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Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 34, 2018, Especial N°

# 14

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
ISSN 1012-1587/ ISSNe: 2477-9385  
Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

# The forms and meanings of baby birth, cultural discourse in manggarai language

**Fransiskus Bustan<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences, Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, Indonesia

[global@ores.su](mailto:global@ores.su)

**Jos Bire<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences, Nusa Cendana University, Kupang, Indonesia

[info@ores.su](mailto:info@ores.su)

## **Abstract**

This study describes the forms and meanings of baby birth, cultural discourse in Manggarai language in Indonesia. The methods of collecting data were observation, interview, focused-group discussion, and a documentary study. Data were analyzed qualitatively by using inductive method. The results of the study show that the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in the Manggarai language are specific to Manggarai culture as they reflect the conceptualizations of Manggarai people on the different status of a female and male in the Manggarai social system of wa'u, patrilineal-genealogical clan, based on sexual differences.

**Key words:** forms, meanings, discourse, Manggarai, language.

## Las formas y significados del nacimiento del bebé, el discurso cultural en el lenguaje manggarai

### Resumen

Este estudio describe las formas y significados del nacimiento del bebé, el discurso cultural en el idioma Manggarai en Indonesia. Los métodos de recopilación de datos fueron la observación, la entrevista, la discusión grupal focalizada y un estudio documental. Los datos se analizaron cualitativamente mediante el uso de un método inductivo. Los resultados del estudio muestran que las formas y significados del discurso cultural del nacimiento del bebé en el lenguaje Manggarai son específicos de la cultura Manggarai, ya que reflejan las conceptualizaciones de la gente Manggarai sobre el diferente estatus de una mujer y un hombre en el sistema social de Manggarai. tú, clan patrilineal-genealógico, basado en diferencias sexuales.

**Palabras clave:** formas, significados, discurso, Manggarai, lenguaje.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This study describes the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisation of Manggarai people, an ethnic group living in the land of Manggarai which occupies approximately one-third of the length of the island of Flores, in the province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Densely peppered with mountains, the Manggarai landscape has given rise to a considerable variation in culture between areas (Erb, 1999), as reflected in the variation in

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language that consists of the social and functional variation (Hasan, 1988). In terms of social variation, according to Verheijen (1991), Bustan (2005), Semiun (2013), and Bustan et al. (2017), there are several dialects spoken in Manggarai and one of them is a central Manggarai dialect which is spoken by Manggarai people living in the central region of Manggarai. As it is used as the lingua franca for Manggarai people, the dialect is regarded as the general language in the land of Manggarai which is known as Manggarai language. While in terms of functional variation, there are various forms of registers in Manggarai language. One of them is a baby birth cultural discourse, which is spoken by Manggarai people when there is a newborn baby in a nuclear family in order to know whether the newborn baby is a female or a male. Referring to its aim, the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language are specific to Manggarai culture as they reveal the conceptualisations of Manggarai people on the status of a female and of a male in the social system of clan in Manggarai culture on the basis of sexual differences. This is why, in this study, we explore in more depth the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization of Manggarai people, paying special attention to the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language.

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## **2. FRAMEWORK**

Different people speak different languages. This is because every language has its own system. The differences between the systems of languages can be identified in three levels or strata that, in technical linguistic terms, consist of semantic, lexico-grammatical, and phonological level (Hasan, 1988). However, as every language represents the world of thoughts with its own ways, it has been widely acknowledged that the differences between languages are essentially due to cultural differences. As Humboldt propounded, the diversity of languages is not a diversity of signs and sounds, but a diversity of views of the world (Cassirer, 1987; Miller, 1968). This comes closest to the theory of linguistic relativity of Sapir and Whorf (2001) that the varying cultural concepts and categories inherent in different languages affect the cognitive classification of the experienced world in such a way that speakers of different languages think and behave differently. The basic principles that should be taken into account related to that conception are as follows: (a) we perceive the world in terms of categories and distinctions found in our native language and (b) what is found in one language may not be found in another language due to cultural differences (Miller, 1968).

