



### THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC POSITION OF PALEMBANG RELIGIOUS POETRY

*Posisi Sociolinguistik dari Puisi Rohani Bahasa Palembang*

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#### Abstract

This article examines the sociolinguistic position of Palembang religious poetry in the Palembang speech community in South Sumatra, Indonesia. The Palembang language is unique in that it is used as a language of wider communication and listed as level 3 on EGIDS, yet it does not have an official writing system. Until this study, no academic research on Palembang religious poetry had ever been conducted. This research examines the use of Palembang religious poetry by Palembang people. Ethnographic research methods were employed, and poets and poetry users from various backgrounds and ages were interviewed. Palembang traditional poetry called pantun is also discussed. Findings reveal the origins and the types of religious poetry. Research highlights five poems: three autogenic poems and two translated poems. Three poems are considered spoken poetry and two poems are sung. Poets and poetry users of Palembang religious poetry in this research consist of four men and three women ranging from 25-65 years of age. There are examples of Palembang religious poetry undergoing language shift but it is clear that poetry has strong connections to ethnic identity and language pride.

## INTRODUCTION

Palembang is an Austronesian-Malay language spoken in South Sumatra Province of Indonesia. It is listed as Musi in the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2022). Palembang is an alternate name for Musi, along with Baso Palembang, Palembangnese, and Sekayu. Research shows that Musi and Palembang are actually two linked subgroups of the Musi cluster in the Southern Malayic dialects (McDowell, 2007, p. 18). This means that they are mutually intelligible dialects. However, since 'Palembang' is the name that is most commonly used for the language by its speakers (Alsamadani & Taibah, 2019). The term Palembang will be used in this study for the name of the language and of the people who speak Palembang as their first language.

In terms of vitality, the language is rated a 3 on the EGIDS scale (Eberhard et al., 2022). The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) evaluates a language concerning its identity function, vehicularity, state of intergenerational language transmission, literacy acquisition status, and a societal profile of generational language use (Lewis & Simons, 2009 [Abstract]). Palembang at level 3 on the EGIDS scale also means that the language is used for trading or intergroup communication by speakers of other languages (Lewis & Simons, 2009, p. 12). This reflects the fact that Palembang is used by different language groups around the area of Palembang City, which is located in South Sumatra Province, as a way to communicate with each other.

The Ethnologue shows that Palembang is still unwritten (Eberhard et al., 2022). Palembang does not have an official written orthography. People text each other using the WhatsApp application or other applications using Palembang as part of their creative writing systems. Educational and religious materials are written in Indonesian using the Roman script. People prefer Palembang because of its cultural stories and songs. Palembang people use Palembang with Indonesian orthography for formal purposes and for writing poems in Palembang. Other Palembang people use different orthography in their poems, but it is not yet publicized. There is definitely a need for an official orthography in Palembang.

Palembang City is the oldest city in the Indonesian archipelago, approximately 1326 years old (Samiha et al., 2020). It has a long history of being the centre of several administrative leaderships including the spread of religion. This section will elaborate on the religions that were developed in Palembang and the surrounding area in South Sumatra, namely Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Christianity, as well as other local beliefs and the current situation. It is necessary to clearly explain the term “Religious Poetry” clearly to understand better what is being investigated. This research uses Scheindlin (1994, p. 112) definition, which classified religious poetry into the following categories: (1) Wisdom-type poems of instruction; (2) Theoretical statements about the nature of the mystic’s religious experience; (3) Personal statements purporting to describe a particular mystic’s religious experience; and (4) Prayers.

Furthermore, Scheindlin explains that “There is some mixing of categories, particularly inasmuch as theoretical poems and poems of personal experience sometimes end with a brief prayer.” This study is the first academic research ever conducted concerning Palembang religious poetry. The use of Palembang religious poetry by Palembang people was previously unknown. The majority of the people in South Sumatra are Sunni Muslims with a few Christians (Kartomi, 2012, p. 146). Many of the Sufi-oriented Sunni Muslim communities are influenced by the ancestral spirit world, as well as the Muslim doctrine of souls (*jin*). However, the strictly monotheistic and fundamentalist Muslims reject Sufi and other mysticism and all the mystical rituals and arts. The people living in the coastal area base their cultural identity on believing in the ancestral sea and beach deities. The people on the mainland believe in local ancestral and forest spirits. The Hakka and Hokkien (the Chinese sub-groups) Peranakan people in Bangka (another area in South Sumatera) honor the deities of their ancestors, especially the goddess Kwan Yin, protectress at sea. The succession of the Dutch and Indonesian authorities to convert these people to Islam or Christianity and settle them in government-built houses was mostly resisted efforts by the people.

