

(EASTERN) SUMBA AND ITS GENRES OF ORAL TRADITION

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Abstract: This paper provides some information on the island of Sumba and its people. As a cultural community not possessing a writing system, the Sumbanese people preserve and transmit their tradition-based creations such as language, literature, music, games, mythology, and rituals, for generations through oral communications. The people's oral traditions, taking forms in some genres, have become inseparable parts of their lives. Though the vocabularies in daily usage are the same as the ones used in 'special' occasions, for instance, in rituals, the metaphorical construction of language of the latter demands 'special' attention.

Key words: oral tradition, folklore, genre

INTRODUCTION

The term 'oral,' meaning "uttered in spoken words; transacted by word of mouth; spoken, verbal," (OED) frequently appears in combinations such as *oral literature, oral narrative, oral testimony, and oral tradition*. In this context, 'oral' is understood as 'using speech only,' and thus is contrasted with 'written/literate.' Oral tradition, which is our topic in question, is simply defined as any kind of unwritten tradition transmitted through words (Finnegan, 1996:6). Vansina proposes a more elaborating definition by stating that "[oral traditions] are 'unwritten' sources couched in a form of suitable for oral transmission, and that their transmission, and their preservation depends on the power of memory of successive generations of human beings"

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(1973:1). The traditions are still alive among the ‘unlettered’ folks, and continue to exist “at the very heart of the environment that gave rise to it” (1973:2). Another term used to cover all forms of ‘orally transmitted tradition’ and referring to a discipline of study as well as its subject matter is folklore.

Finnegan defines folklore as the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of community. Its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms include, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts (1996:12). Based on its type, Brunvand divides folklore into three main groups, those are, verbal folklore, partly verbal folklore, and non-verbal folklore. Verbal folklore includes among others folk speech, traditional idioms, riddles, and folk poetry. Partly verbal folklore includes beliefs, folk games, dancing, customs, and rituals. Non-verbal folklore covers architecture, handicrafts, diets, and jewelries (1978:3). Why is folklore worthily studied? As quoted by Danandjaja (2002:19), William R. Bascom, a folklorist of California University at Berkeley proposes the functions of folklore: a) as a projective system mirroring collective fantasies of a particular society; b) as a means of justifying the existing social structures and cultural institutions; c) as pedagogical devices; d) as a coercive tool in enforcing the existing norms in society.

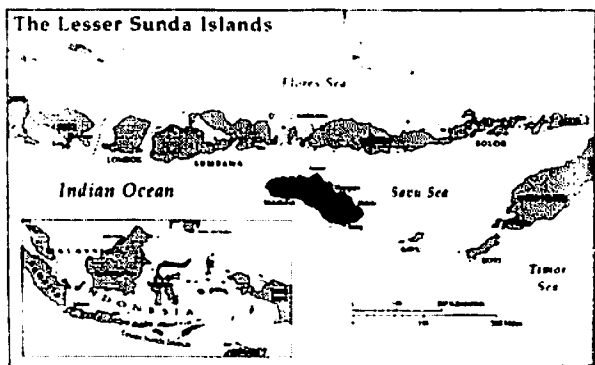
As a discipline, the study of folklore in Indonesia is relatively new. Danandjaya, a prominent figure pioneering the study of folklore in Indonesia, points out that Indonesian folklore indeed has been studied especially by the Dutch researches from various disciplines such as philology, musicology, anthropology, and theology. Even though providing abundantly ‘raw’ materials for further and deeper study on Indonesia folklore, they are fortunately not folklorist (2002:10). Citing Dundes, Danandjaya claims that the method applied by the researchers are called “a method based on the philosophy of collecting butterflies or foreign objects...” (ibid.) This is because they only compiled the lore while did not have sufficient knowledge on its folk. As a result, their studies were speculative in nature for analyzing the lore by means of another social folk.

A serious effort on writing an annotated bibliography of Indonesian folklore has been pioneered by Danandjaja (1972), followed by other scholars such as Arintonpudja (1973) and Dakung (1973) and Kalangie-Pandey (1978).

