


Etnolinguistic Study of Healing Discourse in Buginese Traditional Healthcare

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the traditional healthcare practices of the Bila Village community in Amali Subdistrict, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, through an ethnolinguistic lens. It focuses on how language encodes cultural knowledge related to healing, including the use of medicinal herbs, behavioral norms, and spiritual rituals. Central to this study is the exploration of local terminologies, metaphors, and oral expressions used in traditional treatments for beauty care, foot health, childbirth, and hygiene. These linguistic forms not only convey indigenous medical knowledge but also reflect the Bugis worldview concerning health, illness, and the human relationship with the natural and spiritual realms. By analyzing the intersection of language and healing, this research reveals how verbal practices serve to legitimize, transmit, and preserve traditional medical systems across generations. The findings suggest that acknowledging and integrating such linguistic-cultural dimensions into contemporary healthcare discourse could support more culturally responsive and holistic medical approaches in Bugis communities.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistic, Beauty care, Health care, Traditional Bugis

INTRODUCTION

The integration of traditional and modern medicine offers a unique opportunity to build a more inclusive and culturally grounded healthcare system. Traditional medicine emphasizes preventive care, spiritual and emotional balance, and a holistic approach to well-being, often conveyed through rich linguistic and cultural expressions. In many communities, including the Bugis of South Sulawesi, traditional healing is deeply embedded not only in practice but also in language. The terms, metaphors, proverbs, and oral narratives used in rituals and treatments serve as carriers of indigenous medical knowledge and reflect a worldview where health is maintained through harmony between the body, spirit, and environment.

While modern medicine is built on scientific precision and excels in treating acute and complex conditions, it often neglects the sociocultural and linguistic dimensions that influence health behavior and perceptions. The rising prevalence of chronic illnesses, mental health challenges, and lifestyle-related diseases suggests a growing need to re-evaluate purely clinical approaches. Traditional systems, like those of the Bugis community, offer preventive frameworks that rely on daily practices, natural remedies, and spiritual guidance—knowledge that is passed down intergenerationally through specific language and ritual discourse.

Recent trends in integrative medicine further highlight the value of complementary approaches. Therapies such as herbal medicine and massage—long practiced in Bugis healing—are now being validated through scientific research. Moreover, technological advancements allow for the analysis of active compounds in traditional herbs,

opening pathways for the development of new pharmaceuticals inspired by ethnobotanical knowledge. However, the success of such integration depends not only on scientific validation but also on understanding the cultural and linguistic context in which traditional medicine operates.

In rural or underserved areas, the accessibility of traditional remedies and healers often makes them the primary form of healthcare. Recognizing the ethnolinguistic dimension of this knowledge system is crucial for preserving cultural heritage and ensuring effective communication between practitioners and patients. By documenting and analyzing the language used in traditional healthcare, particularly among the Bugis, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of indigenous medical knowledge and its potential role in modern healthcare systems. Ultimately, this research adopts an ethnolinguistic approach to explore how Bugis traditional healing practices are encoded, transmitted, and sustained through language. It emphasizes the need for culturally responsive healthcare models that value linguistic diversity and indigenous epistemologies as vital components of global health solutions

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional herbal medicine and modern healthcare technology represent two fundamentally different, yet complementary, approaches to healing. Each system has its roots in distinct cultural and scientific principles, with one grounded in centuries of experiential knowledge and the other driven by evidence-based practices and cutting-edge technological advancements. As healthcare systems evolve globally, there has been a growing recognition of the need to integrate these two approaches in ways that leverage their respective strengths, creating a more holistic and inclusive model of care.

Traditional Herbal Medicine: A Holistic Approach to Health

Traditional herbal medicine is deeply embedded in the cultural and historical fabric of societies around the world. Passed down through generations, this system of healthcare emphasizes the use of plants and herbs to prevent and treat a wide array of ailments. Herbal medicine is not limited to simply treating symptoms but also aims to address the underlying causes of illness, promoting balance within the body and its environment. The wisdom of traditional herbal medicine is grounded in an intimate understanding of nature and the environment, with practitioners often relying on empirical knowledge accumulated over centuries. Herbs like turmeric, ginger, and ginseng are commonly used in various cultures to address issues ranging from digestive problems and inflammation to boosting the immune system and improving overall vitality (Ghani, 2017).

