

Documenting literary genres in Sasak, eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

The island of Lombok, eastern Indonesia, is linguistically and culturally complex, with several languages being used there, including Sasak, Balinese, Kawi (a form of early modern Javanese) and Indonesian. Sasak shows wide geographical and social variation, with a system of speech levels, apparently borrowed from its western neighbours. The Sasaks also have a literary tradition of writing manuscripts on palm leaves (*lontar*) in a manner similar to that of the Balinese (Rubinstein 2000), and historically, the Javanese. Lombok today remains one of only a handful of places in Indonesia where reading *lontar* (called in Sasak, *pepaòsan*) continues to be practised, however even there the number of people who are able to read and interpret the texts is rapidly diminishing. In this presentation I outline the nature of the Sasak literary materials (see also Marrison 1999, 2000, Van der Meij 1996, 2002), how reading is taught, the nature of reading performances, and the role of this genre within contemporary Sasak culture. I will support the presentation with multimedia illustrations (video, images and sound) drawn from fieldwork two locations on Lombok, and studies I have carried out with some of the few younger specialists who is able to perform *lontar* reading. I will conclude the talk by looking at some challenges for language documentation theory and practice (Himmelman 1998, Woodbury 2011) that arise in the process of recording and analyzing *pepaòsan* due to their nature as multidimensional events linking written texts to multilingual polyphonic spoken performances in complex ways.

References

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