/aim	2

Ketepik Belian Padi means chopping the paddy rice. Belitung society, especially the farmers likes to dance in the paddy field when it comes to the planting and harvesting moment. It gives them the spirit to work in the paddy field. The title of the song uses Malay language meaning chopping the paddy rice. It shows the activity of harvesting the rice but the diction 'chopping' is to accentuate the useless activity in that rice does not need to be chopped. Other meanings recommend that the full form of paddy rice is destroyed so it cannot be used or eaten.

The most used lexicons in this poem are 'hina' or 'despicable', which is part of the core meaning, and 'badai' or 'storm' as the hook meaning. The rests have the same frequency which is twice what is common in Gambus playing. Since the most frequently used lexicons are about sadness and fortitude, the authors have divided them into two categories. It shows that this song is mostly about sadness and how to deal with it by having fortitude.

From a phonological perspective, the Malay Belitung language differs significantly from Bangka Malay. This difference is particularly noticeable in the pronunciation of the schwa sound. In Belitung Malay, words often end with /ə/ (schwa), whereas in Bangka Malay, the equivalent sound is typically pronounced as /ě/. For instance, the word “supaye” may be pronounced differently in these two dialects.

4.1. Long History of Tin Colonization

Belitung became the main object of tin mining and was targeted by the colonial era. The Dutch colony had its own Billiton Maatschappij (*Belitong Maskapai*) starting from 1850 to 1958. It was Loudon, their financial backers, patrons in the Netherlands, and Prince Hendrik as the noble representative who found old, shallow diggings and signs of primitive pit-and-tunnel burrowings that were, according to Dutch-owned by the Sultan of Palembang. Profits were reached, and it was justified by the pioneer group who were Loudon and his team. Further, private investment grew (Thee & Heidhues, 1993).

The authorities of Bangka became jealous and forbade the Bangka coolie to go to Belitung to avoid the competition - to get the cheap coolie, especially the Chinese workforce. As a consequence, Belitung Tin Mining was under the Batavia supervisor directly. However, at the same time, the Dutch Colony had more independent administration because they no longer reported the mining to Bangka residents. When Belitung went back to Bangka from 1853 to 1932, the assistant resident stayed and had power over the mining without interference (Thee & Heidhues, 1993).

The travel writing made by Loudon (Thee & Heidhues, 1993), states that he adopted the method from Bangka when digging the mining by using *kongsi* or a term that means a cooperative undertaking. It comes from Pinyin, a Chinese term, that is *gongsi*. The method is a Chinese-style chain pump to remove water from Loudon’s trial digging by having manpower through a treadwheel. Because of its success, Loudon and the team hired sixty Chinese laborers from Singapore and had them continue the method mentioned.

The history of Tin colonial control changed the Belitung society, especially the ethnic perspective. In 1921 the last *depati* who was under Loudon’s control had died and was replaced by the *ngabehi* who could not be from nobility. As it was under Dutch control, *ngabehi* was asked to engage with Chinese coolies that were imported from Hongkong, Canton, Amoy, and Swatow via Singapore, and a few indies-born *peranakan* Chinese who were mostly from Bangka. In addition, workers from Belitung were from China-born *Hakka*; thus, they could not be from native Belitung. Later, Javanese woman coolies were also imported from Semarang and Batavia to get married to Chinese coolies to expand the workforce (Thee & Heidhues, 1993). However, the result did not satisfy the Company as only eleven males were born out of twenty-six babies, meaning that most collie families could not afford their lives.

It was *orang sekak* or boat-dwellers who became settled after becoming pirates themselves as they brought ore to their boats. It made them settle on land, and in the twentieth century, they were under the influence of Islam. They mingled with the other dwellers who came from Sumatra, Riau, and around Pontianak, who were mostly Chinese. These Chinese descendants were the coolies that finally got the permanent settlement; some were *Hakka*, but many of them were Hokkien Chinese from Xiamen, Fujian Province (Thee & Heidhues, 1993).

