

CULTURAL CONTENT IN EFL: DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS OF SUBAK AGRICULTURAL LEXICONS

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ABSTRACT

Subak is a traditional system that manages agricultural activities in Bali, including irrigation and rituals from planting through harvesting. The agricultural activities lexicons used in the *Subak* system in Bali are inseparable from the agricultural rituals performed by *Subak* members. This descriptive qualitative study explored the denotative and connotative meanings of the lexicons of agricultural activities used in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*, and their potential as cultural content for English learning materials. The findings indicated that 13 lexicons of agricultural activities were used in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*, spanning pre-planting through harvesting. Those lexicons are *Mapag Toya*, *ngendagin*, *ngurit*, *nandur*, *neduh*, *nyasihin*, *kekambuhan*, *ngiseh*, *mabyakungkungan*, *mluspusin*, *ngusaba nini*, *Manyi*, and *ngerasakin*. Those lexicons have a denotation based on the literal meaning of the lexicons in the Balinese language. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning is influenced by the context of *Subak*'s agricultural activities. Therefore, the denotative meanings of the lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* are rarely used by Balinese farmers, whereas their connotative meanings are commonly used. These findings suggest that *Subak* agricultural lexicons constitute culturally rich linguistic resources that can be integrated into EFL learning materials to promote cultural literacy, contextualized vocabulary learning, and learners' awareness of local wisdom within English education.

Keywords: agricultural activities; *Subak*; lexicon; meaning; cultural literacy

ABSTRAK

Subak adalah sistem tradisional yang mengatur kegiatan pertanian di Bali, termasuk irigasi dan ritual dari penanaman hingga panen. Leksikon kegiatan pertanian yang digunakan dalam sistem *Subak* di Bali tidak dapat dipisahkan dari ritual pertanian yang dilakukan oleh anggota *Subak*. Studi kualitatif deskriptif ini mengeksplorasi makna denotatif dan konotatif dari leksikon kegiatan pertanian yang digunakan dalam *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*, dan potensinya sebagai konten budaya untuk materi pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 13 leksikon kegiatan pertanian digunakan dalam *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*, yang mencakup pra-penanaman hingga panen. Leksikon tersebut adalah *Mapag Toya*, *ngendagin*, *ngurit*, *nandur*, *neduh*, *nyasihin*, *kekambuhan*, *ngiseh*, *mabyakungkungan*, *mluspusin*, *ngusaba nini*, *Manyi*, dan *ngerasakin*. Leksikon tersebut memiliki denotasi berdasarkan makna literal leksikon dalam bahasa Bali. Sementara itu, makna konotatif dipengaruhi oleh konteks kegiatan pertanian di *Subak*. Oleh karena itu, makna denotatif dari leksikon kegiatan pertanian di *Subak* jarang digunakan oleh petani Bali, sedangkan makna konotatifnya umum digunakan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa leksikon pertanian *Subak* merupakan sumber daya linguistik yang kaya secara budaya yang dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam materi pembelajaran EFL untuk meningkatkan literasi budaya, pembelajaran kosakata kontekstual, dan kesadaran peserta didik akan kearifan lokal dalam pendidikan bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: kegiatan pertanian; *Subak*; leksikon; makna; literasi budaya

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with many islands, tribes, and cultures. Indonesia is popular because of its cultural wealth. It includes tradition, belief, and art. Many tribes in Indonesia contribute to the amount of cultural wealth and diversity. Each tribe in Indonesia has its own culture, which becomes its unique characteristics. This cultural diversity has become a special characteristic of Indonesia. It makes Indonesia more popular overseas.

Bali is one of the Indonesian islands known for its many beautiful places and cultures (Budiadnyani et al., 2019). Balinese local culture is a major tourist attraction for many visitors to Bali (Arnawa, 2016; Budiadnyani et al., 2019). Bali has many traditions that draw the world's attention (Parwati & Trianasari, 2016). It is expressed through dances, local Balinese traditions, and ceremonies. Several Balinese cultures have been approved by UNESCO, such as Balinese dances and *Subak* (Arnawa, 2016; Jayantini, Hikmaharyanti, et al., 2022; Jayantini, Surata, et al., 2022).

