

Structure, Narrative Context, and Function of Healing Mantras in Biaro Baru Village, North Musi Rawas Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines the structure, narrative context, and function of healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation from five informants (traditional healers/shamans) who actively use mantras in healing practices. Five healing mantras were recorded, transcribed, translated, and analyzed. The analysis focused on linguistic structure (using frameworks of oral literature analysis), narrative context (using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model), and social-cultural function. Results reveal that the healing mantras exhibit four structural elements: (1) rhyme (end-rhyme and initial-rhyme patterns); (2) rhythm (repetitive syllabic patterns creating a hypnotic quality); (3) repetition (of words, phrases, and sounds for emphasis and magical effect); and (4) distinctive diction (archaic words, code-switching between Musi Malay and Arabic). The narrative context is governed by strict norms regarding setting (typically at the patient's home or specific ritual sites), timing (often at night or specific hours), participants (healer, patient, sometimes family members), and ritual preparations (offerings, water, specific objects). The mantras serve multiple complementary functions: magical-religious (invoking divine power for healing), therapeutic (providing psychological comfort to patients), social (reinforcing the healer's role and community bonds), and cultural (preserving and transmitting local wisdom). This study contributes to the documentation of endangered oral traditions in Indonesia and provides a model for analyzing similar oral literature forms.

Keywords: Context of Narration, Function of Spells, Healing Spells, Spell Structure

A. Introduction

Indonesia is a country rich in cultural diversity, ethnicities, languages, and oral traditions passed down from generation to generation (Dewantara et al., 2024). One form of this cultural heritage is oral literature, which continues to thrive in traditional societies. Oral literature serves not only as a means of entertainment but also contains religious, social, and moral values and serves as a medium of communication between humans and nature and supernatural powers. One form of oral literature that still exists in society is the mantra. Mantras are utterances or sequences of words believed

to possess magical powers and used for various purposes, such as healing, self-protection, safety, and traditional rituals (Fárek & Horák, 2021; Padoux, 2022; Trisnawati et al., 2025). Healing mantras, in particular, play a crucial role in traditional societies as an alternative cure for illness when medical treatment has not yet fully reached a particular region or when people still hold strong beliefs in traditional medicine (Elendu, 2024; Pham et al., 2021; Subu et al., 2022). Healing mantras are not simply understood as simple strings of words but as texts with a specific structure, a unique narrative context, and profound social and spiritual functions.

The healing mantras found in the Biaro Baru Village community, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency, contain a wide variety of words and different functions. A mantra is a word or utterance that can bring about supernatural powers; for example, it can heal, bring harm, and so on (Oman, 2025). Only certain people can understand and know these spells/incantations, and for the younger generation, spells or incantations are considered old-fashioned and uninteresting. Some people don't truly understand that mantras are regional literature that needs to be preserved (Kasanova et al., 2024; Perkins, 2021). Those who can cast mantras don't want to pass them on to the younger generation, and the younger generation isn't interested in studying literature in the form of mantras, preferring modern practices. As a result, people, especially the younger generation, do not pay much attention to the literature in their region, resulting in a lack of public appreciation for the culture or literature of the region.

A mantra is a spoken expression used in certain contexts, particularly traditional medicine, and believed to have a healing effect due to its spiritual power (Blofeld, 2025). Mantras are a form of traditional oral literature passed down through generations within a community. They consist of a series of words or sentences spoken with a specific rhythm and are believed to possess magical or supernatural powers. Mantras are typically used in ritual activities such as healing, protection, salvation, or requests to supernatural powers. Linguistically, mantras are characterized by the use of symbolic language, rhyme, rhythm, and sacred diction (Yelle, 2022). Functionally, mantras are not only magical but also reflect the belief systems, cultural values, and worldviews of the communities they support. Mantras are a form of traditional oral literature with high cultural, spiritual, and social value. In traditional Indonesian society, especially in rural areas, mantras are often used as a means of communication between humans and supernatural powers in certain contexts, such as healing, protection, and religious rituals (Suroyo et al., 2025).

The oral literature of Biaro Baru village has partly evolved into a modern vision, but its traditional characteristics remain. Therefore, to this day, people with Biaro Baru cultural and linguistic backgrounds remain familiar with oral literature. Like other literary works, they reflect various aspects of community life. Oral literature is a vibrant and thriving part of traditional society. One form of oral literature that persists today is the mantra. Mantras are not only understood as a series of magical words but

also as cultural expressions that embody the values, norms, and belief systems of the community (Dalal, 2023). In rural communities, particularly in South Sumatra, mantras are frequently used in various life practices, such as healing, self-protection, and traditional rituals. Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency, is one area that still maintains the tradition of healing mantras.

