

ECOLOGICAL METAPHORS IN THE NATONI ORAL TRADITION OF THE ATOIN METO CULTURE IN WEST TIMOR, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This research aims to reveal the richness of ecological metaphors in the *naton*i oral tradition as a local wisdom of the Atoin Meto culture in West Timor, understand the relationship between language and the environment in the Atoin Meto culture, form support for the preservation of Atoin Meto culture and language, namely the Dawan language, contribute to the field of language ecology, and increase awareness about the importance of environmental conservation. This study uses a qualitative ecolinguistic approach to analyze ecological metaphors in the *naton*i oral tradition of the Atoin Meto culture. Data comes from ten YouTube videos of *naton*i performances, supplemented by interviews. The metaphors were identified, classified, and analyzed to reflect the community's ecological worldview. The study shows that the lexicons in *naton*i contain ecological lexicons, including flora, fauna, and natural landscape. These lexicons are metaphorical languages that appear in parallelism which depict the social life of the Atoin Meto. Additionally, these lexicons indicate a close relationship with the Atoin Meto community, nature, and God. This research remains open for further study on other aspects of the ecological lexicon in *naton*i.

Keywords: Ecological metaphor, Dawan language, lexicon, *naton*i

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap kekayaan metafora ekologis dalam tradisi lisan *naton*i sebagai kearifan lokal budaya Atoin Meto di Timor Barat, memahami hubungan antara bahasa dan lingkungan dalam budaya Atoin Meto, membentuk dukungan untuk pelestarian budaya dan bahasa Atoin Meto, yakni bahasa Dawan, memberikan kontribusi pada bidang ekologi bahasa, serta meningkatkan kesadaran akan pentingnya pelestarian lingkungan. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif ekolinguistik untuk menganalisis metafora ekologis dalam tradisi lisan *naton*i dari budaya Atoin Meto. Data berasal dari sepuluh video YouTube dan dilengkapi dengan wawancara. Metafora-metafora diidentifikasi, diklasifikasikan, dan dianalisis untuk mencerminkan pandangan ekologi komunitas tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa leksikon dalam *naton*i mengandung leksikon ekologis, termasuk flora, fauna, dan lanskap alam. Leksikon-leksikon ini merupakan bahasa metaforis yang muncul dalam bentuk paralelisme yang menggambarkan kehidupan sosial masyarakat Atoin Meto. Selain itu, leksikon-leksikon ini menunjukkan hubungan yang erat antara masyarakat Atoin Meto, alam, dan Tuhan. Penelitian ini masih terbuka untuk kajian lebih lanjut mengenai aspek-aspek lain dari leksikon ekologis dalam *naton*i.

Kata Kunci: Metafora ekologis, bahasa Dawan, leksikon, *naton*i

1 INTRODUCTION

The *naton* is an oral tradition used as a medium for conveying messages in the form of poetry delivered through speech. This oral tradition belongs to the Dawan tribe, known as Atoin Meto or Timorese people in western Timor, East Nusa Tenggara. *Naton* is typically used in rituals, ceremonies, or specific occasions, such as weddings, funerals, welcoming and bidding farewell to guests, and more (Iswanto, 2020). It contains expressions related to social aspects and nature to depict life. Its existence is not only as a communication medium but also a cultural heritage that deserves preservation. *Naton* embodies values of respect, prayer, advice, brotherhood, togetherness, ethics, morals, and politeness (Benu, 2019). This indicates that the expressions found in *naton* have a close relationship with the Atoin Meto community, nature, and God, which is known in their culture as *Uis Neno* and *Uis Pah* (Boy, 2020; Liubana & Nenohai, 2021; Ibu, 2021).

Despite being a form of spoken poetry, its use is limited to specific rituals or ceremonies. The content of the verses in *naton* depends on the type of ceremony or event, such as wedding rituals, which will have very different verses or words compared to guest-welcoming ceremonies. Its existence remains preserved today, although not all Atoin Meto people can perform it because the language used in *naton* is not the common or everyday language but figurative expressions to describe something (Benu, 2022; Taneo et al., 2022). As a cultural asset, *naton* interests the general public and linguistic researchers. From a linguistic perspective, several studies focus on the sociolinguistic and cultural aspects. This indicates that *naton* is still open to studying from various linguistic aspects, including micro and macro linguistics. One field of study that can be used to analyze the lexicons in *naton* verses is ecolinguistics. It is a theory that examines the relationship between language and ecology (Stibbe, 2015; Zhou, 2021). Studying the language through the lens of ecology helps map the ecological vocabulary, identify distinct ideas about nature, and explore how these words connect to the local culture. This vocabulary reflects the abundance of animal life in the region, as well as the deep connection between the community and the natural world (Penz & Fill, 2022). Ecolinguistic studies also highlight ecological concepts such as traditional knowledge for managing resources, protecting certain animals, and recognizing the interdependence of humans and nature (Prastio et al., 2023; Abida et al., 2023).

