

Unen-Unen as a Javanese Proverb on Social Media: Lexical Meaning and Its Significance as a Means of Cultural Inheritance

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ABSTRACT

Unen-unen is a traditional Javanese expression in the form of a series of words and phrases that contain special meanings. Unen-unen contains valuable messages derived from the educational values of the life of the ancestors. Along with the era of information technology, unen-unen is now often found on social media as a means to share values and advice. This paper aims to discuss the lexical meaning and cultural significance. This research method is based on qualitative descriptive. The theoretical approaches used are lexical semantics and cultural semantic analysis. Data sources in the form of unen-unen downloads from Facebook and Instagram. Data is analyzed with independent and interdisciplinary techniques. The results of the analysis of unen-unen posted in social media contain meanings: (1) moral values, (2) religious messages, (3) advice, (4) motivation, and (5) expectations. These values can be a means of binding and strengthening the pride of people of Javanese descent and rebuilding relationships through online social life in the international community. The phenomenon of the use of unen-unen in cyberspace revitalizes the desires of the diaspora of Javanese descendants who now live all over the world. The use of unen-unen through social media is an important means to preserve Javanese values and culture.

Keywords: *unen-unen, lexical and cultural semantics, moral values, Javanese ancestry*

1. INTRODUCTION

The ancestors of the Javanese are famous for their culture and traditions that have high aesthetic and cultural value. One of the cultural heritage of the ancestors that contains the philosophy of life is depicted in unen-unen and Javanese proverbs. Unen-unen is a traditional Javanese expression in the form of a series of words that contain special meanings loaded with life values. In Javanese society, unen-unen can be conveyed in the form of proverbs, among others referred to as 'sanepa', 'pepinhan', 'saloka', and 'paribasan'. The Center for Language Development and Development [1] has made efforts in the form of the publication of the Javanese Dictionary of Expressions. The purpose of publishing is to introduce to the wider community of documenting, inheritance and dissemination to future generations, as well as in the framework of the preservation of regional culture as an element of national culture. The documenting activities are also actively carried out by the Provincial Language Office in Yogyakarta [2]. Unfortunately, expressions that contain religious values, customs, moral education,

behavioural guidance are increasingly lost and not even understood its meaning, especially by the younger generation.

Some Javanese poets such as Sunan Pakubuwana IV and Ranggawarsita in the past have succeeded in packaging and preserving by teaching and disseminating orally to the community and developing well among Javanese people naturally. Although the spread of teachings is traditionally by word of mouth, Javanese people are very concerned and can permeate the meaning as a way of conveying messages effectively and politely. With that expression or unen-unen, the depth of intent of a message and idea can be conveyed, concisely, and densely and on target. The substance contained in the meaningful unen-unen always reflects the view of life and the way of thinking of Javanese people, and becomes a guideline to behave in association in the community [3]. Abdullah [4] found that people in the area around Surakarta still use proverbs that summarize local wisdom because of the guidance of loyalty to their culture. Soehardi [6] added that Javanese proverbial expression is one of the oral

traditions that contain philosophical values and moral ethics that can be revitalized and integrated with the national cultural constellation such as through traditional puppet stage and strengthen character education program in schools.

Lately, the use of 'unen-unen' is slowly but surely almost losing its function as a driver and bearer of moral values for generations of Javanese language users. The expression "*Wong Jowo ilang Jawane*" which means Javanese people have lost their Javanese character may be the right expression at this time. Today, many young people do not obey manners and do not understand the teachings conveyed by their parents using this proverbial word device. This expression of concern received much public scrutiny and a response from community elders at large.

The need and importance of the inheritance of values, in particular, character education for children has been promulgated by the Government of Indonesia through the Strengthening of Character Education program (Presidential Regulation number 87/2017 and the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture displayed in Permendikbud number 20/2018). Those are recently accompanied by Government Regulation number 57/2021 that aims to strengthen the character of the nation's young generation in general.