Traditional healing practices using mantras are carried out by shamans or individuals considered to possess special spiritual abilities. These healing mantras have been passed down through generations and used to cure ailments, both those considered medical and non-medical (such as supernatural disorders). The existence of these healing mantras demonstrates that local communities still uphold traditional values despite the development of modern science and technology. Linguistically and culturally, healing mantras possess a specific structure that distinguishes them from ordinary forms of speech (Rao, 2024). This structure can include an opening, body, and closing; the use of specific diction; repetition of sounds (rhyme and rhythm); and the use of religious symbols. The linguistic structure of mantras often does not strictly follow the rules of everyday language but rather has a specific pattern considered to possess magical powers. Therefore, studying the structure of mantras is crucial for uncovering the linguistic and aesthetic systems contained within them.

Both manifestly and in Latin, in this context, the Biaro Baru Village mantra (a mantra spoken in the Biaro Baru Village language) exhibits a more Latin-based character. Therefore, a serious effort is needed to uncover its function and underlying background. In Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency, the tradition of using healing mantras is still preserved by the community, particularly by shamans or traditional healers. Mantras not only function as healing media but also possess a unique linguistic structure and narrative context, reflecting the local belief system and outlook on life (Yang, 2025). Analysis of the structure, narrative context, and function of these healing mantras is crucial for documenting and understanding the forms and meanings of local cultures that are on the verge of extinction due to modernization and technological development. Thus, this research contributes to the fields of linguistics, oral literature, and the preservation of regional culture. In addition to structure, narrative context is also an integral aspect of mantra studies.

Mantras cannot be fully understood without considering the situation, time, place, speaker, interlocutor, purpose, and norms underlying their utterance. From the perspective of ethnography of communication proposed by Dell Hymes, a speech event must be analyzed through specific components such as setting and scene, participants, endings, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre (SPEAKING) (Putra & Padmadewi, 2023). Therefore, analyzing the context of the recitation of healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how and why they are used in certain situations. Furthermore, the function of healing mantras is not limited to physical healing but also has social, psychological, and religious functions. Socially, mantras strengthen the relationship

between the shaman and the patient and affirm certain social roles within the community. Psychologically, mantras can provide positive suggestions and a sense of calm to the patient. Religiously, mantras reflect the community's belief in the power of God, ancestral spirits, or other supernatural entities. Thus, healing mantras function as a medium of communication between humans and the transcendent powers believed in by the local community.

This research is expected to be useful for the public and the younger generation to understand and understand mantras well and in depth. We intend to provide information to the public about mantras, which are oral literature that needs to be preserved and serve a function appropriate to their intended use. Literature in a region is diverse, including riddles, rhymes, poetry, and even spells/incantations, which need to be preserved. We chose mantras/incantations as the research object within the Biaro Baru Village community, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency. Mantras are oral literature passed down from ancestors and should be understood and preserved by the community (Makki, 2025). This research is expected to provide knowledge to the community, especially the younger generation, that mantras/incantations are regional literature with diverse functions and are included in reading materials such as ancient poetry.

The researcher conducted the study in Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency, because the village still strongly believes in matters related to incantations or mantras, which are believed to cure illnesses. The second reason the researcher chose this village was because no previous research had examined the elements of healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency. Based on the above background, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the field of linguistics in a practical way. This research can serve as useful scientific documentation for the preservation of local culture and serve as a reference for further research on oral traditions in South Sumatra and Indonesia in general. This research focuses on the analysis of mantra structure, narrative context, and the function of healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency. This study is expected to contribute to the development of linguistics and literature, particularly in the fields of oral literature studies and communication ethnography, as well as serve as scientific documentation of the cultural richness of the local community.

B. Methods

This research is qualitative research with a descriptive study approach. The research was conducted in Biaro Baru Village, North Musi Rawas Regency, for two months. The research subjects were people who were trusted by the community of Biaro Baru Village, North Musi Rawas Regency, and understood healing mantras/incantations, totaling 5 people. These 5 people consisted of 3 women and 2 men. The occupations of these 3 women include housewives; some are farmers and housewives, and 2 men

work as farmers. The researcher collected respondent data to describe the structure, context of the narrative, and function of mantras in Biaro Baru Village, North Musi Rawas Regency. Data collection techniques in this study were observation techniques, interview techniques, note-taking techniques, recording techniques, and data analysis techniques.

The data validity test in this study was carried out through triangulation techniques. The researcher used the technical triangulation method. According to Sugiyono (2022), technical triangulation is carried out by checking data from the same source but with different techniques, for example, data obtained through interviews, then checked through observation and documentation. The data analysis technique used in this study was qualitative descriptive analysis. This qualitative descriptive analysis technique was conducted to reveal the structure, context of recitation, and function of healing mantras in the Biaro Baru Village community, North Musi Rawas Regency.