The use of ecolinguistic theory to analyze the lexicons in *naton* verses is motivated by the focus on environmental metaphors. Metaphors offer a way of setting the unfamiliar in familiar terms by carrying over knowledge from past experiences (Falck, 2018; Bellehumeur & Carignan, 2024). Metaphors help express ideas that might be difficult to grasp independently because they rely on a specific situation or conversation (context) to clarify their meaning (Hesse, 2023). These environmental metaphor lexicons indicate the mental relationship between humans and their environment across generations and contain meanings related to the environment (Ephraim & Agwuocha, 2022). Thus, the depiction of socio-ecological changes in a society can be observed through the lexicons in its language. Metaphorical expressions, known as ecological metaphors, can explain the relationship between language and the environment (Mulyadi, 2014). This type of metaphor allows one to understand changes occurring in a language's social ecology. Olson et al. (2019) discuss the use of metaphors in ecological and evolutionary science, emphasizing that metaphors function not only as rhetorical tools but also as a way to shape our understanding of natural phenomena. Kövecses (2008) stated that understanding metaphors must involve a broader contextual analysis, including cultural values, social norms, and individual experiences, as a

critique to the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), which states that metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but also fundamental ways of thinking. According to this theory, many abstract concepts used in everyday life are understood through metaphorical structures derived from our sensory and physical experiences. However, Kövecses (2008) suggests that this theory tends to overly focus on metaphorical structures without giving sufficient attention to the cultural and social contexts in which the metaphors arise.

This research aims to identify and analyze ecological metaphors found in the oral tradition of *natoni*. These ecological metaphors use natural elements to conceptualize human experiences and abstract concepts. By studying these metaphors, a deeper understanding of the worldview of the Atoin Meto people and their relationship with the natural environment can be gained. The research also explores how the metaphoric expression in *natoni* reflects and shapes the Atoin Meto people's understanding of their environment. Ecological metaphors in the *natoni* oral tradition provide insights into how the Atoin Meto perceive nature, interact with it, and understand its place within it. Investigating these ecological metaphors contributes to documenting and analyzing an essential part of Atoin Meto culture and language, specifically the *natoni* oral tradition. This tradition is a valuable source of knowledge and cultural values, and its documentation can help preserve it for future generations. Additionally, this research contributes to ecolinguistics by providing a detailed case study on using ecological metaphors in the Dawan language. This study can help scholars understand the complex relationship between language and environment across different cultures. Finally, the findings of this research can raise awareness to the interconnection between humans and their environment by showing how Atoin Meto uses language to understand and appreciate nature. A better understanding of this relationship can motivate people to protect and preserve the environment for future generations.

Thus, the novelty offered in this research includes (1) its focus on the *natoni* oral tradition, an under-studied medium of communication with limited research on its ecological metaphors; (2) the use of a comprehensive ecolinguistic approach to analyze ecological metaphors within their cultural and environmental context; (3) the contribution to understanding the relationship between language, culture, and the environment; and (4) the potential of this research to raise awareness about the importance of cultural and environmental preservation.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ecolinguistic framework to analyze ecological metaphors in the *natoni* oral tradition of the Atoin Meto culture in West Timor, Indonesia. The ecolinguistic approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore how the language used in this tradition reflects ecological knowledge and the cultural relationship with the natural environment.

