

Social Status as a Nonverbal Language in *Priyayi* Society

An Ethnopragnatics Symbolic Study

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ABSTRACT

Social status in *Priyayi* society is considered important as a determinant of a person's social degree. Social status is usually associated with rank, type of occupation, wealth, lineage, gender, community, and appearance. This article discusses social status as a static nonverbal language with the ethnopragnatics symbolic approach. A symbolic approach in the sense that almost all social status can only be interpreted if one knows the hidden symbolic meaning in the culture of society. Meanwhile, ethnopragnatics is an interdisciplinary approach between ethnography and pragmatics. Ethnography is the study of an object based on cultural background. Pragmatics is the study of the use of language on the basis of the context in which it is used. The data source for this research was *priyayi* people in the village of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta. The research data is in the form of descriptions of the social status of the *priyayi* in the data source. The data collection technique used observation. Data analysis was carried out through data identification, data classification, and interpretation of the results of data classification. This study aims to describe (a) a particular social status in Javanese society, and (b) the symbolic meaning of the social status of static nonverbal language. The study concluded that the East Celebans *priyayi* were little *priyayi*, based on their intellectual level. The little *priyayi* determines his social status through his social life and family life. *Priyayi* social life is influenced by static nonverbal language, including rank, language style, and wealth. *Priyayi* family life is influenced by static nonverbal language, including the wedlock and the lineage.

Keywords: *Ethnopragnatic, nonverbal language, priyayi, social status*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nonverbal language is a language used to communicate without using words (Lappako, 2007). Nonverbal language can be classified into three types, namely (a) sign language (including gestures that indicate the meaning of words, numbers and punctuation, (b) language of action (including various movements that can have different messages and meanings, for example gait, drinking style: one to satisfy oneself and another to convey messages to the listener), and (c) object language (including various objects that are arranged accidentally and deliberately, such as tools, machines, artwork, construction structures, clothing, etc. (Wang, 2019). Both verbal and nonverbal language require context. Context is divided into two, namely dynamic context and static context (Hu, 2014). Dynamic contexts always follow speech or actions that occur, while static contexts are contexts that are consistent with the spoken language.

Regarding the topic of this article, social status is part of nonverbal language with a static context. In other words, social status has existed since time immemorial and is also understood on the basis of the socio-cultural background of the community. Social status is one of the factors to identify a person's position in society. Even though a person is older than others, it does not mean that they necessarily occupy a higher social status. Social status is determined by many other aspects, such as rank, type of occupation, descent, wealth, gender, appearance, and breed (the origin of common people).

The theoretical deepening used as an approach to this study includes a symbolic approach, an ethnographic approach, and a pragmatic approach. The symbolic approach can be interpreted as the interpretation of goods, objects, or situations that are intended by the community to interpret the intended pragmatic meaning. Pragmatics is a functional perspective that seeks to explain aspects of linguistic structure by referring to non-

linguistic influences and symptoms (Levinson, 1983, p. 7). Pragmatic linguistic studies are humans as language users in the form of habits or social actions (Verschuere, 1999). The ethnographic approach refers to a certain community, in this case the ethnic Javanese community, namely the people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta. Each member of a community or social group does not only express themselves, but they also create experiences through language (Kramsch, 1998). An important point in an ethnographic perspective is the focus with the intention of an action and activity of the society being investigated to be understood and comprehended (Spradley, 1980, p. 5).

Yogyakarta is known for its two popular areas, namely *Jeron Benteng* and *Luar Benteng*. *Jeron Benteng* is part of the Yogyakarta Palace area with areas within the fort that are inhabited by palace relatives and courtiers. Outside the fort is a place for ordinary people (Goenawan, 1993). The people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta are among the areas outside the fort. The interesting thing that is explored in this study is social status as a form of symbolic nonverbal language in the people of Yogyakarta, especially East Celeban, Umbulharja. Even though these communities are outside the fortress, they still hold traditions and culture related to their social status.

