



## THE IDIOMS OF MENTAWAI LANGUAGE IN MUNTEI VILLAGE

Mac Aditiawarman<sup>1</sup>, Agustinus Sakukuret<sup>2</sup>

Fakultas Sastra Universitas Ekasakti  
mac\_aditiawarman@yahoo.com

### Abstract

*This thesis is about the idioms of Mentawai language in Muntei Village. Idiom is a word or phrase whose meaning is not obvious through knowledge of individual meanings of the constituent words but must be learnt as a whole. Idiom is something that has its own meaning and we cannot guess the meaning because it needs to be learnt to understand their meaning. The writer took the data from the elder in the community by doing an interview with the informant (a man) whose age is no more than 50 years old to make sure that the informant still remembers the right word of the idioms. Technique of collecting the data of this analysis is by doing the interview to the informant first, and then writes the data down in a table accordingly to their forms.*

*In analyzing this data, the writer uses three theories from three experts. In order to analyze the forms of the idioms used by people in Muntei Village the writer uses the theory of idioms forms from Yayat Sudaryat. In order to analyze the syntactical functions of the idioms used by people in Muntei Village the writer uses the theory of syntactical functions of idioms from Jennifer Seidl and McMordie. Meanwhile for analyzing the meaning of the idioms, the writer uses the theory of idioms meaning from Aminuddin. The result shows that there are two forms of idioms that commonly found in Muntei Village, they are the full idioms (formed in sentence) and half idioms (formed in words or phrases). The result also shows that idioms have this syntactical function that make then can be placed as the subject, object, adjectives, and adverbs in the sentence. This research also shows that the meaning of the idioms that usually found in Muntei Village can only be understood by the people if they know who are the people involved in the conversation, what is the situation where the conversation occur, and what is the intention of using the idioms.*

*Keywords: Mentawai, Idioms, Language, People*

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## I INTRODUCTION

Mentawai is an archipelago found of the west coast of Sumatera (Indonesia). Mentawai communities have been isolated in valleys and islands for relatively long time. Due to headhunting traditions and other socio-cultural reasons, Mentawaians did not frequently travelled through places. Therefore, they speak in different vernaculars. On Siberut, eleven dialects are spoken by Mentawaians and Sipora and Pagai are categorised into two additional dialects. Since 1900s, the Dutch colonials have prohibited

headhunting practices and the Sakalagat communities residing in Pagai island were the first Mentawaiian community that had been converted to be Protestants. The Mentawai Islands comprise 6,011 square kilometres and were inhabited by 80,521 people in 2016. Mentawaians do not practice any written tradition. They maintain their cultural values in the form of oral narratives. Mentawaians tell certain stories and transmit these stories in their family through the generations. Some oral

narratives consist of general information and belong to all Mentawai communities. Mentawaians regard their oral narrative. As long as we know Mentawaians do not have any specific orthography or written language, as they have only a spoken language, they do not have any writing tradition as important sources for understanding their cultural circumstances. The main term currently used by Mentawaians when they speak of either general cultural practices or a particular tradition is *isarat*. This is not a Mentawai term originally, however. It was adapted from the Indonesian word *adat*, which in the Indonesian language has a meaning similar to 'custom, the Mentawaians called their traditional belief system *sabulungan*.

Siberut has a total landmass of 3,838 square kilometres. Geographically, Siberut is a sedimentary island, dominated by shale, silts, and marls of relatively young age, and covered by tropical rainforests. When it rains, there is "an extremely high rate of normal erosion, resulting in the development of a strongly dissected, rugged landscape, with many rivers and streams and few flat-topped hills (WWF, 1980: 5). The writer assumes the other islands of Mentawai suffer from a similarly high rate of erosion. The major rivers ramble down to the lowlands separated by complicated systems of watercourses. When they reach the lowlands, they grow and level out, soon becoming larger streams and later joining to become a river.