2.1.1 Data Sources

The primary data for this study were taken from ten videos of *natoni* performances uploaded on YouTube. The videos were selected based on their relevance to the research theme, specifically, *natoni* representations containing ecological metaphors. The following are the YouTube channels, video titles, and access dates.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdTCgKdPU3w>. Antosiasme tokoh adat Mollo & Amanuban menyambut pak Alfred Baun sebagai calon anggota DPR RI. Accessed on October 2, 2022.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRjDUW9K8s8&t=146s> Natoni adat masuk minta (peminangan) Timor Amanuban. Accessed on October 2, 2022.
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3z4G0le0u2c&t=44s>. Natoni adat Amanuban, Sae Toi Sanu Se'et. Accessed on October 2, 2022.
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j-x_7Cixvw. Natoni adat Timor di Kuanfatu. Accessed on October 14, 2022.
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yCGDyOBGe0>. Natoni Adat - Tae Nekaf (Kumpul Keluarga). Accessed on October 14, 2022.
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLmQ8YOEiQU>. Natoni adat Timor. Accessed on October 15, 2022.
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6XP_r8UHj8. Natoni adat Timor Tengah Selatan (TTS) Kualin. Accessed on October 30, 2022.
8. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3Rulv3XJsg>. Natoni Adat Timor. Accessed on November 5, 2022.
9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HbSjaihfY. Natoni adat. Accessed on November 5, 2022.
10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4w8k3W_c2YM. Sapaan Natoni Bagi Tim Unibraw Malang. Accessed on November 5, 2022.

Using videos from ten YouTube channels allows data triangulation, strengthening the validity of the findings. The transcription process was conducted meticulously, while the identification of metaphors was confirmed with additional sources, namely two *Atonis* (*natoni* chanter) and two elders, to ensure reliability (Benu, 2022). Cross-checking with relevant literature was also performed to enhance the interpretive strength. The researcher believes this methodological approach enables a more in-depth understanding of how ecological metaphors in the *natoni* as an oral tradition convey the ecological awareness of the Atoin Meto community and how these metaphors contribute to their cultural identity.

2.1.2 Data Collection

The data collection process included the following steps:

1. Videos were selected based on the completeness of *natoni* performances, audio-visual clarity, and the presence of elements relevant to the ecological theme. The selected videos displayed significant cultural and environmental contexts.
2. The verbal content of these videos was transcribed in detail. Each *natoni* performance was documented to capture the full linguistic nuances, particularly on metaphorical expressions related to nature and the environment.
3. Besides the verbal content, supplementary information such as the identity of *natoni* performers, event contexts, and cultural meanings presented in the video descriptions or user comments was also gathered to support further analysis.

2.1.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out through the following stages:

1. The transcribed texts from the *naton*i videos were carefully examined to identify metaphors related to nature, animals, plants, and the environment. These metaphors were highlighted for in-depth analysis.
2. The identified metaphors were then classified using the conceptual metaphor theory of Kövecses (2008). The classification included several types, such as orientational, structural, and ontological metaphors.
3. The classified metaphors were analyzed using an ecolinguistic approach to understand how they reflect the worldview of the Atoin Meto people toward their environment. This analysis aimed to comprehend how language conveys ecological knowledge and societal interactions with the natural surroundings.
4. To deepen the analysis, the ecological metaphors were interpreted within the cultural, social, and environmental contexts of the Atoin Meto community. Secondary literature on the culture, history, and ecology of West Timor was used to enrich the context and explain the relationship between metaphor use and the community's ecological practices.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

This section discusses the findings regarding the presence of ecological metaphors in the verses of *naton*i speeches, along with their meanings. Both aspects will be discussed together in this section to avoid repetitive analysis. Observations show that the ecological lexicons in *naton*i verses do not stand alone but always appear in the form of parallel phrases or nominal phrases. For example, *pena? ma ?boko* 'corn and pumpkin', *kolo ma manu* 'bird and chicken', *hu mate Kopan* 'Kupang with green grass', *tua? in helin* 'palm tree sap', and so on. The collected lexicons include flora, fauna, and those related to nature or the environment.

Please note that in this article, the symbol /ʔ/ is used to indicate a glottal sound. This sound is very productive in the Dawan language, at least in the data found in this study. This glottal sound can occur in various positions in a word. For example, *pena?* = corn; *?naek* = big; *no?al* = loose/loosen; *?letu?* = padlock. To clarify, there is a difference in meaning between a word with /ʔ/ and the same word without /ʔ/. For example, *manu* = chicken vs. *manu?* = hard, *hae nua?* = two-legged vs. *hae? nua?* = two times / twice. There is no agreement on the use of the ? symbol for the glottal sound, so there are differences in the orthographic use of this sound. Some of the literature on Dawan language uses a variety of symbols for this glottal sound, namely ['], [q], and [ʔ]. To date, however, no research has specifically discussed the existence of glottal sounds, including the symbols used in the Dawan language.

