

Peribahasa, or ‘proverbs’, in Sumbawa

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1. Introduction

Peribahasa is a genre of folk literature observed in many Indonesian languages and cultures such as Malay (Pusposaputro 1987), Javanese (Darmasoetjupta, F. S. 1985), Sundanese (Simantri et al 1988). It is also observed in Sumbawa, a language that is spoken in the Western part of Sumbawa Island.

According to Departemen Pendidikan Nasional 2008 (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Pusat Bahasa (The Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language of the Language Center or KBBI)*; 4th edition, p. 1055),¹ *peribahasa* is “1. a set phrase or sentence that normally describes something anaphorically for a certain intention [...], 2. a compendious sentence or expression that contains a comparison, parable, advice, principle for life, or [point of] manners. (translated by the present author)”

Peribahasa is conventionally translated as ‘proverb’ in English, but as the definition above shows, its range is wider than that of what are generally called “proverbs” crosslinguistically in that it also includes various kinds of anaphoric idioms.

This paper gives a preliminary observation of Sumbawa *peribahasa* on the basis of the work of an Indonesian researcher, Pranajaya (2012), who has collected 306 *peribahasa*. The present study deals with 50 of them, which Pranajaya treats as “representatives” and of which he gives detailed explanations. A list of the 50 representative *peribahasa*, with English translations, is at the end of this paper.

2. Stylistic features

Proverbs, across languages, often exhibit such stylistic features as alliteration (e.g., “practice makes perfect”), rhyme (“a little pot is soon hot”), and parallelism (“easy come, easy go”) (Mieder 2004: 7, Arora 1984). A considerable number (10 examples) of the Sumbawa *peribahasa* considered here exhibit parallelism, while only a few exhibit alliteration or rhyme. Examples of each features follows.

a. parallelism (10 examples: Nos. 30, 31, 34, 40, 42, 45–47, 49, and 50)

- | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| (1) | <i>Tingi</i> | <i>olat</i> | <i>tingi</i> | <i>penyembir</i> |
| | high | mountain | high | valley |

¹ The original Indonesian-language definition in the dictionary is as follows.

Pe.ri.ba.ha.sa *n* 1 kelompok kata atau kalimat yg tetap susunannya, biasanya mengiaskan maksud tertentu (dl peribahasa termasuk juga bidal, ungkapan perumpamaan); 2 ungkapan atau kalimat ringkas padat, berisi perbandingan, perumpamaan, nasihat, prinsip hidup atau aturan tingkah laku.

‘If the mountain is high, the valley is deep’: if you take a lofty position, it comes with high risk. In other words, the more you have, the more you can lose when you fail (No. 30)

- (2) *Nya baeng isi, nya baeng ai’*
three have content three have water

‘those who possess a fish should take care of the water’: people who have power or people in high positions should take care of the people around them (No. 40)

b. alliteration (three examples: Nos. 12, 28, and 41)

- (3) *Kangila rara kangampang bola*
ashamed poverty tell lie

‘feeling ashamed of one’s poverty, and telling a lie’: people telling lies to hide their poverty (No. 14)

- (4) *Satama saluar ola otak*
wear trousers from head

‘wearing one’s trousers on one’s head’: doing something that shows one’s folly (No.28)

c. rhyme (two examples: Nos. 6 and 25)

- (5) *Liwat no dapat*
go past NEG arrive

‘To go past, not arrive at (the goal)’: to talk about lofty ideals or criticize others but be unable to actually accomplish anything (No. 6)

- (6) *Olo ate lako cantal*
put heart to latch

‘To put one’s wish on a latch’: to have false hopes (No. 25)

3. Grammatical structure

Most of the representative *peribahasa* can be grouped into one of the four grammatical patterns below.²

² Only one example (No. 42) deviates from these four patterns. It consists of a preposed NP and a following equational clause.

mara berang mepang bengkok nan pang batiu
like river wherever bend that place deepen