The larger rivers are 30 to 40 meter wide. The high rainfall on the non-resistant soils means that all rivers carry very heavy silt loads during rains. This map is courtesy of Karl-Heinz. He uses it for showing Mentawai dialects geographically. There are at least eleven major rivers on Siberut, and each of them has dozens of smaller watercourses. Every major river has a name and the name is usually used as the name of the river valley as well as the name for a group or community living in that valley. Several small rivers are not identified by name. Rivers not only separate the land into valleys, but also divide Mentawai communities who speak different dialects. The Simatalu people, for instance, speak the Simatalu dialect, which is different to the dialect spoken by the Simalegi people and other communities in other valleys on the same island.

The dialects are all related, together forming the Mentawai language. The writer observed that Mentawaians differentiate themselves by decorating their bodies with different tattoo motifs, depending on the valley they come from. The Mentawai land to live across or near rivers which usually the name of the rivers would be the name of the village itself. This situation makes almost each village has their own dialect.

In this background, the writer also will talk a little about history of Mentawai Islands. In the seventeenth century, Dutch sailors under Vornelis Pietersz 'discovered' the Mentawai Islands. In 1600, the islands were called Nassau after the Dutch royal family. However, there is no information whether the Dutch sailors stayed on the four islands. It seems that they visited Pagai irregularly by means of sailboats until 1620. They did not stay at Pagai either, so they did not have an official residence on the islands. After 1620, Dutch sailors rarely visited Mentawai. In 1663 Wouter Schouten noted in his diary the names of the Mentawai Islands. The names were taken from a map published in 1606 by the Portuguese, among whom Siberut was known as Mintaon Island. It seems that Portuguese sailors had sailed along the coast of the Mentawai Islands but did not come on shore there.

Afterwards, John Crisp from the British East India Company situated in Bengkulu visited the Mentawai Islands several times in 1792. In 1799, John Crisp published the first important account about Mentawai, but he only mentioned Pagai. He described the geographical situation and cultural characteristics of people living in Pagai. He had not much to say about Siberut. In 1825, the Dutch officially colonized the Mentawai Islands and Siberut was called Groot Fortuine. In 1849 the Dutch opened an administrative office in Pagai in order to impede British attempts to colonize the islands again. In 1905, the Dutch opened a police station on Siberut. After the Dutch occupation was over in 1945, the name Groot Fortuine was no longer used. Instead, the largest island of Mentawai was officially named Siberut.

Scholars like Wirz (1929/30: 133-5) attempted to find out why the island was called Siberut. They examined the etymology of Sabirut, which is formed from the words *sa* (group of people) and *birut* (rat). People's behavior living in the southern part of Siberut perhaps had a rat-like character. Or perhaps the name meant 'a group of people living on an island with a lot of rats'. Which one of these meanings gave Siberut its name remains unclear.

The Mentawai archipelago is inhabited predominantly by an ethnic group called Mentawai. The origins of this group are unknown. Nevertheless, a few scholars like Van Beukering (1947), Nooy-Palm (1968) and Schefold (1988, 1989), have tried to figure out where traditional Mentawaians originally came from. These scholars speculate that Mentawaians might be descended from an initial family connected with a group of people in Sumatra, or

else from inhabitants of the neighbouring island of Nias. Schefold (1989) writes his special article about the prehistory of Mentawai archipelago and its inhabitants.

According to the central bureau of statistics of Mentawai district (Badan Pusat Statistik or BPS), 82,000 people inhabited the Mentawai archipelago in 2017. Mentawaians constitute about eighty percent of the total population. The rest are recent migrants from Sumatra, Java and a small number from other islands of Indonesia. Most of the migrants from Sumatra and Java live in the four sub-district capitals (*ibukota kecamatan*) of the Mentawai Islands. Most Mentawaians prefer to live in traditional settlements and villages far from the capital. From 1945, the islands and people of Mentawai are politically part of Indonesia, falling under West Sumatra province. Administratively, the Mentawai Islands until 1999 were part of Padang Pariaman district, which is on the mainland of Sumatera.