3.1.1 Lexicons of Flora

The collected data shows there are 18 metaphor expressions using flora lexicons in *naton*i. The use of flora metaphors by the Atoin Meto people is widespread, not only in *naton*i but also in everyday formal communication. Botanical metaphors are the primary and common language for describing relationships and processes among the Atoin Meto people. These descriptions are also imbued with religious, ethical, and respectful values. The metaphoric expression of *pena? ma*

ꦂꦧꦺꦴ represents the family lineage, such as an expression of gratitude as found in the phrase *au penaꦂ ma ꦂꦧꦺꦴ nasufam nafuaꦂ* which means ‘my corn and pumpkin bloom and bear fruit’. The combination of these lexicons can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Lexicons of Flora

No	Expression	Literal Meaning
1	<i>penaꦂ ma ꦂꦧꦺꦴ</i>	corn and pumpkin
2	<i>uki ma tefu</i>	banana and sugarcane
3	<i>puah ma manus</i>	areca nut and betel leaf
4	<i>hit leno ma hiti muke</i>	orange and lime
5	<i>pua manasi manu mnasi</i>	old areca nut and old betel leaf
6	<i>pua makuke maun makuke</i>	young areca nut and young betel leaf
7	<i>tefu ꦂfenu tuakenu</i>	the owner of sugarcane and candlenut
8	<i>uik lua pulu tua kenu</i>	the owner of large bananas
9	<i>uik liꦂꦠ tua kenu</i>	the owner of small bananas
10	<i>pen liꦂꦠ tua kenu</i>	the owner of a small corn
11	<i>hu mate Kopan</i>	Kupang with green grass
12	<i>tuaꦂ in helin</i>	palm tree sap
13	<i>abas nonot naleok</i>	cotton
14	<i>uf ma tunaf</i>	base and tip
15	<i>uf ma sufan</i>	base and flower
16	<i>uf ma tlaef</i>	base and branch
17	<i>sufaꦂ ma kaꦂuf</i>	flower and pollen
18	<i>suf muni</i>	young flower

In addition to *penaꦂ ma ꦂꦧꦺꦴ*, there is also *uki ma tefu*, which is used as a depiction of food sufficiency, as seen in *nak tefu ꦂfenu tuakenum uiskenu*, *uik lua pulu tuakenum ne... uiskenu nok uik lua liꦂꦠ tuakenum uiskenu pen liꦂꦠ tuakenum ne... uiskenu* ‘the lord and owner of sugarcane and candlenut, the lord and owner of large bananas, the lord and owner of hybrid bananas, and the lord and owner of hybrid corn’. The expression in the above sentence indicates that these lexicons represent food sufficiency and prosperity.



Figure 1. ꦂꦺꦤꦸ ‘candlenut’ and ꦏꦶꦸ ‘tamarind’

The term *ʔfenu* ‘candlenut’ (*aleurites moluccana*) refers to a tree that significantly contributes to the Atoin Meto economy, along with other trees like *kiu* ‘tamarind’. The *ʔfenu* and *kiu* are often called *hau loit* ‘trees of money’. The natural environment of the Atoin Meto contains many non-cultivated tree species in the forest, providing various needs for the local community, including medicines and dyes, firewood, fencing materials, food, and agricultural tools.



Figure 2. Noah ‘coconut’, puah ‘areca nut’, dan tuaʔ ‘palm tree’

One metaphorical expression about the city of Kupang is mentioned in the *naton*i of welcoming and sending off guests, *hu mate Kopan* ‘Kupang with green grass’. The phrase *hu mate* depicts the availability of food sources and pleasure as the symbol of prosperity in Kupang. Other lexicons in *naton*i are *noah* ‘coconut’, *puah* ‘areca nut’, and *tuaʔ* ‘palm tree’, which are representations of the community's sources of life. The lexicons *noah*, *puah*, and *tuaʔ*, which are widespread, serve as food sources and trade commodities. These trees, from the trunk, leaves, and fruits, can be utilized entirely, producing various products. The trunks are useful when split for building needs, and the leaves serve as roofing. The leaves of *tuaʔ* are highly versatile, not only as roofing but also as buckets, mats, baskets, winnowing trays, and more. The sap of *tuaʔ* is used not only for sugar but also for *lalu*, a natural fermentation product of palm sap. Just like the *puah* and *manus*, *lalu* also plays a significant role in Atoin Meto culture, known by the expression *tuaʔ botil mese* ‘a bottle of *tuaʔ*’ in discussions or negotiations. Thus, *noah*, *puah*, and *tuaʔ* hold economic and cultural values.