‘a river deepens when it bends’: unjust authority always takes advantage of its position and never misses a chance to fill its own pockets

a. (*mara* 'like' +) NP (five examples)

- (7) *Mara nangka rabua lasung*
like jackfruit bear pistils

'a jackfruit tree that bears only pistils but no fruit': the inability to obtain an expected result
(No. 20)

- (8) *Jarim rotas mata*
needle broken eye

'a needle with a broken eye': a man who abandons a woman to pursue his own interests.
Since a needle cannot be threaded if its eye is broken, this can also be a metaphor for a
man who refuses to allow a woman to follow him (No. 5)

b. one clause (22 examples)

- (9) *Samang bawi lis*
patrol pig go out

'Patrol a pig that has already escaped': do something that is useless because it is too late
(especially used as a metaphor for trying to save money after spending too much) (No. 9)

c. two clauses (18 examples)

- (10) *asu ngapan gigil tolang bodok ngnam kakan isi*
dog hunt bite bone cat watch eat meat

'a dog on a hunt bites a bone, while a watching cat eats the meat': experiencing misfortune
while others take advantage of your hard work (No. 44)

d. four clauses (four examples)

- (11) *patis jaran, na dampi burit,*
tame horse PROH get close back
patis kebo, na dampi otak
tame buffalo PROH get close head

'No matter how tame the horse is, don't get close to its back; no matter how tame the
buffalo is, don't get close to its head': even if he looks safe to you, do not approach a
dangerous man (No.50)

These structures are further discussed in the sections that follow.

3.1 *Peribahasa* that consist of (*mara* +) NP

This type is often preceded by a preposition *mara* ‘like’. In three examples among the five, the NP consists of a head noun and a verb phrase that modifies it. The conjunction *ade* ‘who, that’, which is normally used in relativization in contemporary Sumbawa, does not occur in these examples.

- (12) *mara* [*bawi* φ [*lantar* *teming*]]
like pig hit precipice
‘a pig hitting the precipice’: a person who acts rashly in order to gratify his or her desires and encounters difficulties as a result (No. 18)

This absence of any relativizer is observed in all the examples in which a verb phrase modifies a head noun. (e.g., No. 7 in example (13) below).

3.2 *Peribahasa* that consist of one clause

The most frequently observed structure in one-clause *peribahasa* is a verb and a non-actor complement (undergoer and/or PP)

a. V + Undergoer NP (four examples: Nos. 3, 7, 9, and 11)

- (13) *Panto* *kebo* *mangan*
watch buffalo eat
‘Watching a buffalo eat’: a person who does not do anything useful but only watches other people (No. 7)

b. V + Undergoer NP + PP (seven examples: Nos. 10, 25–29, and 39)

- (14) *Olo* *ate* *lako* *cantal*
put heart to latch
‘To put one’s wish on a latch’: to have false hopes (No. 25)

- (15) *Sangentok* *raret* *ko* *bodok*
CAUS-guard jerked meat to cat
‘Leave a cat to guard jerked meat’: trust an unreliable person (No. 27)

c. V + PP (three examples: Nos. 4, 22, and 35)

- (16) *Bertedung* *ke* *lenong*
wear with buffalo skin

‘Wearing a hood made of buffalo skin’: making a poor choice of spouse as a result of impeded sight (No. 4)

- (17) *Mole ko puntuk ladingkong*
back to blunt sickle

‘Back to the blunt sickle’: things getting worse as a result of being too choosy (No. 35)

There are only a few examples found that include a subject (an intransitive single core NP or transitive actor NP).

d. V + S (three examples: Nos. 1, 2, and 8)

- (18) *Bakati asu*
play dog

‘Dogs play’: young people play at night and often start to fight

- (19) *Beranak ayam*
bear chicken

‘To bear a chicken [not an egg]’: to obtain significant benefits from a business venture

- Rame akar bako*
crowded root mangrove

‘The mangrove’s root is crowded’: a crowd of people are not doing their jobs (e.g., people who do not help other people with work, or people who will not come to a decision during a conference)

e. V+P+A (two examples: Nos. 13 and 43)