## II RESEARCH METHODS

As the writer mentioned before, the uniqueness of the idioms in Mentawai, especially in Muntei village which makes the writer wants to analyze the forms, the syntactical functions, and the meaning of the idioms will be explained briefly in this following chapter. The first point that the writer wants to analyze from this research is the forms of the idioms that used by the people in Muntei Village. In order to analyze this part of the research, the writer uses the theory of idioms forms by Sudaryat (2009). Sudaryat says there are two forms of idioms in the world that commonly used; they are idiom penuh (full idioms) and idiom setengah (half idioms). The full idioms are the idioms which usually formed in a full sentence that almost all of the words in the sentence are all idioms. These kinds of idioms are the hardest to understand. The half idioms are the idioms that usually formed in a phrase or sentence but only half part of the sentence that consist of idioms. These kinds of idioms are the easier kind of idioms to understand.

Based on this explanation, the writer finally found that in the idioms that used by people in Muntei Village usually speak in the form of

words, phrases, or simple sentences. Idioms which formed in words or phrases are included in the category of half idioms while the full idioms are represented by the simple. To make the difference of these three forms of idioms that used by people in Muntei Village, the writer put the example of each category in these following explanations:

### 2.1 Idioms in Single word/half idioms:

1.(4)(1). **Balugui**. In Muntei village, the idiom *balugui* is used to call someone who is an inferior person in the community. This person is the one who is usually being ordered by the senior in the community. The literal meaning of this idiom was literally like a kind of "knife" that people usually use in daily life, but when this word is used as idiom, the meaning has changed into a "junior or youth" in the community. The example sentence for this idiom is: "*Balugui ta taat amalauru at anek sosoa*" (translation: Now a day *youth* is not that easy to be told anymore").

### 2.2 Idioms in Phrases and Full Sentences

1. (1)(1) **Kaenungdere**. This idiom consists of two words that combined as one.

When these two words are being split, they have their own meaning. In literal meaning, “Kaenung” has the meaning as “rare” while “dere” has the meaning as “leg”. When these two words are being combined as one and used as an idiom, the meaning has changed into “pregnant”. The example sentence for this idiom is: “*taat moian rapukarajo simanenek sababaita, kalulut ananleksia kaenugdere*” (Translation: Pregnant women should not do hard work).

### 3. The Syntactical Functions of Idioms Used by People in Muntei Village

The second point of this analysis is the syntactical functions of idioms used by people in Muntei Village. In order to analyze the syntactical functions of the idioms used by people in Muntei Village, the writer uses the theory of syntactical functions of idiom which proposed by Seidl and McMordie (1980). Seidl and McMordie (1980) stated there are four commonly syntactical functions of idioms that usually used by people in their daily conversations, they are; 1.) to use the idiom as the subject of the conversation (sentences); 2.) to use the idiom as the object of the conversation (sentences); 3.) to use the idiom as the verbs of the conversation (sentences); 4.) to use the idiom as the adverbs of the conversation (sentences).

Based on the data that the writer has collected before, these four are indeed the commonly syntactical functions of idiom that usually used by people. In this research case, based on the data that the writer has collected before, the writer found no idioms that could be the verbs in the conversation. The writer found idioms in the form of adjective instead. After the data was collected, the writer found some idioms in Muntei Village are used as the replacement of the subject of the conversation (in the sentences uttered), some are the replacement of the object of the conversation (in the sentences uttered), some are the replacement of the adjectives of the conversation (in the sentences uttered), and some others are the replacement of the adverbs of the conversation (in the sentences uttered). The explanation for these four syntactical functions are as followed.