Few linguistic studies have been conducted on the Palembang language. Moreover, of the few that have been written, they have been written in either English or Indonesian. No academic research on Palembang religious poetry has ever been conducted. The following sections are some academic works that have been written in Indonesian and English.

Alsamadani and Taibah (2019) explore reduplication in Palembang and compare certain grammatical features with the features of Standard Indonesian and Riau Indonesian. The study observes that Palembang is understudied in comparison to other Malayic languages.

Afriani (2019) writes a paper investigating politeness strategies and the use of directives by native Palembang speakers. The study identifies politeness strategies and examines the reasons for the speaker to choose such strategies in making directives. The paper identifies the implications for university teaching and learning.

Andriyani et al. write a study of Palembang’s local wisdom, focusing on “Dulmuluk Theater”, a play developed in Palembang (2019). The authors mention a poem that is sung at a performance in the play to tell the audience that the show will soon begin. According to Andriyani (2019, p. 28), the performance will begin by singing a poem or a pantoum as an

opening “beremas”. It was a form of greeting to the host who held the celebration and to the audience. The word “pantom” originated from Malay, which was adapted by a French poet and then imitated in English. However, it is slightly different from what is understood by the Indonesians as “pantun”. Pantun in Indonesian will be explained more in Chapter 6. Andriyani stated that the purpose of “beremas” was to tell the audience that the show would begin soon. There is no explanation about the origin of the term “beremas” in Palembang. There are other meanings in Indonesian and other languages in Indonesia, but they are not the same as what is conveyed in the “Dulmuluk Theater”. Andriyani also explained the rituals that used to be done before starting the play (2019, pp. 28–29) and the religious values in the story (2019, p. 31).

Zulhidayati et al. (2018) write about how local Palembang poetry evolved into a well-known theater performance, which people usually have in formal celebrations. It is said that the ‘Dulmuluk theater’ began with Abdul Muluk’s poetry reading in public in 1854. The poem reading then evolved into a theater, which the Japanese government used as a propaganda tool. At that time, the play was presented in a comedy form.

Hanawalt (2012) writes about a bilingualism survey tool and the results of using it in select communities in Indonesia. The research includes rural minority language communities in the South Sumatra area, specifically in the language communities in Musi Malay cluster and Central Malay cluster. Kartomi (2012) analyzes the music played by different people groups on Sumatra Island and discusses local musical instruments. The author also provides the historical sociolinguistic background of the Palembang people and other groups in South Sumatra. The review describes how this history affected Palembang and other South Sumatra music and art. Included in Kartomi’s discussion are some songs from people groups in South Sumatra. Susilawati (2010) writes about how Palembang deals with language change in Palembang city. She explained how Palembang evolved into two varieties in Palembang city. She also explained how Palembang is used actively by the Palembang people, and how they are even proud to use Palembang in regional media. Amin et al. (2010) wrote a grammar and dictionary of Palembang. Hanafiah (2009), as cited in Susilawati (2010), wrote about different ways of Palembang people using Palembang in local newspapers, radio programs, and national television programs. His paper was concerned with the use of indigenous language as the people’s identity. The local newspapers is most possibly use the Indonesian orthography.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Ethnographic research methods were employed to investigate the sociolinguistic position of Palembang Poetry. The guidelines for research methodology were provided by grounded theory, which offers flexibility in helping ethnographers collect and analyze data. Variants of grounded theory involve the following strategies (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 160): (1) Simultaneous data collection and analysis; (2) Pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis; (3) Discovery of basic social processes within the data; (4) Inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes; and (5) Integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes.