In traditional systems, the connection between the mind, body, and spirit is central to the healing process. Many indigenous healing practices incorporate spiritual elements alongside physical treatments. The Bugis community of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, exemplifies this approach, where traditional healing practices are intertwined with spiritual beliefs. In Bugis culture, health is viewed as a balance between physical well-being and spiritual harmony. Remedies such as turmeric and ginger are used for their medicinal properties, but they are often administered within the context of broader spiritual rituals that aim to restore balance to both the body and the soul (Nurhidayah, 2013). The Bugis also utilize plant-based remedies such as pandan leaves, which are believed to have therapeutic effects, particularly in the treatment of digestive and respiratory issues.

The Bugis healthcare system also includes oral traditions where knowledge of medicinal plants is passed down through generations, often within families or small communities. Elders play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting this knowledge. This tradition of oral learning ensures that the practical application of medicinal plants and spiritual practices is continuously refined and adapted to the changing needs of the community (Alfian et al., 2017). By integrating plants, rituals, and spiritual practices, traditional herbal medicine offers a holistic, preventative approach to health, emphasizing the importance of maintaining harmony between the individual and their environment.

Modern Technology in Healthcare: Precision and Innovation

Modern healthcare, by contrast, is characterized by an increasing reliance on scientific and technological advancements. Modern medicine has achieved remarkable success in treating diseases and conditions that were once considered untreatable or fatal. Innovations such as genetic testing, robotics, advanced diagnostic tools, and pharmaceutical drugs have revolutionized the way health conditions are diagnosed, treated, and managed. One of the key features of modern healthcare is its focus on precision. Technology enables healthcare providers to diagnose diseases with a level of accuracy and efficiency that was previously impossible. For instance, genetic testing allows for the identification of genetic predispositions to certain conditions, leading to personalized treatment plans that are tailored to an individual's unique genetic makeup.

Pharmaceuticals are another cornerstone of modern medicine. Through rigorous clinical trials, modern medicine has developed highly effective drugs that target specific conditions, from infections to cancer. These treatments are based on scientific research and undergo extensive testing to ensure their safety and efficacy. According to Jones et al. (2020), the growing role of evidence-based medicine allows healthcare providers to rely on data and research to make informed decisions about patient care. The development of biologics, monoclonal antibodies, and targeted therapies are just some examples of how modern medicine has harnessed technological advances to treat diseases at a molecular level.

Furthermore, technology is also enhancing patient care through digital tools such as electronic health records (EHRs), telemedicine, and wearable health devices. These technologies enable healthcare providers to monitor patients remotely, track health data in real-time, and ensure that treatments are personalized and closely monitored. The integration of these technologies has vastly improved efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility within the healthcare system.

The Intersection of Traditional Herbal Medicine and Modern Technology

Despite their apparent differences, traditional herbal medicine and modern technology are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the integration of both systems has the potential to create a more comprehensive, balanced approach to healthcare. Experts like Smith and Brown (2019) suggest that combining traditional knowledge with modern technology can enhance healthcare delivery by drawing on the strengths of both approaches. Traditional herbal medicine offers preventative care and holistic treatments that address the root causes of illness, while modern technology provides precision and advanced solutions for complex diseases.

One of the ways these two systems can work together is through research and scientific validation. Modern technology, particularly in the fields of biotechnology and pharmacology, can be used to study and validate the efficacy of traditional herbal remedies. Many plants used in traditional medicine have already been shown to contain active compounds with medicinal properties. By using modern scientific techniques, researchers can isolate these compounds, study their mechanisms of action, and determine their safety and effectiveness. This process not only helps in refining traditional remedies but also allows these natural treatments to be incorporated into evidence-based medical practices.

For instance, research into the medicinal properties of turmeric, a staple in many traditional healing systems, has revealed its powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. These findings have led to the use of turmeric in modern pharmaceutical formulations aimed at treating conditions like arthritis and digestive disorders. Similarly, ginger, another herb commonly used in traditional medicine, has been found to have anti-nausea, anti-inflammatory, and digestive benefits, which have been validated through scientific research (Ghani, 2017).

Moreover, the use of technology to preserve and disseminate traditional knowledge has become increasingly important. In communities like the Bugis, where knowledge of medicinal plants is passed down orally, modern technology can play a key role in documenting and preserving this knowledge. Digital platforms and databases can store information on medicinal plants, their uses, and cultural significance, ensuring that valuable traditional knowledge is not lost to future generations. This preservation of traditional knowledge, combined with modern technology, offers an opportunity to safeguard cultural heritage while advancing medical science.

Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Both Systems

While there are significant opportunities for integrating traditional herbal medicine with modern technology, challenges remain. One of the primary challenges is the lack of formal recognition and standardization of traditional practices. Many traditional remedies, particularly those used in indigenous communities like the Bugis, are not always documented in scientific terms, making it difficult to assess their efficacy using conventional research methods. Additionally, there may be skepticism or resistance from certain sectors of the medical community regarding the effectiveness of traditional remedies, particularly if they have not been rigorously tested through clinical trials.

