From Linguistics to Poetics and Ethnopoetics: Exploring the Richness of Language and Culture

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From Linguistics to Poetics and Ethnopoetics: Exploring the Richness of Language and Culture

A.Introduction: Linguistics – Internal Structures of Language

B.Poetics: Showing the Intricate Structures of Language

C.Poetics: From Linguistic to Poetic Iconicity

D.Ethnopoetics: Revealing the Sophisticated Connection between Language and Culture

E.Conclusions (given along the way, part by part)

A. Introduction: Linguistics – Internal Structures of Language

- Q: What would happen to humans if there were NO language?
- A: There would be NO … speech → NO writing system → NO accumulation of knowledge → NO science →
- … → NO culture & civilization
- … → NO ISOLEC …
- … → NO Linguistics …

1. Human language is displaced = NOT here, NOT now

- The move from linguistics to poetics is the move to higher abstraction in reference: mostly from literal to metaphorical meaning.

2. *Human language is discrete* → **open-ended**

- It consists of layer upon layer of STRUCTURES →
- Phonology – Morphology – Syntax – Semantics

- Syntax: S – V – O : *Harry hates syntax*
- (cf. Animal communication is non-discrete → **closed-ended** *Listen to a duck quacking* …)

- ***On Linguistic Judgment*** – **well-formed** vs. **ill-formed**
  a. *Harry hates syntax* – (grammatical)
  b. **Syntax hates Harry* – (partly grammatical)
  c. ***Hates Syntax Harry* – (totally ungrammatical)
- *…* as related to **Syntax** & **Semantics**

- … NOT to class attendance or a hotel

B. Poetics: Showing the Intricate Structures of Language

- Going back to … Well-formed vs. Ill-formed

- "Poetic License" =
- Poets are entitled to violating LG rules in poetry writing.

1. COILED ALIZARINE (by John Hollander)
- *for Noam Chomsky*
- *Curiously deep, the slumber of crimson thought*
- *While breathless, in stodgy viridian,*
- *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.*

❖ The poem is syntactically well-formed but semantically ill-formed. And yet, poetically, it is acceptable.

2. "JABBERWOCKY" (by Lewis Carrol)

- *'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves*
- *Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;*
- *All mimsy were the borogoves,*
- *And the mome raths outgrabe.*

- *Briga saatnya, dan walutaba salinda*
- *Menggiras dan menggulas dalam wabas;*
- *Sungguh menca puara baragoba,*
- *Dan reta-reta yang mumba menggerabas.*

❖ The poem is syntactically well-formed but semantically empty.

- anyone lived in a pretty how town
- (with up so floating many bells down)
- spring summer autumn winter
- he sang his didn't he danced his did.

(by e. e. cummings)

❖ The poem is syntactically ill-formed but semantically comprehensible.

- **FIRST (set of) CONCLUSIONS:**
- The move from linguistics to poetics has shown the intricate linguistic structures of modern poems.
- What is ill-formed linguistically can be acceptable poetically.
- Linguistics is confined by logic; but the limits of poetics are imagination → So long as literary works are imaginable, they are acceptable.

C. Poetics: From Linguistic to Poetic Iconicity

- Saussure (1915 [1959]): *LG is a system of arbitrary signs.*

- arbitrary >< iconic = form ←→ meaning

- English: *knock-knock-knock*   Indonesian: *tok-tok-tok*
- *knock on the door*   *mengetuk pintu*
- ❖ *If it were tok 3x in English … → …*
- ❖ *If it were knock 3x in Indonesian … → …*

- Whereas everyday LG is mostly arbitrary, poetic LG tends to be iconic → as shown in the use of …
- (a) onomatopoeia (e.g., knock 3x) & (b) sound symbolism

- "The sound must seem an echo to the sense." (Alexander Pope: 1688-1744) – Ref: Perrine & Arp (1984: 200-5)

- (b) sound symbolism → (i) euphony vs. (ii) cacophony
- (i) euphony = smooth and pleasant sound:
- ❖ *So smooth, so sweet, so silvery is thy voice*.

- (ii) cacophony = rough and harsh sound:
- ❖ *All day the fleeting crows croak hoarsely across the snow*.