- (20) *Jaran rea rempak tali*
horse big step rope

‘a horse stepping on its reins’: a person who fails to take a position or loses his or her position because of his thoughtless or careless behavior

- (21) *Rezeki gagak no si ete ling pekat*
livelihood crow NEG MM get by parrot

‘A parrot cannot have the same livelihood as a crow’: each person must find his or her own livelihood (No. 43)

Three examples of a “there is no *x*” pattern are also found in this category.

f. *nonda* (NEG-exist) NP “there is no *x*” pattern (three examples)

(22) *Nonda tau layar bangka dengan*
NEG-exist person sail ship friend

‘No one will sail a ship for others’: no one will take risks for others (No. 37)

(23) *No soda jeruk masam setowe*
NEG MM-exist orange sour half

‘No orange is half sour’: both people in a couple long for each other mutually (No.36)

3.3 *Peribahasa* that consist of two clauses

Among the 17 examples in this group, 12 exhibit parallel construction, in that the two clauses have the same structure and semantic role of the complement.

a. [V S] [V S] pattern (six examples: Nos. 15, 16, 21, 30, and 31)

(24) *Lis uti, tama rentek*
go out lizard enter lizard

‘a lizard goes out, and (another kind of) lizard enters’: one incompetent boss or administrator quits a position, and then a similarly incompetent person takes over the job (No. 15)

(25) *Ngelugu gunter, teri ujan*
roar thunder fall rain

‘(Soon after) thunder roars, rain falls’: a person carries out their word immediately (No. 21)

b. [VP] [VP] pattern (three examples: Nos. 12, 14, and 41)

(26) *Ete range, teruk mata*
take branch stub eye

‘Taking small branches and stubbing one’s eye with them’: doing something that will cause harm to oneself (No. 12)

- (27) *Kangila rara, kagampang bola*
 ashamed poverty tell lie
 ‘Feeling ashamed of one’s poverty, and telling a lie’: people telling lies to hide their poverty (No. 14)

c. [AVP] [AVP] pattern (two examples: No. 6 and 44)

- (28) *Nya baeng isi, nya baeng ai’*
 three have content three have water
 ‘Those who possess a fish should take care of the water’: people who have power or people in high positions should take care of the people around them (No. 40)

- (29) *Asu ngapan gigil tolang, bodok ngnam kakan isi*
 Dog hunt bite bone cat watch eat meat
 ‘A dog on a hunt bites a bone, while a watching cat eats the meat’: experiencing misfortune while others take advantage of your hard work (No. 44)

d. [V] [V] pattern (one example: No.6)

- (30) *Liwat, no dapat*
 go past NEG arrive
 ‘To go past, not arrive at (the goal)’: to talk about lofty ideals or criticize others but be unable to actually accomplish anything (No. 6)

e. [V PP] [V PP] pattern (one example: No. 48)

- (31) *Ramata yam mata beta, patik kuping yam kuping kate*
 have eyes like eye bamboo have ears like ears pan
 ‘Eyes like bamboo knotholes, ears like a pan’s handle’: a person who does not learn from his or her surroundings (No. 48)

It should be noted that conjunctions are never used in examples of this group. The two clauses exhibit various semantic relations, but these are not explicitly expressed.

3.4 *Peribahasa* that consist of four clauses

In all four examples of this category, the four clauses can be divided into two units in parallel constructions. They also share a conceptual structure, in that one clause in a unit expresses a concession or a condition.