#### 2.1.1 Idioms which has syntactical function as Subject.

The examples of sentences for this idiom are as followed:

(11)(1). *Siteila'kubbou soso taat moi tapangatrusa abeuatlek sia*. (Translation: Teenagers now adays are hard to control). The idiom in this sentence is the word *Siteila'kubbou*. This idiom is used to replace the usual word to call *teenagers* in Muntei Village. The usual words to call teenagers without idiom are different according to their gender. In order to call girls they say “siokko” while to call boys they say “silainge”. So, in order to describe how hard now a day’s teenagers to control, they use the idiom *Siteila'kubbou* instead of using those two words above. This idiom is used as the Subject in the sentence.

*Siteila'kubbou soso taat moi tapangatrusa abeuat lek Sia.*  
Teenagers now not can  
control they grown because(be).

#### 2.2.2 Idiom which has syntactical function as Object.

The examples of sentences for this idiom are as followed:

1. (28)(1). *Buai siboboi ibara patuaggajat anai ainek sibabara kalaggai sirimanua* (translation: Because we got the message of the nature, we knew there’s something happen in next village). The idiom in this sentence is the word *patuaggajat* which refers to the message of the nature. The usual word for this is “*palitmata*”. So, in order to say the message of the nature, instead of saying the usual word, they choose to say it in idiom. The position of this idiom in the sentence is as the object of the sentence. *Buai siboboi ibara patuaggajat anai ainek sibabara sirimanua kalaggai sirimanua*

#### 2.2.3 Idiom which has syntactical function as the adjective.

The examples of sentences for this idiom are as followed:

1. (8)(1). *Takpei tagai ipukurek nanak bairabbit, makereklek setauna* (translation: It’s uncertain if we can pick this fruits or not because sometime these fruits can die too). The idiom in this sentence is the word *setauna* which refers to infertile. The usual word for this is “*sitaimabuah*”. Instead of saying the usual word, they choose to say it with idiom. *Takpei taagai ipukurek nanak bairabbit, makereklek setauna*  
Notyet know being this fruits, looks  
like Infertile.

#### 2.2.4 Idiom which has syntactical function as Adverbs

The examples of sentences for this idiom are as followed:

1. (14)(1). *Tak kubesiake simaeru, pokoknia bara pukiriri* (translation: I don't ask much, at least I have what I need). The idiom in this sentence is the word *pukiriri* which refers to the word complementary. The usual word for this description is

"paonien". So, instead of saying the usual word they choose to say it with idiom.

*Tak kubesiake simaeru, pokoknia bara pukiriri*

No wanting good, important that is complete.

### III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the writer does analysis on the idiom used by Mentawai people in Muntei Village. Here, the writer can conclusion that:

1. Idiom that used by people in Mentawai, but this research only focuses in Muntei Village. The idiom used in Mentawai especially in Muntei Village contains connotations meaning because the word with formed the idiom are not in accordance with the translation of the true meaning in idioms.
2. Idioms that used by Mentawai people especially in Muntei Village. That idiom use only specific situation

such as suggestion (recent situation), to implicating something (can be human, animals and plant) joke, and to describing something because idioms that will be used certainly different situation. For example, *urat sinanalep* idiom is used to implicating someone or to describing someone it means *unstopping raining*). The Mentawai people cannot use in other situation.

In this connection with the ability in diction and precision of meaning of the word election and article, the use appropriate idioms can be the right tool, right thing to present the thought of the writer as capable of expressing the meaning and situation carefully.

### IV CONCLUSION

This thesis is the early achievement that still needs to be developed and continued with more careful study, especially in terms of the research in the field of the idioms. The development and presentation of material in this thesis has not been able to delivery maximum result as expected. The material presented in this thesis, there are still shortcomings which need to be

refined. Therefore, it is expected to follow student Department of English in order to perform the analysis further study more about idioms used by Mentawai people in Muntei Village. In addition, student are also expected to English Literature Department in order to improve linguistic research so that eventually our result are very useful for those who need them..



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