



Wednesday, June 25th, 11:30-12:00, room 101

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Are you a butterfly or a spider? A preliminary study of metaphor on Minangkabau women

Keywords: animal metaphor, metaphorical conceptualization, women, cognition, cultural models, politeness

Why are humans sometimes conceptualized as animals? What kinds of animals and animal characteristics are mapped onto humans in metaphorical expressions? Further, are there any cultural models behind the animal metaphors in a particular language? A small number of animal metaphor studies have been done on a small number of languages, for example English, Spanish, Tagalog and Mandarin Chinese (see Rodríguez, 2009; Chen and Chen, 2011). By adopting the folk conception of the 'Great Chain of Being' where humans are placed at the top of the organization and other creatures are below, Rodríguez (2009) demonstrates how animal metaphors in English and Spanish are used to marginalize particular social groups relating to their specific behaviors. The aforementioned studies show that there are cognitive and cultural motivations behind the metaphorical conceptualizations. Amongst a variety of things, the same animals can be viewed differently in different cultures.

Minangkabau, an indigenous culture of Indonesia which is located in West Sumatra, is famous for its matriarchal system and rich literatures and tradition. The latter two managed to influence Indonesian literatures in general since 1920ies. The culture conveys its traditional values through a variety of spoken and written genres, including *Pitaruah*, an oral poetic genre which offers the listeners different kinds of advice. One of the *Pitaruah* talks about Minangkabau women in animal metaphors. There are five types of animals used as models, i.e. *barau-barau* 'Bulbul bird', *layang-layang* 'swallow', *lawah-lawah* 'spiders', *anai-anai* 'flying termite' and *ramo-ramo* 'butterfly'. The animal characters are depicted and metaphorically mapped onto Minangkabau women's characteristics to express the traditional values of being a good traditional woman, such as being a polite and decent woman, from the perspective of Minangkabau culture. This paper will discuss the five animal metaphors relating to Minangkabau women by elucidating the relevant Minangkabau cultural models, such as politeness.

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References

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3. Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*.