Fortunately, the studies, except of Danandjaja, have not been published. In order to celebrate the International Book Year 1973, sponsored by the government of Indonesia and UNESCO, Danandjaya organized a project to compile Indonesian folklore, especially of the Javanese and Sundanese. Along with the increasing concern with the Indonesian Folklore, the government encouraged to the establishment of the Archives of Indonesian Folklore. However, all the efforts in fact do not really trigger the extensive and deep study on Indonesia folklore. The recent institution dedicating to develop studies on Indonesia Folklore, *Asosiasi Tradisi Lisan Indonesia* (The Association of Indonesian Oral Tradition), struggles very hard for survival due to its lack of support and financial problems.

The studies of Sumbanese folklore can be found, for instances, in the works of D.K. Wielenga (1909 and 1913), L. Onvlee (1925), Oembu Hina Kapita (1977, 1979, 1987) Marie Jeanne Adams (1970 and 1971), Janet Hoskins (1988), Christine Forth (1982), and Joel C. Kuipers (1998). Unfortunately, their valuable writings can be hardly accessed in Indonesia. Taro Goh (1991) wrote a Sumba Bibliography containing all the writings on Sumba, which are accessible in the libraries of the University of Leiden and other foreign universities. This paper is a brief introduction on the social contexts of the (eastern) Sumbanese people and a preliminary investigation on genres of their oral traditions. The classification of oral tradition hopefully will pioneer further and extensive researches on the rich and abundant cultural expressions of the given people.

(EASTERN) SUMBA AND ITS SOCIAL CONTEXT



Map of Lesser Sunda Islands (JFreeman 1996)

There seems to have been no record on Sumba before the 14th century. The 14th century Javanese chronicles, *Negarakertagama*, apparently considered Sumba as one of Javanese's (Majapahit) dependencies (Kartik 1999). However, it is unknown if there was a direct contact between the island and Java at this time. In the 17th century, the sultan of Bima considered Sumba to be within his jurisdiction, but the evidences of Bima's actual control were also lacking. Dutch East India Company made an agreement with the ruler of Mangili (one of the former sub-districts of East Sumba) in 1756, though no direct or regular involvement in Sumba's affairs. In 1800, the Netherlands Indies Government took over the Company's interest in the region, and started posting its officials in the island in 1866. In order to succeed its campaign of pacification, the Dutch established an effective colonial administration in 1912 (Forth 1981:58).

Sumba, one of the three big islands (Flores, Sumba, Timor) of the *Nusa Tenggara Timur* province, lies to southeast of Bali, west of Timor and south of Flores. However, Sumba is often confused with the island of Sumbawa, which in fact sits to its northwest. Sumba island covers an area of 12,297 km sq. (Forth 1981:17), and consists of two districts, i.e., East Sumba (*Sumba Timur*) and West Sumba (*Sumba Barat*). The capital of East Sumba is *Waingapu*, and of West Sumba, *Waikabubak*. Sumba, now is populated by about 350,000 people has been noted for its *sandalwood* horses breeding, thus known as Sandalwood island, impressive megalithic graves (*reti*), hand woven textile, and still untouched, and white-sandy beaches. The East Sumba District with a total area of 7,711 km sq. and now populated by 201,394 people consists of 15 sub-districts (*kecamatan*), and 143 villages (*desa*) with *Waingapu* as the main gateway to Sumba Island.

A. Subsistence and economy

The nobility (*maramba*) still has a good deal of gold items, horses and other livestock. However much of their wealth has been decreased in recent years, due to a number factors, such as, external trades, the decreased demand for horses, plagues of locusts, and a series of epidemic diseases affecting livestock. The rest of population, for the most part, have always been and still relatively poor. The majority of them were farmers, though even the poorest own several horses or cattle and all households keep pigs and chicken.

Eastern Sumba is dry and infertile land. Maize is still the main staple product. Rice is also an important crop, since it is considered a superior foodstuff. Rice is used on ceremonial occasions and for ritual offerings. Other crops include green and root-vegetables, various sort of fruits and gourd, sorghum and millet, tobacco, and of course betel and areca, which are universally chewed and extremely important in social relationships. Animals, such as, pigs, chickens, and buffalos are slaughtered for ritual purposes, so that eating meat is relatively restricted to those occasions. Besides for ritual occasion, horses especially are used as prestations (*wili tau*) in transaction between affinal groups, as transport, and for trade.

