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GENDERED LANGUAGE AS CULTURAL PRACTICE AND SYMBOLIC RESISTANCE: AN ETHNOPRAGMAFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF MADURESE WOMEN'S DISCOURSE IDENTITY IN MUNA MASYARI'S FICTION

Abdul Rosid[1*], Setya Yuwana[2], Titik Indarti[3]

[1]Department of language, literature, and Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya.
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5944-7593, Email: abdul.22019@mhs.unesa.ac.id
[2]Department of language, literature, and Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya.
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3435-8532, Email: setyayuana@unesa.ac.id
[3]Department of language, literature, and Education, Universitas Negeri Surabaya.
ORCID iD: https://orchid.org/0000-0002-5937-4256, Email: titikindarti@unesa.ac.id

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Corresponding Author: Abdul Rosid (abdul.22019@mhs.unesa.ac.id)

ABSTRACT

This study examines how Madurese women construct gender identity through language in Muna Masyari's fiction, drawing on an integrated ethnopragmafeminist framework. The analysis combines Hymes's ethnography of communication with Abrams's pragmatics and Irigaray's postmodern feminism to explore three literary works: the novel Damar Kembang (2020) and two short story collections, Martabat Kematian (2019) and Rokat Tase' (2020). Through qualitative content analysis employing close reading, we identify distinctive patterns in women's speech: soft diction, cultural metaphors, indirect speech acts and symbols reflecting molu values alongside Madurese politeness conventions. The ethnographic dimension reveals women's language operating as both an adaptive mechanism within cultural constraints and a negotiation tool allowing personal expression without violating communal norms. Pragmatic examination shows how ambiguity and metaphor become strategic resources for navigating gender identity. Meanwhile, the feminist lens—particularly Irigaray's concept of mimesis—uncovers subtle resistance encoded in bodily metaphors and emotional expressions that quietly critique patriarchal arrangements. We argue that women's language in Masyari's works represents far more than cultural reproduction; it constitutes a dynamic space where gender identity emerges through adaptation, negotiation and transformation. These findings contribute fresh perspectives to cultural linguistics, literary analysis and gender scholarship on Southeast Asian societies.

KEYWORDS: Gendered Language; Women's Identity; Ethnopragmatics; Feminist Theory; Madurese Culture; Symbolic Resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across diverse cultural contexts, language operates as a primary vehicle for constructing and expressing social identities—gender identities particularly so. Within Madurese communities, as in many traditional societies, women's linguistic practices bear the imprint of cultural norms, patriarchal hierarchies and inherited social codes. How women speak, which words they select, what metaphors they deploy, even how they modulate pitch and tone: these choices often mirror—and occasionally challenge—their positioning within the social order. Recent scholarship has moved beyond viewing women's language purely as communication to recognising it as an arena where identity gets negotiated and power relations play out (Bucholtz, 2003; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Hymes, 1962; Irigaray, 1974). This makes understanding women's language use within specific sociocultural milieus—especially societies with rigid cultural frameworks like Madura—increasingly urgent.

Contemporary scholarly discussions around women's representation, particularly from specific ethnic communities, have gained considerable momentum. When we encounter discourse on Madurese women, stereotypes about courage, directness, honour and their place within patriarchal systems often dominate. Yet there's a glaring gap: we know remarkably little about how these women actually construct identity through language, whether in everyday talk or literary portrayals. Examining women's language as gender identity thus addresses both theoretical questions and practical concerns about the intricate relationships binding women, culture and language in Madurese contexts (Masyitah, 2018; Siswanto, 2021; Smith, 2017; Sukatman, 2021).

Our focus here falls on Muna Masyari's fiction—specifically her novel *Damar Kembang* (2020) alongside two short story collections, *Martabat Kematian* (2019) and *Rokat Tase'* (2020). These works share a consistent engagement with Madurese cultural settings where women's experiences take centre stage. Writing from within Madurese culture herself, Masyari draws on local traditions and symbolic resources to portray women's roles, social positions and voices with considerable nuance. Take *Damar Kembang*: female characters navigate complex terrain involving marriage customs, family obligations and community expectations. Throughout her oeuvre, women appear not simply as victims of cultural pressure but as figures who possess—and sometimes exercise—capacity for resistance through both language and action.