Along with such differences, it is worth noting that both language and culture shared by a people as members of a social group are inextricably intertwined (Brown, 1994; Palmer, 1996; Foley, 1997; Kramsch, 2001; Fairclough, 2003). The relationship can be

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identified by looking at the features of the language they employ in various domains (Goodenough, 1964) which reflect their culture. As pointed out by Wardaugh (2011), the culture of a people finds its reflection in the language they employ because they value certain things and do them in a certain way, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do (Wierzbicka, 1991). This comes closest to the idea of Brown (1994) declaring that culture is deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language as the means for communication among members of a culture is the most visible and available expression of that culture (Wierzbicka, 1991; Ola, 1998).

The significance of language as the most visible and available expression of a culture is the main concern and interest of cultural linguistics, one of the theoretical perspectives in cognitive linguistics which explores the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization. As language can be defined differently, from the perspective of cultural linguistics, language is defined as a cultural activity and, at the same time, and an instrument for organizing other cultural domains. This is because the language used by a people as members of a social group is shaped not only by special and general innate potentials, but also by physical and sociocultural experiences. Similar to the language, as a culture may mean different things for different people, from the perspective of cultural linguistics, culture is defined as the source of conceptualization of experience (Palmer and Fazad, 2007; Palmer, 1996; Sibarani, 2004; Wallace,

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1981). In line with this, according to Foley (1997), culture is a cognitive map shared together by members of a social group as it serves as a display which illustrates how they organize their ways of thinking about items, behaviors, and beliefs or events in the cultural domain. The relationship between language and culture is reflected in conceptualisation which refers to the way they conceptualise experiences in their minds (Palmer and Fazad, 2007).

On the other side, Kramsch (2001) pointed out that language in its use as the means for communication among members of a culture is a symbolic system with the power to shape and create such symbolic realities as norms, values, perceptions, and identities which are expressed and conveyed through discourse as its vehicle (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Grice, 1987; Dillitone, 2002). Discourse as the vehicle of symbolic realities is produced when they interact with each other, as pointed out by Kovecses (2009) that when people interact with each other for particular purposes and to achieve their goals of interactions, they produce particular discourses as assemblies of meanings relating to particular subject matters. When the discourses present a conceptual framework within which significant subject matters are discussed in their culture and latent norms of conduct, discourses can be regarded as ideologies or worldviews. Therefore, according to Geertz (1971) and Schneider (1976), a discourse in this sense is the source of making meaning in a culture.

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The function of discourse as the source of making meaning in a culture is mainly realised in a cultural discourse, an umbrella term for any form of discourse which takes place within a cultural domain as a set of items, behaviors, and beliefs defined as belonging to the same category of things (Gumperz, 1992). As the cultural domain is a basic unit of meaning that shapes how a people as members of a cultural group conceptually organize their worlds, a cultural discourse is the vehicle for the representation of their cultural conceptualisation. Along with the idea of Langacker (1999) that language is an essential instrument and component of culture, whose reflection can be seen in linguistic structure, Kovecses (2009) advocated that a cultural discourse is a repository of meanings stored in the forms of linguistic signs commonly shared by members of a culture. A study on the cultural discourse should be viewed from two poles of linguistic signs, which is pairing of form and meaning. The form refers to the physical feature of language used, as reflected in its structure, while the meaning refers to the content stored in the forms of language used which reflects the conceptualisation of experiences faced by its speakers in the context of living together for years (Foley, 1997). This is one of the reasons that we explore in more depth the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language as the dominant theme of this study.

There have been many studies on Manggarai language, Manggarai culture, and Manggarai people, but none explores in more depth the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language. Nevertheless, it is found out

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that there are several studies which directly and indirectly stimulate us to conduct this study. The study of Erb (1999) on the Manggaraians: a guide to traditional lifestyles, with special reference to *mbaru gendang*, traditional house of Manggarai people, provided an overview on the tradition of baby birth in Manggarai culture. The study of Lawang (1999) on the conflicts of lands in Manggarai: a sociologic approach, suggested that the forms and meanings of register spoken when there is a newborn baby event should be taken into account in an attempt to solve the conflicts of lands between sisters' families and brothers' families in Manggarai. The study of Pampe (2004) on the female as the outside person in Manggarai ethnics provided an overview on the status of female in view of the perspective of sociolinguistics based on the idea that to say a language is to say a society, in this case ethnics or ethnic group with special reference to Manggarai ethnics. The study of Bustan (2005) on the cultural discourse of *tudak* in the ritual of *penti*, agricultural-new year in Manggarai culture, viewed from cultural linguistic perspective, reported that the members of sister's family as *anak wina* (wife receiver clans) are also invited by her brother as the participants of *penti* ritual carried out in their natal village. The study of Bustan (2016) on Manggarai cultural ethnography provided an overview on baby birth event which is mostly carried out in most parts of Manggarai.