The data was collected from native Palembang speakers, ages 25-61, both male and female, who were available to participate in the research. Local poetry users were identified through local poets. Both poets and poetry users were interviewed using grand tour questions according to Spradley (2016) and structured interviews. All participants consented to be interviewed and the research was approved by Payap University’s IRB ethics review committee.

The interviews were conducted in approximately one hour. The shortest interview was completed in one-half hour because the participant was very focused on answering questions

according to the questionnaire. The longest interview was completed in two hours. In total, four Palembang poets and three Palembang poetry users were interviewed. During the interviews, the researcher purposefully allowed the participants to share their ideas and stories, which gave the researcher additional insight and opportunities to ask questions not included in the questionnaire. At first, the researcher wrote down notes of interest that were mentioned by the participants while recording. After a while, the researcher simply focused on the participants and questions.

Following the interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions to some participants using WhatsApp. At first, some questions from the questionnaire did not give enough specific information pertaining to research that was already collected and addressing information given by the participants. As a result, the researcher revised the questionnaire accordingly to address what the researcher expected should happen at the interview, especially since it was more challenging to ask follow-up questions by WhatsApp. However, continuing the conversation via WhatsApp or online was inevitable, since several of the participants could not remember poems or experiences that they had written or had in the past. During initial meetings with participants, all of them were polite and helpful throughout the interviews. Even though some questions remained unanswered, the collected data was more than enough for analysis in this paper.

Due to the Covid-19 situation, there were some social distancing considerations in doing the recording. The recordings were made in a quiet place, either in the open air or in a room with air conditioning. There were more noises, which may have impacted the quality of the recordings but were not enough to hinder the study. Traveling to places to find local Palembang artists was limited, and so it is possible that fewer artists were found to be participants in this study. There is a debate among the locals about whether a poem is considered religious or not, depending on their religious background and also how they view things that are considered religious. However, a poem will be classified as religious when the majority of the informants consider that poem to be religious.

All data were collected and analyzed in Palembang City, the capital of South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder (zoom H1n) in a quiet place. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian at the interviewees' houses or at agreed upon locations such as a coffee shop. The interviews were transcribed into the computer and data was backed up on a personal computer, an external hard drive, and on Google Drive.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The Palembang people use Palembang in their daily lives in informal settings, along with Indonesian in formal settings. Palembang is considered an informal language, which means it has a lower status than the national language. When meeting some local residents to find my participants, they said that Palembang is a language that people use to joke with one another. Therefore, the language is not appropriate for poetry. When meeting several local Palembang cultural advocates, they acknowledged that they knew of no poems in Palembang. The absence of known poetry reinforces the attitude shared by some Palembang people who believe that Palembang cannot be used in poetry because it is not prestigious enough for this art form. However, after interviewing many Palembang people, the findings clearly reveal the existence of Palembang religious poetry.

### **The Origins of Palembang Religious Poetry**

#### ***Autogenic Poetry***

Saurman coined the term "Autogenic" to refer to the process of creating songs within a music system that is perceived as from one's own culture (T. W. Saurman, 2013, p. 11).

Palembang religious poems, that are made by local poets, can be called autogenic. The following writing details autogenic Palembang religious poetry.

Vebri is a local Palembang artist, who advocates the preservation of Palembang language and culture. Vebri mentioned an autogenic lullaby song called *Nenggung Mato* ‘A Song for the Eyes’ (personal communication, May 31, 2021). Sometimes, the song can also be called “Nenggung”. In the past, the song was used to put a child to sleep. According to Vebri, this song’s lyrics can vary depending on the user. By singing the song, the singer hopes that his or her child can go to sleep easily. The song lyrics consist of prayer, advice, and hope for the child. However, it will always start with a part of the Islamic oath, the *syahadah* “Shahada”, which is the Muslim declaration of belief to acknowledge the oneness of their God and Muhammad as His prophet. However, the opening lyrics can also be varied, as well as the lyrics in the body of the song – depending on the singer.

Anto is a Palembang poet who has been writing poems in Palembang and in Indonesian for many years (personal communication, May 26, 2021). He has been writing poems since he was young. He also has attended workshops with other Indonesian poets. Anto wrote a religious poem in Palembang, *Sekepeng Wayang*, ‘A Piece of Shadow Puppet’ in October 1997. He plans to include the poem in a book or poetry.