The social status of these societies is carefully investigated through certain groups. Javanese society is usually divided into two groups, namely the *wong cilik* (ordinary people) and the *priyayi* (intellectuals) group and specifically for the Yogyakarta area there are *ndara* groups (aristocratic groups) (Suseno, 1984). As time goes by, the social status may change, for example, the *wong cilik* group has descendants who can pursue higher education to attain a change in status to become a *priyayi* group or vice versa. Because of the socio-economic situation, a *priyayi* group can become a *wong cilik* group. This kind of situation can still be found among the people of East Celeban, Umbulharja who are still outside the fort or outside the Yogyakarta Palace area. It is different from other cultures in Indonesia, for example in NTT where each region has its own traditions and languages (Adonis, 1997). The leaders in each area are named differently, including in Dawan called *Lemukung*, in Sabu it is called *Udu*, in Manggarai it is called *Tua Teno*, in Helong it is called *Kaka Ama*, in Ngada Mosa it is called *Mia*, and in Sumba it is called *Kabihu* (Adonis, 1997, p. 23). The various names are very different from Javanese culture where emphasis is put more on the leadership class, especially Yogyakarta.

The form of nonverbal language is divided into two forms, namely dynamic nonverbal language and static nonverbal language. Dynamic nonverbal language is a form of moving nonverbal language in the form of gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions in conveying meaningful messages. Static nonverbal language refers to

something that is physically attached to speakers and speech partners. Static nonverbal language is a particular symbol or symbol in a certain cultural context. Social status includes static nonverbal language that determines pragmatic meanings. Social status as a nonverbal static language is in the form of social life and family life. This study describes the social status of the East Celeban as a symbolic nonverbal language with an ethnoprismatic perspective.

2. METHOD

This research is a qualitative research. This study describes several aspects of static nonverbal language for social status which include aspects of form, aspects of function, and pragmatic meaning. The data source of this research is the social status of the *priyayi* in the East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta. The research data used in this study is in the form of static nonverbal actions in the social status found in the community. This research data collection technique adapted ethnographic research, namely observation and recording. Observation is an activity of observing community activities, the physical characteristics of social situations, and feeling part of these activities (Spradley, 1980). Observation and recording methods are appropriate to naturally reveal the form, function, and pragmatic meaning of static nonverbal language by using visual recording through film, video and photography which is a special ability to capture visible and objective phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The data analysis technique was carried out in stages, (1) data identification to find the characteristic markers of each nonverbal language action in language behavior, (2) data classification to categorize each nonverbal language action based on certain classes in order to provide a real picture of data analysis, and (3) data interpretation to interpret the various forms, functions, and pragmatic meanings of static nonverbal language in Javanese socio-cultural status. Thus, data analysis can describe (1) the form of static nonverbal language expressed by the people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta, (2) the communicative function of static nonverbal language social status of the people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta, and (3) the overall interpretation of usage behavior of static nonverbal language which determines social status of the people in East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Priyayi of East Celeban*

The people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta are Javanese people who develop dynamically outside the *Jeron Benteng* area or the Yogyakarta Palace area. As has been mentioned previously, although the area is outside

the palace and inhabited by common people, it also consists of *priyayi*. *Priyayi* is a body image that functions to present a self-image with a high social background or the social background of intellectuals. The impact of this function in social life is respect for the *priyayi* in ordinary society and upholding the socio-economic status in the area. Body image is divided into two things, namely body image evaluation and body image investment (Burgoon, 2016). *Priyayi* presents both forms, *priyayi* can improve one's physical appearance (body image evaluation) and behavior in improving one's appearance (body image investment). Thus, the function static NV of *priyayi* affects the lives of community groups that are considered *priyayi*. They must maintain a good attitude in society. Pranowo (2019) explains that Javanese people are identified as two *priyayi* groups, namely the noble *priyayi* and the little *priyayi*. Noble *priyayi* are aristocratic or royal-blooded people who live in the Yogyakarta Palace area. The little *priyayi* is an intellectual group and a group of religious leaders. They are considered *priyayi* based on socio-economic and cultural backgrounds which are influential in certain activities. Therefore, it can be taken into account that it is *priyayi cilik* or little *priyayi* inhabit East Celeban.

