



## Language Phenomena of Sago in Irrires Language



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### Abstract

The current research was a descriptive study which aimed at exploring Irrires language in West Papua, Indonesia. The exploration was conducted to describe language and culture that correlate with sago palm as well as its processing system, especially lexicon of the nouns that correlates with Sago (traditional food from local plant in Papua) in Irrires language. The research was focused on inspecting the language form of the lexicon which influenced by Tambaraw culture phenomena. The researchers have applied Word of Structure in Morphology which constructed nouns as morphological process. The morphological process was inspected through (1) language meaning and form, (2) the wealth of the word that is owned by speakers of the language, and (3) the list of words arranged to identify the type of Sago. As the results, it is found that there are generic and specific lexicons, such as the sago lexicon, especially the classification between male sago (*afes*) and female sago (*afai*). Furthermore, sago stabbing wood (*memsug*), is also a specific noun which is different from (*meckur*) which is usually used by most farmers. *Meckur* is used to grow beans, sweet potatoes, bananas (*meney*), and sugar cane (*meras*). Sago also has a navel (*agen-gen*) which is identical to humans that has a navel. Therefore it could be analogous that sago is a representation of human life. Sago (*mendow*) as an entity that is always imprinted in the human life of Irrires in particular and in general the people of Papua.

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## 1. Introduction

Irires language is a regional language spoken by Irires ethnic group that inhabits the region of Southern part of Tambrauw regency, West Papua- Indonesia (Syufi, *et al.*, 2019). Related to the language, the current research was focused on morphology aspect of pronoun for non-human as well as compound words. From the aspect of culture, the current language was also focused on several cultural words related to sago palm.

The research is interesting since Irires people, based on the researchers' pre-research, differ several terms of nouns related to sago palm. For example, when referring to sago palm, the people of Irires differ it into male and female sago palm (their cognitive systems consider sago as a human being). In the cognitive system of the Irires community, there are so many linguistic mysteries that are still hidden (Russel, 1912). The hidden phenomena must be explored.

What is hidden in the minds of Irires speakers, like the navel of sago (*mendow agengen*), male and female sago, is interested to be revealed. Therefore, the current research is needed to be conducted, so that the knowledge about Irires people can be well narrated and documented.

Furthermore, the term refers to male sago is called *afes*, while the term referring to female sago palm is called *afaj*. *Afes* and *afaj* can be understood as noun that refers to the sago palm. In addition, the people of Irires community also distinguish the term referring to the container for sago pith into *afes* (male) and *afaj* (female). *Afes* is a term referring to a container of the upper part of sago pith, while *afaj* refers to the container for accommodating the pith of the lower part of the sago palm. Sago also has a navel (*agen-gene*) which is usually correlated with fauna. However, in the perspective of the community Irires, sago is identical with humans that also have navels. Next, the current research has got a high novelty since there is no previous research that explores the nouns that refers to the sago palm in Irires language (Syufi *et al.*, 2019).

## 2. Materials and Methods

Language is a nomenclature; therefore we must say that there are a number of different concepts (Saussure, 2013). Related to this research, morphology is the theory of word structures, in which the apparatus of morphological rules are defined by the nature of a (morphological) word of a language (Mayerthaler, 1988; Sugerman, 1999). The morphology aspect that was focused in this current study is only related to nouns that relate to sago in the Irires language.

The current study is a kind of qualitative descriptive study. The goal of qualitative descriptive studies is a comprehensive summarization, in everyday terms, of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). As has been mentioned above, the group of individuals in this research is the Irires people. The method was implemented with the aim to describe the concepts and phenomenon of the pronoun 'that' in relation to the culture of Irires language, both theoretically and practically.

Data were taken through observation. In the other side, the reflection method was also implemented to gaining data. The method was applied since one of the researchers in the current research is the native speaker of Irires language (Sudaryanto, 2015). After data were gained, the researcher described the phenomena as it was (Bungin, 2008). The description was focused on the study of Irires language pronoun that correlates with sago.

