

# The Metaphoric Aspects of Water in Traditional Sundanese Expressions

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

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Traditional Expressions

*Regional languages can be expressed in various forms, including traditional expressions, whether in the form of phrases (idioms) or proverbs. Many traditional expressions contain elements of water or have a water-related nuance, which are referred to as hydrological traditional expressions. This research aims to identify and describe the metaphorical aspects and forms of hydrological traditional expressions in the Sundanese language. This type of research is qualitative with a descriptive method. The data consists of hydrological traditional expressions in Sundanese, which were collected through bibliographic study techniques and intuitive techniques. The sources of this research data are books on Sundanese traditional expressions, ancient Sundanese manuscripts, and the researcher themselves. Data processing was conducted through direct element analysis techniques and hermeneutics. The research findings discovered traditional expressions that are water element-based and water-toned. Their forms can be in the form of derivative words, reduplicated words, compound words, phrases, single sentences, and compound sentences. The metaphorical aspect of traditional hydrological expressions consists of associative metaphors in word expressions and comparative metaphors in proverbs.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, which was formerly commonly referred to as the Archipelago, has a wealth of islands, ethnic groups, cultural arts, and languages. Indonesia has 17,380 islands (<https://www.big.go.id>), 1,340 ethnic groups (<https://indonesia.go.id>), and 718 local languages (<https://petabahasa.kemdikbud.go.id>). In addition, Indonesia is rich in cultural arts and is famous for its natural beauty. As one of the local languages in Indonesia, Sundanese has a wealth of traditional expressions that are recorded as many as 1,094 (Sudaryat, et al, 2008, pp. 21-221), which in other writings consist of 727 phrases, 807-word expressions, and 449 proverbs (Sudaryat, 2016, pp. 15-144). The number of traditional expressions may have some omissions; not all are recorded, so the number may still increase.

Traditional expressions can be in the form of word expressions (idioms) or proverbs. Word expressions take the form of compound words and phrases, while proverbs are in the form of clauses or sentences. The order of the words is relatively fixed with a certain intention, usually containing a comparative meaning as a reflection of human life behavior (Sudaryat, 2016, p. 48; 93). They are conveyed by the speaker so that the listener knows which values are good and which are not. The good must be taken as a guide, and the bad must be avoided (Danandjaja, 2002). Proverbs are very aesthetic, containing elements of rhythm and the power of words. The structure and sound of the words essentially remain unchanged from generation to generation. In addition to containing messages and advice, proverbs subtly encapsulate meanings and high moral values and reflect the wisdom of the community that created them (Warnaen et al., 1987, p. 8).

Traditional expressions can be traced and studied from various aspects contained within them, including educational philosophy values (Sudaryat, 2012); character education values (Sudaryat, 2012a); national moral values (Sudaryat, 2013); aspects of flora and fauna and teaching materials (Rachmah, 2016); language paradigms as pedagogical foundations (Sudaryat, et al., 2017); ecopedagogical values (Sudaryat et al., 2018); cultural

values (Jamilah, 2019); as well as the moral values of Pancasila and local wisdom (Sudaryat, Y., et al., 2024). Each traditional expression has structure, semantics, and psycholinguistics (Santosa, 2013); formal semantics and ethnopedagogy (Kulsum, 2015); structure, lexico-semantics, and the worldview of the community (Kurniasih & Sudaryat, 2025). The arrangement of traditional expressions is relatively fixed and unchanged, very aesthetic, containing rhythm and the power of sound of words (Warnaen et al, 1987), and includes certain language styles, including the style of metaphorical language (Khotimah, 2016).

Various elements of the physical nature, such as water, heat, wind, soil, and space can be used in the formulation of traditional expressions. This can be understood because living beings like humans have a dependence on nature. As a part of the physical nature, water (BS: cai) is a hydrological aspect closely related to the lives of living beings such as humans, animals, and plants. Due to its importance for human life, water for the Sundanese society is used as a source of comparison in life, as expressed in the traditional expression "*Ka cai jadi saleuwi, ka darat jadi salebak*", meaning "To water becomes a shelter, to land becomes a neighborhood," which implies that in living life, one must be in harmony, aligned, and peaceful. The element of water in traditional expressions is often used to describe various aspects of life, such as purity, tranquility, change, or strength. In addition, water is used along with other natural elements such as fire, earth, and air to reflect life principles and social rules. The concept of nature, including water, is used in metaphors to convey cultural values and local wisdom.