The central problematic emerging from these texts concerns positioning: how are Madurese women situated, silenced, enabled to negotiate or granted space for voicing through particular linguistic choices? Women's language in Masyari's fiction operates on multiple registers—as emotional outlet, certainly, but also as cognitive apparatus for negotiating identity within constraining structures. At the same time, this language frequently surfaces as symbolic resistance to patriarchal control. What interests us are the forms this language takes and the functions it performs in both constructing gender identity and reflecting Madurese cultural dynamics.

The issues Masyari explores resonate with lived realities for Madurese women, whose experiences get shaped by honour codes, power asymmetries and conventional gender expectations. Language becomes the medium showing how women respond to these forces—through compliance, negotiation or resistance. Luce Irigaray's (1974) postmodern feminist theory contends that women's language often gets 'moulded' by patriarchal systems, compelling women to carve out their own linguistic territories for identity-building. Meanwhile, Hymes's (1962) ethnography of communication insists language cannot be divorced from cultural surroundings. Bringing these perspectives together allows us to read Masyari's texts as rich representations of how language becomes a crucial medium through which Madurese women forge and sustain gender identities.

Existing research reinforces the need for this study. Siswanto (2021) approached Madurese women through an ecofeminist lens, finding them portrayed as guardians of both culture and environment. Sukatman (2021) characterised women's positions as cultural agents who nonetheless remain subordinated within patriarchy. Masyitah (2018) likewise showed how Madurese women's identity gets tightly bound to cultural regulations and social hierarchies. What all three studies lack, however, is attention to women's language itself as constitutive of gender identity—particularly through ethnopragmafeminist approaches. Here lies our contribution (Arimbi, 2009; Priyatna, 2018; Wiyatmi, 2010).

Three considerations drive this research. First, understanding Madurese women's literary representation requires linguistic analysis to grasp how gender identity gets constructed and contested. Second, no previous work has integrated ethnographic, pragmatic and postmodern feminist

theories when analysing Madurese women's language—we thus offer fresh theoretical ground. Third, this study enriches both literary scholarship and cultural linguistics whilst deepening our comprehension of women's voices within a tradition-laden Madurese society (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 1996; Holmes, 1992; Tannen, 1994; Wodak, 1997; Wood, 2015).

2. METHODS

Research Design

We adopt a qualitative descriptive design centred on literary content analysis (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2019; Sugiyono, 2017). Our focus lies in examining textual evidence from Masyari's works to understand patterns in women's language as they relate to gender identity formation. Qualitative methods allow us to explore linguistic subtleties, cultural contexts and ideological dimensions embedded within women's discourse.

Data Sources

Primary sources comprise three works by Muna Masyari: the novel *Damar Kembang* (2020), plus two short story collections—*Martabat Kematian* (2019) and *Rokat Tase'* (2020). We selected these texts precisely because they foreground Madurese cultural settings whilst spotlighting women's characters and their linguistic behaviour. Secondary materials include scholarly articles, monographs and theoretical frameworks addressing ethnopragmatics, feminist linguistics, Madurese culture and gender studies more broadly (Masyari, 2019, 2020a, 2020b).

Theoretical Framework

Our ethnopragmafeminist approach weaves together three theoretical strands. Hymes's (1962) ethnography of communication foregrounds the relationship between language and culture, attending to speech events, communicative norms and cultural patterning in discourse. This enables analysis of how Madurese cultural values shape women's linguistic choices (Goddard, 2006; Peeters, Mullan, & Sadow, 2020).

Abrams's (1971) pragmatic framework investigates meaning-making, interaction and interpretive multiplicity within texts. Focusing on how language generates layered meanings in social contexts, this approach lets us examine implicit meanings, metaphorical expressions and ambiguities pervading women's discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Teeuw, 2000; Wellek & Warren, 2003).