The little *priyayi* is an intellectual group that comes from the common people (Pranowo, 2020). They are ordinary people who undergo a long process in socio-economic life to raise a high social status. The East Celeban are mostly inhabited by little *priyayi*. In other words, they are actually the society with a high-ranking and respectable intellectual group. The function of the static nonverbal language of *priyayi cilik* is to communicate the level of personal honour among ordinary people. The times have shown that the little *priyayi* also has the same pragmatic meaning as the noble *priyayi*, which shows a high social status. Little *priyayi* have an important role in society, for example social agendas are represented by people who have a certain rank or position to lead the agenda. However, the fundamental difference between the two groups is their place of residence and origin. Thus, the little *priyayi* still played an important role in the socio-economic system of the people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta.

3.2. The Social Life of Priyayi

Someone's social position in society is a symbolic form of the values of Javanese cultural life. Social position is divided into three important things, namely rank, degree, wealth (*semat*) (Saliyo, 2016). These three things are inherent in the life of the people of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta. Community life is transformed into three static nonverbal language which are ranks, degrees, and wealth. The people of East Celeban are inhabited by various Javanese people with different ranks. The *Priyayi* in East Celeban pays attention to their social life, especially regarding ranks,

degrees, and wealth. The *priyayi* determine these three things in order to improve the welfare of social life in society.

The *priyayi* of East Celeban were little *priyayi*, namely intellectuals who are considered an important group. Little *priyayi* has a minimum profession in middle position. The middle jobs of the East Celeban are employees, teachers, school principals, self-employed people, and others. Middle rank is measured from the level of education where the average graduate has a bachelor's degree and has sufficient wealth to open their own business. The static nonverbal language of middle rank is interpreted as ordinary people who are in a higher order, based on the level of wealth they are able to show good welfare. Middle rank can be considered as pragmatics to communicate the image of a group of ordinary people who have descent intellectual level. Therefore, some of these middle rank people can be called as *priyayi cilik* (little *priyayi*).

Meanwhile, the high ranks found in the East Celeban region are people who work as regional officials, such as *camat*, professors, directors, and others. The East Celeban area shows that some people have increased their social status due to high levels of education, wealth and regional positions, and religious leaders. In Javanese culture, this high rank gives a high value of respect. In other words, ordinary people have more respect for high-ranking groups who have a socio-economic average above the low and middle ranks. High rank society is referred as the high social status of the little *priyayi*. Their existence in society is an example or role model for society. In other words, high-ranking people must be able to show noble attitudes, such as *alus* (polite), respectful, *andhap asor* (humble) attitude (Suseno, 1984). The static nonverbal language function of high rank is to show upper class groups can become role models in society. The social pragmatics of high ranks is the upper class who must always maintain a good, wise, and polite attitude so as not to create gaps in society.

The little *priyayi* especially those with high rank must use polite language in communication. The usage of polite language of *priyayi* society in the East Celeban area can be described as a *Joglo* house. This description gives a metaphorical meaning to the degree held by *priyayi* society. The social degree of society is classified into four things, including *Sasmita Narendra*, *Esem Bupati*, *Semu Mantri*, and *Dhupak Bujang*. *Sasmita Narendra* is a royal blood/noble, namely the royal family. *Esem Bupati* as the top ruling group rarely uses direct verbal words. In other words, all verbal statements have often been expressed by subordinates of officials as their representatives (Pranowo, 2019). The top group of *esem* (smile) pragmatically shows *alus*, kind, pure and clean attitudes and is not reprehensible. *Semu* means *pasemon*, which is a verbal explanation that attempts to subtly and indirectly insinuate it to the attention of ordinary people.