- Pushing poetic iconicity to the extreme → producing "poems for the ears" & "poems for the eyes"

- I skip "the former" and go directly to "poems for the eyes"

- Poems for the Eyes:
- "Easter Wings" (by George Herbert)
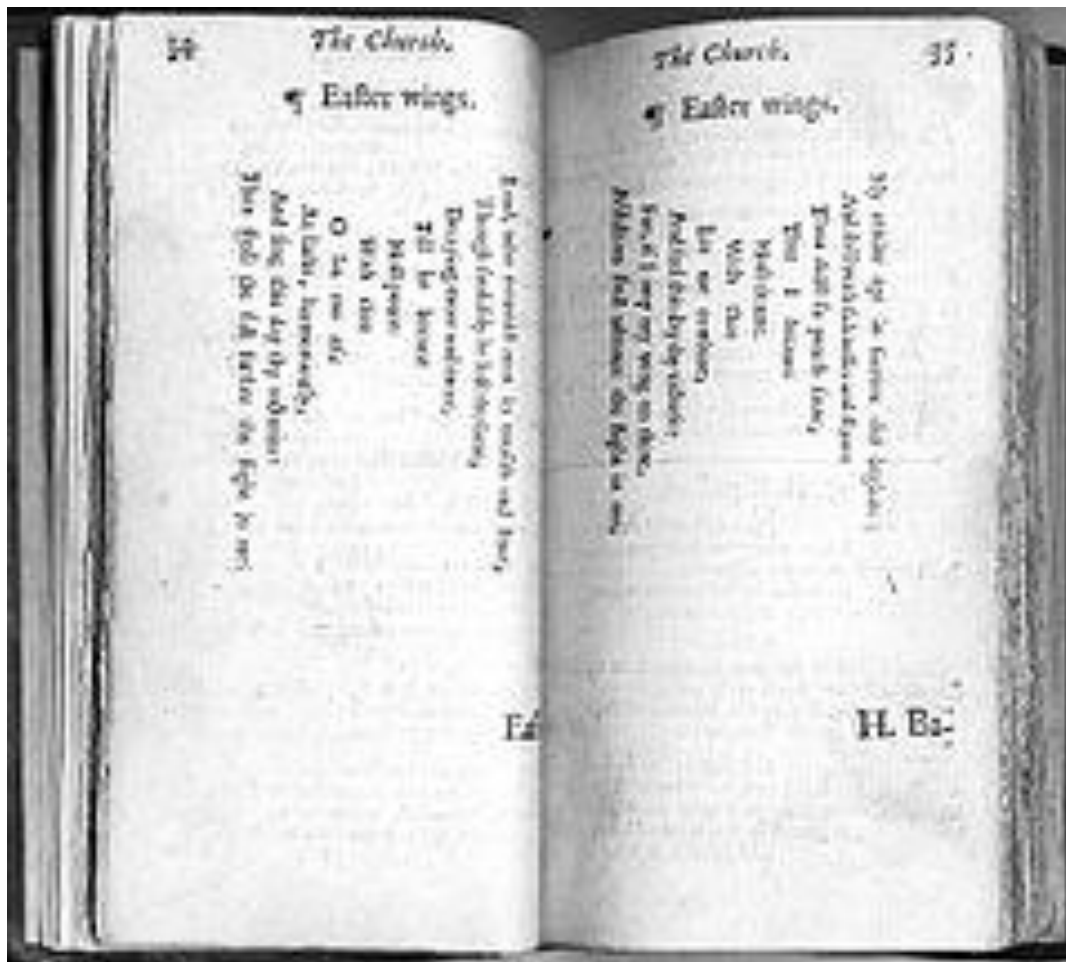
- "The Pillar of Fame" (by Robert Herrick)

Fame's pillar here at last we set,
Out-during marble, brass or jet;
Charmed and enchanted so
As to withstand the blow
Of o v e r t h r o w ;
Nor shall the seas,
Or   o u t r a g e s
Of storms, o'erbear
What   we   uprear;
Tho' kingdoms fall,
This   pillar   never   shall
Decline   or waste at   all;
But   stand   for ever   by   his   own
Firm   and   well-fixed   foundation.

