

# Tantri: From Ancient Temple to Modern English Class

Titis Agunging Tyas

Email: agungingtyastitis@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Tantri is animal story or fable which is usually carved as reliefs in ancient temples. It contains high moral values about doing good and doing bad. In ancient time, tantri which was carved in temples was used as a mean of educating crown prince, preparing him to be a king. One example of tantris was carved in Jago Temple at Tumpang, Malang Regency. It tells a story of two turtles and a heron. The moral values of this story is people should be patient, modest, and calm in every condition. In this article, I would like to bring idea of using this local genius to modern English class as media and materials to teach narratives. The reason why this local genius is important to be exported to the English class is that the current students are not familiar with this kind of stories. When they go to the temple, their focus is on taking pictures and uploading them into social media. They do not care with stories in the temple, in yet it is like invisible diamond. As adults, it is a must for us to give them a wisdom touch of tantris to these milenials. We have responsibility to create wise, magical, and logical educational environment to this kind of generation.

**Keywords:** tantri, narrative, media, materials

## Introduction

Ancient temples commonly found in several places in East Java including Malang, Blitar, Kediri, Tulungagung, Pasuruan, and Mojokerto. It is believed that it was ancient kingdoms territories. Some kingdoms existed subsequently. One kingdom replaces another kingdom or they existed at the same period.

Temples in East Java were usually built for commemorating a former king as the form of religion implementation called "*sraddha*". Ancient people stored some of the king's ashes in these temples. It seems to be reason the current people call these temples "*cungkup*" which means burial. People in ancient times tend to be Hindus or Buddhist, so the religious activities and the people's daily activities apparently reflected their religions.

The changing of powers in the kingdoms seems to be followed by the changing of people's religion. The

functions of the temple has also changed by time. It was a place for god worshipping, commemoration for the worship of a king, both for the worship of a god and a king, hermitage, and holy bathing place (Kieven, 2013:90). The people were Hindus or Buddhist at once, then when Islamic kingdom ruled, they became Moslems. Therefore, some of these temples are no longer used daily. For example, the majority religion of the people around Jago Temple is Islam. In yet, the temple is Siwa Buddha temple.

Religion practices in this temple are only conducted by some people outside the district. People around the temple uses it as a recreational place, a temple from ancient times. So, they come to the temple as tourist without conducting any religious activity.

Since temples become a recreational place and some of them contain tantric reliefs, I try to figure out that the tantri reliefs could be used as English learning media and materials to teach narrative. Tantri is

animal story or fable which is usually carved as reliefs in ancient temples. It contains high moral values about doing good and doing bad.

Tantri story is very short but usually it has complete narrative structure. The idea of its story seems to come from everyday interactions among nature, human and their environments. The characters in the story are apparently animals that the current students are familiar with. So, using tantris to teach narrative and moral values seems to be promising to build good characters for millennials. In short, this article will describe tantris for media and materials in teaching English narratives in current situation.

### **Tantri**

Tantri is popularly known as fable. The history of tantris itself comes from a story of King Esaryapala from Pataliputra. He wanted to marry a different beautiful girl everyday until there was no more girl to be married. His governor's daughter, DyahTantri, was willing to be married by the king to stop the king's misbehaviour. After they married, DyahTantri told the king animal stories or fable. This fable is a frame story, so in a story there will be other stories following it and so on. These stories contain good moral values and wisdom that finally the king did not want to marry anymore. The stories contain a friendship of a lion king, Candapingala, and a cow, Nandaka. Tantri is famous in Java and Bali. Soekatno (2009:10) states that this story popularity among Balinese causes "tantri" becomes the synonymy of animal story or fable.

Some tantris were chosen to be carved on temple's wall to deliver religious messages. It was created based on king's order and it was based on the priests' advices. Temple was chosen because the temple was used by people to gather and worship gods (Lelono, 2016:103-104). It means that there were a lot of people using the temple. Tantri was also believed to be used as a means of educating crown prince, preparing him to be a king. So, during that time relief was considered to be effective means of communication and it was proven to be everlasting.