An exciting aspect is commonly found in *naton*i verses during wedding ceremonies that describe the kinship and social relations of the Atoin Meto people. The Atoin Meto's social life is depicted as the life cycle of a tree, from the growth of the trunk, flowering, fruiting, decaying, and regrowing. This kinship is portrayed as a tree consisting of *uf* ‘base’, *sbaken* ‘branch’, *tlaef* ‘twig’, *sufa* ‘flower’, and *fuan/fuaf* ‘fruit’. The general term for a tree in the Dawan language is *hau*. Metaphorical expressions like *uf ma tunaf* ‘base and tip’, *uf ma sufa* ‘base and flower’, *uf ma tlaef* ‘base and twig’, and *sufa ma kaʔuf* ‘flower and pollen’ are used to describe social relations in the Atoin Meto community. McWilliam (2009) sees the use of the asymmetric metaphor *uf ma*

tunaf as depicting the archetype of virtue. The *uf* is not only superior to *tunaf* but also precedes *tunaf* in terms of distance (spatial) and time (temporal).



Figure 3. Tree of life as representation of kinship and social relation

The metaphors of *uf ma tunaf*, *uf ma sufan*, and *sufa ma kaʔuf* are paired categories (parallelism) representing complementary elements of social life. The core idea of the relationship between paired terms is the notion of asymmetry, where one element holds a higher status than its complement. In this context, the term *uf* or base, trunk, stem, or origin is assigned a higher value concerning its complement *tunaf*. McWilliam (2009) also argues that the specific application of this dualism in different social contexts provides a basis for Atoin Meto's collective representation of priorities and the tendency to classify social and political relationships in distinct or asymmetric terms.

Lexicons related to trees form a division between opposing groups (dichotomy) and are instructive due to their application in various domains of meaning in Atoin Meto's social and cultural life. The use of metaphors in the Dawan language has wide appeal in Atoin Meto society, giving particular distinctions as one of the main ways to emphasize seniority in social and political matters, both individual and group. The division of trees into *uf ma tunaf*, *uf ma tlaef*, *uf ma sufa*, and *sufa ma kaʔuf* does not imply that one part is more important or better but should be seen as one of several central paired categories that function to distinguish social relationships and are highly dependent on context and circumstances.

The metaphorical expression of *puah ma manus* as a symbol of kinship is practiced as a cultural custom in the lives of the indigenous people. The lexicons *puah* 'areca nut' and *manus* 'betel' play an important role in the social life of the Atoin Meto people. The Atoin Meto have a habit of chewing *puah* and *manus* mixed with *ao* 'lime' and some people add *sbot* 'tobacco'. This habit is called *mamat*, similar to drinking coffee, smoking, drinking tea, or eating while entertaining friends or relatives. The practice of *mamat* is a medium for opening cultural conversations in Atoin Meto society. Additionally, *puah ma manus* is a symbolic language in certain ceremonies or rituals. In certain conditions, *puah ma manus* serves as a medium for solving a problem or in political communication. In traditional rituals such as weddings, the terms *pua mnasi ma manu mnasi* 'old areca nut and old betel' and *pua makuke ma maun makuke* 'young areca nut and young betel' are used. The metaphor of *puah mnasi manu mnasi* signifies respect

for the bride's parents as those who gave birth to, cared for, and raised her, known in the Dawan language as *alikit ape?et* 'the one who incubates and the one who breaks'. Meanwhile, *puah makuke maun makuke* symbolizes a request for permission from the bride's parents if they are not yet able to fulfil *pua mnasi ma manu mnasi*, allowing the couple to *natofab sin lene ma nahelib sin tua?* 'makes them work in the fields and tap palm wine'. If later *lene na mak* 'the field bears harvest' and *tua? naoe* 'the palm tree produces sap', or until the couple can afford it from their efforts, then the *puah mnasi manu mnasi* ceremony can be held.



Figure 4. *Puah* 'areca nut', *manus* 'betel', *ao* 'lime', and *shot* 'tobacco'

Thus, *puah ma manus* is essential in its denotative meaning and as a metaphor in Atoin Meto culture. This is why the metaphor *puah ma manus* always appears in *natoni* verses. These metaphors depict relationships and cultural wisdom conventionally associated with social contexts and various rituals. Trees and their parts in Atoin Meto life reveal that human relationships are inherently asymmetric, relatively unequal but complementary. Using metaphors in *natoni* verses illustrates social, political, and economic life and the vertical relationship with *Uis Neno*, the Creator.

