



The 2nd Balinese Language Month: to raise Society awareness on the Balinese Language

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ABSTRACT

On February 1st, 2020, Bali Governor Wayan Koster scheduled to open the 2nd Balinese Language Month at the Ksirnawa Building, Art Centre, Denpasar as an implementation of Bali Governor's Regulation No. 80 of 2018, concerning the Protection and the usage of Language, Literacy, and Balinese Literature & the Implementation of the Balinese Language Month. The Balinese Language Month imbued the spirit of language preservation. The event is strongly related to the apprehensive fact that the Balinese's interest in using their native language is plummeting significantly over the years. The festival was successfully held and gathered significant attention from the public. It is suggested to conduct follow up research to

measure the public's heed after the Balinese Language Festival or any similar events. Should the public's favour in learning and using their native discourse increases, then the program should be treated as a frontline in preserving the language. However, when the festival turned out did not make any significant change in society, perhaps a better strategy should be considered in generating social awareness in their mother language. Furthermore, the research might be as well acts as input for the committee; on this occasion, the provincial Government of Bali to keep on improving the quality of the language preservation festival.

Keyword: Balinese language Month, Language Preservation, Society Awareness

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INTRODUCTION

On February 1st, 2020, Bali Governor Wayan Koster scheduled to open the 2nd Balinese Language Month at the Ksirnawa Building, Art Centre, Denpasar, as an implementation of Bali Governor's Regulation No. 80 of 2018, concerning Protection and the usage of Language, Literacy, and Balinese Literature & the Implementation of the Balinese Language Month. The Balinese Language Month imbued the spirit of language preservation. The event is strongly related to the apprehensive fact that the interest of Balinese in using their native language is plummeting significantly over the years.

A survey conducted in 2018 by Balinese Language Instructors, a frontline group formed by the Provincial Government of Bali to promote the use of Balinese language, revealed the phenomenon in Balinese society. After interviewing 51.513 respondents throughout Bali, the result showed that only 12.73% Balinese families teach the native tongue to their children, 39.93% rarely used, and 47.34% never use the native language to their children.¹ To prevent the phenomenon leads toward its worst scenario, extinction, the Provincial Government proposed the Balinese Language Festival program since 2019 to enforce and promote the Balinese language use in both daily use and literacy. In its second year, series of activities were

held, starting from February 1st to 27th.

The festival raised theme 'Melarapan Bulan Bahasa Bali Nyujur Atma Kertih' (Celebrating the Balinese Language Month to reach Atma Kertih). The issue represents a vision to glorify and purify the soul or Atma with its mascot *Manuk Dewata*, a mythical bird that is carrying the soul to the afterlife. The theme of Atma Kertih in the exhibition encompasses seventeen kinds of competitions (*wimbakara*), three workshops (*krialoka*) and four thematic discussions (*widyatula*), also a show (*prasara*) with participants from universities, organisations, and artisans. All activities cover the interpretation of several literature references related to the theme of Atma kertih.

In the opening ceremony, the committee has prepared various activities including the *Utsawa Nyurat Lontar* (Lontar etching Festival) and Drama of *Aji Saka*. The Nyurat Lontar festival attracted 2020 participants from students, teachers and Balinese language instructors. Meanwhile, the 'Prabu Aji Saka' performance was an act that performed the history of eighteenth *Hanacaraka* scripture, the old alphabet from ancient Javanese kingdom. During the event, there were twelve literary arts performances presented by students from SMAN 1 Denpasar, SMAN 2 Denpasar, SMAN 3 Denpasar, SMKN 3 Sukawati, SMAN 7 Denpasar, SMPN 1 Denpasar, IHDN Denpasar, Udayana University,

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and UNHI Denpasar.

Besides academic participants, similar activities were also participated by the public. The events for the general public and district/city representatives were short stories and poetry writing competition in Balinese language, drawing and colouring competitions, sound poetry competitions, Balinese article writing competitions, and student-level Balinese Speech competitions. There were some new art festivals as well, such as comics, posters,

vlogs, and memes contest that presented in Balinese language or script.