Satire is not to hurt feelings but a form of attention. *Priyayi* are able to use language politely in various contexts of communication, for example, communication between the little *priyayi* and the noble *priyayi* using the *alus* language or known as *Krama Inggil*. The little *priyayi* and the common people use polite language, a mixture of *Krama* and *Ngoko*. Little *priyayi*, such as leaders in society, often use *semu* language or *pasemon*, namely *alus* words with certain parables, for example a village head conveying “*yen wani aja wedi-wedi yen wedi aja wani-wani*.” This expression is intended to give a warning to the public to become a society that has courage, confidence, and does not hesitate in making decisions. In the context of learning, a teacher conveying “*becik ketitik ala ketara*” to students. This expression is meant to give advice that always be careful in acting because it is despicable behaviour that is always remembered in people’s lives. Some of the examples above show that *priyayi* use *pasemon* in expressing advice. The use of *semu* language serves to reduce the impression of direct satire. *Semu* language is a subtle style of delivery with advices that are known to the public. *Dhupak bujang* means the nature of children who still like to play (Pranowo, 2020). *Dhupak bujang* communication does not use parables but shows the actual communication according to the intention. *Dhupak bujang* means ordinary conversation which use in daily life or unformal activity.

The wealth of *priyayi* society is often depicted in a symbolic metaphorical manner, for example the wealth of a person who has meaning and impressions of cultural values. This assessment can be described in terms of *telu-teluning atunggal* in the form of *kukila*, *turangga*, and *wanudya* (Wahyono, 2017). Javanese people are said to live in a stable manner based on these three things. A capable society can be seen based on domestic animals, such as the maintenance of singing birds. People who keep certain expensive chirping birds and keep more than one, of course, mean that they are already in a high social group, such as *priyayi*. The *priyayi* shows their wealth through the *semat* of the *kukila* or the pet. The house of a *priyayi* is marked by many pets such as various types of chirping birds which are expensive, such as the *Murai*, *Cucak Ijo*, and *Cucak Rowo*, and other expensive birds. Pets serve to show the wealth of a *priyayi* who is different from ordinary people. *Kukila* have pragmatic meaning to show the level of wealth of a *priyayi*. The more pets, the *priyayi* is considered as a rich *priyayi* financially. *Turangga* means horse riding or it also can be interpreted as a vehicle. People with high ranks, such as regional officials, directors, and others have a high-value family and have more than one role, which certainly shows a high socio-economic level. Similar to the *kukila*, the *priyayi* who has many *turangga*, the *priyayi* is considered as a rich *priyayi* financially. Furthermore, *wanudya* means woman/wife. A capable life will be complete if someone has the courage to live with a family. The

priyayi must have a wife with a *priyayi* background as well. *Semat* or the wealth has a noble meaning in decorating cultural life in Javanese society. *Semat*/the wealth is considered as pragmatic to show one’s independence in social life by building a good and prosperous family for each family member.

3.3. The Family Life of Priyayi

The *priyayi* of the East Celeban area Umbulharja still considering their socio-economic background in making a match. The wedlock is one of the *semat*/the wealth so that a person can be said to be living well after getting a *wanudya*/wife. The considerations of the *priyayi* people in wedlock are *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* (Rohmanu, 2016). These three criteria are the measure of how parents consider in marriage in hope that their spouse can run the family well. *Bibit* is a consideration for the origin of heredity. *Bebet* is a consideration of dignity, and social economy. *Bobot* is a consideration of the quality of educational background. Little *priyayi* in East Celeban also determines wedlock based on *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot*.

The *priyayi* wants sustainable socio-economic welfare. Therefore, the *priyayi* choose a mate according to their *bibit*, that they have the same *priyayi* background. The wedlock of the *priyayi* functions is to maintain the social dignity of the *priyayi* in society. The public will judge that the *priyayi* shows respectful actions according to their social status background. The pragmatic meaning of *bibit* is to maintain the social dignity of a *priyayi* in society. Family life certainly needs a solid foundation, especially in meeting basic needs. The *priyayi* hope that their descendants build a family. A family that does not only built by desire and love, but also the consideration of their basic needs or *bebet*.