Randi is the successor of the “Dulmuluk Theater” play (personal communication, June 11, 2021). The “Dulmuluk Theater” has been managed by his family since his grandfather’s time, and now Randi is in charge of leading the play. “Dulmuluk Theater” is a local performing art that is quite well-known among residents of Palembang City and other places in South Sumatra Province. This traditional art is often performed on stage at weddings and other local events, as well as in local television programs or provincial television programs. Usually, “Dulmuluk theater” will be performed using both the Malay language and the local language. The local language will be used to express comical elements in contrast to the main dialogue. In Palembang city and other nearby areas, the local language used for such theater is Palembang. There are other groups that run the “Dulmuluk Theater” and Randi’s group is one of several. Randi’s group has fortunately survived competition with modern theaters. However, he noted that it is getting more challenging to compete these days. Randi wrote a religious poem, *Pantun Lebaran* ‘the Ied’s Festival Pantun,’ which was used when he was performing the “Dulmuluk theater” during the Ied’s festival, which is the most important festival for Muslims.

From these examples, Palembang clearly has autogenic poetry, which was created by Palembang poets and originated within Palembang culture.

### ***Translated Poetry***

A young man named Arief reported that he was asked to write a religious song in Palembang (personal communication, May 19, 2021). However, he replied that he was not used to writing songs in Palembang. Even though he was born in Palembang city and uses Palembang every day, he found it difficult to write songs in Palembang. As a solution, he first wrote in Indonesian, and then he asked one of his friends to translate it into Palembang. Arief wrote the song, *Ari Pembebasan* ‘The Day of Deliverance’, and it was used in Easter services by some churches in Palembang.

A woman named Fajar said that she has been using religious poems translated into Palembang (personal communication, June 18, 2021). She uses the poems in her weekly prayer meeting with her family members and shares them sometimes with her friends in a Whatsapp group. She said the translated poems are easier to understand in Palembang than reading them in Indonesian. At first, some of her friends argued that the poems use Palembang words that are considered impolite. For example, one of her translated poems in Palembang uses the word *betino* ‘woman’. However, the word “betino” in Palembang is slightly similar

to the Indonesian word “betina”, which refers to a female animal. However, after she explained how Palembang people use the words, her friends understood and accepted the poem. The poem *Saer Nyanyian 23* ‘Psalm 23’ is an example of one of the poems she uses. This example reveals that Palembang people also appreciate and use translated poetry.

## **Types of Palembang Religious Poetry**

### ***Traditional Poetry: Pantun***

Pantun is an oral tradition in Indonesia and Malaysia. More specifically, Pantun is a style of poetry, which is used in several genres of poetry, such as love poems, morals, histories, and religious poems. In Indonesia, pantun may be used in slightly different forms, but there are marked similarities across the region. Pantun may be used as part of a ritual ceremony, as an art for communication, or as entertainment (Murti, 2017, p. 544).

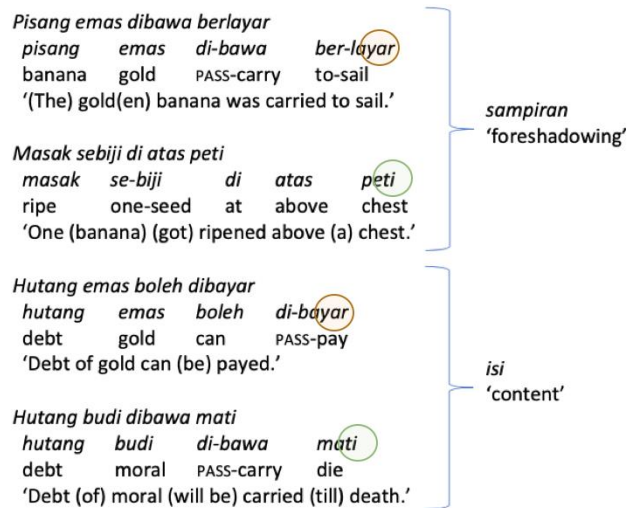
Pantun is one of the types of Malay poetry that existed before Islam came to Indonesia (Hamid, as cited in Ali, 2017). In the past, pantun was used to teach about cultural norms (Effendy, as cited in Andriani, 2012). Salleh mentions how pantun form grew and spread from Srivijaya (*Sriwijaya*) probably from around the city of Palembang or Malayu (2011, p. 83), which confirms that pantun was known by the Malays before Islam came. Even though it was mentioned that pantun was originally used for cultural norms, Salleh also briefly cited how pantun was used as a mantra by the Dayak Desa of Sintang (2011, p. 80) and by the Orang Laut in Selangor (2011, p. 87). This is probably true considering the Malays in South Sumatra have their own local beliefs, even before Buddhism started to grow in the area. After Islam came, it is possible that the locals added some Islamic beliefs in their pantun and used them like before, so the poems will be more suited for their purpose.

