

# Metaphors of Anger in Contemporary *Bahasa Indonesia*: A Preliminary Study

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**Abstract.** According to “the” definition, metaphors conceptualize an *abstract* noun (i.e. a noun that is relatively burdensome to construe like ‘anger’, ‘love’, ‘life’, etc.) through a *concrete* one / ones. The first domain is called *target*, the latter is called *source*; and the link (*mapping*) between these two is based upon (1) a perceptual or / and (2) a culture-bound association. A prime example of a mixed type association could be *sometimes, life (abstract) is like a boxing match (concrete): you have to push through life’s hardships!* Although voluminous data about the metaphors of *anger* in linguistically rather diverse languages (like Hungarian, American English, Spanish, etc.) are available, these publications do not cover the two *linguae francae* of the historical Nusantara, *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Melayu*. According to the experts’ literature, *anger* is often and language-independently (!) conceptualized as ‘a substance in a container’, as ‘an opponent’, as ‘a weapon’ or as ‘an object belonging to someone’; however, the salience of these metaphors shows slight differences (Kövecses / Szelid / Nucz et al. 2015). In this paper, we will discuss whether *anger* is conceptualized similarly in *Bahasa Indonesia*. As there is a wide selection of words for *anger / angry* (*marah, kesal, sebal, jengkel, gusar, ngegas, gondok*, etc.) that represents diatopic and diastratic variations, and even semantic differences, we had conducted a frequency of occurrence analysis in Google to find the most salient term. Based on this very term, we performed interviews with ten native speakers, gathered metaphors, and, after a primary evaluation of the data, we classified them according to their respective metaphoric concept (‘substance in a container’, etc.). Subsequently, we also tried to identify culture- / language-specific metaphors or metaphoric patterns that yet cannot be found in the specialist literature, and looked at the reasons behind the existence of these metaphoric concepts.

**Keywords:** *metaphor, anger, Bahasa Indonesia*

Received 20 February 2020 | Revised 27 February 2020 | Accepted 20 March 2020

## 1. Introduction

In comparison to other emotions (such as *fear* or *happiness*, for instance), *anger* is relatively understudied [1]. Ultimately, *anger* is, however, one of the most important emotional states in humans; if unchanneled, it can cause sleep problems, hypertension, and thus, cardiovascular diseases (e.g. stroke). Its physiological short-term effects include, but are not limited to, rapid heart rate / breathing, increase in blood pressure, headache, dizziness, sour stomach, tense muscles and pains. The concepts of *anger* in different cultures are in a large measure similar

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(because they are “symptom-based”), but they also exhibit some culture-specific and even temporal (!) variations. To illustrate: In contrast to the individualistic concepts of anger in the Western world; for the Ifaluk (also spelled Ifalik), a group of less than 500 people in Micronesia, one type of *anger* emphasizes on the social aspect of the term: Their concept of *song* or *justifiable anger* is the recognition of the violation of social norms by another person [2]. Moreover, the categorization of *anger* as a “negative” or “positive” force changed (and is still changing) over time: Whereas in the 1960s *anger* was already seen as “something negative”, earlier people had considered it as a positive, competition-driving force [3]. At the present time, *channeled anger*, again, is “something positive” though, an instrument to release suppressed negative energies that could poison body and mind.

Linguistic conceptualizations of *anger* have been widely studied and the data are easily accessible for many languages (e.g. for American English, Spanish, Turkish and Hungarian see [4], albeit not for the two main languages of the historical Nusantara, *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Melayu*. (Two counter-examples to welcome are from [5], [6] even though the latter focuses exclusively on old literary texts.) On this account, a preliminary analysis of the notion *anger* in these languages seems to be necessary. However, one of the difficulties one might be facing in analyzing a certain domain of *Bahasa Indonesia* or *Bahasa Melayu* is that their written varieties (the so called *bahasa baku* or standard) are very different from their spoken varieties in the region. These differences are far more pronounced than in most European languages for instance, and they appear on all linguistic levels; and obviously, they affect word choices as well. Although some text corpora are available for *Bahasa Indonesia* and *Bahasa Melayu* on the Internet (an interesting initiative is <https://www.sketchengine.eu>), the analysis of the *spoken* form of the language is more feasible, simply, because of the sheer number and the diversity of possible respondents. These two factors enable the researcher to compile his *own* minimalized and focused corpus according to his preferences (especially in terms of educational background of the respondents); whereas a pre-compiled corpus does not provide him with any information on the background of the author(s) of the texts. To narrow down the corpus to one of the above languages, our language choice is this time *Bahasa Indonesia*.