- (32) *Kmpo, no tangkele gempir,*
 fat NEG show sturdy
kerong, no tangkela tolang.
 lean NEG show bone

‘Not looking sturdy **even though** you are fat, not letting your bones stick out **even though** you are lean’: a rich person should hide his or her wealth, and a poor person should hide his or her poverty. It is a virtue not to show your economic condition (No. 46)

- (33) *Uler, na tarik tali,*
 extend PROH pull string
betak, na beang kapate.
 pull PROH make tangle

‘(In kite flying), **when extending** the string, one must not make it too tight; **in pulling** the string, one must not let it tangle’: you should be neither too severe nor too indulgent with your children (No. 47)

- (34) *No mo aku lala, lamin mudi,*
 NEG MM 1SG princess if later
ulin-ulin mo, asal to.
 servant MM if now

‘Better to marry a servant girl today than to marry a princess tomorrow’: describing someone who is impatient (the connotations are the opposite of “better an egg today than a hen tomorrow” or “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”). (No. 49)

- (35) *patis jaran, na dampi burit,*
 tame horse PROH get close back
patis kebo, na dampi otak.
 tame buffalo PROH get close head

‘**no matter how** tame the horse is, don’t get close to its back; **no matter how** tame the buffalo is, don’t get close to its head’: even if he looks safe to you, do not approach a dangerous man (No. 50)

4. Semantic content of *peribahasa*

The 50 *peribahasa* in the representative list are all metaphorical expressions, with only one exception: *kangila rara kagampang bola* ‘feeling ashamed of one’s poverty, and telling a lie’ (No. 14)

The majority of the examples (34 of 50) express a negative situation or judgment and are used to make fun of, criticize, or blame the behavior of others (e.g., *dadi lentah* ‘to be a leech’: to leave friends behind after getting what you want from them (No. 3), *sekarat api ke kadebong punti* ‘make a fire with a banana stem’: useless deed).

The other *peribahasa* have such content that "proverbs" across languages canonically have delivering advice, a social rule or convention, or some common-sense truth.

a. advice (five examples: Nos. 24, 43, 45, 47, and 50)

(36) *Nonda malaekat datang raboko*
NEG-exist angel come bring present

‘There is no angel to bring you presents’: you have to work hard and not rely on others (No. 24)

(37) *Kasena kita pang dengan,*
mirror 1PL.INC at friend
kasena dengan pang kita
mirror friend at 1PL.INC

‘Your mirror is in the place of another, while the mirror of another is in your place’: you can look at the people around you to correct your behavior (No. 45)

b. common-sense truth (five examples: Nos. 14, 30–32, and 38)

(38) *Ringi olat, tingi penyembir*
high mountain high valley

‘If the mountain is high, the valley is deep’: if you take a lofty position, it comes with high risk. In other words, the more you have, the more you can lose when you fail’ (No. 30)

(39) *Tuja loto, mesti ramodeng*
pound rice must crack

‘if you pound rice, some rice will crack’: when you do work, the results always include some flaws. There is no such thing as perfection (No. 32)

(40) *peko-peko mo, asal kebo kita*
 downward mm if buffalo 1PL.INCL

‘even a buffalo with downward-facing horns looks fine if it is yours’: your own possession looks better than that of others, even if it has a defect (No. 38)

c. social rule or convention (three examples: Nos. 34, 40 and 46)

(41) *Kita bagerik, kita baeng pili*
 1PL shake 1PL get take

‘The one who drops the fruits should take them’: the people who actually do the work have a right to the products of their work (No. 34)

(42) *Nya baeng isi, nya baeng ai’*
 three have content three have water

‘Those who possess a fish should take care of the water’: people who have power or people in high positions should take care of the people around them (No. 40)

(43) *Kompo, no tangkele gempir*
 fat NEG show sturdy
kerong, no tangkela tolang
 lean NEG show bone

‘not looking sturdy even though you are fat, not letting your bones stick out even though you are lean’: a rich person should hide his or her wealth, and a poor person should hide his or her poverty. It is a virtue not to show your economic condition (No. 46)

It can be seen that the message is normally delivered inexplicitly. Negative imperatives and the deontic modality, which are quite common in English proverbs, are rare in Sumbawa *peribahasa*: there are only two examples of negative imperative (Nos. 47 and 50), and no examples in which the deontic auxiliary is used. All other examples occur in affirmative sentences.