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### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

As mentioned earlier, this study describes the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization of Manggarai people, as reflected in the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language, a kind of register produced when there is a newborn baby in a nuclear family aimed at knowing their sexual differences. Therefore, specifically, the objectives of this study are twofold, that is to describe the forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language and to describe the meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language. To achieve the intended objectives, the description is made on the basis of conceptions proposed in a number of theories which include, among others, the theory of language diversity of Humboldt in Cassirer (1987) and Miller (1968), the theory of linguistic relativity of Sapir and Whorf (2001) and Miller (1968), the theory of cultural linguistics by Palmer (1996) and Palmer and Farzad (2007), the theory of anthropological linguistics by Foley (1997), the theory of language and culture by Kramsch (2001), the theory of sociolinguistics by Wardaugh (2011), Gumperz (1992), Bernstein (1972), and the theory of culture by Schneider (1976) and Geertz (1971).

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#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This study is descriptive in nature as it describes the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage based on data collected during thefield research conducted in Ruteng as the main location of research (Muhadjir, 1995).The data were mainly obtained by using an ethnographic approach(Hymes, 1974; Spradley, 1997;Palmer and Farzad, 2007; Geertz, 1971; Foley,1997). The methods of collecting data were observation, interview, and focused-group discussion.The observation was done in order to have a general picture on the forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage. Based on the data of observation, we interviewed a number of key informants selected on the basis of criteria proposed by Faisal (1990), Spradley (1997), and Sudikan (2001)representing Manggaraipeople. The interviews were aimed at distilling theirconceptualizationson the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage.For the sake of data triangulation, the focused-group discussion was carried out with the key informants and a number of supporting informants randomly selected.Besides recordingdata,we also took some descriptive notes during observation, interview, and discussion. The documentary study was done in order to collectsecondary data relevant to the dominant theme of this study. The documents used as the sources of reference were general documents(books) and special documents(scientific articles, results of research, paper). The data of this study were analyzed qualitatively by using inductive method, the analysis was

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started from data to concepts related to the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language in particular as the dominant theme of this study (Casson, 1981).

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study show that there is a close relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization of Manggarai people. The relationship is reflected in baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language, a form of register spoken by Manggarai people in the context of baby birth event in a nuclear family. The forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language are specific to the Manggarai culture as they reflect the conceptualizations of Manggarai people on the different status held by a female and a male in Manggarai culture on the basis of their sexual differences. As mentioned earlier, the differences are conveyed in verbal expression *ata pe'ang* 'outside person' as the label for a female baby and verbal expression *ata one* 'inside person' as label for a male baby. These two verbal expressions designate asymmetric relationship between female and male in the social system of *wa'u*, a patrilineal-genealogic clan as its membership is marked by patrilineage and blood relationship, in Manggarai culture.

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The verbal expression *ata pe'ang* 'outside person' as the label for a female baby marks the subordination, marginalization, and discrimination of female in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggarai culture. It is conceptualised in the cognitive map of Manggarai people that female as *ata pe'ang* is inferior as her role is submissive and subservient in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggarai culture. In contrast, the verbal expression *ata one* 'inside person' as the label for a male baby designates that the male is superior in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggarai culture. This implies that verbal expression *ata one* shows that male holds primary power and predominates in roles of political leadership, moral authority, and the social controls of all properties in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggarai culture. Besides reflecting male dominance, male identification, and male centredness in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggarai culture, verbal expression *ata one* also reveals gender differences in linguistic practices in Manggarai language. The sexual differences between male and female as something given are socially constructed by Manggarai people as the basis of identifying the differences in the status of female and male in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggarai culture.