Salleh explains how pantun was initially used in games and charades for entertainment. However, then it grew to be used in proverbs, metaphors, and maxims (*perumpamaan*), children songs, and for expressions of love (2011, p. 80). He adds that “*adat*” (custom/laws), past wisdom, and traditional laws are sometimes framed within pantuns’ easily recalled quatrains.” Therefore, pantun naturally became the Malays’ style in expressing their emotions, ideas, and creative imagination. He mentions, “...there is a celebration of the free use of words and naughty teasing and even of criticism of seniors, albeit in hidden terms and allusions” (Salleh, 2011, p. 81).

According to Hamid (as cited in Ali, 2017), Indonesians consider pantun to be one of the most famous types of Malay poetry. This kind of poetry existed before Islam came to Indonesia. After Islam came, another kind of poetry, *syair*, was created due to a cultural adaptation to Arab culture. The difference between these two kinds of poetry is in the rhyming. Pantun has an a-b-a-b rhyming pattern, while *syair* has an a-a-a-a pattern. Pantun usually has four lines, while *syair* has more varied lines. Every four lines is bundled together and they will be called one stanza. In one stanza in a *pantun*, the first two lines are called *sampiran*, and the last two lines are called *isi* ‘content or body’. Ming described the first two lines as foreshadow, which usually use nature to present it. And those two lines will compliment the last two lines which are called the meaning (Ming, 2010, p. 119).

The first two lines are called *sampiran* because the meanings are not related with the body, and so it is not considered important. For this paper, the researcher used Ming’s term for the first two lines and her term for the next two stanzas, since they have the closest meaning to the actual Indonesian terms. So the term *sampiran* will be translated as ‘foreshadowing’ and the subsequent term *isi* as ‘content’. For *syair*, the whole poem contains the content. Also in each line, a pantun must have at least four words, while *syair* can have at least three words. An example of a pantun (Andriani, 2012, p. 198) is shown in Figure 1.



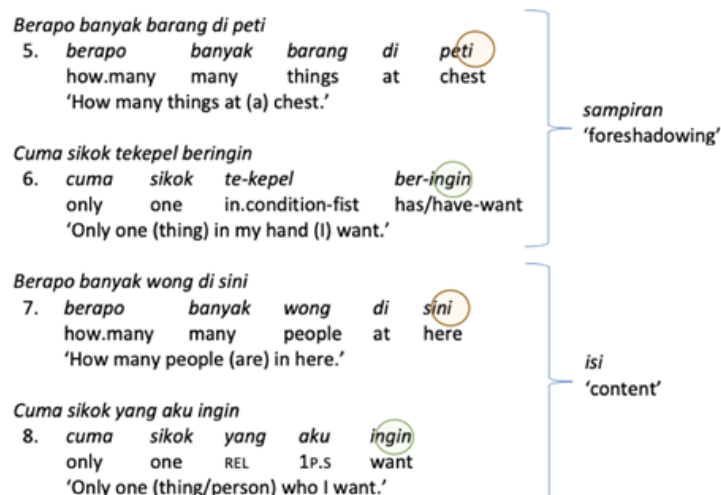


**Figure 1. An example of pantun**

As we can see in Figure 1, each line has at least four words. The pantun also has an a-b-a-b rhyming pattern. Lines 1 and 3 have the same syllable ending “yar” [jar]. Lines 2 and 4 have the same syllable ending “ti” [ti].