5. Final remarks

In this study, we have presented preliminary observations on Sumbawa *peribahasa* on the basis of the work of Pranajaya (2012). Frequent use of parallelism characterizes Sumbawa *peribahasa* structurally and stylistically.

Almost all of these “proverbs” are metaphoric expressions. The majority of them describe some undesirable behavior of others and are used to make a fun of, or criticize others, while the rest have content that is more easily recognizable as “proverbial,” such as advice, conventional truths, or social rules, though even in these cases the messages are delivered inexplicitly. Imperative sentences and deontic auxiliaries of the sort that are often observed in proverbs in other languages (e.g. English or Japanese) are rarely found in Sumbawa *peribahasa*.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3	the first person, the second person, the third person
EXCL	exclusive
INCL	inclusive
MM	mood marker
NEG	negator
PASS	passive
PL	plural
PROH	prohibitive
SG	singular

References

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A list of the 50 representative peribahasa in Sumbawa from Adi (2012)

1 Bakati Asu

Dogs play: young people play at night and often start to fight.

2 Beranak ayam

To bear a chicken (not an egg): to obtain significant benefits from a business venture.

3 Dadi lenta

To be a leech: to leave friends behind after getting what you want from them (e.g., to leave a friend's house soon after a meal).

4 Bertedung ke lenong

Wearing a hood made of buffalo skin: making an incorrect choice about one's spouse as a result of impeded sight.

5 Jarim rotas mata

A needle with a broken eye: a man who abandons a woman to pursue his own interests. Since a needle cannot be threaded if its eye is broken, this can also be a metaphor for a man who refuses to allow a woman to follow him.

6 Liwat no dapat

To go past, not arrive at (the goal): to talk about lofty ideals or criticize others but be unable to actually accomplish anything.

7 Panto kebo mangan

Watching a buffalo eat: a person who does not do anything useful but only watches other people, benefitting from what they do.

8 Rame akar bako

The mangrove's root is crowded: a crowd of people are not doing their jobs (e.g., people who do not help other people with work, or people who will not come to a decision during a conference).

9 Samang bawi lis

Patrol a pig that has already escaped: do something that is useless because it is too late (especially used as a metaphor for trying to save money after spending too much).

10 Bilin api bao puntuk

To leave a fire on the bulk: to leave something half done and cause an unfortunate result.

11 Dadi bote bau balang

A monkey seizing a locust: a very greedy person.

12 Ete range teruk mata

Taking small branches and stubbing one's eye with them: doing something that will cause harm to oneself.

13 Jaran rea rempak tali

A horse stepping on its reins: a person who fails to take a position or loses his or her position because of his thoughtless or careless behavior.

14 Kangila rara kagampang bola

Feeling ashamed of one's poverty, and telling a lie: people telling lies to hide their poverty.

15 Lis uti tama rentek

A lizard goes out, and (another kind of) lizard enters: one incompetent boss or administrator quits a position, and then a similarly incompetent person takes over the job.

16 Mangan bedis naeng kebo

To eat (as) a goat, defecate (as) a buffalo: a person who works only a little, but wastes a lot.

17 Mara asu boka otak

A dog with a mangy head: a person with no job who loafes around.

18 Mara bawi lancar teming

A pig hitting the precipice: a person who acts rashly in order to gratify his or her desires and encounters difficulties as a result.

19 Mara cahaya damar kurung

Like a light under the covers: a person who likes to help people who are far away, but does not attend to his or her own family or relatives.

20 Mara nangka rabua lasung

A jackfruit tree that bears only pistils but no fruit: the inability to obtain an expected result.

21 Ngelugu gunter teri ujan

(Soon after) thunder roars, rain falls: a person carries out their word immediately.

22 Ngelugu yam (yang) gunter balit

Like a peal of thunder in the dry season: a person who never carries out his or her word (since it rarely rains after thunder in the dry season).

23 Ngesit no pele kuping

To bite someone without moving your ears: to harm or attack someone without making any sign beforehand (normally, a horse bites someone after moving its ear backward).