Metaphor in language is a way of conveying meaning indirectly by comparing one concept to another that is more familiar (Dirvens & Pörings, ed., 2002). Metaphors are often used in everyday communication, literature, and even in science to explain complex concepts in a more understandable way (Underhill, 2011). A metaphor refers to a form of language that implicitly compares two things, without using comparative conjunctions. Metaphorical aspects in language encompass several important elements, including (1) conceptual comparisons, which are often used to describe a concept by comparing it to something more familiar; (2) meaning transfer, which refers to the use of words or phrases in metaphor experiencing a shift in meaning from their original usage; (3) language creativity, which allows for richer and more imaginative expressions in communication; and (4) cultural influence, which refers to the fact that metaphorical meanings are often influenced by culture and collective experiences (Arduini, 2007; Punter, 2007; McKinnon, 2012).

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## RESEARCH METHOD

The qualitative or naturalistic approach with descriptive methods in research is conducted on real phenomena (Cresswell, 2012), utilizing actual or natural objects that develop as they are, not manipulated by researchers, and their presence does not influence the dynamics of the objects (Litchman, 2006). Descriptive methods are used to describe data on metaphorical aspects and forms of traditional hydrological expressions. Data is collected through bibliographic studies. The data sources are books on traditional expressions and ancient Sundanese manuscripts. The determination of the written data sources is based on the consideration that (a) written varieties are more preserved than spoken varieties, thus reflecting a planned, stable, and standard language (Labov, 1972, pp. 97-120; Ochs, 1979, pp. 51-80); (b) the research subjects have a standardized writing system (Samsuri, 1995, p. 196); (c) the value of local wisdom in the perspective of Sundanese culture (Alwasilah, 2009; Rosidi, 2011). Another source of data is the researchers themselves through intuitive techniques and elicitation techniques.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques and hermeneutics. Traditional hydrological expressions that exhibit similar symptoms were grouped together, while those with different symptoms were placed into another group (Sudaryat, 2012). Through content analysis techniques, an effort was made to determine the hydrological components in the traditional expressions, aided by intuitive techniques since the researcher is a native speaker of the target language (Langacker, 1982; Alghatas, 2024). To interpret the content of hydrological aspects, hermeneutic analysis techniques are used (Sumaryono, 1999, pp. 23-24). The principle of hermeneutics is objective because it focuses on the text, which is specifically ontological, dialectical, historical, and linguistic in nature, and relates to current understanding that applies aesthetics (Bleicher, 1980; Palmer, 2003). The activities of hermeneutics are carried out through stages (a) comprehension, (b) explication, (c) explanation, and (d) interpretation (Ricoeur, 1985, p.28).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result of Bibliometric Analysis

Traditional expressions that contain hydrological aspects often use elements of water, rivers, rain, and lakes as metaphors to describe various conditions of life. In Sundanese, for instance, there are expressions and proverbs that reflect the relationship between humans and nature, especially water. The research found a total of 100 traditional expressions, consisting of 30 expressions (*babasan*) and 70 proverbs. All of these traditional expressions were analyzed from three aspects: the continuity of hydrological elements, the form of expression, and the metaphoric aspects.

*The first*, the continuity of hydrological elements in traditional expressions. The continuity of hydrological elements in traditional expressions refers to the use of words meaning water or water-related words that are employed in traditional expressions, both in phrases (*babasan*) and in proverbs (*paribasa*). Of 30 phrases, 8 phrases contain water elements, and 22 phrases have water-related nuances. Meanwhile, of the 70 proverbs, 22 proverbs contain water elements, and 48 proverbs have water-related nuances. In terms of the continuity of hydrological elements, expressions and proverbs are differentiated, both those containing water elements and those with water-related nuances.

For example, the data presents traditional expressions that consist of water-element phrases (01) and water-themed phrases (02), as well as traditional expressions that consist of water-element proverbs (03) and water-themed proverbs (04).