### 3. Results and Discussions

The Irires language nouns which will be presented in this section are related to the processing of sago. In the processing of sago, there are a number of nouns which have a more specific and unique forms. Those words are related to these concepts: (1) sago stabbing wood (2) parts of sago stem (3) container for storing sago starch, (4) navel of sago, (5) male sago (*mendow afes*) and female sago (*mendow afaj*). Furthermore, sago shoots can also be classified into two parts, namely (*afoi*) and the part that can be consumed (*mengogah*). Specifically, the nouns of the language described were focused on pronoun 'that', in which that pronoun itself refers to those five concepts above.

In Irires language, the non-human nouns (*memsug*) or a sago stabbing wood, is used to separate the sago stem into two halves. This log of wood is very hard and strong so that it can easily separate the sago stem into two halves. In Irires language, *memsung* is different from the log of wood used by the farmers in general, which has a pointed shape, known as *mecukur*. The size of *mecukur* is smaller than *memsung*. Both of them have the same shape, but different in terms. *Memsung* has the function to break the sago stem into two halves so that it becomes easier for the sago farmer to do their activities. If the sago stem is cultivated in full form, the farmer will certainly have difficulties (Sidu et al., 2016; Genggong & Ashmarita, 2018).

Sago has a lot of fiber structures; therefore, for breaking the sago stem, it is easier to use *memsung* than the other tools. This can be compared with wood and bamboo which do not have a lot of fibers so that they can be cut easily using axes or sword.

*Mecekur* is known by Irires people as a tool used to penetrate the ground to sprinkle seeds like beans (*mengukei*), corn (*mecah*), cucumber (*merot*), pumpkin (*mefet*), sprout trees like banana (*meney*), taro (*mom*), and cuttings like stems of cassava (*mondef*), sweet potato (*moi*), gedi stem (*meref*). Besides that, there is also a smaller log used by Irires people to stab forest bananas and soft trees which is called *mergoh*. All of these three tools, namely *memsung*, *mecekur*, and *mergoh* have got the similar shape, but different in the terms of use.

The upper part of sago stem is called *mending gid*, and the lower part of sago stem is called *mendir mow*. While the term referring to the upper part of bamboo and wood stem is called *awir gid*, and the term for the lower part is called *awir mow*. The examples are as follows: *mer awir gid* (upper part of wood), *mer awir mow* (lower part of wood).

The upper part of bamboo is called (*mendag awir gid*), and the lower part of the bamboo is called (*mendag awir mow*). Furthermore, the container used to hold/storage the sago starch/flour can be classified into two parts, namely *afes* and *afaj*. The upper part is called male (*afes*), while the lower part is called woman (*afaj*). This may happen because there is an indication that the lower container called a woman correlates with the heavy burden of a woman, as it is described by an Irires idiom *ifaj uk mowran aromat aso* (women have a lot of burdens to bear). In other words, the burden borne of a woman is very heavy because she has to experience menstruation, conceiving, giving birth and breastfeeding. This can be studied further from various point of studies such as hermeneutics and socio-cultural semiotics.

In relation to the container of Sago, semantically, it has denotation and connotation meanings. Denotatively, the container is a tool used for storing or accommodating the sago starch. In the other side, connotatively, the container has got three meanings, namely: (1) a woman who has a heavy burden of life, (2) Woman as a complementary, and (3) woman as a lower individual. The second and the third meanings are related to the position of the sago container, that is at the bottom of sago. This also applies to the socio-cultural life practices of Irires community, in which a woman must obey what her husband says.

From a cultural view, a Papuan woman must not argue with her husband. It is reinforced by the dowry that has been paid in full by her husband. A wife must obey all commands given by her husband. However, from the view of other groups, this case is a kind of discrimination that deserves to be criticized because women and men must live harmony without burdening one another (Seralurin & Yendra, 2019; Gainau, 2019).

The question now is why the container for accommodating the upper sago palms is not categorized as women or male container. It is affected by an ideological view that related to the domination of power. In the culture of Irires, male people are more dominant than female people. The upper container for male sago flour is called *meseaf afes*. Male power is very dominant in the Papuan culture since there is a

perception that females are the second numbered group. The power denomination between men and women needs to be ratified, so that women may have the same degree as men.