Balinese tradition extends beyond dances, rituals, and ceremonies. Bali also has an agricultural tradition, which has become one of its cultural heritage (Mantaka et al., 2017). Bali has an agricultural system called *Subak* (Windia et al., 2015). *Subak* manages the agricultural system on agricultural lands across various places in Bali (Arta et al., 2020). Each area usually has a *Subak* to manage the watering or irrigation system, planting, and harvesting (Sartini, 2017; Sumiyati. et al., 2017). *Subak*, as the traditional agricultural system, is still preserved by Balinese farmers (Norken et al., 2017). It maintains Balinese traditional farming practices and the organization's management in *Subak* itself (Windia et al., 2015). *Subak* was inscribed on UNESCO's cultural heritage list in 2012 (Jayantini, Hikmaharyanti, et al., 2022; Jayantini, Surata, et al., 2022; Norken et al., 2017; Wijayanti et al., 2020).

Subak, as the only Balinese irrigation system, can adapt to technological advancements, especially those that support agricultural activities (Githa et al., 2020; Yusmita et al., 2017). *Subak* enables the continued use of traditional agricultural practices in the farming process (Mantaka et al., 2017). *Subak* is not limited to the irrigation system (Hutasoit & Wau, 2017; Sumiyati. et al., 2017). It maintains the ecosystem of the agricultural lands through religious rituals (Hutasoit & Wau, 2017). Agricultural rituals implemented in the *Subak* system have a very important meaning for Balinese farmers, as they are inherited from one generation to another (Sumiyati. et al., 2017). *Subak* is based on *Tri Hita Karana* as its philosophical foundation, which encompasses three ways to achieve happiness (Norken et al., 2017; Parwati & Trianasari, 2016; Wijayanti et al., 2020). *Tri Hita Karana* comprises three values that should be considered the philosophy of life for Balinese people (Norken et al., 2017; Parwati & Trianasari, 2016). It also serves as the foundation for Balinese farmers in managing their land, including harmonious relationships among humans and God, among humans, and between humans and the environment (Norken et al., 2017; Parwati & Trianasari, 2016).

The rituals in the *Subak* system have contributed to the lexicons used by farmers to address traditional agricultural procedures in Bali (Windia et al., 2015). Lexicons of agricultural activities used in *Subak* cannot be separated from farmers' traditional agricultural practices (Mantaka et al., 2017). The lexicons of agricultural activities used in *Subak* cover activities from before planting rice to harvesting (Githa et al., 2020; Suryasa & Dewi, 2018). Some lexicons of agricultural activities refer to collective rituals among *Subak* members (Windia et al., 2015). Some lexicons refer to the individual rituals performed by farmers on their own land (Sartini, 2017; Suryasa & Dewi, 2018).

Beyond its cultural and linguistic significance, local wisdom has also been increasingly explored as a resource in English language education for EFL. Suwastini et al. (2020, 2022) developed digital learning media, such as role-playing games and e-comics, grounded in Balinese local wisdom, and found that these media promote meaningful English learning and strengthen students' character. Other studies also confirm that local values, including *Tri Hita Karana*, can be

display, and conclusion drawing. To analyze the meanings of the lexicons, this study also applied the theory of meaning proposed by Chaer (2007), which was used to interpret both literal and contextual meanings of the lexicons in *Subak* practices.

Research site and participants

The research was conducted in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*, located in Banjarasem Village, North Bali. The participants of this study were *Subak* members or farmers who were directly involved in agricultural activities and rituals.

Data collection and analysis

The data in this study included lexicons of agricultural activities used in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*. The data were collected through note-taking, focusing on lexicons used during rice farming and ritual activities. After data collection, the lexicons were classified according to the sequence of agricultural procedures, from pre-planting to post-harvesting. The data analysis in this study was conducted through a simultaneous and interactive process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, following Miles et al. (2014). The conclusion was repeatedly confirmed throughout the data collection and analysis. This process was repeated several times to ensure that the data collection and analysis are consistent and trustworthy. Through this repeated process, the study ensured that interpretations of denotative and connotative meanings reflected the cultural context of *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings highlighted thirteen lexicons of agricultural activities used in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*. It included lexicons of agricultural activities during the pre-planting, planting, harvesting, and post-harvesting periods. The lexicons of agricultural activities are *Mapag Toya*, *ngendagin*, *ngurit*, *nandur*, *neduh*, *nyasihin*, *kekambuhan*, *ngiseh*, *mabyakungkungan*, *mluspusin*, *ngusaba nini*, *Manyi*, and *ngerasakin*. The lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* during pre-planting periods are *Mapag Toya* and *ngendagin*. The lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* during the planting period cover *ngurit*, *nandur*, *neduh*, *nyasihin*, *kekambuhan*, *ngiseh*, *mabyakungkungan*, and *mluspusin*. The lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* during harvesting include *ngusaba nini* and *Manyi*. Meanwhile, *ngerasakin* is considered the lexicon that is conducted after the harvesting period.