Irigaray's (1974) postmodern feminism treats women's language as resistance against patriarchal structures, emphasising mimesis, bodily metaphors and alternative symbolic orders. Through this lens we can trace how women create linguistic spaces for expressing subjectivity beyond male-defined categories (Irigaray, 1977; Tong, 1998).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection proceeded through close reading, systematically identifying and documenting instances of women's language across the corpus. We followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) flow model through three stages: data reduction (identifying and categorising relevant linguistic utterances by female characters); data display (mapping patterns of language forms and functions according to our theoretical frameworks); and conclusion drawing (synthesising interpretations to understand gender identity construction). Analysis worked through three integrated perspectives. Ethnographic analysis examined cultural contexts, speech events and communicative norms reflected in women's language. Pragmatic analysis investigated semantic layers, metaphorical expressions and indirect speech acts. Feminist analysis explored how linguistic patterns reveal adaptation, negotiation and resistance to patriarchal structures (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

3. RESULTS

Women's Language as Cultural Practice

Masyari's representation of women's language shows communication deeply anchored in Madurese cultural norms upholding *molu* (honour) principles. Consider an episode from *Damar Kembang* where a mother instructs her daughter: 'Lek ngakanah ben bhenyak kakanah' (if speaking, speak as necessary). This terse directive signals how women learn to self-censor. From Hymes's ethnographic viewpoint, the utterance encodes interaction norms governing women's expression. Gentle, limited speech marks not merely politeness but women's subordinate place within Madurese social hierarchies. Positioned as harmony-keepers, women orient their language toward averting conflict and maintaining household equilibrium. This passage confirms that women's linguistic forms emerge from robust cultural socialisation (Goddard, 2015; Mullan, Peeters, & Sadow, 2020; Peeters *et al.*, 2020).

Women's verbal caution surfaces again when they employ indirection to convey disagreement. In *Martabat Kematian*, a wife responds to her husband's behaviour merely with 'Sah, kaulah lakona' (fine, as you wish)—no explicit protest, just acquiescence on the surface. Hymes would read such speech acts as

culturally saturated events, not mere vocabulary selections. Women opt for brevity to shield themselves from potential discord, given social structures positioning men as authority figures. This verbal deference shows language functioning beyond communication as cultural practice shaping both identity and gender relations. The example plainly illustrates how women's language manifests Madurese value systems and behavioural codes (Ameka, 2009; Hymes, 1962).

Beyond conversational restraint, women's language connects intimately with cultural symbols woven into rituals and social practices. Female characters in *Rokat Tase*' use the phrase 'nyapo' ajhunan' (cleaning tracks) to express regret and intentions toward improvement without assigning blame. For Hymes, this metaphorical expression exemplifies cultural patterning in communication, revealing how language intertwines with Madurese ritual life. Women mobilise symbolic language to voice emotions whilst remaining within normative bounds. Such linguistic forms showcase women's capacity to navigate cultural pressures through subtle yet meaningful strategies. Women's language thus appears as performative cultural practice—reflective, adaptive, responsive to governing social structures (Goddard, 2006; Wierzbicka, 1991).

Women's Language as Meaning and Negotiation

Viewed through Abrams's pragmatic lens, women's language in Masyari's fiction conveys far more than literal content—it contains semantic strata shaped by relational contexts. Linguistic ambiguity becomes women's protective strategy, allowing them to shelter from cultural pressures whilst still communicating authentic views. In *Damar Kembang*, one character states 'Tape' badha atena' (but there is heart/feeling), a delicate way of signalling objection without frontal opposition. This utterance carries implicit meaning accessible only to those versed in Madurese social codes. It exemplifies how women deploy language for maintaining surface harmony whilst flagging personal desires underneath. Women's language thus operates as negotiation apparatus within familial and social relationships (Abrams, 1971; Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

In multiple passages, women turn to metaphor for expressing inner turmoil that cannot surface directly. When a character in *Martabat Kematian* calls herself 'dhu' langgar se pettes' (a cracked prayer house), we glimpse fragile emotional states that remain officially unspoken. Abrams reminds us that literary meaning resides not just in words themselves but in readers' engagement with symbols and metaphors. This particular metaphor opens interpretive space for grasping women's psychological conditions that stay invisible on the surface. In pragmatic terms, metaphors function as conduits for indirectly channelling pain or protest. Women's language thereby reveals ambivalence between cultural conformity and inner conflict (Goddard, 2004; Lakoff, 1975).

Women's language as negotiation medium also appears during ritual dialogues and communal exchanges. A character in *Rokat Tase*' declares 'Aing-ngongghi' bhedhenah' (I only follow traces), suggesting adjustment to cultural values whilst harbouring personal aspirations. From Abrams's standpoint, this utterance generates interpretive possibilities producing dual meaning: compliance and resistance simultaneously. Readers can detect this ambiguity as identity assertion caught between tradition and women's subjective experiences. Such language shows women participating in cultural structures yet maintaining interior spaces. Women's language consequently operates not merely as communicative instrument but as symbolic arena for negotiating gender subjectivity (Cameron, 1996; Fairclough, 1995).