The notable handcraft is the weaving of decorated textiles, which used to be entirely in the hands of women, but now men are also involved for accelerating productivity of traditional cloth. The textiles (*hinggi*): loincloth, shoulder cloth (*hinggi duku*) and headcloth (*tiara*) for men and tubular skirt for women (*lau*) are dressed out in the special/important ceremonial occasions, used mainly as prestation in transactions between affinal groups, and as the shrouds of corpse.

The traditional form of internal trade is termed *mandara* in which a man seasonally exchanges with people in other parts of the island surplus products for items in short supply in his own area. Now only few people still practice *mandara* since the introduction of *paranggang* (weekly markets), the general stores owned by Chinese and of money as the modern exchange. Cash slowly takes over the exchange based on barter.

B. House and village organization

The basic pattern of traditional house is built of wood and thatch on piles some two feet above the ground. The center of the house is occupied by the hearth (*au*) or cooking area, flanked on the right (from a position facing the front of the house) by the great floor (*kaheli bokulu*) in which the major liturgical speeches (*hamayangu*) to the ancestors are performed, where the corpse is placed before burial, and where males guests are formally received on ceremonial occasions. The area on the left of the hearth is the informal as the domestic area of the house where food is prepared and female guests are received. Running along the front and back of the house are open verandahs (*bangga*) shaded by the thatched roof. If the back

verandah is an additional domestic area where daily activities take place and the household tasks are performed, the front verandah, like the *kaheli bokulu*, is a formal area largely reserved for ceremonial occasions.

The floor of the house is constructed of slats with spaces between, through which food waste is dropped to the ground below where chickens and pigs scratch and root. A few houses are high enough off the ground to the house horses beneath them. Some houses are additionally provided with a high peak housing a loft. It is consecrated to a clan ancestral deity (*marapu*) and serves as a residence and a clan temple (*umma marapu*). Sacred relics and effigies are placed there. The spirit of deity is said to present there in the peak. Therefore it is restricted area, which may be entered only by senior members of the clan. Smaller houses are built near the agricultural lands (*wuaka*) some distance away.

In the traditional fortified village (*paraingu*) consisting of thirty or more houses, every clan would normally maintain at least one house. Subsidiary villages and hamlets (*kuataku*) would be normally smaller. The houses are built close together and arranged in a straight row, and even two or more rows facing one another and the central, cleared, flat are known as village square (*taluara*). If there is only one row of houses, the graves of deceased villagers are placed opposite the houses on the other side of the village square, and where there are two or more rows, the graves are placed between the rows. The *paraingu* functions as the capital village and religious center, while *kuataku* tend to be largely functional units of residence, located close to rivers and other water sources and to areas of *wuaka*. The number of *paraingu* has decreased significantly, and it is caused by some factors such as the conversion of the *marapu* believers into major religions (mainly into Christianity), the migrations caused by the lure of ‘modernity’ in the city, the cost of rebuilding the old and big *umma marapu*. The uncultivated areas beyond the fields and villages are called *marada* (the plains) and are used as grazing ground horses, buffalos, and cattle. *Marada* is considered as the outside characterized as an important boundary between inside and outside.

C. Religion and religious organization

The traditional religion centers on the cult of *marapu* that refers to the ancestors of clans (*kabihu*), of which Tunggu estimates as more than

227 in eastern Sumba alone (2000:20). Although many 'natives' of eastern Sumba have converted into five 'approved' religions (Islam, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, and Budha), the *marapu* followers, who believe that the dead ancestors continue showing "an interest in the welfare and conduct of their living descendants..." (Hoskins 1988:30), still form about 65 percent of the total population (Sumba in Figures, 2004). Each clan has its own *marapu*, propitiated with offerings and liturgical speeches. It is regarded as protector of clan members and clan interests. Appeals to *marapu* are made by the priest (*ama bokulu/mahamayangu*) on the behalf of the clan members as a whole. Normally, each clan has its own priest, who is the eldest living male in the clan, wise and experienced in religious matters, and an expert in the symbolic and often indirect ritual language used in liturgies. They do not undergo any formal training. Their knowledge comes naturally with the wisdom and experience of old age and many years of listening to and observing rituals.