3.1.2 Lexicons of Fauna

The fauna lexicons in *natoni* verses are limited to *kolo ma manu* 'bird and chicken'. The lexicon connotatively refers to people or descendants of a person or clan. For example, the phrase *ho to ho tafa ho kolo ma ho manu* is translated literally as 'your people, your bird, and your chicken', referring to humans and animals.



Figure 5. *Kolo ma manu* 'bird and chicken'

Observed data shows that no other animals, besides chickens and birds, are specifically mentioned but are always referred to with the lexicon *pusuf* which refers to pets. As in the sentence *maut he na tnana sini ma nakesib sin he nati pusuf hae nua ma pusuf hae ha kaisa teli ma ntanhai sin* 'let us put them in the middle and keep them carefully so that does not get stepped on or violated by two-legged and four-legged pets'. Perhaps another reason for not directly mentioning pet names is related to the cultural etiquette of not saying *asu* 'dog' or *fafi* 'pig' in front of guests or others. Social etiquette reasons have become important to maintain, not only for religious norms but also for health values. These metaphorical expressions contain educational and social communication values that are important to study and preserve because they can help enhance the understanding of Atoin Meto culture and improve social communication and interaction among individuals.

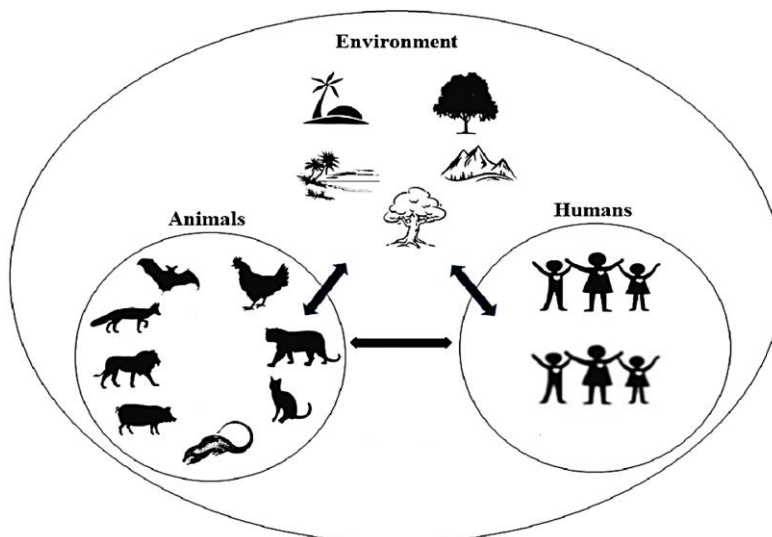


Figure 6. Relationship between human and nature

These expressions indicate that *naton*i verses contain educational values about fauna and the society's culture. Using the lexicon *kolo ma manu* 'bird and chicken' to refer to people and pets, in general, can help children understand the relationship between humans and nature and the importance of caring for animals. The sentence *maut he na tnana sini ma nakesib sin he nati pusuf hae nua ma pusuf hae ha kaisa teli ma ntanhai sin* 'let us put them in the middle and keep them carefully so that does not get stepped on or violated by two-legged and four-legged pets' educates about the importance of cleanliness and health. These expressions demonstrate how language can convey moral messages and cultural values to future generations. From the aspect of social communication, these expressions show how language is used to build communication and social interaction within the Atoin Meto community. Using lexicons *kolo ma manu* and *pusuf* demonstrates the ability of Atoin Meto society to use language creatively and effectively. These metaphorical expressions also show how language can convey moral messages and cultural values to others. Understanding the meaning of metaphors in *naton*i verses can help improve communication and social interaction among individuals in Atoin Meto society. Punter (2007) cites Derrida's opinion that metaphors are deeply ingrained in language change, so this needs to be understood for communication purposes. Therefore, he concludes that metaphors are not something to be tested for truth but inherited as cultural wealth.