Based on the long history of Tin colonization, the song lyrics were produced to represent the condition of the Belitung people after being ignored by the Dutch colony. They did not have access to their land relating to the Tin mining. If only Tin mining could be managed by the native descendants, their lives could be better, and they could maintain their customs and

society. By having other dwellers come to their island, they had to create a hybrid society among Belitungnese, Chinese that were Hakka and Hokkien, Javanese, and *orang sekak*. The sudden mingle was not anticipated. Belitung people became the minority on their island. The grievance is accentuated in the lexicon *hina* (despicable), *air mate* (tears), *tak tertahankan* (unbearable), and *mati* (died).

By 1920 the coolie miners were of Chinese descendants 77%, and a small portion was from the native people that had lower wages. Once again, the natives had less value than the Chinese and Javanese immigrants. However, as stated in the song lyrics, the lexicons *badai* (storm), *hati* (heart), and *Tuhan* (God). Although *badai*, *hati*, and *Tuhan* are part of the hook of the *pantun* (Indonesian rhyming), the diction is chosen to describe the storm of sudden immigrants coming to their island. It is worsened by the condition that the Malay language is neglected as Chinese only talk in Chinese language (Thee & Heidhues, 1993). The resistance of the native Belitung people is evident in their use of the schwa sound at the end of phonemes that would typically have an /a/ sound. This feature also serves to distinguish Belitung Malay from Bangka Malay, which typically ends with an /e/ sound. In the song lyrics, this distinction can be observed in words like *air mate*, where the schwa is present at the end.

Table 3. The Effect of the Great Depression on Belitung Tin Mining on Population Growth

Year	All Chinese	Chinese Miner	Native	Miner
1920	29,000	21,000	39,000	1,500
1930	29,000	19,000	44,000	1,200
1932	14,000	8,000	44,000	500
1933	10,000	4,000	44,000	400

In the 1930s, the great depression happened in the tin mining that affected Chinese and other coolies' lives. Many immigrants went back to their native lands, and few of them stayed to deal with agriculture. The song lyrics titled *Ketepik Belian Padi* represent the situation that is a new life of agriculture when tin is down. However, they also wanted to leave so it was only the natives to continue planting peppers and paddy. It was seen in the lyrics "...ketepik belian padi.." which means the activity of chopping or harvesting the plants that can be paddy or peppers.

Belitung people, thus, use Gambus and *Ketepik Belian Padi* to differentiate them from other identities in their region, such as Chinese descendants as a product of imported tin labor. The music preference is used to show the social and cultural identity, adding the fact that the music is the representation of the Belitungnese life struggle during the Tin colonization.

5. Conclusion

This song, titled *Ketepik Belian Padi*, represents a condition in the past that shapes the identity of native Belitung. It starts from the tin colonization done by the Dutch and the hybrid cultures from various immigrants that are Chinese (Hakka and Hokkien), Batavia (now Jakarta), Semarang, and *orang sekak* coming from Sumatra, Riau, and a few of Pontianak. The choices of lexicons represent the experience of being alienated from their land. The experience did not happen in a few years but in decades; thus, it forms a kind of identity as the native Belitung and as the host of the island.

As the native identity, they have less power, as seen in the wages that they received as the minor coolies. It is represented in some lexicons such as *hina*, *air mate*, *tak tertahankan*, and *mati*. Moreover, they have to deal with other cultures and customs, such as Chinese and Javanese.

The only resistance they have made is the use of schwa to defend their Malay Belitung language compared to the domination of Chinese and Malay Bangka languages. The rest is in the form of a resignation that is seen from *badai*, *hati*, and *Tuhan*. As the host of the island, they find other life sources than tin mining when having a great depression that is planting paddy and peppers. They also welcome the immigrants to stay on their island. Gambus's melody makes the lyrics melancholic to identify that Belitung people have kind-hearted personalities and are full of resignation about their fates.

In addition, the authors recommend further adding more lyrics to get more comprehensive findings relating to the shaping of the identity of the Belitung people. The sociolinguistics is still related by adding more micro linguistics such as the semantic and morphological elements. The method can be better if possibly using corpus as the data collection.

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