As is the tradition in many tribes and ethnic races in Indonesia, the meaning of words in unen-unen are often conveyed not only explicitly but there is a deeper implied meaning. These beautiful and meaningful words were indeed created to convey the advice of the elderly to the younger generation or from the government to their people. Unen-unen also contains cultural meanings that implicitly require a broad and deep understanding [7]. That is why the study of the meaning of Javanese unen-unen is very important for the preservation of life values and regulating the norms of ethical society at large.

The importance of learning and revitalizing unen-unen is expected to be a bridge to the booster of character education that is needed, especially for the younger generation who also need role models in various ways. Through Javanese proverbs, meaning can be learned to teach people that life will be more meaningful if it can promote togetherness, tranquillity, and peace [5].

With the existence of information technology, Javanese expressions are now easily found in online mass media and various social media such as Instagram and Facebook. Usually, certain unen-unen are rewritten and used as a symbol of personal identity or status juxtaposed with the meaning and message of its content in Indonesian. Javanese unen-unen such as "*Lamun Siro Sekti, Ojo Mateni*" for example, is the title of Eko Sulistyo, the Deputy of Political Communication and

Information Dissemination of the Presidential Staff Office, on Kompas newspaper on Monday, August 12, 2019. This Unen-unen is widely discussed after Indonesian President Joko Widodo uploaded it on his personal social media account, namely Instagram. The meaning of Javanese philosophy in this unen-unen is that power has limits and is not absolute. The president uses it to remind himself and teach his people about the limits of power, and the work of the head of state.

Similarly, on Facebook media dated January 18, 2021, found unen-unen in Javanese: *Bagus ayu mung winates mata. Kabeuh manungsa padha, sing bedha amal nyata*. The philosophical meaning contained in this unen-unen is that the difference of man in the eyes of God the Creator is based on real charity not limited to one's physical good looks and beauty. Everyone is the same. In essence, beauty and good looks are not eternal but only limited to the eyes.

The many uses of Javanese language on social media is actually a revitalization or act to revive the old culture. This phenomenon is also carried out by other ethnic groups in Indonesia that have a diversity of languages through traditional expressions, such as in Sundanese [8]; [9]; Batak, and Banjar [10]). Similarly, the people of Bima in West Nusa Tenggara are proud to upload expressions through social media. In addition to being a means of communication, Nurmiwati & Wahidah [11] affirm that the meaning of expressions owned by Bima people share, among others, to advise each other, motivate, provide support, remind, resuscitate, complete, and encourage.

The particular meaning contained in the Javanese language is believed to lift the dignity of the heritage of the Javanese people. Along with the era of information technology, modern Javanese society began to realize the importance of 'unen-unen' as a means of sharing advice, meaning, and pride as part of Javanese ancestry. The phenomenon of the use of unen-unen in cyberspace revitalizes the desires of diaspora people of Javanese descent who now live in various parts of the world.

Along with the increasingly vibrant use of social media as a means of friendship and collaboration, the author aims to analyse and discuss proverbs in Javanese-language forms found on social media accounts. The purpose of the paper is to examine the meaning contained in Javanese unen-unen, especially discussing the lexical and cultural meaning and its significance for the preservation of noble values and their inheritance for the younger generation.

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative descriptive research methods are used with data in the form of Javanese unen-unen in the form of traditional expressions that include in *paribasan*, *saloka*, and *pepinjahan*, whether in the form of phrases,

clauses, or sentences. Theoretical approaches to lexical semantics and cultural semantics are used for the study and interpretation to obtain an explanation of the express meaning and implied meaning. The source of the research data is unen-unen found on social media Facebook and Instagram. Data collection techniques are used by recording and listening (Sudaryanto, [12]), which is to record and mark unen-unen in Javanese following the purpose of research on Instagram and Facebook. The data obtained is continued with data analysis using independent techniques and interdisciplinary techniques [13]. Self-contained techniques are used to analyze data without regard to other elements. Data in the form of Javanese unen-unen is analyzed lexically. Furthermore, interdisciplinary techniques analyze data with cultural semantic theory, namely analyzing the meaning of Javanese language by paying attention to the cultural context of social media users.