(01) *Hujan cipanon* (PBS/Bbs/64/235)

= Lots of crying.

(02) *Clik putih clak hérang* (PBS/Bbs/59/120)

= Sincere, a pure heart comes out.

(03) *Cai asa tuak bari, kéjo asa catang bobo* (PBS/117/53)

= Everything feels unpleasant when in trouble or sick.

(04) *Asa kagunturan madu, kaurugan menyan bodas* (PBS/115/18)

= Feeling happy because of gaining something beneficial.

Data (01) and data (02) are expressions of hydrological words, each containing an element of water and having a watery nuance. The word *ci-* "water" in *cipanon* "teardrop" serves as an abbreviation of the word *cai* "water", which is the hydrological element in these expressions, while the words *antaran clik* "fall" and *clak* "fall" modify the adjectives *putih* "white" and *hérang* "clear" in hydrological expressions that portray a water nuance.

Data (03) and data (04) are hydrological proverbs, each containing elements of water and having a water-related theme. The word *cai* "water" in the expression "*Cai asa tuak bari, kéjo asa catang bobo*" represents the element of water in the hydrological proverb, while the word *kagunturan* "flooding" in the expression "*Asa kagunturan madu, kaurugan menyan bodas*" represents the water-themed element in the hydrological proverb.

The second form of traditional hydrological expressions. Traditional hydrological expressions refer to the embodiment of traditional phrases through both single words and strings of words. Research findings identified traditional hydrological expressions in the form of derivative words, reduplicated words, compound words, phrases, simple sentences, and compound sentences. The six forms of traditional hydrological expressions are presented consecutively as follows. Consider the following data.

(05) *Diangeuncareuhkeun* (PBS/B/60/130)

"Left to be as is."

(06) *Teu cai hérang-hérang acan* (PBS/B/87/729)

"Not served anything."

(07) *Gurat cai* (PBS/B/63/196)

"Soothing."

(08) *Kawas ciduh jeung reuhak*

"Similarly bad."

(09) *Cai di hilir mah kumaha ti girangna*. (PBS/P/117/54)

"The behavior of the community reflects its leaders."

(10) *Bébék ngoyor di sagara, rék nginum néangan cai*. (PBS/P/116/36)

"Many riches, but cannot benefit from them because they do not belong to him."

Data (05)-(10) are forms of traditional expressions that include derivative words, reduplicated words, compound words, phrases, simple sentences, and compound sentences. In data (05), the term "*diangeuncareuhkeun*" is composed of the compound word "*angeun careuh*", which means "*luwak* vegetable" supplemented with the affix combination {*di-*+*-keun*}, meaning "*made like luwak* vegetable." This data is referred to as a derivative word because it refers to a form of a word that has been affixed (Alwi et al., 2009; Sudaryat, 2013).

Data (06) is a traditional expression that contains a reduplicated word, formed from the word *hérang* “clear”, which is repeated twice in full (*Dwimurni*), combined with the word *cai* “water” and the adverbial combination *teu...acan* “not yet”, resulting in the phrase *Teu cai hérang-hérang acan* “Without being served clear water at all”. This data is referred to as reduplicated words because it refers to a word form that is constructed by repeating the base form entirely twice (Ramlan, 1987; Sudaryat, 2013).

Data (07) *water line* is formed from the noun *line* and the noun *water*, which implies “to calm”, not a *water line*. This data includes a compound word form because it refers to a word form that is composed by combining two words to produce a new meaning (Badudu, 1994; Ramlan, 1987; Sudaryat, 2013), which has characteristics of inseparability, irreversibility, and non-extensibility (Kridalaksana, 1988).

Data (08) “*kawas ciduh jeung reuhak*”, which means “like saliva and phlegm”, is a prepositional phrase composed of the preposition “*kawas*” meaning “like” and the coordinating nominal phrase “*ciduh jeung reuhak*”. This data is classified as a phrase because it is composed of more than two words that are non-predicative (Alwi et al., 2009; Sudaryat, 2016; Kridalaksana, 1982).