D. Stratification

Three basic classes in the society are the nobility (*maramba*), commoners (*tau kabihu*), and slave (*ata*). *Ata* class belongs to nobility, but certain of the large and wealthy commoner clans and lineages also own some. The classes are ideally endogamous, but intermarriage between nobility and commoners, and between commoners and *ata* may occur. Marriage between nobility and slaves is formally impossible.

Ata is also classified into two: *ata bokulu* and *ata kudu*. *Ata kudu* is the lowest and humblest group in eastern Sumba, and derived mainly from captives of war. They can be bought and sold. *Ata bokulu* can be characterized rather as a class of retainers or hereditary servants. They can't be bought and sold. *Ata bokulu* are better treated than *ata kudu*, and many attain considerable influence as advisors and companions to their masters. Unlike *ata kudu*, they often live in the same house with their masters and form a strong bond of affection and loyalty. Female of *ata bokulu* serves as *ata ngandi*, those are, slaves brought along, who accompany their *tamu rambu* (mistress) when marrying and serving her in her husband's house.

E. Alliance

Eastern Sumba is characterized by the operation of a system of asymmetric prescriptive alliances. The mother's brother's daughter (*ana-na i tuya*) is the most preferred spouse, while marry with the father's sister's daughter (*ana-na i mamu*) is absolutely forbidden. As typical to societies practicing prescriptive alliance, the relationship between alliance groups, that is wife-givers (*yiara*) and wife takers (*ana kawinni*) are paired in a relation of complementary opposition. The wife-givers are classified as 'masculine' and superior and the wife-takers as feminine and inferior. When both parties for instance meet on the occasion of marriages and funerals, prestations are exchanged. The prestations given to wife takers such as horses and metal ornaments) are referred as masculine goods (*banda mini*), in contrast to the class of counter-prestations given by wife-givers to wife-takers (textiles and non-metal jewelry) are called feminine goods (*banda kawinni*).

GENRES OF ORAL TRADITION OF EASTERN SUMBA

The indigenous language used in everyday life by the majority of the eastern Sumbanese people (approximately 150,000 speakers) is *Kambiara*. *Kambiara* is classified as belonging to the Central Malayo-Polynesian (CMP) subgroup (Klamer 1998:1 citing Blust). Though *bahasa* Indonesia is the formal language and language of instruction, for instance, in education and government, *Kambiara* is spoken and understood in the large part of eastern Sumba. While there are certain variations in custom and beliefs, and dialects, the culture of eastern Sumba, particularly of the *Kambiara* speaking parts is sufficiently homogenous.

The genres of oral traditions in eastern Sumba can be roughly classified as follows:

A. *Li Ndai* (old/ancient tale) or *Li Marapu* (matters concerning with *marapu*/the ancestor tale)

Li Ndai is a form of ritual speech narrated by *ratu/wunangu maramba/wunangu bokulu* (religious leader) concerning with the creation of the earth, the history of the ancestors and certain locations, or clans. For instance, some myths generally describe that the first inhabitants of Sumbanese people "... arrived by boat, or sometime from heavens, at the northernmost

peninsula (Cape Sasar), and dispersed into *kabihu*, which migrated and populated the remainder of the islands” (Forshee 2001:16).

Umbu Hina Kapita (1979), a very productive Sumbanese writer on Sumbanese folklore, wrote a book on the history of some clans (*kabihu*) in eastern Sumba. Here is an example of texts on the history of the *Kabihu Maru*, *Watu Bulu*, and *Matualangu* (Kapita 1979:7-32). Due to the impossibility of presenting the complete and very long text in this short paper, only some lines are quoted for the purpose of showing the characteristics of eastern Sumba’s *Li Ndai*.

Na ina mangu tanangu
The mother who owns the land
Na ama mangu lukungu
The father who owns the river
Na matanangu haupu
who own a heap of soil
Namarumbangu hawalla
who own a stalk of grass
Na matimba wai kahingiru
who take water from a clear spring
Na hullu rumba muru
who burn the green grass
Na mataka wungangu tana paraingu
who are the first comers in fortified village
Na mataka mangilungu luku mananga
who firstly arrive in the mouth of the river

Ba dahallaka papanjajarangu njarada
When they have made their horses dancing
I Umbu Ndilu Buru I Umbu Jara Tangga,
[the one who is] Umbu Ndilu Buru,
[the one who is] Umbu Jara Tangga
I Umbu Nggada Ndilu I umbu Ndilu Huru;
[the one who is] Umbu Nggada Mditlu
[the one who is] Umbu Ndilu Huru

