



## Revealing local wisdom of "Orahua Mbanua" in Nias

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### Abstract

This research is a descriptive qualitative and discusses the function of language in Nias cultural society who domicile in Nias island, North Sumatra. Discussing local issues and decision-making in Nias is always carried out through village meeting which is termed "Orahua Mbanua" which is aimed at gathering all the ideas and views but they are usually not delivered directly. Rather, they are outspoken by using proverbs or parables containing knowledge that is closely related to local wisdom (local genius) and this study describes their functions. The data was gathered from Botohilitan village by using recording technique (Sudaryato, 2015) and by observation when the "orahua" was in progress. The data was then transferred into scripts of all phrases used by the participants pronouncing their "Orahua Mbanua"; after classifying the data, we reveal the values of the local wisdom contained in the proverbs or parables.

**Keywords:** oral tradition, local wisdom, Orahua Mbanua

### 1. Introduction

Language and culture are two inseparable systems and culture is a system that regulates human interaction and language is a system that serves as a means of interaction in society<sup>[1]</sup>. In Nias culture, the delivery of ideas, insights or information, especially in 'Orahua Mbanua' is not always directly, sometimes using idioms, aphorism, sayings/proverbs, or parable. The idioms are short expressions or statements intending to indirectly express a purpose by using metaphor. The aphorism is a phrase or a concise phrase containing comparison, parables, satire counsel, principles of life or behavior. While the saying is the one that contains advice or teachings.

Culturally, the culture of knowledge and habits are orally delivered from one generation to the next; therefore, such culture is called oral culture or oral tradition. In the Nias community, oral tradition can be said to play a role as a vehicle to understand and inherit the social values. Furthermore, it is said that the result of oral or cultural tradition in oral form is very close to the society because it is the expression of community life itself. Therefore, oral tradition becomes the source of local wisdom of a cultural society. Local wisdom refers to the original knowledge or wisdom derived from the noble values of cultural traditions which are used to regulate the social life<sup>[2]</sup>.

The "Orahua Mbanua" is one of Nias oral traditions which is determined as a forum to discuss problems faced by rural communities, such as plans or development program for the future. When the "Orahua Mbanua" is going on, each participant expresses his or her own opinion by saying, alternately expressing consent, objection or rejection of the opinion of others in indirect way and the way he/she talks is by using idioms, aphorism, and sayings/proverbs.

The participants are village leaders of nobility (or si'ulu),

village scholars or the village elders (or si'ila) and other village figures. During the meeting, they discuss any plans and solutions about how to cope disasters, misfortune or death, fights, agriculture and environmental issues, hygiene, juvenile delinquency, education, village security and so on; all of them are related to the existence (or welfare) and peace of life in the village community.

Uttering all ideas and views are sometimes delivered indirectly so each participant must be able to interpret. It should be noted that the results, although they are not written, have to be respected and obeyed by all members of society as a regulation. Any violations will get sanctions or fines which are called "fogau" in Nias.

### 2. Methods

This is descriptive qualitative research focusing on idioms, aphorism, and proverbs that are found during "orahua" meeting. The data was obtained from Botohilitan village by recording technique<sup>[3]</sup> and observation. Data analysis is carried out by making script of all phrases used by participants, by classifying data, and by revealing the values of local wisdom.

### 3. Discussion

Some core data<sup>[4]</sup> are described in the followings. In the current perspective of oral tradition and language preservation three important aspects that should be noted are culture, indigenous knowledge (IK), and indigenous languages<sup>[5]</sup>. Language preservation should be carried out since each language undergoes shift which gives impacts on cultural pride and love<sup>[6]</sup>.