3. ANALYSIS

There are hundreds of unen-unen in Javanese that have been found, collected on posts to social media, either through personal blogs or other forms such as youtube, Instagram, and Facebook. Unen-unen uploaded on social media usually included explanations and lexical meanings. Unen-unen contains a special message and is full of veiled or implied meaning that needs to be clarified with the context. For this article, selected proverbs used on social media Instagram and Facebook that are quite important in conveying moral messages as the inheritance of Javanese society. Based on search results on social media, selected 10 examples of unen-unen that are loaded with cultural values and character of Javanese society.

- (1) *Aja adigang, adigung, adiguna* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)
- (2) *Alon-alon waton kelakon* (Facebook, 30th January 2021)
- (3) *Jamane jaman edan, yen ora edan ora keduman, isih seja sing eling lan waspada* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)
- (4) *Mangan ora mangan sing penting kumpul* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)
- (5) *Mikul dhuwur mendhem jero* (Facebook, 3rd March 2021)
- (6) *Sura dira jayadiningrat lebur dening pangastuti* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)
- (7) *Becik ketitik ala ketara* (Instagram, 10th April 2021)
- (8) *Jer basuki mawa beya* (Instagram, 1st January 2021)
- (10) *Ngundhuh wohing pakarti* (Instagram, 1st December 2020)
- (11) *Sapa temen bakal tinemu* (Instagram, 10th March 2020)

This selected expression is then analyzed and explained accordingly. First, the lexical word for word meaning. Then continued by interpreting according to the context and understanding of culture. The rest is an important interpretation and explanation of unen-unen in today's social life for Javanese society.

- (1) *Aja adigang, adigung, adiguna* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)

In the example of quote number (1), the phrase unen-unen *adigang, adigung, adiguna* comes from Sunan Pakubuwana IV's work entitled Serat Wulangreh on verse Gambuh fourth stanza. The word *adigang* means the strength described by an antelope animal that has advantages in the right of body or physical strength by being able to run fast, and agile. The word *adigung* is symbolized by the elephant which is the largest mammal on the mainland. The elephant as a parable of the one who boasts the rank of degree, dignity, and offspring. Followed by karakter *adiguna* means cleverness and is symbolized by a snake that can bite but also secrete deadly poison.

Thus, the phrase unen-unen *adigang, adigung, adiguna* symbolizes a unity of human nature, namely strength, dignity, and intelligence. However, a person who is *adigang, adigung, adiguna* can be interpreted as an act of pride and abuse that can harm others. The meaning of the expression contains the teaching of a prohibition that a human being should not only highlight the strength, blood of descent, and intelligence because it is close to the arrogant. Reksodiharjo [14] says that human beings should act not arrogantly and should respect their fellow human beings. The word 'aja' in front of the phrase means advice that forbids people to commit such unworthy acts if they want to live safely and be appreciated by others.

- (2) *Alon-alon waton kelakon* (Facebook, 30th January 2021)

Lexically, quote (2) '*alon-alon waton kelakon*' seems to advise that we should work slowly as long as it is completed. However, the implied meaning is not interpreted negatively to support laziness, but what is emphasized is to do something carefully, deeply, and thoroughly. The meaning in the unen-unen is considered not following the current era that demands fast-paced and precise as a consequence of the development of information technology.

The meaning of '*alon-alon*' should be interpreted with carefulness, prudence, and thoroughness in doing a job. Thus, the implied meaning in this unen-unen is very supportive in carrying out social activities based on information technology. Tiani [15] states that unen-unen '*alon-alon waton kelakon*' contains the meaning of wisdom associated with the culture of Javanese people who are not ambitious (ngoyo) but still work patiently and meticulously to achieve life goals.

Frequently, the phrase 'alon-alon waton kelakon' is interpreted literally that all activities that can be done slowly as justification for people who laze and without effort. The Javanese philosophy contained in this unen-unen is closely related to the formation and development of human character, namely patience and tenacious and continuing to strive when failing in achieving hope.