Women's Language as Resistance Space

Through Irigaray's perspective, women's language within patriarchal cultures frequently lacks legitimacy, compelling women to devise alternative expressive forms for asserting existence. This dynamic emerges in *Damar Kembang* when a female character quietly observes, 'Oreng poteh ngakanah sengko'' (others determine me)—a phrase suggesting confinement yet also awareness of injustice. Following Irigaray's theory, this expression constitutes female subjectivity surfacing through ostensibly compliant language that actually harbours implicit critique. Women use language not for direct confrontation but to signal experiences diverging from patriarchal prescriptions. Soft, symbolic word choices become vehicles for conveying inequality without provoking overt conflict. Women's language thus functions as veiled yet potent resistance space (Irigaray, 1974, 1977; Whitford, 1991).

Irigaray's notion of mimesis—women's strategy of mimicking patriarchal language to expose power imbalances—proves especially illuminating. When a character in *Martabat Kematian* says 'Sengko' perempuan biasa' (I am an ordinary woman), this sounds self-effacing. Yet it actually spotlights how society relegates women to subordinate positions. By voicing this sentence, she replicates social

constructions precisely to reveal awareness of imposed limitations. Irigaray sees mimesis as subtle criticism showing women grasp patriarchal structures but opt for linguistic methods of expression. Women in Masyari's texts appropriate male-coded or culturally dominant language to unsettle these very imbalances. Seemingly straightforward statements thus carry weight as symbolic resistance tactics (Burke, 1981; Moi, 1985).

Women's language as resistance becomes starkly visible in *Rokat Tase'* when a character utters 'Jhukok se tak bisa eombai' (burden that cannot be lifted), offering emotional critique of cultural burdens she must bear. This expression typifies what Irigaray identifies as women's language refusing to compress women's experiences into patriarchal idioms. Women invoke bodily and natural metaphors to articulate what remains inexpressible through language shaped by masculine logic. Women's language thereby offers alternative symbolic orders for voicing women's subjectivity authentically. Such speech acts simultaneously reject women's erasure within cultural structures. Women's language emerges as resistance arena fusing symbolic criticism with profound emotional resonance (Chanter, 1995; Irigaray, 1993; Pinggong, 2018).

4. DISCUSSION

Our findings reveal women's language in Masyari's fiction operating simultaneously as cultural practice, negotiation medium and resistance space. This multilayered functioning points to the complexity of gender identity construction within Madurese cultural settings. Integrating ethnopragmatic and feminist frameworks yields comprehensive understanding of how language serves as both site for cultural reproduction and transformation.

Ethnographically speaking, women's language in Madurese society embeds itself deeply within cultural norms emphasising *molu* (honour) and social harmony. Restrictions on women's speech—manifested through brevity, indirectness, symbolic expression—reflect broader patriarchal structures positioning women as subordinate yet essential for social stability. This finding aligns with existing research on gendered communication in hierarchical societies, where cultural expectations constrain women's linguistic choices (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Holmes, 1992; Tannen, 1994). We extend this scholarship, however, by showing how these very constraints become sites of agency where women strategically mobilise cultural resources for self-expression.

Pragmatic analysis uncovers ambiguity and metaphor functioning as sophisticated linguistic strategies enabling women to traverse complex social terrain. Creating meaning layers accessible to different audiences, women juggle multiple identities and allegiances. This resonates with research on women's strategic indirectness within patriarchal contexts (Cameron, 1996; Lakoff, 1975), whilst contributing fresh insights into how Madurese-specific cultural metaphors serve as vehicles for negotiating modern identities within traditional frameworks. The bodily and natural metaphors we identified—'cracked prayer house', 'burden that cannot be lifted'—demonstrate how women draw upon culturally resonant imagery to articulate experiences lacking official vocabulary in male-dominated discourse (Goddard, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1991).

From a feminist standpoint, women's language constitutes symbolic resistance that, whilst not overtly confrontational, nonetheless challenges patriarchal hegemonies. Irigaray's mimesis concept proves particularly valuable for understanding how Madurese women replicate and simultaneously subvert dominant discourse. Speaking 'as women' within patriarchal structures, they expose the constructed nature of gender categories whilst carving alternative spaces for female subjectivity. This contributes to ongoing debates in feminist linguistics about language and women's agency (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 1996; Wodak, 1997), suggesting resistance need not be explicit for political significance.