However, these challenges also present opportunities for collaboration. By encouraging interdisciplinary research that includes both traditional healers and modern scientists, we can create a more inclusive and comprehensive healthcare model. Collaboration between traditional practitioners and researchers can lead to a better understanding of how traditional remedies work and how they can be optimized using modern technology. Furthermore, partnerships between healthcare providers, policymakers, and indigenous communities can help ensure that traditional knowledge is respected and integrated into national healthcare policies.

Traditional herbal medicine and modern technology offer distinct yet complementary approaches to healthcare. Traditional medicine emphasizes holistic healing, prevention, and spiritual balance, while modern technology provides precision, innovation, and evidence-based solutions for complex health issues. When combined, these

two systems can create a more comprehensive, balanced approach to healthcare that draws on the strengths of both traditions. By embracing the potential of both systems, we can foster a healthcare model that is inclusive, effective, and sustainable, benefiting individuals and communities worldwide. Integrating traditional knowledge with modern technology not only enhances the efficacy of healthcare treatments but also preserves cultural heritage and promotes a more equitable and accessible healthcare system for all

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach emphasizes understanding the experiences, perspectives, and contexts of participants, rather than measuring or quantifying specific variables. It allows researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth, capturing the richness of human behavior, emotions, and interactions. By focusing on the subjective experiences of individuals, qualitative research aims to uncover meanings and patterns that may not be immediately apparent through quantitative methods. This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, which focuses on providing a detailed and nuanced description of the subject matter, offering insights into how individuals or groups experience and interpret their world.

Research Time and Location

This first phase of research was conducted from April to December 2017. The research location is in Bila Village, Amali District, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi Province.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted using several techniques. The first method was observation, which involved gathering initial data about the traditional healthcare knowledge system of the Bila village community in the Amali sub-district of Bone Regency. This was done through a combination of reading existing texts, examining collected materials, and conducting interviews to obtain both primary and secondary data. The second method, interviews, involved directly asking informants in order to confirm data obtained from lontarak manuscripts. The steps in the interview process included selecting the interviewees, preparing key topics for discussion, initiating the interview, maintaining the flow of conversation, summarizing and concluding the interview, documenting the results in field notes, and identifying follow-up actions based on the gathered information.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was employed to examine the traditional healthcare knowledge system. This process involved tabulating and grouping data according to various types of treatments and treatment methods. The analysis also included interpreting the healthcare knowledge system and traditional treatment practices specific to the Bila Village community in the Amali Subdistrict of Bone Regency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Healthcare encompasses various forms of care, including skill-based care, behavioral care, and herb-based care, each of which plays a vital role in maintaining the well-being of individuals. Skill-based care involves the application of techniques such as massage, which aims to alleviate physical discomfort, improve circulation, and enhance relaxation. These practices are typically learned through hands-on experience and passed down through generations, ensuring that each technique is refined and adapted to the specific needs of the community. Behavioral care, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of maintaining health through cultural traditions and belief systems. This type of care is based on practices that promote healthy lifestyles, such as dietary habits, exercise routines, and other preventive measures that are deeply ingrained in the social fabric of the community. Often, these practices are not formally recognized by modern medicine but are nonetheless vital to the maintenance of health in many societies.

Herb-based care is another crucial component of healthcare that relies on natural substances for the treatment and prevention of illness. These substances can include plants, animals, and minerals, as well as the mixtures or galenic preparations derived from them. These natural remedies are typically grounded in the empirical knowledge accumulated over generations, often passed down through families or communities. The use of herbal medicine is a prime example of how traditional healing practices are closely tied to the local environment, with plants and natural resources being utilized for their known therapeutic properties. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that health maintenance and the treatment of diseases can indeed be based on knowledge, skills, and

practices derived from the beliefs, experiences, and cultural contexts of a given community. The understanding of health in traditional systems often involves a more holistic approach, which integrates the mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of the individual, and places emphasis on the balance between these aspects of life.

The WHO also acknowledges that while modern healthcare focuses primarily on disease prevention and treatment, traditional healthcare systems provide a valuable complement to these efforts by offering alternative methods that can be both preventative and curative. This integration of traditional and modern practices is particularly relevant in communities where access to advanced medical technology and pharmaceuticals is limited. In such settings, traditional health care systems often provide accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant options for maintaining health. In the Bila Village community in the Amali Sub-district of Bone Regency, Indonesia, traditional healthcare is particularly rich, rooted in generations of knowledge that include medicinal herbs, behavioral practices, and cultural beliefs. This knowledge system is not simply a set of remedies but a comprehensive approach to health that reflects the values and traditions of the community.