In terms of assimilation and acculturation, the characters in the reliefs were the blend of local

character and other culture's characters. Lelono (2016:103) states that the characters came from the Hindu and Buddha myth and they were adopted with local myth. They were portrayed in the form of Indonesian flora and fauna such as mouse deer, tiger, crab, swan, turtles, and so on.

I will tell the example of tantris as being carved in Jago Temple, Malang Regency. It consisted of three scenes. The first scene depicted a heron brought two turtles with a stick in his beak. Second scene depicted two wolves sitting and the third scene depicted the two wolves were eating the turtles.

The story began in a lake where two turtles and a heron lived. The dry season would come soon, and the turtles asked the heron to move them to another lake which still had a lot of water. The heron agreed to help them. He asked the turtles to bit the end of a stick for one turtle and another end for the other. He himself would bite the stick with his beak in the middle. He told the turtles not to say anything until they arrived. Then, he flew bringing the turtles with the stick through a forest, rivers and farms. Far below them, there were two wolves. These two wolves watched up above them two flying turtles, and they wanted to eat them. The wolves mocked the turtles that they looked like flying buffalo's feces. The turtles were angry and annoyed. They forgot what the heron said not to do. They opened their mouth because they wanted to reply the wolves' mocking words. Therefore, they fell, and they were eaten by the wolves (Wardhono, 1995:27).

The messages that the people could have from the story above are in life we should be trustworthy, patient, and calm. Other tantris that had been carved in Jago Temple are: crocodile and bull, monkey and ungrateful man, palmwine tappers judge between monkeys, and so forth (Kieven, 2013:169). The story of turtles and a heron was also carved in Penataran Temple, Blitar, East Java.



Figure 1 A heron brought two turtles with a stick.



Figure 2 Two wolves were sitting.



Figure 3 The two wolves were eating the turtles.



Figure 4 Relief of *tantri* depicted two turtles and a heron.

In short, *tantri* reliefs were carved on the temple's wall with a purpose, to spread the message to the people about moral and wisdom. So, I believe that the idea of using *tantri* as media and materials to teach English will not only increase the students' English skill but also build their good character.

#### **Tantri as English Teaching Materials**

The *tantri* entitled two turtles and a heron (some sources give different title) could be a materials to teach English. It contributes to narratives materials in particular. Materials refer to what the teacher teaches and what the learners are expected to learn. Materials serve as the English language input to be worked on in the teaching and learning activities (Cahyono & Megawati, 2013: xi). In the story of two turtles and a heron, it has simple and clear structure of a narrative. Narrative is a text which tells a story (Anderson and Anderson, 1997:8). The purpose of this text is to entertain, amuse and interest the reader but at the same time it teaches, explains or inform. It could be spoken or written literary text that describes or explores human experiences. Two types of narratives are traditional fiction such as folktales, fairy tales, parables, fables, moral tales, myths, and legend, and the other is modern fiction like modern fantasy and contemporary realistic fiction.

Narrative compared with other text has its own structure. It consist of orientation, complication, series of events, resolution, and coda. Orientation is the first part of the story which introduces the setting

and the characters. Complication is the time when some problem occurs. Series of events is some events that follows the complication. Resolution is a happy or unhappy conclusion when the problem is solved. Coda is final commentary provided by the writer. These structure is supported tantris reliefs to be transform into narrative materials since tantris meets the required structure of a narrative.

However, tantris reliefs only provide scenes, the teacher who will use it as materials should create his own story based on the scenes. He could also read several literatures related to the carved tantris to support his knowledge about the story and retell it in his own words. He is suggested to provide information about the language feature and structure of the story.