The following is the description of sago navel which is called *agen-gen*. Sago navel is the joint center between sago midribs that unite the sago. Normally, in the other terms of plants in Irires language, there is no navel lexicon (*agen-gen*). For example, banana tree is called *meney*, palm tree is called *moch*, and wine tree is called *moft*. The language phenomena show that sago navel (*agen-gen*) is very meaningful in the life of the Irires community. The navel itself is a very important element for both human and animal life.

During infancy, humans and animals need a navel as a transferring medium of food from a mother to her child so that the baby may grow up perfectly. This also applies to animals in which the parents feeding the babies through a navel so that the babies can develop perfectly. Even at the age of adulthood, the navel is still visible on human. Generally, most people think that only fauna has a navel, and does not apply to flora. But the reality, based on the current study, is different. Sago palms as flora, in Irires language, have got a navel. Therefore, this phenomenon is a mystery that deserves to be studied more.

Sago shoots can be classified into two parts, namely: (1) *medow afoi* shoots that develop into sago leaves, and (2) *mengogoh* sago shoots that can be consumed. This sago shoot (*mengogoh*) is usually cooked first so that it is tasted more crunchy and delicious for consumption. If it (*mengogoh*) is not cooked, it feels thick. Therefore, there is a concept of thinking which states that it's better to boil it first to make it more delicious to consume. Sago shoots (*mengogoh*) can be consumed by all family members, without restrictions. Sago shoots (*mengogoh*) will be tasted more delicious to be consumed if it is taken when the sago tree has just been cut. In addition, if the sago shoots are taken from the sago tree that has had fruits, then the sago shoots will be tasted hard and not soft anymore to be consumed.

Next, since language can produce true knowledge about the world, it is stated that the smallest element of language is a picture of the smallest element of the world or atomic facts (Russell in Khoyin, 2013). The relationship of meaning is very dependent to the speakers and the context of speakers. It can be seen in the case of sago container. Morphologically, the compound words in Irires language have experienced inversion. The examples of the compound words are presented in the following table.

Table 1  
Irires Compound Words of Sago

No	Indonesian - English Languages	Irires language
1	<i>Daun sagu</i> Sago leaf	<i>Mendow afei</i>
2	<i>Batang sagu</i> Sago stem	<i>Mendow afag</i>
3	<i>Pucuk sagu</i> Sago shoots	<i>Mendow afoi</i>
4	<i>Pucuk sagu untuk dikonsumsi</i> Sago shoots for consumption	<i>Menggogoh</i>
5	<i>Pelepa sagu</i> Sago fronds	<i>Mendow afef</i>
6	<i>Duri sagu</i> Sago spines	<i>Mendow afog</i>
7	<i>Pati sagu</i> Sago starch	<i>Mendow afam</i>
8	<i>Biji sagu</i> Sago seeds	<i>Mendow afed</i>
9	<i>Lidi sagu</i> Sago sticks	<i>Moftpow</i>
10	<i>Wadah untuk menampung pati sagu</i> Containers for accommodating sago starch	<i>Mesef</i>
11	<i>Akar sagu</i>	<i>Mendow afow</i>

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Sago roots	
<i>Kuit sagu</i>	<i>Mendow afoh</i>
12 Sago skin	

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Based on the table of Irires compound words above, the word *mendow* means sago, while *afei* means leaves. Thus, the subordinate of the compound word *mendow afei* is the word *mendow*. Furthermore, there is also specific word such as sago shoots that can be consumed. It is called *menggogoh*. Sago shoots are called *mendow asus*. Sago shoots that grow are called (*mendow afoi*). The boundary where sago can grow or the end of growth has not been identified. The sago stick is called *moftpow*. This is a phenomenon of language owned by the socio-cultural community of Irires that inhabits the Southern part of Tambrauw Regency. Based on the perception of the speakers of Irires, sago sticks (*moft pow*) are identical with the sticks of palm wine tree. Therefore, the naming is outside the entity of sago. Sago sticks (*moftpow*) is a more specific lexicon. This sago stick (*moftpow*) is usually used by Papuan children aged 4 to 7 years as arrows when they learn to shoot lizards (*meed*), grasshoppers (*mof*), forest bananas (*mengei*), and cassava shoots (*modof asus*). All of this knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truth is based on recognition. Irires community has the competence to be able to identify the objects related to sago in more detail because sago can answer their needs.