#### 3.1 Andre isai fanölö, andre isai ndrulu gasagasa vamatulu

This phrase is an aphorism meaning ‘while confronting the waves, the storm hit’. The words "fanölo" ‘waves’ and "ndrulu" ‘storms’ have the same meaning but they are interpreted as disasters. Villagers are busy to discuss (or vamatululu) about how to avoid disasters caused by waves, storms or other natural disasters. But, because people speak too long and consume time, then the big disasters (or isai) come to hit. This phrase expresses disappointment about how to seek solution to a problem. Too broad study on a problem brings sadness because disasters that can possibly be avoided finally occur. The aphorism contains local wisdom that people have to think intelligently and to act quickly in order to avoid disasters or troubles.

### 3.2 Awölo jakelakela alio jani’o tugala

This phrase is a parable which is translated into English as ‘the lame is stronger, the person with the trunk stick is faster’. The cripple (or sakelakela) and the person with stick (or sani’o tugala) are considered the weak or the illiterate who are predicted to achieve something in difficulty. But, because they are diligent and sincere, they quickly achieve and get good results or good jobs; unluckily, a strong and knowledgeable person gets nothing because having no serious intentions. The parable teaches people to work hard and work with heart although they perhaps have weakness and difficulties. All serious efforts always bring sweet fruits. Motivation to work diligently and to strive continuously in the most difficult circumstances should be continued.

### 3.3 Naigö döla geu sogambi

This idiom means ‘to leave the "bearded" trees’; the bearded trees refer to old trees. Nias people who are nomaden are said to destruct environments, but in fact they construct the sedentary cultivation that keeps the soil fertile and maintains the environment. The reason is simple. When, for example, some farmers cultivate area A for one year and leave the area afterwards and move to areas B, C, D etc. And after eight or ten years they come back to area A, this area changes to become forest or have shady trees ("eu sogambi") 'bearded tree' because the area A has old trees after their migration. To leave the bearded trees can be interpreted that we have to leave old trees but not to cut all trees and the old trees can keep the earth green but not barren. The local wisdom here is that we have to maintain the nature and environment and live friendly with them.

### 3.4 Aboto lewuö ba vamalo’o balö

This is an idiom meaning ‘bamboo breaks because (we) flatten the tip’. Bamboo rods can be used for various purposes, such as supporting tools or poles, cottage walls or houses. Before using people first clean the bamboos and level both ends but in an effort to flatten the ends they make mistakes, for example, their tools are not sharp or they are careless. This proverb describes a condition in which, when people meet for a discussion, they can not produce accurate solutions because taking a decision or solution towards problems requires analytical thinking.

### 3.5 Mae fa’akhozi nomo ba Dumöri dasiwa jamabömaböli, dafulu janöri-nöri

This is a proverb or sayings whose literal meaning is ‘when a house in Tumöri village is set burned, nine people try to extinguish the fire but ten people fan it or they just see it’. If there are problems such as fires, fights, deaths, etc., more people are passive and just wait to see, rather than they take initiative to help or to save. This proverb means that it is very difficult to find people who want to help without being asked. Every person in the society should be proactive to face difficulties without waiting for instruction or command.

### 3.6 Tafao belu tafao ba’e tafao tafa’ohe’ohe

This is also a proverb which is literally translated as ‘come here monkeys, come here monkeys, let us walk hand in hand’. The animal "belu" ‘monkey’ has big body while the “ba’e” ‘monkey’ has small body but they can walk hand in hand and live together. The proverb refers to an invitation that men should live peacefully and do many things hand in hand, although they actually have differences among others. Keep walking along and keep words are two points that should be done to create safety and peace in the neighbourhood. Diversity but unity.

### 3.7 Löna gumbunu ndrao ba gamatela garawi

This is an aphorism and its meaning is ‘I do not want to die because of civet/weasel carcasses’. The word "gamatela" ‘carcasses’ points to uselessness and should be wasted, especially the weasel carcasses (bangkai musang). Someone will not die because of ‘löna gumbunu ndrao’ (fighting for the carcasses) which does not bring benefit. The wise man will not sacrifice his/her life, self-esteem and reputation for a useless or trivial little thing.