In Bila Village, the traditional healthcare system can be understood through three distinct yet interconnected categories. External care focuses on the health of the body's exterior, including treatments for beauty and overall appearance, such as those aimed at maintaining the health of the skin, hair, teeth, eyes, and feet. This category of care is particularly important for the prevention of external diseases, such as skin infections or issues related to hygiene, and includes practices such as herbal baths, oil massages, and the use of plant-based cosmetics. These treatments are also believed to contribute to the overall well-being of the individual, offering both physical and emotional benefits. Internal care, on the other hand, is concerned with maintaining the health of the body's internal systems. This includes remedies for digestive health, respiratory issues, and the overall functioning of the body's internal organs. The knowledge of medicinal plants in this area is particularly significant, as various herbs are used to address a wide range of internal health concerns, from stomach aches to respiratory infections. The belief in the healing power of plants is deeply embedded in the community's culture, with many remedies being prepared using locally sourced materials and passed down through generations.

Lastly, external and internal care refers to the holistic approach that addresses both the external and internal health of the body simultaneously. This integrated approach is often practiced for individuals undergoing specific life events, such as pregnancy and postpartum recovery. During these times, women in the Bila Village community receive special attention, with treatments that not only address physical health but also support spiritual and emotional well-being. Herbal remedies, massages, and dietary practices are tailored to help restore balance to the body after childbirth, and these practices often include rituals and ceremonies that help to spiritually nurture the mother. This form of care is deeply personal and culturally significant, as it incorporates both the community's medical knowledge and its spiritual beliefs.

The traditional healthcare system in Bila Village is a testament to the enduring importance of cultural practices and empirical knowledge in health management. By integrating medicinal herbs, behavioral practices, and spiritual beliefs, this system offers a holistic approach to health that provides individuals with the tools to maintain well-being in every aspect of their lives. As the world continues to evolve, and as modern healthcare systems increasingly recognize the value of traditional medicine, the health care practices in Bila Village can serve as a model of how community-based health solutions can provide meaningful and culturally appropriate care. The village's healthcare knowledge system underscores the importance of preserving traditional knowledge while embracing opportunities for collaboration with modern healthcare to ensure the health of individuals and communities in a rapidly changing world.

Herbal-Based Traditional Health Care and Healing Practices

Traditional health care involving medicinal herbs and behavioral practices focuses on the various methods and techniques within traditional healing systems that utilize herbal remedies and specific behavioral patterns. The primary emphasis of this topic is to examine the impact of herbs and daily habits on an individual's health and well-being, as well as how these practices have been utilized and embraced across different cultures throughout history.

a. Beauty Care

Traditional skin and health care methods often involve natural ingredients and remedies passed down through generations. For skin cleansing, before the advent of modern soaps, people used banana peels, both ripe and unripe, to create a charcoal that was rubbed onto the skin during bathing (Agrawal et al., 2024; Howell et al., 2024). To prepare this treatment, the banana peels were dried in the sun and burned into charcoal, which was then mixed with water and applied to the body. Another method for smoothing and brightening the skin involves the use of crushed powder, or *beddak tettuk*, which is widely used by women. This powder is made by soaking plain rice overnight, drying ingredients like turmeric, *temulawak* (Javanese ginger), and various herbs, then grinding them into a fine paste. The powder is applied to the entire body to enhance skin freshness. Alternatively, *beddak lotong*,

or black powder, is a traditional scrub that removes dead skin cells and whitens and smooths the skin. It is made from roasted rice mixed with turmeric, tamarind, and other ingredients, and applied before bathing.

b. Skin Care

For skincare, women in traditional practices have long relied on natural remedies to maintain their beauty and youthfulness. One such remedy is Fatimah grass (*Labisia pumila*), which is known for its ability to tighten the skin. The grass is dried, ground into a fine powder, and then brewed with hot water to create a tonic consumed once a week. This practice is believed to help preserve the elasticity of the skin, keeping it youthful and radiant. Similarly, in the Bugis community, lime juice mixed with bath water is used to tighten the skin and prevent signs of aging, as lime is known for its rejuvenating properties. Another common practice involves crushed starfruit, which is applied directly to the skin before bathing. Starfruit is used not only for its skin-whitening properties but also for its ability to treat conditions like ringworm or itching, offering an effective and natural solution for common dermatological issues. These treatments, while rooted in tradition, remain popular due to their affordability and accessibility, making them available to everyone in the community.