- "Swan and Shadow", by John Hollander

```
                              Dusk
                           Above the
                        water hang the
                               loud
                               files
                              Here
                              O so
                              gray
                              then
                              What                     A pale signal will appear
                              When              Soon before its shadow fades
                              Where          Here in this pool of opened eye
                              In us    No Upon us As at the very edges
                              of where we take shape in the dark air
                               this object bares its image awakening
                                 ripples of recognition that will
                                 brush darkness up into light
           even after this bird this hour both drift by atop the perfect sad instant now
                                 already passing out of light
                                 toward yet-untroubled reflection
                                this image bears its object darkening
                                into memorial shades Scattered bits of
                                 light     No of water Or something across
                                water             Breaking up No Being gathered
                                soon                Yet by then a swan will have
                                 gone                  Yet out of mind into what
                                  vast
                                   pale
                                    hush
                                     of a
                                     place
                                      past
                            sudden dark as
                              if a swan
                                 sang
```

- The "swan" (not the "shadow") broken down into a regular text:

- *Dusk. Above the water hang the loud files. Here. O so gray then. What? A pale signal will appear. When? Soon before its shadow fades. Where? Here in this pool of opened eye. In us. No. Upon us. As at the very edges of where we take shape in the dark air, this object bares its image awakening —ripples of recognition that will brush darkness up into light …*

- *Senja. Di atas air mengambang karang kenangan. Di sini. O begitu kelabu saat itu. Apa? Sebuah tanda putih-pasi akan mengada. Kapan? Segera sebelum lenyap bayang-bayangnya. Di mana? Di sini, di kolam cendera mata. Di dalam diri kita. Bukan. Di atas kita. Ketika di ujung paling-sana kita menjati-diri pada rembang cuaca, wujud ini muncul seakan citra bangun-mengayun—riak kenal-sua yang akan mengusir gelap ke dalam cahaya …*

```
                    Senja
                  Di atas air
              mengambang
                    karang
                   kenangan
                   Di sini
                  O begitu
                   kelabu
                  saat itu
               Apa Sebuah                tanda putih-pasi akan mengada
                  Kapan              Segera sebelum lenyap bayang-bayangnya
               Di man          Di sini di kolam cendera mata
            Di dalam    diri kita.  Tidak di atas kita. Ketika
         di ujung paling-sana kita menjati-diri pada rembang
         cuaca, wujud ini muncul seakan citra bangun-terbuka
          riak kenal-sua yang akan mengusir gelap ke dalam cahaya
```

Figure 2. "Angsa" (Swan)… ?!"

- **Conclusions:**

1. The poetic text is translatable, …

2. But, the typographic poem is NOT transferable

D. Ethnopoetics: Revealing the Sophisticated Connection between Language and Culture

Linguistics

↓

ETHNOPOETICS

Oral
Literature

Cultural
Anthropology
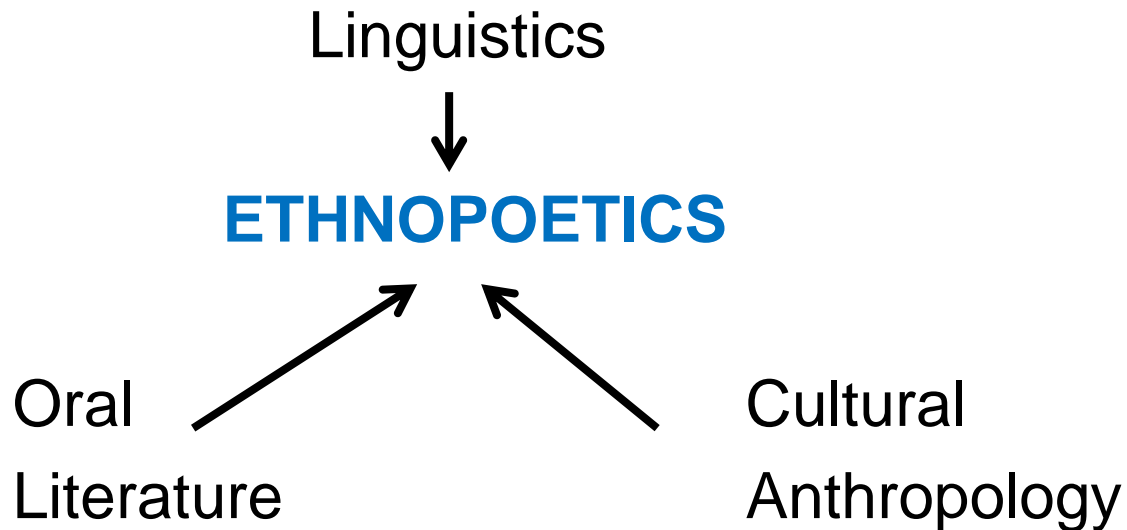
- Ethnopoetics = verbal art performance closely related to local beliefs