At the closing ceremony on February 27th, The Head of the Bali Provincial Culture Office, I Wayan Adnyana conveyed that the Governor of Bali would grant the *Bali Kerthi Nugraha Mahottama* award. The prize would be dedicated to honouring figures or activists who persistently take part on the sake of Balinese language, and literacy development.⁴

THE OPENING CEREMONY

Governor of Bali, Wayan Koster officially marked the opening of the 2020 Balinese Language Month by beating *kulkul* at the Ksirarnawa Building, Art Center, Denpasar, on Saturday, February 1st 2020. In his remarks, Governor Koster pointed out his concern about the current time, where the usage of Balinese language, script and literature has been plunging over the years. Therefore, He believed it is essential to stimulate people's interest in their native tongue by creating multiple Balinese language-related events. The Balinese language month is one of many programs to foster and preserve the ancestral languages. Despite significant growth in the tourism industry where foreign language skills become prominent, yet he argued the native language, as well as its works of literature, should not be entirely neglected.

The opening ceremony featured *Nyurat Lontar* festival, which attended by 2,020 participants. The contestant background was ranging from students, teachers, and Balinese language instructors. They were enthusiastically demonstrating their skill in carving the *hanacaraka* letters on palm leaves. The activity acted to familiarise the participants to the writing instrument, the lontar leaves, including to educate them in identifying the specific dryness condition of lontar to utilise in writing the script. In this occasion, the participants were writing a verse of *Nitisastra*, piece of old literature discussing the art of politics and leadership. According to The Head of the Bali Provincial Office, I Wayan Adnyana, *Nyurat Lontar* festival involved the key figure in Balinese literature development: The Language Instructor, The School Teacher, The Student and The Public.

Nyurat Lontar is an activity to write on *Borassus* leaves, by utilising special knife *pengrupak* in etching the palm leaves' surface. Once the engraving process is completely done, then the leaf's surface would be dusted by carbon dirt, and rubbed gently by index finger or thumb. The result would leave the carbon dust trapped in the cracked surface; therefore, the engraved leaf could be read. The Javanese and Balinese ancestors broadly used this writing method in recording their insight for



Figure 1. The 2nd Balinese Language Month Billboard at the Ksirarnawa Building, Taman Budaya' Art Centre, Denpasar²



Figure 2. Utsawa Nyurat Lontar (Lontar etching Festival)³



Figure 3. Nyurat Lontar is an activity to write on the palm leaves, by incorporating special knife *pengrupak* in etching the palm leaves' surface⁵



Figure 4. A written lontar

future references. It may be seen from hundreds of ancient Javanese, and Balinese works of literature were written by this technique. The differences were in central and eastern Java; they incorporated old Java or *Kawi* language. While in Bali, ancient Balinese style was preferred. However, both pieces of literature were written in similar letters.

Adnyana added, through the Nyurat Lontar Festival, it is expected the society would understand the importance of Balinese language, script and literature. Since most of the old pieces of writing

were written in the ancient alphabet, thus it would be difficult to access the information when the future generation no longer has the skillset to read or write it. Furthermore, it would be remarkable if the society could treat the script, language and literature as a part of their modern lifestyle, not only for several occasions.⁶

THE ACTIVITIES

Out of many activities in a series of Bali Language Months 2020, some notable events attracted mass public attention such as a *Widyatula* (Seminar) with topic *Ngelimbakang Basa, Aksara Miwah Sastra Bali, Nyujur Jiwa Paripurna* by the Bali Provincial Culture Office. Hundreds of students, teachers, lecturers and writers attended the seminar on Tuesday, February 11th 2020, at Ksirarnawa Building, Art Centre. The workshop featured three keynote speakers, Made Suatjana (Creator of Bali Simbar Font), I Wayan Westa (a Cultural activist), I.B. Putu Suamba (a lecture from Bali State Polytechnic) with I.B. Djelantik Suta Negara as the moderator. The participants were attentively listening to the speaker discussion in explaining the core concept of Balinese culture that reflected on its literary art; from its philosophy, application and technology development.

Westa presented a paper entitled "*Gni Sakunang Amatra Mungguing Sastra Kalepasan*", which explores the appropriate path of life and death according to Balinese literature philosophy. According to Westa, the foundation to achieve sanctity and salvation, one may find it by consulting through various libraries or texts. Once they found the essence of the philosophy, the path of enlightenment would show them the true meaning of life and death. He mentioned that many invaluable scripts written in palms had been passed down in Bali. He suggested it should be used as guidance throughout the journey of life due to its practical contents.