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## The forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language

As reflected in their linguistic structures of language used, there are two forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage, that is if the newborn baby is female and if the newborn baby is male.

If the newborn baby is female, the form of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguageis as follows:

- (1) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*  
(Question) person inside or person outside  
'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'  
Interlocutors: *Ata pe'ang*  
(Answer) person outside  
'It is an outside person'
- (2) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*  
(Question) person inside or person outside  
'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'  
Interlocutors: *Ata pe'ang*  
(Answer) person outside  
'It is an outside person'
- (3) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*  
(Question) person inside or person outside  
'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'  
Interlocutors: *Ata pe'ang*  
(Answer) person outside  
'It is an outside person'
- (4) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*  
(Question) person inside or person outside  
'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'  
Interlocutors: *Ata pe'ang*  
(Answer) person outside  
'It is an outside person'
- (5) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*  
(Question) person inside or person outside  
'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'
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Interlocutors: *Ata pe'ang*

(Answer) person outside

'It is an outside person'

If the newborn baby is male, the form of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage is as follows:

(1) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*

(Question) person inside or person outside

'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'

Interlocutors: *Ata one*

(Answer) person inside

'It is an inside person'

(2) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*

(Question) person inside or person outside

'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'

Interlocutors : *Ata one*

(Answer) person inside

'It is an inside person'

(3) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*

(Question) person inside or person outside

'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'

Interlocutors: *Ata one*

(Answer) person inside

'It is an inside person'

(4) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*

(Question) person inside or person outside

'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'

Interlocutors: *Ata one*

(Answer) person inside

'It is an inside person'

(5) Locutor: *Ata one ko ata pe'ang?*

(Question) person inside or person outside

'Is it an inside person or an outside person?'

Interlocutors: *Ata one*

(Answer) person inside

'It is an inside person'

There are some natures of similarities and differences between the forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage. The similarities can be seen in question, *Ata pe'ang ko ata one?* 'Is it an outside person or is it an inside person?', as it is realised in the same

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form in text 1 and text 2. The question is ‘yes-no question’ which appears as a compound sentence consisting of two independent clauses as its component parts. The two independent clauses are *Ata pe’ang* ‘Is it an outside person?’ and *Ata one* ‘Is it an inside person?’, which are linked by using coordinating conjunction *ko* ‘or’. The use of this coordinating conjunction shows that the two independent clauses have the same semantic roles.

While the differences between the forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarai language, as presented in the two texts above, can be identified by looking at the answers given by interlocutors, *ata pe’ang* in text 1 if the newborn baby is female and *ata one* in text 2 if the newborn baby is male. Both verbal expression *ata pe’ang* and verbal expression *ata one* are compound words because the combinations of lexical items as their immediate constituents shape not only new forms, but also create new meanings (as will be described in the next section). The verbal expression *ata pe’ang* is made up of two lexical items as its component parts which include the word (noun) *ata* ‘person’ and the word (the adverb of place) *pe’ang* ‘outside’ as its locative marker. The verbal expression *ata one* is made up of two lexical items as its component parts which include the word (noun) *ata* ‘person’ and the word (the adverb of place) *one* ‘inside’ as its locative marker. The adverb of place *pe’ang* ‘outside’ as locative marker in verbal expression *ata pe’ang* is the antonym of the adverb of place *one* ‘inside’ as locative marker in verbal expression *ata one*. These two locative markers make the forms of verbal expression *ata pe’ang* and

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verbal expression *ata one* different in their physical features. Different from the rules in the syntactical structure of English, in the syntactical structure of Manggarailanguage, the locative marker *pe'ang* in the verbal expression *ata pe'ang* and the locative marker *one* in verbal expression *ata one* should distribute following the noun *ata* 'person' as the head word.