Pantun is a very famous poetry style among Malay speakers (Andriani, 2012, p. 195). It is one of several kinds of old Malay poetry which serve a similar purpose. According to Effendy, in the past pantun was used to teach people about cultural norms (as cited in Andriani, 2012). However, now people mostly use pantun to joke with one another. Pantun can also be used to criticize others without hurting them (IR Poedjawijatna, as cited in Andriani, 2012)

Pantun is also found in Palembang autogenic poetry, such as Nenggung and Pantun Lebaran, which was found through this research. Parts of pantun in Nenggung are shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Parts of pantun in Nenggung**

Figure 2 shows us that Nenggung has the characteristics of pantun. Every line has at least four words. Lines 5 and 7 have the same vowel ending “i” with consonants (“t” and “n”) before the vowel. Lines 6 and 8 have the same syllable ending “ngin” [ɲɪn]. Another example of pantun is found in Pantun Lebaran made by poet Randi, the successor of the “Dulmuluk Theater” play, as shown in Figure 3.

<i>Memang lemak makan lakso</i>				} <i>sampiran</i> 'foreshadowing'
1.	<i>memang lemak makan lakso</i>	truly delicious eat lakso	'(It is) truly pleasant (to) eat Lakso.'	
<i>Makannyo ngepor bealas koran</i>				
2.	<i>makan-nyo ng-epor be-alas koran</i>	eat-the.way ACT-sit.on.the.floor with-base newspaper	'(We) eat by sitting on the floor on newspapers.'	
<i>Setelah sebulan kita puaso</i>				} <i>isi</i> 'content'
3.	<i>setelah se-bulan kita puaso</i>	after one-month 1P.EXCL fast	'After one month we fasted.'	
<i>Sekarang kita sambut lebaran</i>				
4.	<i>sekarang kita sambut lebaran</i>	now 1P.EXCL welcome ied's festival	'Now we welcome (the) ied's festival.'	

**Figure 3. Pantun Lebaran**

As we can see in Figure 3, this poem uses pantun style by using the same syllable ending "so" for lines 1 and 3. Lines 2 and 4 have the same syllable ending "ran" [ran].

### **Spoken Poetry**

The poem *Sekepeng Wayang* created by Anto is an example of spoken poetry. The poem presents human actions in the forms of the shadow puppets. Anto plans to put this poem into a book, along with other original poems (personal communication, September 17, 2021). Parts of the poem is shown in Figure 4.

<i>malem la caer</i>							
1.	<i>malem la caer</i>	night has/have melt	'(The) night has come.'				
<i>suaro langgem cerito</i>							
2.	<i>suaro langgem cerito</i>	sound durable story	'(The) voice kept on (telling the) story.'				
<i>penu makno</i>							
3.	<i>penu makno</i>	full meaning	'Full (of) meaning.'				
<i>sebab arti di dalemnyo</i>							
4.	<i>sebab arti di dalem-nyo</i>	because meaning at inside-POSS.3s	'Because (of the) meaning inside of it.'				
<i>tekaet doa ke dengen zeker di balek tahajud</i>							
5.	<i>te-kaet doa ke dengen zeker di balek tahajud</i>	become-hook prayer to with a kind of Islamic at behind a kind of Islamic prayer	'Connected (with) prayer by <i>zeker</i> after (doing) <i>tahajud</i> .'				

**Figure 4. Parts of the poem Sekepeng Wayang**



Randi made a poem titled *Pantun Lebaran*, which is also a spoken poetry (personal communication, June 11, 2021). The poem was used at his performance at the “Dulmuluk theater” during the Ied’s festival. The poem is shown in Figure 3.

Another example of spoken religious poetry found in Palembang is translated from another language. The poem *Saer Nyanyian 23* is used by some Christians to pray and to teach about God. It was made into a narrated video and was posted online on YouTube (Proyek Woto, 2019b). The poem illustrates a metaphor of how God is acting as a shepherd towards His people (or His sheep). Fajar used this poem to teach her friends and family members about God by sharing it through WhatsApp (personal communication, August 3, 2021). She also uses the poem when praying. Eka also uses this poem and other translated religious poems in her daily prayers (personal communication, August 21, 2021). The spoken poetry from *Saer Nyanyian 23* was made into a narrated video, and it was posted online on YouTube (Proyek Woto, 2019b). Parts of the poem are provided in Figure 5.