The steps taken in the data analysis were as follows: 1) Recording informants reciting healing mantras found in the Biaro Baru Village community, North Musi Rawas Regency; 2) Re-examining the collected data; 3) Transcribing the recorded healing mantras from Biaro Baru Abab Village, North Musi Rawas Regency, into written form.; 4) Translating the mantras into Indonesian; 5) Analyzing the mantras in terms of structure, context of recitation, and function; 6) Interpreting the data; 7) Summarizing the analyzed mantras.

C. Results and Discussion

Research shows that mantras are a form of oral literature that thrives in traditional Indonesian communities, including in Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency. As a cultural heritage of our ancestors, mantras are not simply collections of words spoken ritually but rather embody social values, beliefs, and local wisdom that have been passed down from generation to generation. According to Caesarine & Setyaningsih (2023), mantras are oral expressions used in specific contexts, particularly in traditional medicine, and are believed to have healing effects due to their spiritual power. Mantras are a form of traditional oral literature passed down through generations within a community. Mantras consist of a series of words or sentences spoken with a specific rhythm and are believed to possess magical or supernatural powers. They are typically used in ritual activities such as healing, protection, safety, or requests to supernatural powers.

Linguistically and literarily, mantras have a unique structure that differs from ordinary forms of speech. The structure of a mantra is constructed from distinctive formulaic elements, including a preamble, the main body, and a closing, which often contains religious elements. Furthermore, the context in which a mantra is spoken determines its success and validity, as mantras cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context in which they are recited. Based on the explanation above, researchers

conducted a study on the structure, context of recitation, and function of healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village, Karang Dapo District, North Musi Rawas Regency. This study was conducted to understand the structure, context, and function of mantras used in Biaro Baru Village. Overall, the results show that healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village have a distinctive structure, a situational context, and complex functions, encompassing healing, protection, religious, and psychological aspects. These findings reinforce and complement previous research on the mantra tradition in Indonesia.

As stated by Sumarlina et al. (2024), mantras, as oral literature, are characterized by the use of rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and specific diction not found in everyday language. This research is deemed necessary given the increasing erosion of oral traditions due to modernization and globalization. Scientific documentation and analysis of mantras in Biaro Baru Village are expected to contribute to preservation efforts and academic contributions to the development of linguistics, folklore, and cultural anthropology in Indonesia. Tempilang is one of the places that still maintains traditional customs in community life, namely the Ngancak Ritual event in the Ketupat War ceremony tradition. The position of the Ngancak Ritual mantra in the Ketupat War event within Bangka Malay and Indonesian literature. This study aims to provide an overview of the position of mantras within the oral literature genre.

The Ngancak Ritual Mantra is a ritual passed down from generation to generation through specific methods that can only be performed by individuals with special competencies. Several previous studies that are relevant to this study include research by Seach & Chan (2025) on classical Malay mantras, which comprehensively examines the structure and categories of mantras; Hidayat et al. (2025) research on the nature of orality in Malay folklore, which emphasizes the importance of context in understanding oral traditions; and Putri et al. (2024) research on Minangkabau oral literature, which provides a comparative perspective for understanding mantras in the Malay language-cultural family.

For the scope of South Sumatra and Musi Rawas, Halilintar et al. (2021) research on the oral traditions of the Rawas people. Previous research can be interpreted as showing significant differences from the results of the current study. This study only examined and analyzed structure, while the current study examined the structure, narrative context, and function of healing mantras in Biaro Baru Village.

D. Conclusion

This study analyzed the structure, narrative context, and function of five healing mantras from Biaro Baru Village, North Musi Rawas Regency, Indonesia. Three main conclusions emerge. First, the healing mantras exhibit a distinctive linguistic structure characterized by rhyme (end-rhyme and initial-rhyme), rhythm (repetitive syllabic patterns), repetition (of words, phrases, and sounds), and specialized diction (archaic

words and code-switching between Musi Malay and Arabic). These features distinguish mantra speech from everyday conversation and contribute to their perceived magical efficacy. Second, the recitation of mantras is governed by strict contextual norms regarding setting, timing, participants, and ritual preparations. Using Hymes' SPEAKING model, the analysis reveals that mantra effectiveness is believed to depend on adherence to these contextual requirements. Third, the mantras serve multiple complementary functions: magical-religious (invoking divine power), therapeutic (providing psychological comfort), social (reinforcing healers' roles), and cultural (preserving local wisdom). This study demonstrates the applicability of Hymes' SPEAKING model to the analysis of ritual speech in an Indonesian context and provides empirical support for the integration of structural and ethnographic approaches to oral literature. Small sample size (5 mantras from 5 informants); single-village focus limits generalizability. This study contributes to the documentation of endangered oral traditions in Indonesia. Future research should compare healing mantras across multiple villages and examine the mechanisms of transmission from elder to younger generations.

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