- (3) *Jamane jaman edan, yen ora edan ora keduman, isih seja sing eling lan waspada* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)

Quote (3) unen-unen above reads '*Jamane jaman edan, yen ora edan ora keduman, isih seja sing eling lan waspada*' was written by a poet from Surakarta Kasunanan named Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita in the 19th century. This unen-unen is often heard because its meaning is relevant to the current conditions. This present is called the crazy era (*Jamane jaman edan*), of course, which is meant not crazy in the literal sense of being physically insane, but mentally or psychologically insane in the form of crazy behaviour, attitude, thoughts and statements.

Many people already know this is a violation of rules or norms but some of them continue to satisfy lust. *Yen ora edan ora keduman*, means if someone does not follow crazy actions will be afraid will not get wealth (duman). A meaningful suggestion is that the best of all characters is the one who remembers and is alert. Humans should always remember (eling) in behaving according to existing rules and do not forget to remain vigilant. The phrase '*eling lan waspada*' serves as a control so that life can run harmoniously, safely and peacefully [16].

- (4) *Mangan ora mangan sing penting kumpul* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)

Quote (4) '*Mangan ora mangan sing penting kumpul*' means literally eating or not eating that is important to get together. Javanese people tend to feel happy, enjoyable, safe, and comfortable if they can gather with family and relatives [17]. The tradition of gotong-royong and mutual assistance in various ritual ceremonies and religious celebrations in Javanese families continues to this day. This event is always missed by nomads and becomes motivation and attraction to go home and do something by putting forward gotong royong and togetherness (Tiani, [15]).

Unfortunately, many misinterpret superficially this Javanese philosophy, which is concerned with gathering rather than making a living to meet the needs of life. The phenomenon of returning home or homecoming at eid celebrations is an example of the attachment of Javanese people to their family environment. Even the Javanese at the end of his life often asked to be buried in the land of birth. Although with the threat of fines and sometimes endangering lives, the ban should not go

home does not have the maximum effect for Javanese families to be able to gather during Eid al-Fitr. During the recent covid-19 pandemic, the travel ban to the village became a polemic that quite haunted Javanese people in overseas cities who want to return home [18].

- (5) *Mikul dhuwur mendhem jero* (Facebook, 3rd March 2021)

The lexical meaning of this unen-unen data quote (5) is to lift it high or bury it deeply. The implied meaning is that one must behave to uphold the good and close or bury the bad. This attitude is very commendable done by a child who must uphold the dignity of his parents by doing good. A child is also obliged to close the disgrace of his family so that others do not know. Today, the expression *mikul dhuwur mendhen jero* is also interpreted to realize a sense of concern for the leadership as well as the nation and the country. This behaviour is extended to the community with the consideration that good achievement by the leadership is also an impact on the performance of his staff or subordinates and the community at large. Tiani [15] and Rahyono [19] assert that the attitude of *mikul dhuwur mendhem jero* is a value of life that has become the philosophy of life of the Javanese as a local wisdom that is still relevant and worth preserving.

- (6) *Sura dira jayadiningrat lebur dening pangastuti* (Facebook, 15th January 2021)

The literal meaning of this expression (6) is that courage and power, kindness, loyalty, and holiness will defeat evil. These unen-unen contain the advice that in any difficult time should be steadily seeking happiness in the right way because the happiness gained by evil will be defeated by the happiness obtained by virtue. This phrase was once used as the status of FB Pak Jokowi in 2014 ago. In general, the meaning of the expression '*Suro Diro Jayadiningrat Lebur Dening Pangastuti*' is that all stubborn, petty, and angry figures can only be defeated with a wise, gentle, and patient attitude. Whoever patiently disperses evil will be wiser in dealing with the problems of life. This expression is closely related to the Javanese unen-unen *Wong ngalah dhuwur wekasane* which means if we relent at the beginning the consequences will turn around in the end we will get a higher position [15].

- (7) *Becik ketitik ala ketara* (Instagram, 10th April 2021)

This quote (7) means that good deeds must be proven while evil deeds by themselves will look real. This message is contained in Serat Wedhatama by Mangkunegara IV in verse Pangkur. It is stated that all good and bad deeds will be rewarded. Good deeds do not need to be shown, over time seen and proven and appreciated. This expression implies that people should always do good and leave reprehensible deeds. As written by Widyastuti [16] that unen-unen '*becik ketitik*

'ala ketara' contains the intention that humans can control themselves from the lust of evil. This expression also implies the suggestion, to be honest and that the person who is honest and good in time will be seen and the one who hides evil will eventually also be revealed [14].