3.1.3 Lexicons of Natural Landscape

In addition to the flora and fauna data mentioned above, there are lexicons related to natural landscape. The opening sentence in *naton*i is *lasi man apinat neon aklahat on he mausi kai matua kai maama kai mne... maena kai* which literally means '(you are) the burning sun, (you are) the blazing day, we want to worship and serve, be a father... be a mother (to you)'. This expression shows a high level of respect for the interlocutor. This sentence seems to be a standard pattern in the structure of *naton*i. In addition to *man apinat neon aklahat*, which always becomes the opening sentence, other lexicons refer to natural environment. These lexicons have hyperbolic, euphemistic, or elliptical meanings, such as *sonaf ma pano* 'palace and castle', *pah ma nifu* 'earth and lake', *o?of ma tilu* 'pen and cage', and *kuan ma bale* 'village and place'. These expressions can be seen in the excerpt of *naton*i verse: *...au utninat mapaham ma nifu kitim makua am mabale kit... '... I feel we have earth (land) and lake (water) and have a village and place'*. Another sentence is *...es hai on he mausi kai matua kai neu hai uisfenu mbi sonaf inanan ma pano ne... in ananan* 'so we want to worship and serve (to you) to our kings in the palace and the cage'.



Figure 7. *pah ma nifu* 'earth and lake' and *kuan ma bale* 'village and place'

The metaphorical expressions *pah ma nifu* and *kuan ma bale* refer to the residence of the person being addressed, while *sonaf ma pano* refers to the residence. In Atoin Meto culture, using such words aims to maintain etiquette in communication. For instance, it is impolite to ask *ho ume es me?* ‘Where is your house?’ but *ume* ‘house’ must be replaced with *sonaf* ‘palace’ as *ho sonfa es me?* ‘Where is your palace?’. Note that the word *sonaf* which changes to *sonfa* is a process of metathesis in the Dawan language; it is purely phonological, not semantic (Benu et al., 2023). The lexicon *sonaf* in this context also has meaning, value, and usefulness similar to the existence of traditional houses in general. Therefore, the use of *sonaf* instead of *ume* contains socio-economic, religious, and socio-political values and benefits (Manafe, 2016).

In Atoin Meto culture, the metaphorical expression *pah ma nifu* symbolizes life, fertility, and prosperity. This depiction reflects the close relationship of the Atoin Meto people with nature, where the earth and lake become natural resources supporting life and promising abundance. This metaphor also symbolizes the fertility of the land, enabling bountiful harvests and prosperity for the community. On the other hand, *sonaf ma pano* emerges as a metaphor representing community, identity, and security. The village represents a residence where families and ancestors dwell, building a sense of unity and collective identity. This metaphor also emphasizes the importance of a sense of security and protection within the community, creating a conducive environment for development and happiness.

The use of these metaphors is not just an aesthetic expression but reflects deep values and philosophies held by the Atoin Meto people. Life, community, and meaning are closely intertwined in these metaphors, showing the relationship between humans and nature. Understanding the meaning of the metaphors *pah ma nifu* and *kuan ma bale* helps open the door to a deeper understanding of Atoin Meto culture. This is not just about words but also about values, beliefs, and ways of life embedded in the society. Studying these metaphors can help bridge cultural gaps, increase empathy and respect for other cultures, and foster dialogue among individuals and groups (Subagiharti et al., 2023). By understanding the meaning of these metaphors, we can build stronger relationships with nature and enrich the Timorese understanding of the world around them.

4 Discussion

Metaphor is a fascinating linguistic phenomenon that can be examined from an ecolinguistic perspective. Ecolinguistics studies the relationship between language and environment, including how humans use language to understand and interact with their surroundings. Kravchenko (2016) explains that the focus of ecolinguistics has shifted to exploring how language acts as an organizing principle of society (life systems). Thus, this perspective examines how language influences the development of the brain, mind, and even environmental self-awareness (Neilson, 2018). Metaphors, with their ability to bridge different concepts, play a crucial role in this context.

Metaphors in ecolinguistics can be used for various purposes, such as helping to understand complex ecological concepts by linking them to more familiar concepts from daily experiences (Abida et al., 2023). Metaphors can also effectively and engagingly communicate environmental messages to the broader public, such as *pah ma nifu*, describing the close relationship between humans and the earth. Additionally, metaphors used in *naton* can raise public awareness about social issues, such as *kolo ma manu* ‘bird and chicken’. Regarding social structure, *kolo ma manu* are ordinary people who work as farmers or livestock herders (Arvianto & Kharisma, 2021). Using *kolo ma manu* metaphorically depicts high social relations and

encompasses economic, educational, and spiritual values (Fina, 2014). According to Humane Society International (2014), birds and chickens symbolize good social relations compared to other animals. Anderson (2024) also states that birds or chickens are considered highly social animals because they always live in groups. The characteristics and the social relationships of birds and chickens are seen as something humans should emulate because good social skills with others can make all activities easier (Anderson, 2024). Chickens are crucial animals, and their existence is essential because economically, chickens benefit humans (Prabowo et al., 2023). In this context, the metaphor of *kolo ma manu* shows that humans can see the good side and that everyone should grow well to benefit others and make life more meaningful. The metaphorical expression of *au kolo ma au manu* ‘my birds and my chickens’ also emphasizes ownership within the group as protectors to symbolize authority that provides protection and the best form of love.