Sensory data is personal for each person; what is immediately captured by someone's vision is not necessarily immediately captured by someone else's vision (Russell in Asnawi, 2002). The experience and knowledge accompanied by the five human senses may be easily transferred through speech. The knowledge transfer is also needed to be accompanied by someones intellectual so that the recipients may understand the message well and are easy to apply.

Scientific narratives expressed on the basis of logical thinking of the speakers. The speakers express what is seen and experienced. The scientific language has its own characteristics, namely informative, reproductive or inter-subjective (Houghton, 1975). Informative means that scientific language must express information or knowledge. This information or knowledge must be stated explicitly and clearly to avoid misunderstandings. Reproductive means a speaker or writer delivers the same information as the information received by the listener or reader (Khojin, 2013). Language has a very important role in human life (Duchêne & Heller, 2008). Along with the existence of language, humans may express what is in their world.

There are a number of lexicons that have been presented before. Some of them are general and some are specific in nature. So it is worth noting the meaning of the lexicon. Lexicon is a vocabulary that is conceptualized as a wealth of words or treasures that are owned by the users of a language. To be clearer, let's examine the concept of lexicon proposed by Kridalaksana. According to Kridalaksana (2008), the concept of the lexicon has three characteristics. They are (1) language components containing all information about the meaning and the use of words in a language (2) the wealth of words that are owned by speakers of a language (3) a list of words arranged like a dictionary but with a brief and practical explanation.

The lexicon can be divided into two forms, namely, the active form (*active vocabulary*) meaning and the passive lexicon (*passive vocabulary*) meaning in which a wealth of words are understood (but never be used, or used rarely). The wealth of words possessed by the speakers of Irires needs to be inherited well to the younger generation so that the existence of the language will be well maintained. Specific lexicons are part of the passive lexicon because they are rarely used by the speakers unless there is a direct interaction so that it turns into an active lexicon. The lexicon of sago stabbing wood is called *memsug*, the container of upper sago starch is called a male *afes*, the lower part is called a woman *afaj*, sago shoots that can be consumed are called *mengogah*, sago navel *agen-gen*, the upper sago stem is called *mendir gid*, and the lower sago stem is called *mendir mow*. All of these lexicons are part of a specific lexicon. All these specific sago lexicons represent the life of the Irires community in relation to sago environment. The arrangement of these specific lexicons is based on the cognition contained in the minds of the Irires community. The knowledge of the more specific lexicon is a reflection of the life of Irires community that is closely related to sago palm.

The mindset of speakers who produce a particular culture to the lexicon owned by a community is related to human interaction with the environment. In the Whorf hypothesis, it is divided into two parts,



namely the strong hypothesis and the weak hypothesis. Language has a central position, the two languages form the speaker's way of thinking and consequently, the language determines how they see the world. Language is used by the speakers of a community. The natural environment is where a language can live and develop so that the lexicon can live among speakers of languages. Don't leave your language alone.

The lexicon may change or survive depending on the speakers and also the environment in which the speakers interact with each other. Therefore, the sago environment must be well maintained, so that the language may exist for the next generation. Language changes and shifts are determined by humans who maintain and care for their natural environment so that humans may continue to use the language based on what ?. Human observation is real if the environment also supports. Environmental degradation also has implications for the language used by local communities. Cognition of the speakers can be very strong if the environment is well maintained. Environmental degradation has implications for the degradation of a language. Therefore, there needs to be a balance between the environment and the use of the environment so that they complement each other.

The wealth of lexicons is the wealth of language (Hoffart *et al.*, 2011). It is a representation of humans living in reflecting life through lexicons (both general and specific). It depends on the time and space where the speakers use the language (Klein, 2013). Observation of both generic and specific lexicons can be done while doing research. Empirical research can reflect the experience and knowledge of the speakers based on the lexicons found at the time of research. The wealth of lexicons can be owned by the speakers and partners about what they want to convey.