Discussion

The use of agricultural lexicons in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit* shows that language plays an important role in expressing cultural practices and values. These lexicons not only describe farming activities but also represent shared beliefs and traditions among *Subak* members. From an EFL perspective, such culturally embedded lexicons can be used as meaningful learning resources to help students understand how language carries cultural meaning. Therefore, this discussion explores the denotative and connotative meanings of the lexicons and highlights their potential contribution to cultural literacy and English language learning. The lexicons of *Subak Pangkung Kunyit* will be explained below, starting from pre-planting, planting, harvesting, and the after-harvesting period, which is divided into 13 categories.

Mapag Toya

Mapag Toya is the first ritual performed before the farmers plant rice. This agricultural activity was carried out collectively by *Subak* members at the *Pengulun Subak* temple. *Mapag Toya*

is a Balinese lexicon used in *Subak*, consisting of two words: *mapag* and *toya*. *Mapag* means to pick up. Then, *toya* means water. Denotatively, *Mapag Toya* means 'to pick up water'. However, this denotative meaning is not commonly used by Balinese people (Sartini, 2017). The connotative meaning of *Mapag Toya* is more meaningful because it is combined with the context of *Subak*. The connotative meaning of *Mapag Toya* is to invoke a blessing toward the water that will be used to water the rice field. In *Mapag Toya*, the farmers pray for being blessed with abundant water for their rice fields. This connotative meaning of *Mapag Toya* is more familiar among Balinese people, especially Balinese farmers (Windia et al., 2015).

Ngendagin

After *Mapag Toya*, the second ritual performed in *Subak* is *ngendagin*. *Ngendagin* is usually done individually by every farmer in their rice field. *Ngendagin* is derived from the word *endag*, which means rise. Denotatively, *ngendagin* means to rise. In the *Subak* context, *ngendagin* conveys the idea of starting work on the rice field. It is symbolized by hoeing the rice field three times, facing east. Then, the farmers have to go home. They are not allowed to continue the work in the rice field on that day. This ritual is also performed to invoke blessings from *Ida Sanghyang Ibu Pertiwi* (The Mother Earth) and *Ida Bhatari Sri* to ensure the work in the rice field runs smoothly and successfully (Sartini, 2017).

Ngurit

Ngurit is done individually by the farmers in their rice fields. *Ngurit* is derived from the word *urit*, which means to sow. It is added by the prefix *nge-*, which becomes *ngurit*. The denotative meaning of *ngurit* is to sow seeds. Meanwhile, in the *Subak* context, *ngurit* means invoking blessings from *Dewa Surya* and *Ida Sanghyang Ibu Pertiwi* (Aridawati, 2020). In this ritual, the farmers ask for permission to sow the seeds and invoke blessings for them to grow well. Moreover, in this ritual, the farmers make offerings for *Ida Sanghyang Ibu Pertiwi*. The denotative and connotative meanings of *ngurit* are interrelated, but the connotative meaning of *ngurit* places more emphasis on the ritual before the seeds are sown.

Nandur

Nandur is the ritual when the farmers start planting rice seeds. *Nandur* is derived from the word *tandur*, which means to plant. *Nandur* means to plant something. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning of *nandur* is the ritual of planting seeds that are already growing. The denotative and connotative meanings of *nandur* in the *Subak* context remain relevant. However, the connotative meaning is more complex, as it involves the ritual that precedes farmers planting rice seeds. It begins with making offerings to *Ida Bhatari Sri* before planting the rice seeds. It is aimed at invoking blessings on the seeds to grow well and to protect them from pests (Aridawati, 2020). After that, the farmers can plant rice seeds on a good day, according to Balinese astronomy.

Neduh

Neduh is a ritual performed by farmers several days after planting rice (Windia et al., 2015). It is done in each rice field by the farmers. *Neduh* is derived from the word *teduh*, which means cold, calm, or shady. Denotatively, '*neduh*' means 'to calm down'. This denotative meaning of '*neduh*' is not relevant to use in the *Subak* context. *Neduh* connotatively means being grateful toward *Ida Sanghyang Ibu Pertiwi* (The Mother Earth) and *Ida Bhatari Sri* because the rice is growing. The offerings for *Ida Sanghyang Ibu Pertiwi* (The Mother Earth) and *Ida Bhatari Sri* are placed in a *sangguh pengalapan*, a temporary temple set up in the rice field.