Meanwhile, Suamba discussed topic about Yoga, ranging from Yoga and contemporary Balinese culture, Yoga, *Yantra*, *Tantra*, *Yoga Sastra*, and *Yoga Sastra* in Balinese Literature. He proposed that the core of Balinese culture was born from the practice of *Yoga Sastra*. He referred to the *Ramayana* story that becomes inspiration in creating various types of art, such as sculpture model, dance, painting and music.

A practitioner in technology, Made Suatjana, the creator of infamous font *Bali simbar*, reviewed the development of Balinese script from the ancient period to hitherto. The rise of technology, especially computer, has broadened the possibilities in

Nama	Latin	Pengetikan	Aks.Bali	Nama	Latin	Pengetikan	Aks.Bali
ha	h	h	ꦲ	la	l	l	ꦭ
na	n	n	ꦤ	pa	p	p	ꦥ
ea	e	e	ꦺ	ja	j	j	ꦗ
ra	r	r	ꦫ	ya	y	y	ꦪ
ka	k	k	ꦏ	nya	ny	z	ꦚ
da	d	d	ꦢ	ma	m	m	ꦩ
ta	t	t	ꦠ	ga	g	g	ꦒ
sa	s	s	ꦱ	ba	b	b	ꦧ
wa	w	w	ꦮ	nga	ng	ꦤꦒ	ꦤꦒ

Figure 5. font *Bali simbar*⁹

language teaching and development. As proposed by Nidia González-Edfelt (1993) technology had passed the pedagogical bases needed to implement it in the language learning process effectively.⁷

He pointed out several writing techniques utilised by the forefather from *sidhamatreka* script which commonly written on a stupa. Stone tablet inscriptions, palm etching, tin moulding and the current font in the computer that he believed should be well-appreciated. Suatjana, in his conclusion, marked that it is accessible for the current generations to learn Balinese script. Since from 1996 to 2019 the Balinese script has been successfully programmed on a UNICODE Bali Script keyboard. The program allows the user to transliterate Latin word to Balinese script or vice versa at ease.⁸

THE CLOSING CEREMONY

Vice Governor of Bali, Tjokorda Oka Artha Ardhana Sukawati closed the 2020 Balinese Language Month at the Ksirarnawa Building, Art Centre, on Thursday, February 27th 2020. He expressed his gratitude for all participants, the Regency / City Government and the community support for the event. He admitted many inputs and suggestions from the public made this year festival achieved its success. The second-year implementation of Balinese language month received an outstanding reception from the public, especially from the younger generation. It could be

seen from the increasing number of participants involved in various competitions held in a series of Balinese Language Month events. From the initial target of 5,000 participants, the final report revealed that total 5,500 active participants were participating in the festival of competition, workshop, and discussion.¹⁰ Meanwhile the Head of Bali Province Education Office, I Wayan Adnyana said, In the future, further exploration would be added in *Prasara* (exhibition) since on the second-year, *Prasara* was only participated by the Universities. Next year, Adnyana is expecting the program to collaborate with creative industries.

An award of Bali Kerthi Nugraha Mahotama was granted to Ida Bagus Sunu Pidada, a litterateur from Griya Pidada Klungkung who dedicated his life to the preservation of Balinese Literature. He has been actively compiling various lontar scripts and conducting to book transcription. Thus, it becomes easier for the public to access knowledge. Certificates of appreciation were also given to the winners of seventeen variants of the wimbakara (competition) during the 2020 Balinese Language Month. At the end of his remarks, Vice Governor emphasised, the importance of lontar literacy. He expected that the future generation would keep refining their skills in Balinese scholarship. The beating of a gong marked the closing ceremony, then followed by the performance of *Begawan Domya Act*.

CONCLUSION

The series of Balinese Language Festival was successfully held and gathered significant attention from the public. It is suggested to conduct follow up research to measure the public's interest after the Balinese Language Festival or any similar events. Should the public interest in learning and using their native discourse increases, then the program should be treated as a frontline in preserving the language. However, when the festival turned out did not make any significant change in society, perhaps a better strategy should be considered in generating the public's interest in their mother language. Furthermore, the research might be as well acts as input for the committee; on this occasion, the provincial Government of Bali to keep on improving the quality of the language preservation festival.

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