Lexicon can grow and develop if the environment is still well maintained. For example, if the environment of Sago in Papua is well maintained, the nouns, as have been described above, will exist. The phenomenon of language related to lexicon of sago palm needs to be studied systematically and comprehensively in order to show the lexicon features both in a general and specific manner so that they can be widely understood by the other language speakers who want to learn the language. Specific lexicons have to be studied so that it becomes knowledge of the language. Furthermore, it can be maintained.

Correlation between human needs and language in Irires language can be seen clearly. It is used for representing the needs of life. Language solves the problems of human life through lexicons that are owned by each individual and group of speakers. Every word has meaning because words refer to something as described sago. Language is a name, so we must say that there are a number of different concepts (Rochmah, 1996; Sanders, 2004).

Social facts about a number of lexicons, both generic and specific terms are not disputed because they are conventional by the speakers of a community. Every entity in the lexicon is described in more detail and some are universally described. Language as a social value system is not only a collection of elements. It defines its substance (Saussure, 2013).

#### 4. Conclusion

Language and culture is a unit that cannot be separated from each other (Grinblatt & Keloharju, 2001). The representation of language and culture is a manifestation of a socio-cultural presence (Kramsch & Widdowson, 1998). Society speaks a language to reflect on the experience and their knowledge. The knowledge and experience do not stand alone without the human senses and cognition system. Related to the theoretical facts, there are generic and specific lexicons, such as the sago lexicon.

In Irires language, sago is classified into man and woman. It has got a gender classification. The classification between male sago (*afes*) and female sago (*afai*) reflects the culture of Papuan. Furthermore, sago stabbing wood (*memsug*) is also a specific noun which is different from *meckur* which is usually used by most farmers. *Meckur* is used to grow beans, sweet potatoes, bananas (*meney*), and sugar cane (*meras*). Sago also has a navel (*agen-gen*) which is identical to humans that has a navel. Therefore it could be analogous that sago is a representation of human life. Sago (*mendow*) as an entity reflects human life of Papuan, especially of Irires people.

During the period of food famine, sago becomes a food barn for the community. Sago does not need irrigation and fertilizers. It grows naturally. The lexicon *mendow agen-gen* means that the sago midrib attached to the sago stem. They meet each other so that *mendow agen-gen* categorized as a navel. Usually, the

navel is found in fauna. However, in Papuan language, sago has also got a navel. It is a language phenomenon in the mystery of life since navel is found also in flora, that is in sago as a tree of Papuan life. Various varieties of fauna such as epiphytes can also live in sago trees.

Sago is also a gathering place for various types of fauna. For example, sago beetle (*yafi*) (*rhynchophorus ferrugineus*), sago caterpillar (*meikuk*) (*rhynchophorus ferrugineus*). The sago beetle can also live in sago tree, as well as the sago caterpillar. The other fauna that also live in the environment of sago are a frog (*mos/ ranae*), dragonfly (*meren afah/ anisoptera*), and grasshopper (*mof/ locusta*).

Furthermore, the description of the container used to hold or store the starch or the upper sago flour, which is called male (*afes*), and the lower container which is called a woman (*afaj*) has got an indication of Papuan culture. The lower container called a woman correlates with how heavy is the burdens borne of a woman. There is an idiom in Irires language that says *ifaj uk mowran aromat aso* (women have a lot of burdens borne). Semantically, it has also got denotative and connotative meanings. Denotatively, it is a place to hold sago flour. Connotatively, it is (1) socio-culturally, woman is regarded as a lower class individu, (2) a woman in Papuan has a heavier burden of life, and (3) woman is an individu with a heavy burden of life. From the linguistic dimension, the Irires language experiences inversion (compound system). Sago leaves becomes sago (*mendow*) leaves (*afei*) which can be observed in the table above.

Linguistic forms of Irires language can be seen in both complex and non-complex form (morphology form). The complex form is constructed by several morphemes, while the single form is built by one morpheme. In complex forms, especially those in the form of derivative words, the nouns are always found in the original form and basic form. The original form is different from the basic form (Simpfen, 2009). Sago is also viewed as a human being who has a back (*mendow ajmeg*) and a chest (*mendow amen*). It is a phenomenon of language as well as a mystery of language which is kept in the cognitive system of Irires speakers.

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