The data of traditional expressions (09) “*Cai di hilir mah kumaha ti girangna*” is a complete clause or a single sentence structured as S-P-Complement, where the noun phrase “*Cai di hilir mah*” meaning “water in the east” functions as the subject, the interrogative “*kumaha*” meaning “how” functions as the predicate, and the prepositional phrase “*ti girangna*” meaning “from the upstream” functions as the complement. This data falls into the category of clause or single sentence because it is predicative, consisting of a subject, predicate, and complement (Alwi et al., 2009; Sudaryat, 2016; Kridalaksana, 1982).

Data of traditional expressions (10) A duck swims in the sea, wants to drink looking for water formulated in a compound sentence consisting of two clauses, namely the clause *Bébék ngoyor di sagara* “The duck swims in the ocean” which has a subject-predicate adjunct structure, and the clause *rék nginum néangan cai* “Wants to drink looking for water” which has a predicate-complement structure (P-Pel). This data is classified as a compound sentence because it consists of two clauses or simple sentences (Alwi et al., 2009; Sudaryat, 2016; Kridalaksana, 1982).

The third, type of water metaphors is in traditional hydrological expressions. Metaphor is the use of words or phrases not in their literal sense, but as a depiction based on similarities or comparisons (KBBI Online, 2023). As a figure of speech, a metaphor expresses something directly in the form of an analogical comparison by omitting the comparative word (Sulissusiawan et al., 2013). Some experts regard metaphor as the “queen” of figures of speech because, when examined in terms of its formation process, many other types of figures of speech can be categorized into this type (Zaimar, 2002). Metaphor is used to enrich language and provide deeper meaning (Keraf, 1985). Indirect meaning in phrases can be called idiomatic-associative meaning, while the meaning in proverbs is used indirectly by comparing a concept with something more familiar. The indirect meaning in proverbs can be referred to as idiomatic-comparative meaning (Sudaryat, 2016).

The urgency of water in daily life is immortalized in traditional expressions as a metaphorical aspect, both associative and comparative. Water or hydrological metaphors in traditional expressions refer to two types, namely associative metaphors and comparative metaphors. Associative metaphors refer to figurative metaphors found in

idiomatic expressions, while comparative metaphors refer to comparative metaphors found in proverbs. Based on their sources and references, there are several hydrological metaphors, namely hydro-substantive metaphors, hydro-anthropomorphic metaphors, hydro-fauna metaphors, hydro-flora metaphors, hydro-locative metaphors, hydro-axional metaphors, and hydro-stative metaphors.

The hydro-substantive metaphor refers to water as a metaphor or comparison to other objects in life. The element of water, namely *cai* “water” or elements that have a watery nuance, namely *sagara* “ocean”, serves as a substantive metaphor as seen in the following examples.

(11) *Gurat cai* (PBS/63/196)

= Likes to break promises.

(12) *Bébék ngoyor di sagara, rék nginum néangan cai* (PBS/116/36)

= Has a lot of wealth, but cannot use it because it is not rightfully theirs.

The word “*cai*” means “water” and is a liquid that is used as a metaphor for life. In expression (11) it appears that water is likened to something that changes, while in proverb (12) it shows that life is in an environment rich in water, but there is difficulty in drinking it.

The hydro-anthropomorphic metaphor refers to water as a symbol or comparison to humans in life, as seen in the following data examples.

(13) *Hujan cipanon* (PBS/64/235)

= Lots of crying.

(14) *Nepak cai malar cérét* (PBS/130/257)

= Pretending to ask to find out the real problem.

In expression (13), the word *ci-* “water” in the word *cipanon* “tears” is used as a metaphor for crying, which is commonly done by humans. Similarly, the word *cai* “water” in proverb data (14) is used as a metaphorical comparison for someone who knows the problem but pretends to ask.

The hydro-fauna metaphor refers to water as a metaphor for fauna (animals) in life, as seen in the following examples of expressions (15-16).

(15) *Kukuh Ciburuy* (PBS/70/362)

= Firm stance, cannot be influenced at all.

(16) *Mangpéngkeun kuya ka leuwi* (PBS/127/215)

= To return or relocate someone to their hometown.