Therefore, someone who is ready to start a family is clearly someone who has already a settle income. The demands of having a high education are influential in marriage. A harmonious pair is built on the same level of education so that the descendants are well educated. The *priyayi* consider *bobot* as an important thing in order to avoid a gap, jealousy/meri, between husband and wife, and it also can help them to educate their offspring morally and ethically. The static nonverbal language of marriage with consideration of *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* serves to carefully select and determine the right partner in building a family. Javanese people want the family to have good relations between family and relatives, and also have good relations in the community. The consideration of *bibit*, *bebet*, and *bobot* needs to be understood as cultural noble values which have a pragmatic meaning that doing a wedlock in Javanese culture is a noble hope to build a harmonious and prosperous family life especially family life of the *priyayi*.

Families that have been running for years provide a large number of descendants. The *priyayi* thus cares for lineage or *temu trah*. The *priyayi* want the descendants to *srawung* each other, especially between descendants and the same "family tree" have a close relationship. Families who have close relationships among descendants/relatives are considered good and noble in Javanese society. Therefore, extended families usually hold a kind of gathering known as *temu trah*. *Trah* means descent derived from the word *truh*/ rain (Triratnawati, 2009). The *trah* is depicted as rain dripping down so the lineage is also counted vertically from top to bottom. *Temu trah* is a Javanese cultural tradition that has been widely adapted by people in the village of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta. The noble *priyayi*/aristocratic group have certainly become an example of the existence of the *temu trah* in the Jeron Benteng area or the Yogyakarta palace area. The development of the times shows that the agenda of *temu trah* has been widely adapted by little *priyayi* communities. The purpose of *temu trah* is to build good relationship between descendants so that the good relationship creates a large, harmonious family. The nonverbal static *trah* as Javanese cultural pictured vertically from top to bottom, including *anak, putu, buyut, canggah, wareng, udheg-udheg, hanging siwur, gropak senthe, debog bosok, and galih asem* (Pranowo, 2020). Lineage or *temu trah* are held depending on the agreement of each member of the family. The senior *priyayi* of family or elders (*sesepuh*) determine the meeting of lineage by naming their extended family, such as the *Hardjolukito*, the *Hadiswoyo*, the *Mangunkusumo*, and other lineages. The function of the static nonverbal language of *temu trah* is to strengthen the family relationship. This function is manifested in events at *temu trah*, for example a large family gathering event which is filled with sequences of events such as introductions, meals together, and picnics together. The pragmatic meaning of *temu trah* is to release feelings of longing and nostalgia together about the history of a family.

Hence, the little *priyayi* continues the practice of maintaining *kepriyayan* through their social practice and pragmatics. The *priyayi* as social status in Javanese culture functions to maintain Javanese traditions in carrying out social life and family life. The *priyayi* symbolizes the form of static nonverbal language that prioritizes feelings in every action in social life and family life. The *priyayi* has a pragmatic meaning that the *priyayi* is a Javanese person who shows a person who has *adu rasa* (keeping feelings) and *angon rasa* (maintaining feelings). As such this study confirms (Pranowo, 2012).

4. CONCLUSION

The static nonverbal language of social status in the *priyayi* of East Celeban, Umbulharja, Yogyakarta is related to Javanese cultural traditions. The *priyayi* still

practice Javanese cultural traditions. The static nonverbal language of social status can be described as the circle of life of the *priyayi*. In other words, the life journey of the *priyayi* is always symbolized through noble cultural values ranging from the background of social life and family life.

The symbolic meaning of nonverbal language's static social status is to achieve a unity of life in harmony with God's will. Javanese philosophy often expresses "*sangkan paraning dumadi*" which is understood as a journey in search of life perfection. Meanwhile, the pragmatics of little *priyayi* is carried out through subtle and hierarchical language. Both are necessary to pursue the ideal of the *priyayi* society, which is those who are able to maintain, preserve and implement the noble values of Javanese culture manifested in social life and family life.

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