Ba dahallaka papawilikungu rambahuda:
when they have shown their whips
I Umbu Lu I Umbu Jinga Lara,
[the one who is] Umbu Jinga Lara
I Umbu Kaka Manau;
[the one who is] Umbu Kaka Manau

Ba da pangga ndedi ndukapa
when they walk before being delayed
Ba da laku ndedi ndadikupa
when they depart before being stopped
La Ruhuku la Mbali
in Ruhuku in Mbali
La Enda la Ndau
in Enda in Ndau
Ba da ngiangupa la ruawa tiana
[at first] they live in the stomach of the boat

Ba da ngiangupa la lumbu liru
they live under the shade of their sails
Ba da lindipa wai ma wurra
they go over the foaming sea
Ba dangadupa wai mamuru
they look at the blue sea
Ba da maradangupa tehiku
the sea is their open field
Ba da tandulangupa ngalingu,
the waves are their mountains

Ba da limangupa liru
Sails are their hands
Ba da wihingupa buhi
Oars are their feet
Pangga hi da takka
and then they walk and arrive
Laku hi da lundungu
they turn up and get to

La tana hupu haranguda

[at] the land they are able to reach

La mananga hupu hiwida

[at] the estuary they are able to dock [their boat]

La Kataka Lindi Watu

in Kataka Lindi Watu

La Haharu Malai

in Haharu Malai

The ritual speech is characterized with complicatedly figurative ways of speaking so that most of its audience does not understand most of the speeches. *Li Ndai* narratives are considered sacred, and thus need many prescriptions and conditions. Children and young people are forbidden from being present during their narration. They may normally only be narrated in the *Marapu* house. The procedure is so shaped with secrecy, danger, and the risk of causing the wrath of the clan ancestor. Animals, such as fowl, pig, or buffalo, must first be slaughtered for the ancestors and invocations are performed to ‘win’ the ancestors’ hearts. In a field research in 2004, the writer ever faced the reluctance of an informant asked to tell the histories of some *kabihu*, and only wanted to proceed his story until a ‘proper’ ritual, that is, slaughtering a pig, was carried out.

B. *Lawiti Luluk* (parallel with sayings or proverbs)

A compilation of *Lawiti Luluk* is done by Kapita (1987). *Lawiti Luluk* appears in religious verses, everyday speech, in fixed expressions, and in narratives. Here are some examples of this genre:

Na mapandoi pamanandangu

He who creates beautifully

Na malala pakaworingu

He who makes completely

This couplet refers to the creator of human beings

Ngia papata tibu mawalla

The right place to take full-grown sugar cane

Ngia papunggu kalu maihhi

The right place to cut down ripened banana

This couplet refers to the wife-givers (*yiara*) who are supposed to give a bride to wife-takers (*ana kawinni*)

Na wallahu-ndakka lunggi

He/she has spread out his/her hair

Na bata-ndakka kajia

He/she has turned his/her back to us

This couplet refers to someone who has just passed away.

Karuduku ndakku pitti

I bow but get nothing

Pajualangu ndakku tuama

I extend my hands but reach nothing

Meanwhile, this following couplet refers to someone who expresses his/her powerlessness

Ngaru mapahamangu

Mouths that speak the same [words]

Limma mapamiarangu

Hands that are parallel [to one and another]

This couplet refers to a discussion in which the participants are looking for an agreement.

C. *Li pangerangu* (tales)

There are mainly two kinds of *li pangerangu*. The first type is *ana lalu* (orphan tales). *Ana lalu* are stories about orphans characterized by the interruptions of songs in the course of the stories. The central characters in *ana lalu* are the eastern Sumba folkhero and heroine, **Umbu-** a title of respecting a male but is also used as a mark of respect for all class of people, and a term for a grandfather and forbear- **Ndilu** and **Rambu-** a title of respecting female but is also used as a mark of respect for all class of people- **Kahi**. There are other minor characters such as Mada (usually younger brother to Ndilu) and apu Kammi. The second type of *li pangerangu* are fables and which often adopt the archetypal names in *ana lalu*, but are distinguished from *ana lalu* due to their spontaneity, and therefore allowing