In expression (15), the word *ci-* “water” in the word *ciburuy* “tadpole water” is used as a metaphor for something that behaves consistently like a tadpole. Similarly, the word *leuwi* “pool” in proverb (16) is used as a comparative metaphor for someone who is returned to their hometown.

The hydro-flora metaphor refers to water as a metaphor or comparison to flora (plants) in life, as seen in the following data examples (17-18).

(17) *Mandi kembang* (PBS/73/423)

= A bath with a mixture of seven types of flowers was chanted.

(18) *Kawas cai dina daun taleus* (PBS/123/148)

= Advice or proverb not absorbed.

In the expression (17), the word *mandi* “to bathe” in that expression is used metaphorically-associatively as something that can attract affection like a flower, which symbolizes purity. In the proverb (18), the word *cai* “water” is used as a comparison for something that is unstable, reflecting the nature of humans who can change like water.

Hydro-axional metaphors refer to water as a metaphor or comparison for activities (actions) in life, as seen in the following data example.

(19) *Diangeuncareuhkeun* (PBS/60/130)

= Left alone without being noticed or eaten.

(20) *Ka cai diangir mandi, batu lenjang panuusan* (PBS/66/280)

= The homeland where one lives and is born.

The word *sayur* "vegetable" in the idiomatic expression data (19) is used as a metaphor like civet coffee that is left untouched and uneaten. The word *cai* "water" in the proverb data (20) is used as a comparison to the homeland where one lives and where one is born. This symbolizes purity, tranquility, flexibility, and strength.

Hydrostatic metaphor refers to water as a metaphor or comparison to the nature and conditions in life, as seen in the following example of idiomatic expressions.

(21) *Encér uteuk* (PBS/61/161)

= Calakan, smart.

(22) *Kawas cucurut kaibunan* (BPS/55/317)

= Very ugly and needs to be cared for.

The word *encér* "liquid" in the expression (15) is used as a metaphor-associative like water that is not thick on *uteuk* "brain". The word *kaibunan*, "wet with morning dew" in the proverb (16), is used as a comparison to something that is considered ugly.

The metaphorical element of water in traditional expressions is often used to describe the traits, attitudes, and values of human life. In various cultures, water symbolizes purity, tranquility, flexibility, and strength. The use of water metaphors in traditional expressions is often associated with advice and teachings, and reflects the human nature that can change like the flow of water. Meanwhile, water is one of the four main elements used to convey life principles and social rules. Cognitive semantic studies indicate that water-based metaphors in traditional expressions have profound meanings that reflect the relationship between humans and nature as well as the values inherited through generations.

The richness of traditional Sundanese expressions contains all these elements, namely depicting the nature, attitude, and values of human life; symbolizing purity, tranquility, flexibility, and strength; as well as conveying principles of life and social rules that reflect the changeable nature of humans, like the flow of water

## CONCLUSION

Every language in the world, including Sundanese, has its own way of expressing ideas, thoughts, feelings, and desires. One form of expression in language is through traditional phrases, which take the form of expressions (*babasan*) or proverbs. Many traditional expressions contain hydrological elements, both words that directly mean water (Sundanese: *banyu*, *cai*, *ci*, *tirta*) and those that have water-related nuances, such as *balong* 'pond' and *sagara* 'ocean'. Hydrological traditional expressions, whether they be word expressions or proverbs, usually use words that have meanings related to water and words that evoke a sense of water. Their forms can be in the shape of derived words, reduplicated words, compound words, phrases, clauses (simple sentences), and compound sentences. Most traditional expressions are in the form of compound words, phrases, and sentences.

In traditional expressions, there are metaphorical aspects, which include associative metaphor (figurative) in word expressions and comparative metaphor (comparison) as a

reflection of human life in proverbs. There are seven types of hydrological metaphors, namely hydro-substantive metaphor, hydro-anthropomorphic metaphor, hydro-fauna metaphor, hydro-flora metaphor, hydro-locative metaphor, hydro-ational metaphor, and hydro-stative metaphor. Sundanese traditional expressions contain depictions of traits, attitudes, and values of human life, symbolizing purity, tranquility, flexibility, and strength, as well as conveying life principles and social rules that reflect the changing nature of humanity, like the flow of water.

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