(8) *Jer basuki mawa beya* (Instagram, 1st January 2021)

Having the literal meaning of all happiness costs money, which means that if the desire or ideals can be realized everything is not free from the cost. The word 'beya' or cost is interpreted as an effort and hard work to get a desire in this case money. Cost is not only interpreted materially, but also intended inner efforts to achieve it, such as the practice of concern, determination, commitment, effort, and prayer. So, it takes effort and hard work done day and night. Javanese people prioritize work during the day emphasized on physical effort, while at night when rested and tired of soul and body, one must also try to pray and communicate with God.

(9) *Ngundhuh wohing pakarti* (Instagram, 1th Desember 2020)

This unen-unen teaches that everyone will gain the results of the deeds he does, both good and bad deeds. This unen-unen has become a view of Javanese life to always do good to get a similar reply. Tiani [15] revealed that this unen-unen becomes a handle in the daily life and philosophy of Javanese people. Unen-unen can be associated with the teachings of Hinduism, namely the teachings of Karma which is written in Javanese literature [14]. The teaching of karma explains that God will reward or punish people according to what he does. In the age of the current generation, this unen-unen should be preserved as an effort to motivate the younger generation to work hard to get good results.

(10) *Sapa temen bakal tinemu* (Instagram, 10 Maret 2020)

Quote (10) is a picture and parable that anyone who works and strives earnestly in achieving what is aspired to will surely achieve the result. Obstacles, stumbling blocks, sharp pebbles, winding roads and temptations are always there when one is willing to realize a desire. Therefore, it must be consistent and earnest and of course accompanied by always praying to God. This Unen-unen emphasizes the earnestness of the heart and perseverance if you want to get what you want. This unen-unen also contained implicit meaning of who is honest, patient, and diligent will get good results [16]. Anwar [7] added that our ancestors were able to have Indonesian territory and maintain the unity of all because it had wise leadership and people who put forward *Sapa temen bakal tinemu* as one principle.

Such are the various ways that Javanese people do in socializing meaning and advice to the community. By utilizing online media to show its existence, it is expected that the successors of the owners of the tradition continue to be familiar and live the meaning and teachings of the past they contain. With the initiative to upload through social media, the people of Java are giving each other examples and sharing advice. Javanese people who are now spread throughout the world feel they have and preserve because of '*rumangsa handarbeni*' or also have this ancestral heritage wherever he is. Phrases chosen as icons or statuses on social media can bridge the desire to give each other advice and remind each other both as a people and leaders.

4. CONCLUSION

Unen-unen as a form of expression and Javanese proverb contains various meanings of messages that include morals, religious values, advice, motivation and hope. The noble meaning contained in Javanese unen-unen uploaded in social media contributes as a medium of inheritance and dissemination that describes the character and ethics of the Javanese nation in the association in cyberspace. Through social media such as Instagram and Facebook, unen-unen is not only known more widely but also conveyed messages and morals to the public. Moreover, if the writing is compared with other languages as a translation of the original language so that it can be more easily understood.

The implied meaning contained in the Javanese language must be conveyed in a friendly and polite manner to social media users, especially the younger generation so that there is no more misunderstanding of receiving messages. Often, quotes posted on Facebook even become the subject of ridicule, such as in unen-unen '*alon-alon waton kelakon*' and quotes '*mangan ora mangan sing penting kumpul*' that are understood only limited to lexical meaning.

The moral values in Javanese philosophy conveyed in this form of unen-unen are universal to mankind. The ability to understand and interpret the meaning of philosophy in Javanese expressions precisely is very important so that there are no more misunderstandings. The inability of some people to understand the meaning of Javanese philosophy can have the opposite effect, Javanese proverbs are made a mockery so that the actual beautiful message is not conveyed.

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