24 Nonda malaekat datang raboko

There is no angel to bring you presents: you have to work hard and not rely on others.

25 Olo ate lako cantal

To put one's wish on a latch: to have false hopes.

26 Samolang batu ko tiu

Throwing a stone in the deep pool of the stream: giving useless help to people.

27 Sangentok raret ko bodok

Leave a cat to guard jerked meat: trust an unreliable person.

28 Satama saluar ola otak

Wearing one's trousers on one's head: doing something that shows one's folly.

29 Satempu sira lako kuris

Bringing salt to Kuris: giving something to someone who has better/enough or that same thing already (*Kuris* is a location famous for salt production).

30 Tingi olat, tingi peruak

If the mountain is high, you have to climb high: if you aim high, you have to work hard and make the necessary sacrifices to reach your goal.

31 Tingi olat, tingi penyembir

If the mountain is high, the valley is deep: if you take a lofty position, it comes with high risk. In other words, the more you have, the more you can lose when you fail.

32 Tuja loto mesti ramodeng

If you pound rice, some rice will crack: when you do work, the results always include some flaws. There is no such thing as perfection.

33 Usi baringin no basa

Taking shelter under a banyan tree and not getting wet: benefiting from the protection of rich people or people of high position.

34 Kita bagerik, kita baeng pili

The one who drops the fruits should take them: the people who actually do the work have a right to the products of their work.

35 Mole ko puntuk ladingkong

Back to the blunt sickle: getting worse things as a result of being too choosy. .

36 No soda jeruk masam setowe

No orange is half sour: both people in a couple long for each other mutually.

37 Nonda tau layar bangka dengan

No one will sail a ship for others: no one will take risks for others.

38 Peko-peko mo asal kebo kita

Even a buffalo with downward-facing horns looks fine if it is yours: your own possession looks better than that of others, even if it has a defect.

39 Sekarat api ke kadebong punti

Make a fire with a banana leaf: act in vain.

40 Nya baeng isi, nya baeng ai'

Those who possess a fish should take care of the water: people who have power or people in high positions should take care of the people around them.

41 Lelang tu tetak, tuna tu tungku

Cutting the frog, joining the eel: treating people unfairly.

42 Mara berang, mepang bengkok, nan pang batiu

A river deepens when it bends: unjust authority never always takes advantage of his or her position and never misses a chance to fill his or her own pockets.

43 Rezeki gagak no si ete ling pekat

A parrot cannot have the same livelihood as a crow: each person must find his or her own livelihood.

44 Asu ngapan gigil tolang, bodok ngnam kakan isi

A dog on a hunt bites a bone, while a watching cat eats the meat: experiencing misfortune while others take advantage of your hard-work.

45 Kasena kita pang dengan, kasena dengan pang kita

Your mirror is in the place of another, while the mirror of another is in your place: you can look at the people around you to correct your behavior.

46 Kompo no tangkele gempir, kerong no tangkela tolang

Not looking sturdy even though you are fat, not letting your bones stick out even though you are lean: a rich person should hide his or her wealth, and a poor person should hide his or her poverty. It is a virtue not to show your economic condition.

47 Uler na tarik tali, betak na beang kapate.

(In kite flying), when extending the string, one must not make it too tight; in pulling the string, one must not let it tangle: you should be neither too severe nor too indulgent with your children.

48 Ramata yam mata beta, patik kuping yam kuping kate

Eyes like bamboo knotholes, ears like a pan's handle: a person who does not learn from his or her surroundings.

49 No mo aku lala lamin mudi, ulin-ulin mo asal to

Better to marry a servant girl today than to marry a princess tomorrow: being impatient (the connotations of this are different than "Better an egg today than a hen tomorrow" or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush").

50 Patis Jaran na dampi burit, patis kebo na dampi otak

No matter how tame the horse is, don't get close to its back; no matter how tame the buffalo is, don't get close to its head: even if he looks safe to you, do not approach a dangerous man.