*Allah ialah gembala aku; dak bakal kekurangan aku*

1. Allah ialah gembala aku dak bakal ke-kurang-an aku  
 God is shepherd poss.1s not never become-less 1s  
 ‘God is my shepherd; I never lack (anything).’

*Di padang yang berómpót ijo, Dio baréngke aku*

2. di padang yang ber-ómpót ijo dio baréng-ke aku  
 at field that has-grass green 3s lie.down-make 1s  
 ‘He makes me lie down in green pastures.’

*Ke banyu yang tenang, Dio nóntón aku*

3. ke banyu yang tenang dio nóntón aku  
 to water that still 3s lead 1s  
 ‘He leads me to still waters.’

*Jiwo aku, Dio segerke*

4. jiwo aku dio seger-ke  
 soul poss.1s 3s fresh-make  
 ‘He makes my soul fresh.’

*Dio mempen aku di jalan kebeneran óntók namó-Nyo*

5. dio mémpén aku di jalan ke-bener-an óntók namó-nyó  
 3s lead 1s at path nominalizer-true for name-poss.3s  
 ‘He leads me in the right paths for His name’s (sake).’

**Figure 5. Parts of Saer Nyanyian 23**

### **Poetry in Songs**

The poem *Nenggung* is always sung. The poem is used by mothers to calm their babies. However, it is hard to find people who use *Nenggung* in the present day. Vebri and his music group, *Rejung Pesirah*, performed the song to preserve the local Palembang traditions (personal communication, May 31, 2021). When Vebri and his music group performed the song *Nenggung*, it was recorded and posted online on YouTube (Al Lintani, 2013). Vebri also made a video about how *Nenggung* was historically used (Al Lintani, 2021).

The song *Ari Pembebasan* was made to be sung to celebrate Easter at church. It was made into a video, and was posted online on YouTube (Proyek Woto, 2019a). After it was made, some churches started to use it in their services. This was reported by Eka, who used

the song in her church. She is one of the worship leaders in her church, and she used the song because she wanted more people to experience singing a religious song in the local language (personal communication, June 17, 2021). The song was made into a video and it was posted online on YouTube (Proyek Woto, 2019a). Parts of the song are provided in Figure 6.

- Kau ngomong ke umat Kau di Mesir*
1. *kau ngomong ke umat kau di mesir*  
*2s talk to people poss.2s in Egypt*  
*'You talked to Your people in Egypt.'*
- Awal mulo pasal ari pembebasan*
2. *awal mulo pasal ari pem-bebas-an*  
*beginning start about day make-free*  
*'(The) beginning of the day of deliverance.'*
- Ngambék anak domba yang sempurna nian*
3. *ngambék anak domba yang sempurna nian*  
*take kid lamb that perfect very*  
*'Took the very perfect young lamb.'*
- Daranyo ngeléndóngi umat Kau*
4. *dara-nyo ngeléndóng-i umat kau*  
*blood-3s protect-make people 2s*  
*'Its blood protected Your people.'*

**Figure 6. Part of Ari Pembebasan video**

### ***Poetic Debate***

During initial interviews, several Palembang people did not believe that there were poems in the Palembang language. One person even tried to argue that Palembang has been reduced to a language people use to joke with one another. From their perspective, Palembang was not good enough to be used as a language for poetry. However, after meeting more Palembang people, it was apparent that there are clearly identified poems in Palembang that are either autogenic or originating from outside Palembang language and subsequently translated.

It is quite common for people groups with languages that have not had an official orthography, to feel that their language is not good enough to be used in more formal genres like poetry. These people need time or education to understand and accept their language as valid and deserving of formal functions – especially concerning religious materials. Pike explained that language is a communicative and symbolic behavior (1964, p. 88). It cannot be separated from action. He analogized communication to a molecule that has two atoms: the formal component (words, sounds, and grammar) and the social one. With this insight, it can be understood that some Palembang speakers might not see Palembang as a formal language because they do not use it in a formal function or they have not seen Palembang used in formal domains of language use.