### **The meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage**

The forms of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage serve as the sources of making meanings in Manggaraculture, as conveyed in verbal expression *ata pe'ang* and expression *ata one*. These two verbal expressions function as the repository of meanings which reflect the conceptualizations of Manggarai people on the different status of a female and of a male in the social system of *wa'uin* Manggaraculture identified on the basis of their sexual differences. Viewed from the contents stored, both verbal expression *ata pe'ang* and verbal expression *ata one* used in baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage have manyfold meanings. As conceptualised in the cognitive map of Manggarai people, verbal expression *ata pe'ang* 'outside person' means that a female is not the owner of *wa'ub* because, after marriage, she must move away from her natal village, live in her husband's natal village, and become a member of her husband's

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clan for life. This is also conveyed in verbal expression, *Weta wa'i deu, nara lami tana* 'Sister gets married far away, brother guards land', meaning that, being born as *ata pe'ang*, a female is destined to reproduce for other clan, that is the clan of her husband. This also designates that a female as an outside person has no right of having inheritance from her parents in the nuclear family.

In contrast, verbal expression *ata one* 'inside person', as the label for a male baby, means that he is the owner of *wa'u* because, after marriage, he must stay in his parents' house and live in natal village. As such, as the owner of *wa'u*, he holds the privilege of having inheritance in the nuclear family because he will take care of his parents when they get old and maintain the existence of *wa'u* for life. At the same time, being a member of *wa'u* as an extended family originated from the same descent, a male as *ata one* is obligated to guard *mbaru gendang* 'drum house', the origin house of *wa'u*. The term *mbaru gendang* is a compound word made up of the word (noun) *mbaru* 'house' and the word (noun) *gendang* 'drum'. The origin house of *wa'u* is called *mbaru gendang* because there stores *gendang* which is conceptualised by Manggarai people as the image of their common ancestors.

Besides guarding *mbaru gendang* as their origin house, a male as *ata one* together with other members of the same *wa'u* are obligated to control over agricultural land which is called

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*lingko* 'round field'. The obligation is implied in verbal expression, *Gendang one, lingko pe'ang* 'Drum inside, round field outside'. This verbal expression is a compound sentence consisting of two independent clauses as its component parts which include, *Gendang one, lingko pe'ang* 'Guard drum inside' and *Lingko pe'ang* 'Guard round field outside'. The word (noun) *gendang* is the conversion of *mbaru gendang* as the origin house of *wa'u* and the word (adverb of place) *one* 'inside' refers to village (*beo*) as their natal village. The word (noun) *lingko* refers to agricultural land of *wa'u* and the word (adverb of place) *pe'ang* refers to location of *lingko* which lies quite far from the location of their village.

Being born as a male into a nuclear family (*kilo*) as well as a member of *wa'u*'s patrilineal-genealogic clan, the verbal expression *ata one* 'inside person' designates that he shares not only physical properties like natal village (*beo*), origin house (*mbaru gendang*), and agricultural land (*lingko*), but also various rules, norms, and conventions relating to the wider world. This is because he holds primary power and predominates in roles of political leadership, moral authority, and social control of property in the social system of *wa'u* in Manggaraiculture.

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## **6.CONCLUSIONS**

There is a close relationship between language, culture, and conceptualization of Manggaraipeople, as reflected in the forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in Manggarailanguage. The forms and meanings of baby birth cultural discourse in the Manggarailanguage are specific to Manggaraiculture as they reveal not only the different status of females and males in the social system of *wa'u*, patrilineal-genealogic clan, in Manggaraiculture, but also the gender differences in linguistic practices in Manggaraiculture.

The study not only contributes the conception that every language represents the world of thoughts with its own ways, as proposed by Humboldt and linguistic relativity of Sapir and Whorf (2001), but also enriches the conceptions on the relationship between language, culture, and conceptualisation proposed in cultural linguistics of Palmer and Farzad (2007), anthropological linguistics of Foley (1997), the theory of language and culture of Kramsch(2001), the theory of sociolinguistics of Wardaugh (2011), Gumperz (1992), and Bernstein(1972), the theory of culture of Schneider (1976) and Geertz (1971), and the theory of cultural discourse of Bernstein(1972). Besides enhancing understanding on the role of register as a functional variation in language that we employ in cultural domains, it is hope that the study might be beneficial to inspire other researchers who are interested in studying the features of Manggarailanguage used in other kinds of registers reflecting the conceptualisations of Manggaraipeople in viewing the world.

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 34, Especial N° 14, 2018

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.  
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