Metaphors, like guiding lights, help one navigate unfamiliar worlds using maps they already understand. Nevertheless, Olson et al (2019) emphasized that this approach opens the gates of creativity and allows for abundant interpretations, sparking new ideas and refreshing our understanding. However, the flexibility of metaphors can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, metaphors free individuals from the constraints of literal language, allowing them to express complex ideas more understandably and memorably. Metaphors in ecological lexicons in *naton*i help understand various aspects of life, enriching language and fostering creative thinking. On the other hand, the flexibility of metaphors can lead to misinterpretation and ambiguity. Over time, the meanings and uses of metaphors can evolve and become blurred, potentially obscuring their original meanings due to changes in the living environment of the Atoin Meto people. For example, the expression *hu mate Kopan* ‘green grass Kupang’ in *naton*i for welcoming guests can encourage excessive urbanization, ultimately impacting social and economic life. Kupang is perceived as more economically promising than life in the village. Furthermore, metaphors used excessively can become clichés and lose their impact. Repeated use of the same metaphor can make communication ineffective and limit understanding. Therefore, it is essential to use metaphors carefully and wisely, considering the context and purpose of the communication.

Thus, metaphors are powerful tools for understanding and expressing complex ideas. However, it is crucial to carefully recognise and use their limitations to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguity. Introducing these ecological metaphors widely to the public, such as through the education sector (Yuniawan et al., 2023; Roe et al., 2023), not only helps prevent ambiguity but also promotes environmental conservation. Balancing flexibility and precision of meaning is key to effectively utilizing metaphors. Therefore, the context, type of metaphors, and purpose of communication need to be considered. The meaning of a metaphor can be significantly influenced by the context in which it is used (Taneo et al., 2022). Understanding the context helps interpret the metaphor more accurately. Different types of metaphors have different characteristics and potential for ambiguity. Understanding the type of metaphor helps identify potential misunderstandings. Meanwhile, the purpose of using a metaphor affects how it is interpreted. Understanding the purpose of the communication helps determine whether the metaphor is used appropriately and effectively. By considering these points and analyzing these metaphors, one can gain insights into how the Atoin Meto people view their relationship with the environment and how their language, particularly the lexicon used in *naton*i, embodies this complex connection. Ecological metaphors, figurative expressions utilizing elements from the natural world to conceptualize abstract ideas, provide a glimpse into a culture's ecological awareness.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, we can conclude that the *naton* oral tradition in Atoin Meto culture contains ecological metaphor lexicons, including flora, fauna, and the natural landscape. These metaphorical lexicons and expressions are in the form of parallel repetition phrases and nominal phrases. The use of these lexicons depends on the speech events of *naton*; for example, *naton* for a wedding ceremony will be different from that for welcoming guests. The lexicons used also vary from one speaker to another. Using metaphors in *naton* has cultural significance as it encompasses local wisdom that must be preserved in the Atoin Meto community. It is also found that the metaphoric expression in *naton* reflects and shapes the Atoin Meto people's understanding of their environment. It provides insights into how the Atoin Meto people perceive nature, interact with it, and understand its place within it. This tradition is a valuable source of knowledge and cultural values, and its documentation can help preserve *naton* for future generations. The metaphorical lexicons and expressions found in *naton* can raise an awareness of how deep the connection between humans and their environment. Besides, that metaphorical expression can motivate the Atoin Meto people to protect and preserve their environment for future generations. Therefore, preserving *naton* is a mandatory duty that future generations will inherit.

This study is focused on the metaphorical ecology of lexicons and expressions in the *naton* within the ecolinguistic framework. Therefore, research on this topic remains open for further examination, especially regarding the perceptions and understanding of the community, particularly the youth, towards these metaphors. Additionally, regional or environmental differences of the Atoin Meto correlate with the use of ecological metaphors to describe their environment. It is also essential to study the presence of these lexicons in the social practices of contemporary society.

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