Integrating ethnopragmatic and feminist approaches yields important theoretical advances. First, it underscores the necessity of cultural specificity in gender linguistics research. Universal theories of women's language inadequately capture nuanced ways that local cultural values shape linguistic practice. *Molu*, for instance, creates particular constraints and possibilities for Madurese women's speech that Western feminist frameworks alone cannot illuminate. This supports calls for decolonising feminist theory and developing culturally grounded approaches to gender analysis (Mohanty, 2003; Oktaviani *et al*., 2024).

Second, adaptation and resistance prove not mutually exclusive but coexistent within women's linguistic practices. Women in Masyari's fiction simultaneously conform to and contest cultural norms, deploying identical linguistic resources for different purposes depending on context and audience. This challenges binary frameworks categorising women as either patriarchy's victims or

its resisters, instead revealing the dialectical nature of gendered agency. Women's language emerges as a site where cultural reproduction and transformation occur concurrently, reflecting dynamic gender relations in shifting social contexts (Bucholtz, 2003; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

This study also advances Indonesian literary scholarship by foregrounding regional women writers' significance. Masyari's works provide valuable windows into Madurese women's lives and linguistic practices, enriching national literature with diverse female voices. Her sophisticated portrayal of women's language demonstrates literary artistry whilst documenting cultural knowledge at risk of erasure in globalising Indonesia. This underscores the importance of supporting regional women writers and incorporating their works into literary canons (Arimbi, 2009; Priyatna, 2018; Wiyatmi, 2010).

Methodologically, we demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis. Integrating ethnography of communication, pragmatics and feminist theory, the research achieves analytical depth impossible through single-theory frameworks. Each theoretical lens illuminates different dimensions of women's language; their integration reveals the complex interplay of culture, meaning and power in discourse. This methodological contribution suggests productive directions for future research on gendered language in Indonesian contexts and beyond.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. First, this study focuses exclusively on literary representations of women's language, which may differ from actual linguistic practices in Madurese communities. Whilst literary analysis provides valuable insights into cultural ideologies and imaginaries, ethnographic research on real women's speech would complement these findings. Second, examining works by a single author potentially limits generalisability. Future research might compare multiple Madurese women writers to identify broader patterns and individual variations. Third, incorporating perspectives from Madurese women readers on how they interpret these linguistic representations could enrich the analysis.

Despite these limitations, this study makes significant contributions to understanding gender identity construction through language in Indonesian contexts. It shows women's language constituting a complex site where cultural values, social negotiations and political resistances intersect. The findings carry implications beyond literary analysis, offering insights relevant to sociolinguistics, anthropology, gender studies and education. Understanding how women navigate linguistic constraints whilst asserting agency can inform efforts promoting gender equality in Indonesia and similar contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

Women's language in Masyari's fiction constitutes a complex, multilayered construction of gender identity emerging from interactions amongst Madurese cultural norms, social negotiations and symbolic resistance against patriarchal structures. From Hymes's ethnographic communication perspective, women's language appears as cultural practice affirming *molu* values through gentle speech, indirectness and traditional symbol usage. Abrams's pragmatic analysis reveals women employing ambiguity, metaphors and implicit utterances to negotiate personal desires whilst maintaining social norm compliance. Irigaray's theory uncovers women's language also functioning as subtle resistance space through bodily metaphors, emotional expressions and mimesis that dismantle power relation imbalances.

Overall, women's language in Masyari's works not only reflects culture but becomes a negotiation and resistance medium enabling women to voice subjectivity and form dynamic gender identities. This study contributes to gender linguistics by demonstrating how local cultural contexts shape women's linguistic practices in ways that universal theories cannot fully capture. It reveals the adaptive, negotiative and transformative nature of women's language in navigating patriarchal constraints whilst asserting agency.

Future research should extend this analysis through ethnographic studies of actual Madurese women's speech practices, comparative analyses of multiple regional women writers and investigations of how contemporary social changes affect traditional linguistic patterns. Such research would deepen understanding of gender, language and cultural transformation in Indonesian contexts, contributing to both academic knowledge and social change efforts promoting gender equality.

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