Nyasihin

Nyasihin is a ritual performed by farmers when the rice plant is 35 days old, or a month in the Balinese calendar. Farmers in each rice field conduct this ritual. *Nyasihin* is derived from the word *sasih*, meaning 'moon'. Then, one of its derivatives is *asasih*, which means 'month'. In the Balinese calendar, a month is counted as 35 days, unlike the Gregorian calendar. *Nyasihin* is derived from *asasih*, which means 'month'. The denotative meaning of *nyasihin* is to make it a month. This denotative meaning of *nyasihin* is commonly used and understood by Balinese people. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning of *nyasihin* in the *Subak* context is the ritual celebrating the rice plant that has grown for 35 days. This ritual is aimed at invoking *Ida Sang Rare Angon*, who manifests as pests and diseases, so as not to spoil the rice plant. Therefore, the rice can grow well until harvest. The farmers will make offerings to *Ida Sang Rare Angon*, which is placed in a *sanggah pengalapan* (a temporary bamboo temple erected in the rice field during the planting period).

Kekambuhan

Kekambuhan is the ritual performed by farmers after *nyasihin*. It is done when the rice is 42 days old. The farmers performed this ritual in their own rice field. *Kekambuhan* is derived from the word *kambuhan*, which means 42 days of birth. It is added by the suffix *an*, which becomes *kekambuhan*. Denotatively, *kekambuhan* is a derivative word from *kambuhan*. It means day 42 of birth. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning of *kekambuhan* is the ritual for rice plants that have grown for 42 days. This ritual aims to prevent *Bhuta Kala*, who accompanies *Ida Bhatari Sri*, from spoiling the rice plants planted by the farmers (Yusmita et al., 2017). The farmers have to make offerings that are put in the *sanggah pengalapan*.

Ngiseh

Ngiseh is the ritual performed by farmers when rice plants begin to pollinate (Aridawati, 2020). *Ngiseh* is derived from the word *iseh*. *Iseh* means circle or roll. Then the word *iseh* is added, with the prefix *nge-* which becomes *ngiseh*. Then, this term is used in the lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak*. Denotatively, *ngiseh* means to perform circular or rolling movements. This denotative meaning is very common in daily communication among Balinese people. Meanwhile, this meaning is not related to the *Subak* context. In the *Subak* context, the connotative meaning is more acceptable. The connotative meaning of *ngiseh* is ritual during the pollination period. It is aimed at strengthening the rice grains.

Mabyakungkungan

Mabyakungkungan refers to the ritual performed by farmers when the rice plant is about 70 days old. During this period, the rice plants are pregnant, or the grains are starting to grow. *Mabyakungkungan* is a Balinese lexicon that is derived from the words *bya* and *kungkung*. *Bya* means danger, and *kungkung* means to imprison. *Byakungkung* means to imprison danger. Therefore, the denotative meaning of *mabyakungkung* is to imprison the danger. In the *Subak* context, *mabyakungkung* refers to a ritual celebrating the rice plants when they are 70 days old, when the rice grains begin to grow. This ritual aims to make the rice grains grow large and strong until harvest (Aridawati, 2020; Sartini, 2017). The farmers have to prepare offerings to be placed in the rice field, consisting of items that symbolize pregnant women. By preparing the offerings, the rice plants are expected to have many rice grains.

Mluspusin

Mluspusin is the ritual performed when the rice grains grow. *Mluspusin* is derived from the word *mluspus*, which means to have the grains grow. *Mluspus* is added by the suffix *-in*

which becomes *mluspusin*. Denotatively, *mluspusin* means to have the grains grow. Connotatively, *mluspusin* means a ritual for the rice grains that are already grown. It is intended to protect the grains from pests such as birds, planthoppers, and caterpillars. In this ritual, the farmers are required to make offerings and set a *Sanggah Catu* with *kober gana* (flags) for *Dewa Siwa* and *Dewi Uma*. The offerings are placed in the *sanggah pengalapan* upstream of the rice field (Sartini, 2017). This offering is delivered to *Ida Sang Hyang Widi Wasa* (The Almighty God) to protect the rice plants.

Ngusaba nini

Ngusaba nini is the ritual performed collectively by *Subak* members in the *Subak* temple and individually in each *sanggah pengalapan* in each rice field before the harvesting period begins. *Ngusaba nini* is derived from the words *ngusaba* and *nini*. *Ngusaba* is derived from the word *usaba*, which means a village thanksgiving ritual. *Nini* means rice grains. Therefore, denotatively, *ngusaba nini* means thanksgiving for the rice grains. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning of *ngusaba nini* is the ritual before harvesting. It is done when the rice grains begin to turn yellow (Aridawati, 2020). This ritual is aimed at invoking blessings from *Ida Bhatari Sri* and *Sanghyang RareAngon*, as the yellow grains are protected from danger and pests.