Lewis and Simons mention that speakers of languages that are used for informal functions might feel that their language is not appropriate to be written. Languages with informal functions are less frequently standardized, so certain art forms might be considered inappropriate for formal functions (Lewis & Simons, 2016, p. 92). In other words, certain art forms, such as poetry, may be considered inappropriate for languages that typically only hold

informal functions. That explains why some Palembang speakers feel that Palembang is not suitable for religious poetry.

However, other Palembang speakers have different opinions about using Palembang in poetry. Poetry user Fajar stated that in every language group, there is always someone artistic and poetic. She said that there is no boundary for people to use art, either in language, gender, race, or religion. There are already some songs in Palembang, specifically songs that are partly made from poems. This is clear evidence that Palembang has been used and can be used for poetry (Fajar, personal communication, November 4, 2021). Poet Anto claimed that a poem is not used to present a language but to present the meaning that a poet wants to convey through language. If one desires to create a poem, then he would use appropriate language to make the poem beautiful (Anto, personal communication, November 4, 2021).

Not all people groups think that their unwritten language is not appropriate for poetry. For example, the Cashibo, a small group of people living in the Upper Amazon Valley of Peru, uses songs and chants in their everyday lives (Wistrand-Robinson, 1975). Even when only about 1000 people were speaking the Cashibo language in 1971, music played a very important role in expressing their emotions – especially among women. Songs served both religious and secular functions. Songs and poetry confirm the people's beliefs, conduct, and rituals to preserve the tribal's identity against the Western culture.

The Hmong in Thailand migrated from China in 1895 (Culas and Michaud, as cited in Saurman, 2021, p. 43), and have adapted to the Thai culture and government in many ways (M. E. Saurman, 2021, p. 44). Unfortunately, cultural adaptation has replaced their traditional ethnic minority cultural practices, except for traditional religious rites (M. E. Saurman, 2021, pp. 62–63). M. Saurman's research in the Hmong home-language preschool program has shown to build the confidence of Hmong children by using the traditional Hmong culture in their learning style (M. E. Saurman, 2021, p. 268). This traditional Hmong culture includes songs in Hmong which are used in the program. The Thai Ministry of Education official acknowledged the confidence of the pupils in their academic level, identity, and culture after they followed the program (M. E. Saurman, 2021, p. 267). This research has shown that using the local language in songs or poems, or other art forms is not only possible, but it could also build confidence in the speakers' identity.

## CONCLUSION

Palembang poetry is alive and well. Based on the origination of Palembang poetry, it is evident that there are both autogenic and translated poetry. For example, autogenic poems are Nenggung or Nenggung Mato song, Sekepeng Wayang, and Pantun Lebaran. Translated poetry is shown by Saer Nyanyian 23 and the Ari Pembebasan song. Research concerning the types of poetry shows that there is traditional poetry, spoken poetry, and poetry in songs. The traditional poetry found in this research is considered to have a style of pantun. For example, Nenggung and Pantun Lebaran are considered to have pantun styles. The poems considered spoken poetry are Sekepeng Wayang, Pantun Lebaran, and Saer Nyanyian 23. The poems considered poetry in songs are highlighted as Nenggung and Ari Pembebasan.

From this research, it can be concluded that Palembang speakers can write and use Palembang religious poetry. Palembang religious poetry is not only used as an expression of God but also as an identity maker for Palembang people. The song Nenggung, which was used as a prayer and a song to calm children to sleep, is now being used as a key component for Palembang language revitalization.

Further research needs to be done to find additional autogenic Palembang religious poetry. It would be interesting to research poetry related to Buddhism, other religions, or beliefs in Palembang City or South Sumatra province. Such research would give more exposure to the study of Palembang poetry and possibly identify additional types of

Palembang poetry, thereby adding to the richness of local culture. It would be worthwhile to investigate how Palembang people construct religious poems so future poets can learn how best to create autogenic Palembang religious poetry in a way that can be understood by their speech community. Since language and cultural revitalization are a theme for Palembang people, it will be beneficial to have a deeper analysis of Palembang religious poetry. More specifically, it is important to understand how Palembang religious poetry denotes identity and carries language pride. Ongoing research covering people's attitudes toward Palembang language development will prove beneficial in framing the sociolinguistic position of Palembang religious poetry.

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