### **Tantris English Teaching Media**

Tantris reliefs could be used as teaching media in the form of visual or audio visual. Teacher could bring its picture or video to the class, or he brings the students to have a visit in the temple. If the teacher uses some tools in teaching the materials, these tools are called as media (Cahyono & Megawati, 2013: xv). In other words, when something, in this context the picture or video of tantris, helps the teacher to explain the lesson, they function as media (Latif, 2011: 67).

Some media that could be used for teaching English are pictures (in the form of flashcards, large wall pictures, cue cards, photographs, or illustrations) and images/graphic (drawn, taken from books, newspapers and magazines, or photograph); overhead projectors (OHPs) or LCD projectors; the board; bits and pieces (realia, language cards, and cuisenaire rods); the language laboratory (computers, headphone, microphone, etc); and homegrown materials including worksheet, sentence cards, etc (Harmer, 2001:134-151).

Related to tantris as English teaching media, the teacher should homegrown it in order to adjust it with

the students' need. Basically, tantris stories could be used for any level of students.

### **Using Tantris to Teach Narrative**

Below I will present a general plan to teach narrative for junior high students using tantris as materials and media. The material is tantris entitled two turtles and a heron. Speaking will be the focus skill to be taught. The media are homegrown video of tantris and students' mobile phones. The teaching procedure is adapted from "Being a Real Travel Guide!" (Gobel, Gunther and Berger:48). The steps are: (1) at the beginning, the teacher shows the video of tantris scenes entitled two turtles and a heron without sound; (2) the students gather in a group of 4 and discuss about what they have seen; (3) the teacher told the students to imagine that they are a guide and have to present those tantris scenes to a group of tourist; (4) the video is played again and the students should take notes; (5) to give some help, the students are allowed to access the internet; (6) the students present their works; (7) the video is played again with sound. For practical use, these steps could be adapted.

### **Conclusion**

Bringing idea of using tantris which contains local genius to modern English class as media and materials to teach narratives is challenging. The current students seem to be unfamiliar with this kind of stories, but using media like video and mobile phone--which are familiar to them--will help them understanding unfamiliar materials so that later when they go to the temple, their focus is not only on taking pictures and uploading them into social media, but also could pay attention to tantris or other stories in other reliefs. As adults, it is a must for us to preserve wisdoms of ancient stories and teach them to these milenials. We have responsibility to create wise, magical, and logical educational environment to this kind of generation.

## References

- Anderson, M., & Anderson, K., 1997, Text Types in English (Australia; Macmillan).
- Cahyono, B. Y. & Megawati, F., 2013, Introduction: Materials and Media in English Language Teaching, edited by Bambang Yudi Cahyono & Fika Megawati. (Malang: State University of Malang Press), pp. xi-xxi.
- Gobel, L., Gunther, S., & Berger, T., 2010, Using Videos in the Classroom. In: Learning and Teaching English with the New Media: Developed by Students of the Class "New Media in Foreign Language Education, edited by Ana Maria Schafer (Germany: Philipps-Universität Marburg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik)
- Harmer, J., 2001, The Practice of English Language Teaching: Third Edition Completely Revised and Updated (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Limited).
- Kieven, L., 2013, Following the Cap-Figure in Majapahit Temple Reliefs: A New Look at the Religious Function of East Javanese Temples, fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV).
- Latif, A., 2011, Information Tables as Media and Materials in the Teaching of English. In: Teaching English by Using Various Text Types, edited by Bambang Yudi Cahyono. (Malang: State University of Malang Press), pp. 67-73.
- Lelono, T. M. H., 2016, The Relief of Candi as an Effective Media to Deliver Moral-Didactic Message in Ancient Java. *Berkala Arkeologi*, 36(1), 099-116.
- Soekatno, R. A. G., 2009, Kidung Tantri Kediri. *Kajian Filologis Sebuah Naskah Jawa Pertengahan*, Doctoral Thesis, Leiden University.
- Wardhono, S. W., 1995, Memperkenalkan Kompleks Pecandian Penataran di Blitar (Mojokerto: KPN Purbakala).