Manyi

Manyi is the ritual in the harvesting period. It is done when the rice grains are ready to be harvested. *Manyi* is derived from the word *anyi*, which means "to reap". It is added by the prefix *me-*, which becomes *Manyi*. Denotatively, *Manyi* means to reap. In the *Subak* context, *Manyi* refers to a ritual to harvest rice grains. *Manyi* is done by making offerings for *Ida Bharati Sri* to show gratitude for the blessing of the rice grains that will be harvested soon (Yusmita et al., 2017). This ritual also includes cutting rice grains from the plants.

Ngerasakin

Ngrasakin is the ritual after the harvesting period. The denotative meaning of *ngrasakin* is to be grateful for the result of the harvest. Connotatively, *ngrasakin* refers to a ritual to thank God for a good harvest. It is aimed at *Ida Bhatari Sri* and *Dewi Uma* as manifestations of God (Sartini, 2017). The offerings are usually grilled pork, chicken, or duck.

The findings show that the agricultural lexicons used in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit* have both denotative and connotative meanings. Denotative meanings refer to the literal meanings of words, while ritual practices and cultural beliefs shape connotative meanings. In the *Subak* context, the connotative meanings are more dominant because they express prayers, gratitude, and harmony with nature and God. Therefore, these lexicons function not only as linguistic terms but also as cultural symbols.

As learning develops to meet 21st-century skills, low literacy interest remains a serious issue in Indonesian education (Suwastini et al., 2025). This condition underscores the need for meaningful, culturally relevant learning materials to support literacy development. These lexicons can be introduced in English-language discussions to promote traditional Balinese *Subak* culture at the international level. They can also be used as references for English teachers to develop locally wisdom-based learning content. Learning activities that explore local culture play an important role in providing students with relevant and meaningful learning experiences (Rosidah et al., 2025). In the Balinese context, English teachers are encouraged to take the initiative to integrate local culture into teaching and learning as part of contextual learning (Jayantini et al., 2022). Integrating local wisdom into the curriculum can create more meaningful and engaging learning experiences that relate closely to students' real lives (Mahayantiet al., 2025). Culture-based learning also supports interactive learning, improves students' cultural literacy, and contributes to character development

(Suryani et al., 2024). Character development should be prioritized in the teaching and learning process (Suwastini et al., 2023), because in the 21st century, education should develop students' cognitive skills as well as their moral values (Hutapea & Suwastini, 2019). Furthermore, in an EFL context, analyzing *Subak* lexicons helps students practice critical reading by understanding cultural meanings behind the words. Through critical reading, students are encouraged to develop awareness of fairness, respect, and harmony in their lives and in society (Mahayanti et al., 2025). The cultural meanings embedded in *Subak* lexicons can support character education, such as cooperation, respect, and harmony, which are essential for students in early adolescence to support character development during this critical stage (Khanadi et al., 2022). This integration can help improve students' cultural literacy and support character education through English learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit* cannot be separated from the rituals that farmers must perform as members of the *Subak*. There were thirteen lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak Pangkung Kunyit*. Those lexicons include agricultural activities during the pre-planting, planting, harvesting, and after-harvesting periods. The lexicons of agricultural activities are *mapag toya*, *ngendagin*, *ngurit*, *nandur*, *neduh*, *nyasihin*, *kekambuhan*, *ngiseh*, *mabyakungkungan*, *mluspusin*, *ngusaba nini*, *manyi*, and *ngerasakin*. *Mapag toya* and *ngendagin* are included in the lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* during the pre-planting period. *Ngurit*, *nandur*, *neduh*, *nyasihin*, *kekambuhan*, *ngiseh*, *mabyakungkungan*, and *mluspusin* are lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* during the planting period. During the harvesting period, the lexicons of agricultural activities are *ngusaba nini* and *manyi*. *Ngerasakin* is the lexicon of agricultural activities in *Subak* after the harvest period, to give thanks for the harvest.

Regarding the lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak*, each lexicon has both denotative and connotative meanings and can serve as a teaching resource for English. The lexicons are derived from the Balinese language, which is commonly used by Balinese people in daily communication. Meanwhile, the connotative meanings of the lexicons of agricultural activities in *Subak* are derived from their use in the *Subak* context, where the meanings are more readily understandable to farmers. Introducing traditional Balinese *Subak* lexicons in English-language discussions allows local cultural knowledge to be shared with a wider international audience. In addition, these lexicons can serve as references for English teachers in developing local culture-based on English learning content. This approach supports the development of students' cultural literacy, character education, and their ability to communicate local culture in global contexts.

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