*Metaphors* consists of two domains, an “abstract” (*target*) and a “concrete” one (*source*). The latter is something that we *experience* through our very senses, something that represents an already existing mental concept that helps mapping, simplifying the abstract domain or, in most of the cases, certain features of it. A good example would be the saying that has been recently making its rounds on the Internet: *Life* (target domain) *is like Twitter* (source domain). *You can't control what people say and do. You can just follow or unfollow them.* From the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics, metaphors reveal a lot about *how* we think, *how* we conceptualize abstract terms, or about which of their components we prioritize. Interestingly, we can find a number quasi-universal metaphors in many languages of the world; these concepts often reflect

emotional states (*anger, love, sadness, etc.*), most probably because of the physiological symptoms (i.e. physical experiences) accompanying them. These symptoms are more or less (although *not completely*) the same in every culture. *Anger* is one of the most intense emotions in humans, and its conceptualization as metaphors has been discussed in quite a number of research papers. According to [7], the metaphors of *anger* use the imagery of ‘a substance (usually a *hot fluid*) pressurizing the walls of a container’ in many cultures; however, this substance-in-a-container-metaphor is subject to some cultural specifications. In Turkish, for instance, this container is the heart or the eyes, occasionally, the nose; but the feature *heat* is missing [8]. In the ancient Chinese philosophy of *yin* (cold) and *yang* (hot) however, water and other fluids are traditionally *cold*; thus, in the metaphors of *anger* they use *qi* (gas, energy, etc.) which can be *hot* [6] list a number of languages in which *anger* is conceptualized as ‘a hot liquid (usually blood) in a container’: *Bahasa Melayu* and *Bahasa Indonesia*, English, Tunisian Arab, Farsi, Spanish, Akan, etc. Yet, according to the findings in [4], *anger* can be not only ‘a hot liquid in a container’, but also ‘an opponent’, ‘a weapon’ or ‘an object belonging to someone’ (= someone’s anger); and the top three salient concepts are ‘container’, ‘opponent’ or ‘an object belonging to someone’, although in different order.

## 2. Research Method

*Bahasa Indonesia* is the national language of Indonesia, and it is spoken by some 250 million people; however, for many of these speakers is *Bahasa Indonesia* not their mother tongue as there are approximately 700 (!) tribal languages in the archipelago. (The number of these tribal languages is still subject to discussion due to the issue of what counts as a separate language and what does not.) Historically, *Bahasa Indonesia* has evolved from the Malay dialect of Riau (in the eastern coast of Sumatra); and, although there are smaller or bigger differences in vocabulary, it is widely understood also in Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, Southern Thailand and even in some parts of the Philippines. In this paper we make an attempt to analyze how *anger* is conceptualized in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Furthermore, we would like to see whether *Bahasa Indonesia* conceptualizes *anger* the same way as other languages do (‘container’, ‘opponent’ or ‘an object belonging to someone’), and of interest is the question too, whether it has any language- or culture-specific metaphors for this emotion, and if yes, why. In the first phase of our analysis, we collected words for *anger* in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Obviously, these words reflect different states / qualities of *anger* (short- or long-lived, directed at whom, etc.) and some of them are regional. Thus, in the second phase, we looked at the salience (frequency) of these terms in Google. Upon finding the most salient term for *anger*, we conducted short and written interviews with ten native speakers (university students of foreign languages), in which they were asked to write *expressions / sentences* that contain this very word or its derivations (third phase). The fourth phase was the classification of these expressions / sentences according to the