addition and subtraction. Wielenga (1913) compiled tales such as *I Dari*, *Karoboe Toenoe*, *Karoboe Hamoe*, *Maka Ihi Naoe*, and *Na Woeya*. A missionary linguist, Onvlee (1925) recorded some eastern Sumbanese's tales such as *I Oembu Mada Dangu I Mili Kami*, *I Oembu Ndilu Buti*, *I Ramboe* and *Kahi Wai Kakalakoe*. In a field research in Sumba on June 2005, the writer himself recorded some other tales such as *I Umbu Miata*, *I Kapilandu*, *I Rambu Kahi Kapuala*, *I Tara Tibu*, and *I Umbu Buti dangu I Umbu Kapaki*.

D. Lawiti Ludu (songs lyrics)

There are several kinds of *lawiti ludu*, songs, for instances, to accompany dancing (*ludu rianja*), to give spirits in dragging tombstones (*Ludu yila watu*), to harvest paddies (*ludu parinna*), to celebrate harvest time (*ludu kanduku wuaka*), and to express feelings of sorrow, dependency, humility, when one (usually male) loses his beloved, families, or family members (*ludu pahangu*). The following *ludu pahangu* was recorded by Kapita (1977:145).

A jiaya hi kuhi
That's why I cry
Kuhi-ka nyungga eri,
I do cry my lover
Lalu mijanguna I parandaingu
[because] the promise has been broken
Muda nda namuda
It is too easy to forget
La paimbu la I hama hada-mu
[since] you want to find someone else who suits you better
Tawurru la kawana-mu
the ring on your right finger
Mbadda ninya la wunggu limma-mu
It has already been in your grip
Tiara haputanga
The handkerchief [I gave you]
Daingu ninya nggi la hakumu
Is it still there in your pocket?

E. Dikangu/padikangu (riddles)

Samples of riddles are as follows:

Ba anakiada-ya na hau lau, ma na-matua na-kalulu.

When she was a child, she wore tubular skirt,
but when she was grown up, she was naked.

Solution: bamboo tree.

*Jakka na he la pingngi kokuru i umbu Ndilu,
ndanna he-a weli la pingngi-na, na he weli la kapukka-na.*

If umbu Ndilu climbs a coconut tree,
he doesn't climb it from its trunk but from its tip.

Solution: a ring

Nda paita-aya na pinggii-na, nda pa-ita-aya na kapuka-na
Its stem is invisible, its top is invisible.

Solution: the wind

F. Piapaku (word-games).

Here are three examples:

*Apu ku luala la wuaka, ku lua la wuaka, ku pápu tora, ku pápu
tora, ku julú wángu, ku julú wángu la lumbu mbuamangu, la lumbu
mbuamangu la hupu bangga, la hupu bangga la ru hawindu, la
ruhanwindu la kilimbuanga, la kilimbunnga ai la taluara.*

*Indaka-indaka wanna i tabu timbi ngaru, jia dukka i dukku i marau
kambu lumbu ndakku luppa inda-ya.*

*Jajjaka-jajjaka wanna I kabeli tanga mengitu, jia dukka i dukku i
ana mbuti mburungu ndakku luppa jajja-ya. Happaka-happaka
wanna i kuamalu matumbu, jia dukka i dukku i winnu muru maja
ndakku luppa happa-ya.*

CONCLUSION

In eastern Indonesia, including the island of Sumba, where literacy has still been limited to certain amount of people, oral traditions are lively and diverse. The indigenous languages in the region do not merely function as a means of education, but have become the essential vehicles for the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge. The peculiar way of

using vocabularies, for instance, in ritual and social communication/speech, and religious invocations calls for further and extensive studies on the cultural expression of the given people.

(Eastern) Sumba alone possesses 6 (six) genres of oral traditions. First, *Li Ndai/Li Marapu* concerning with the history of the clans and the tales of and the invocation to the ancestors who are believed as directly affecting the lives of the living, second, *Lawiti Luluk* used in religious rituals, in narratives, and in everyday speech, third, *Li pangerangu* referring to folktales, fourth, *Lawiti Ludu* (songs) performed in various occasions, fifth, *Dikangu/padikangu* (riddles) practiced as recreational activity, and sixth, *Piapaku* (word-games) which are sung or recited in staccato rhythms.

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