- Linguistics → "structural approach" (performance at the end)

- **From general / universal poetic iconicity** (e.g., "Easter Wings", "The Pillar of Fames", "Swan and Shadow") →

- **… to Culture-specific Poetic Iconicity**

- In Javanese culture, everyday words are often given "forced interpretation", known locally as *jarwa dhosok* (Becker 1995).

- Contrived Examples in English:
- *phonological – manager – secretary*
- Phonological = phonation that sounds logical
- Manager = man at old age but always eager
- Secretary = a woman who keeps secrets in her diary

- Back to Javanese *jarwa dhosok* (forced interpretation)
- *guru* = *digugu lan ditiru*
- (teacher = obeyed (for his advice) and followed (for his exemplary deeds))

- *kodhok* = *teka-teka ndhodhok*
- (frog = soon after arriving, it sits down)
- If this were universally acceptable, the English word for it is NOT **frog**, but ***riveting***

- This goes serious into the heart of the culture:
- Damardjati Supadjar (1993) – *Jawa*
- NOT *nguja hawa* = following instinctive desires
- But *muja hawa* = controlling instinctive desires

- Back to English example: giving a "forced interpretation" to the Roman alphabet – *A B C D E …*

- *A-lways B-e C-ool. D-on't have E-go with F-friends and family. G-ive up H-urting I-ndividuals. J-ust K-eep L-oving M-ankind. N-ever O-mit P-rayers. Q-uietly R-emember G-od. S-peak T-ruth. U-se V-alid W-ords. X-press Y-our Z-eal.*

- Notes: This interpretation is known to few native speakers of English, NOT common knowledge in English-speaking countries.

- **Javanese Script** = 20 basic syllabic characters
- *ha na ca ra ka*
- *da ta sa wa la*
- *pa dha ja ya nya*
- *ma ga ba tha nga*

- *forced Interpretation of **ha na ca ra ka**, well accepted by those who claim to be "true Javanese" (*e.g., President Soeharto *was fond of these interpretations)*
- *ha na ca ra ka = hananing cipta, rasa, karsa*
- *da ta sa wa la = datan salah wahyaning lampah*
- *pa dha ja ya nya = padhang jagade yen nyumurupana*
- *ma ga ba tha nga = marang gambaraning bathara ngaton*

- *English Translation:*
- Present here are the thoughts, feelings, and intentions.
- If you choose the right time and take the right path,
- then your inner world gets enlightened as you encounter
- the appearance of God clad in human image

- The 20 basic characters of Javanese script:

The local interpretation of the 20 characters:

(Notes: This contains two small errors …)

- The interpretations put into calligraphy, depicting Semar—the God of virtue in Javanese mythology.

- In the politico-cultural history of Indonesia, the late President Soeharto was a strong believer in Semar.

- The figure of **Semar** in shadow-play.

- *Shadow-play or wayang* is considered to be the center of Javanese culture (Geetz 1960, Koentjaraningrat 1985)

- From **Culture-specific** to **Religion-specific Poetic Iconicity**

- Islam—in this context—is the religion of the majority of people living in East Java.
- It consists of 5 pillars: (1) the creed (*shahadah*), (2) five daily prayers (*shalah*), (3) almsgiving (*zakah*), (4) fasting during Ramadan (*siyam*), and (5) pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

- The creed or *shahadah* reads as follows:
- *Ash-hadu an-laa ilaaha illa-Llaah, was ash-hadu anna Muhammadan rasuulu-Llaah*

- (I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah).