respective metaphoric concepts of *anger* in them. In last phase, we attempted to find metaphors of *anger* specific to *Bahasa Indonesia*.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The following list of synonyms for the concept *anger* was compiled with the help of two native speakers from Sumatra. Certainly, it does not claim completeness or to be free of dialectal expressions. To reduce this corpus to a reasonable size, we limited our frequency analysis to ten words that were deemed to be the most “common” ones by our native speakers; these are underlined in the list below, the number of Google hits follow in brackets (13/11/2019): marah (61.600.000), *bengis*, berang (4.880.000), berapi-api (4.290.000), *bergelora*, *gemas*, *geram*, *gondok*, *gregetan*, gusar (2.820.000), *hangus dada*, *hangus hati*, *jengkel*, *keki*, *makian*, *meluap-luap*, *mendidih*, *mendongkol*, *menggelegak*, *mengkal*, *mengkal hati*, meradang (2.980.000), *merah telinga*, *merajuk*, *meramas jantung*, murka (8.360.000), naik darah (30.300.000), *naik geram*, naik pitam (794.000), *naik stim*, *palak*, panas hati (58.700.000), *pedar*, *pegal hati*, *radang*, *rongseng*, sebal (1.740.000), *semburan*, *sewot*. Unambiguously, the most salient term is *marah*. This word had been given to our informants to write expressions / sentences with, without any further instruction. Upon receiving their answers, we were looking for contexts that recurred in every person’s return, totalling to seven in the end. We treated these correspondences as “a common ground” and unified them in the following seven sentences (one can read the respective word-by-word translation between the brackets following the sentences):

1. *Tangannya mengepal menahan **amarah** yang membara.* (handGEN-to clench one’s fist-to fight-anger-REFL.PRON.-to flame up)
2. *Anak kecil itu menghentak-hentakkan kaki meluapkan **amarahnya**.* (child-small-DEM.PRON.-to stamp down-leg-to be overflown-angerGEN)
3. ***Amarahnya** memuncak dan membuatnya lepas kendali.* (angerGEN-to peak-to makeGEN-out of control)
4. *Tatapannya tajam menusuk memancarkan **kemarahannya**.* (gazeGEN-sharp-to pierce-to emit- angerGEN)
5. *Darahnya mendidih karena **amarah** yang meledak-ledak.* (bloodGEN-to boil-because-anger-DEM.PRON.-to explode)
6. *Dia sangat **marah** sampai wajahnya merah padam.* (PERS.PRON.S/3-very-angry-until-faceGEN-red-dark)
7. *Matanya memerah menyimpan api **amarah**.* (eyeGEN-to become red-to fight-fire-anger)

In sentence 1, *anger* is ‘something that flames up’ and ‘something to fight’. In 2, it is ‘something that overflows’ and ‘something to be released’. In 3, *anger* is ‘something that peaks’

and ‘something that makes someone losing the control’. In 4, it is ‘a sharp object’. In 5, *anger* is ‘boiling / exploding blood’. In 6, it is ‘something that makes very red’. Finally, in sentence 7, *anger* is ‘fire’ and ‘something to fight’. The bodily locations of *anger* are as follows: legs, eyes, face and eyes (or unspecified); thus, most of them are on the head.

#### 4. Conclusions

Like in many other languages, in *Bahasa Indonesia* too, *anger* is conceptualized as ‘a hot substance that threatens to explode / to overflow (its container)’, ‘something sharp’ (i.e. a weapon), ‘something that makes someone lose control’. Surprisingly, this ‘hot substance’ is not always a *liquid* (blood), but also *fire*. In contrast to other languages, the *control-aspect* is exceptionally pronounced; and it shows that *anger* has to be suppressed, because *anger* threatens the common good, because showing *anger openly* in Indonesia (and in other cultures of the historical Nusantara) might result in someone losing his face in front of the others. Certainly, a small-scale research of this sort cannot do justice to the metaphoric conceptualization of *anger* in a language spoken by hundreds of millions. However, it is our hope that the present short paper can give an impetus to the research of linguistic conceptualization of emotions in *Bahasa Indonesia*.

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