### 3.8 Noro nilui vahea, noro nilului vaoso tafaföfö na enau tafahea na asolo

This aphorism means ‘the load should be raised together, the burden should be brought together, we put the burden on the shoulder together if it is long, we carry the burden together if it is big’. In order the heavy burden (noro) can be raised, it should be put on the shoulder together (nilului vahea), or lifted together (nilului vaoso). If the burden is long, it must be placed on the shoulder together and if it is big (asolo), it should be lifted together’. This local wisdom teaches us that heavy work can only be solved when it is done together. In order to lift heavy burden or face major problems in society, it is necessary to think together, find ways or strategies that will smooth the implementation of the problem solving. This proverb encourages community members to work together, cooperate in the face of any problems or hard work be solved together.

### 3.9 He lumana böi mendrua, he akao samuja ha

This is also an aphorism referring to ‘despite (we are) poor but do not be poor for twice; despite suffering, but (we) suffer only once’. The poor or suffering condition is something normal because it can still be improved by efforts and working more diligently; this is in contrast to self-esteem and human dignity. But when the poor acts indecent, such as stealing, fighting, etc., he/she is actually concerned deliberately with the multiplication of poverty or suffering. It is a pity when somebody who is poor and suffering then loses his/her self-

esteem and dignity as human being. The local wisdom of this aphorism refers to an advice that human being should always think and act wisely even when he/she is in difficult circumstances. Despite poor but he/she does not lose his/her esteem and dignity as human being.

#### **Additional notes on the "Orahua Mbanua"**

Village meetings have become habits in Nias society and inherited from generation to generation. The target to be achieved is to produce a prosperous solution and to provide security and peace in the village. Therefore, the meetings are usually attended by village leaders, village noble groups (parasi'ulu), village scholars (parasi'ila), religious leaders and other community leaders. Participants are usually those who have speech proficiency, able to interpret expressions delivered in the meetings, and have extensive insights. They are also capable to give feedback during the meetings and therefore, they compete to convey good speech according to words that have been inherited from their ancestral messages (böwö ni? orisi).

The participants express their opinions or insights in turns after topics are determined. Two people as one group consisting of junior and senior speak and propose their arguments which become the problem solving. The speaker is usually the senior and the other shows his reactions. The reactions are intended to affirm or to reinforce to what the speaker talks. Some expressions that are common as forms of reactions are eeee.....! ya'ia hōō..... "!" or andre..... ! (yes..... ! that's right... !, that's it..... !). The duty of junior is to motivate his senior and to draw the attentions from other participants.

Nias has adopted patrilineal kinship system; therefore, women do not usually involve in the meetings. When they have ideas, they talk to their parents or to their husbands for married women. Young males who are not married are not allowed to participate because they have not understood the meanings of words during the meetings and are requested to learn a lot at homes. The youths who have passed from "si'ila" can take parts. The si'ila is title given to youths who are considered as beginners of tua-tua adat (adat law elders). Their inauguration as si'ila is carried out through stages of customary policy in rural communities and rituals of "owasa" are held to mark their status changes.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The idioms, aphorisms, sayings/proverbs, and parables that are communicated during "Orahua Mbanua" meeting contain various local wisdoms that can be used for everyday life guidance. What a pity is that many local people, especially younger generations, do not understand their meanings. All this is due to the declining comprehension because parents no longer teach Nias language to their children but they speak Bahasa Indonesia. However, Nias language needs to be taught in schools as local contents (Mulok for short) and be activated at homes. Therefore, parents are encouraged to use Nias language everyday. With this ethnic language, the meanings of local wisdoms can be preserved.

Local wisdoms are still relevant until today, for example, they can be useful to organize life in rural communities because they have "great grandfathers' moral values" (böwö ni'orisi)

which are priceless and bring teachings about living together, villages and natural environments. The Orahua mbanua looks like a container that can be used by people to hold meetings and to discuss the situations that are vulnerable to disputes due to differences of opinions. The basic purpose of village meeting is to get the appropriate skills to understand each other, to appreciate and to weigh the senses to which the desired goal is achieved.

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