- In ordinary Arabic calligraphy, the *shahadah* reads as follows:

- =====

- Interpretations of *ha na ca ra ka* → put in iconic calligraphy of **Semar**

- *Shahadah* → put in iconic calligraphy of a **Muslim in prayer**

- *Shahadah* → iconic calligraphy of a **Muslim sitting in prayer**

- **SECOND (set of) CONCLUSIONS:**
- "Swan and Shadow" is an example of universal poetic iconicity – appealing to anyone familiar with a swan swimming in a pond / lake.

- The Semar calligraphy is an example of Javanese-specific poetic iconicity – appealing only to Javanese proficient in reading Javanese script.

- The shahadah in prayer is an example of Islam-specific calligraphy – appealing only to Muslims proficient in reading Arabic script.

- The move from poetics to ethnopoetics has revealed "hidden treasures" of a given culture and/or a religion

- LG is primarily speech; and writing is a secondary representation of speech (Bloomfieldian postulate)

- Speech ← LANGUAGE → Writing

- Performance ← ETHNOPOETICS → Calligraphy

- In Islam, the first verse of the Qur'an is …
- *Bismillaahir-rahmaanir-rahiem*

- (In the name of Allah, most Merciful and most Compassionate)

- *Bismillaahir-rahmaanir-rahiem*

- (In the name of Allah, most Merciful and most Compassionate)

- "*Bismillaah*" may be performed in 4 different "melodies" and written in 8 different styles of Arabic calligraphy.

- Let's have the PERFORMANCE …

- Let's take a look at different styles of Arabic calligraphy

- **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**: The move from Linguistics to Poetics and Ethnopoetics …

1. brings out exotic aspects of LG = the richness of LG and culture;

2. reveals structural complexities of LG in terms of speech and writing;

3. reveals the dynamic move between arbitrariness and iconicity;

4. reveals the dynamic move between universality and relativity (in linguistics, poetics, and culture)

5. "Relativity" shows up in LG-, culture-, or religion-specific features.

- **IMPLICATIONS:**

- Javanese-specific poetics implies that there are many other culture-specific poetics, e.g., Balinese-, Sundanese-, Batak-, Makasarese- … specific poetics (in Indonesia), and Thai-, Vietnamese-, Japanese-, Chinese-, Indian-, Iranian- … specific poetics (in Asia).

- Islam-specific poetics also implies that there are other religion-specific poetics, e.g., Christianity-, Buddhism-, Hinduism-, Confusianism- … specific poetics.

- To reveal hidden features of culture-specific and religion-specific literary texts, it is necessary to make the best use of linguistics, poetics, and ethnopoetics in a collaborative manner.

THANK YOU

- JAVANESE (Variants & Speech Levels):

Speech Level	Variant	
	A. Everyday	B. Classical
1. Ngoko (Low)	+	+
2. Madya (Mid)	+	-
3. Krama (High)	+	+

- Examples:
- *"Have you received a letter?"*

- *A.1. Kowe wis oleh layang*
- *A.2. Sampeyan empun angsal serat?*
- *A.3. Panjenengan sampun pikantuk serat?*

- *B.1. Sira wis nampa nawala?*
- *B.2. Paduka sampun pikantuk nawala?*

- Notes:
- All the 5 sentences have the same semantic content.
- But they have different social and poetic overtones.

3. Human language is displaced =

•It can be used to refer to "objects" which are NOT here and NOT available now.

•Examples of LG use moving up to higher and higher abstraction:

a.*The laptop is on the table*

b.*Linguistics is a scientific study of language*

c.*The woods are lovely dark, and deep …*

•(Semantically, the poem moves up to the highest abstraction in meaning by means of metaphors.)

•Lyric poetry lies within the second-order semiotics; a poem often builds up its own world, becoming meaningful by referring to itself (Culler 1981).

- Poems for the Ears:
- ❖ "What the Motorcyle Said" (b) Mona van Duyn

- ❖ Br-r-r-am-m-m, rackety-am-m, OM, *Am*:
- ❖ *All*—r-r-room, r-r-ram, ala-bas-ter—
- ❖ *Am*, the world's my oyster

- (cf. "Music" [?] – on the Violin)

- poetic license & musical license =
- Deviation from general rules of LG & music →
- "meeting point of LG & music"

- Poems for the Eyes …