Lastly, traditional dental health treatments include the use of natural ingredients like alosi (areca nut), which is burned, ground into powder, and then applied to the teeth. The paste created from this powder is used regularly to strengthen and whiten the teeth. These ancient remedies highlight the community's deep connection to nature and the holistic care practices passed down through generations, providing natural and cost-effective solutions for health and beauty.

Healing through Behavioral Practices or Actions

The treatment methods involving care behaviors or actions encompass various aspects of health and well-being, particularly in relation to pregnancy, personal hygiene, and specific body care (Ovhal, 2024). In the context of maternity care, several traditional practices are followed to ensure the health and strength of both the mother and the child. For young pregnancies, certain taboos are observed to protect the fetus, such as avoiding durian, pineapple, and coconut water, as these foods are believed to introduce "hot air" into the stomach, potentially leading to a miscarriage. Pregnant women are also advised to eat the foods they desire, even in small amounts, to prevent the child from constantly salivating, a condition believed to be caused by the mother's refusal to satisfy her cravings during pregnancy. Additionally, various behaviors and taboos are followed to prevent miscarriage and ensure the fetus remains strong. These include the avoidance of specific foods like durian, pineapple, and coconut water, which are considered harmful in early pregnancy. These traditional practices highlight the strong connection between cultural beliefs and health care behaviors within the community. Moreover, the integration of such practices emphasizes the community's holistic approach to health, where spiritual, physical, and dietary considerations are intertwined, demonstrating the significant role that cultural knowledge plays in shaping healthcare practices.

Treatment through Medicinal Herbs and Belief Systems

In the Bila Village community of Amali Subdistrict, Bone Regency, traditional health care practices are deeply intertwined with the use of medicinal herbs and elements of faith. These treatments are designed to improve various aspects of health, including facial care, foot care, labor assistance, and underarm hygiene. For facial care, the community emphasizes preventive measures, such as applying cinoddo (dew) to the face every Friday morning while reciting Salawat, with the belief that this practice prevents acne. Acne treatments include unique behaviors, such as wetting the hand used after defecating and applying it to the face, with the intention of curing existing acne. Additionally, another acne remedy involves using the sole of the right foot on Fridays to rub the face after making a prayer and intention for healing.

In terms of foot care, the community has a tradition of using sewage water (*cemmek*) from a neighbor's house to treat cracked feet. This involves dipping the feet into the water, leaving them for a few minutes, then washing them with soap. This ritual is typically performed every Friday as part of maintaining good foot health. Labor care practices also play a significant role in the community, as they seek to make the birthing process smoother. One practice includes mixing the husband's urine with water to drink before labor, while another involves using the first water that drips from a shell during a Friday ritual, accompanied by the recitation of Salawat to ensure a smooth delivery.

Underarm care is especially emphasized for adolescents, with parents guiding their children to perform specific rituals to avoid unpleasant body odors. These rituals include bathing on Fridays and rubbing the left and right armpits on the corresponding knees while reciting Salawat. Such actions are believed to purify the body and prevent odors, ensuring social acceptance. In addition to these practices, eye and oral care are also vital in the community's health traditions. For eye health, *beru* tree sap is applied to the eyes, accompanied by a prayer for clear vision.

Similarly, to prevent bad breath, newborns undergo a ritual involving the sucking of their dried umbilical cord, with the belief that it will prevent bad breath as they grow.

These traditional health practices demonstrate the community's holistic approach to well-being, where medicinal herbs, physical actions, and spiritual elements work together. The Bila community's use of medicinal herbs—whether dried, soaked, pounded, or boiled—combined with behaviors such as rubbing, bathing, drinking, and reciting prayers, reflects a deep connection to nature and belief in the healing power of faith. Whether for preventing common ailments or supporting key life events like childbirth, these practices highlight the importance of maintaining balance between body, spirit, and environment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the traditional healthcare practices of the Bila Village community represent a unique fusion of natural remedies, cultural beliefs, and spiritual healing, providing a holistic approach to health that contrasts with modern medicine's technological precision. These practices are deeply ingrained in the daily lives of the community, serving as both preventive and therapeutic measures that are believed to maintain balance and wellness. While modern medicine has advanced through technological innovations and clinical testing, traditional medicine's emphasis on prevention, personal care, and the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being holds significant value. The potential to integrate traditional healing with modern healthcare systems offers an exciting opportunity to enhance healthcare outcomes by combining the best of both worlds. As traditional medicine continues to inform modern pharmacology and healthcare, it serves as a reminder of the power of cultural knowledge and the ongoing relevance of holistic, nature-based treatments in today's rapidly advancing medical landscape. Ultimately, both modern and traditional systems share the same goal: to improve the quality of life and promote health across communities.

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