



Inventory and Analysis of Maritime Lexicons in an Ecolinguistic Perspective within the Mandar Community of Gili Tapan

Suparman

Sumbawa University of Technology, Sumbawa Besar, Indonesia, suparman@uts.ac.id.

Article info

Received Date: 2025-11-07

Accepted Date: 2025-12-01

Published Date: 2025-12-05

Keywords:*

Maritime

Ecolinguistics

Mandar

Lexicons

Abstract*

This research aims to inventory, classify, and analyze in-depth the maritime lexicon of the Mandar ethnic community residing on Gili Tapan Island, West Nusa Tenggara. The study employs an ecolinguistic perspective to understand the interconnectedness between linguistic systems, marine ecosystems, and the sociocultural dynamics of the speech community. A descriptive qualitative approach was utilized, incorporating the *simak-libat-cakap* (engaging observation) technique, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. The results indicate that the Mandar community of Gili Tapan possesses a rich maritime lexicon structured into various semantic categories, such as boat nomenclature, fishing gear, traditional navigation, and marine natural phenomena. From an ecolinguistic standpoint, these lexicons reflect the interdependence between humans and the marine environment. However, the modernization of fishing gear, shifting economic patterns, and marine ecosystem degradation have triggered a shift in local lexicon usage. This trend potentially leads to language loss regarding traditional Mandar maritime knowledge.

1. Introduction

Language does not merely function as a mechanical instrument of communication; rather, it operates as a complex cognitive-cultural representation system that enables humans to organize, interpret, and assign meaning to their surrounding ecological realities. Within this framework,

language serves as an epistemic tool that not only reflects the world but actively shapes human perspectives toward the environment. In coastal societies, particularly the Mandar community on Gili Tapan Island, language plays a central role as a medium for storing collective memory and a mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of knowledge regarding the sea as a primary living space. The sea is understood not just as a geographical entity but as a cultural landscape imbued with symbolic, spiritual, and economic meanings, all dimensions of which are manifested in the structure of the lexicon they employ. Consequently, every maritime term within Mandar speech represents the result of long-term interactions between humans and their environment, internalized within the linguistic system.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the ecolinguistic paradigm, which views language as an inherent part of a dynamic and mutually influential ecosystem. This perspective is rooted in Einar Haugen's (1972) concept of the "ecology of language," suggesting that the existence and development of language are perpetually in a reciprocal relationship with the biological, social, and cultural environments of its speakers. In this sense, language cannot be decoupled from its ecological context, as environmental changes invariably imply linguistic shifts. Furthermore, Michael Halliday (1990) expanded this scope through a systemic functional linguistic approach, emphasizing that human linguistic choices have ideological consequences for how they treat nature. In other words, lexical structures and environmental discourses are not passive reflections but active indicators of the quality of human-ecosystem relations. Therefore, the diversity and richness of a maritime lexicon can be read as a reflection of both ecological health and the cultural sustainability of a community.

Historically, the Mandar community is recognized as one of the most adaptive maritime entities in the Nusantara archipelago, with centuries-old traditions of sailing, navigation, and fishing. Adrian B. Lapien (2009) noted that Mandar mobility is not only economic but also cultural, where migration serves as an adaptive strategy to marine resource dynamics. The migration of the Mandar to West Nusa Tenggara, including Gili Tapan Island, created a multidimensional adaptation process encompassing ecological, social, and linguistic aspects. In this context, geographical relocation does not merely move a community physically; it triggers a recontextualization of local knowledge to suit the oceanographic and ecological characteristics of the new waters. This adaptation is manifested in the formation and modification of a distinct maritime lexicon, which describes not only physical phenomena, such as currents, winds, and seabed topography, but also records historical experiences, survival strategies, and the identity of the Mandar diaspora. These lexicons function as a "living archive" integrating traditional navigational knowledge, understanding of ecological cycles, and ethical norms in the sustainable utilization of marine resources.

However, in recent decades, the sustainability of this linguistic-ecological system has faced severe pressure from globalization and modernization, particularly in the fisheries sector. Technological transformation, marked by the use of modern fishing gear and digital navigation systems, has displaced traditional practices that previously relied heavily on reading natural signs. Consequently, many local terms related to ecological phenomena, such as seasonal current patterns, fish behavior, or weather indicators have experienced functional reduction or lost relevance in daily practice. This situation is exacerbated by the changing orientation of the younger generation, who tend to associate local languages with backwardness, preferring dominant languages perceived to have higher social and economic prestige. In the perspective of Steffensen and Fill (2014), this phenomenon is not merely an ordinary linguistic shift but a form of cultural-ecological degradation

that could lead to the loss of accumulated Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK). Thus, the erosion of the maritime lexicon impacts not only the language as a symbolic system but also the community's adaptive capacity to understand and respond to marine environmental dynamics.

Therefore, this research carries high urgency, serving not only as descriptive linguistic documentation but also as an epistemological intervention in maintaining the sustainability of human-environment relations. The ecolinguistic approach allows for a more critical analysis of how language represents and constructs ecological practices. By inventorying and analyzing the maritime lexicon of the Mandar community in Gili Tapan, this study aims to reveal the ecological knowledge structures hidden within language while offering contextual and sustainable revitalization strategies. Ultimately, language preservation is defined not only as an effort to maintain cultural identity but as a strategic step in preserving marine ecosystem balance through the reinforcement of time-tested local knowledge.

2. Research Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach by adopting the Dialectical Ecolinguistics framework, a paradigm that integrates ecological, social, and ideological dimensions in language use (Bang & Trampe, 2014). The research site is Gili Tapan Island, Sumbawa Regency, selected purposively due to the presence of a Mandar diaspora community that consistently preserves traditional maritime activities. The focus of this study is to uncover the link between language and the environment through data sources including maritime lexicons (nouns, verbs, and adjectives), traditional seafaring expressions, and oral narratives regarding marine knowledge practices. Following Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001), these data reflect how the physical environment shapes the vocabulary structure and local wisdom of a speech community.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, where the researcher was directly involved in seafaring activities to capture language use in its natural context. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, such as senior fishers (punggawa), boat builders, and traditional leaders, to explore the depth of meaning behind the terms used. The Simak-Libat-Cakap (SLC) technique was also applied to record authentic verbal interactions within the community (Sudaryanto, 2015). These techniques ensure that the data obtained are not merely texts but also the socio-ecological contexts embedded within them.

Data analysis followed an interactive model encompassing data reduction through lexicon classification, data presentation in semantic categories, and conclusion drawing via ecolinguistic interpretation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Specifically, the analysis links three main dimensions according to the language dialectics theory: the biological dimension (physical marine environment), the sociological dimension (fishermen's social structure), and the ideological dimension (Mandar values and beliefs). Through the synthesis of these three dimensions, the study intends to map how language functions as an instrument that both records and maintains the balance of the maritime ecosystem on Gili Tapan Island (Stibbe, 2015).

4. Results and Discussion

1. Classification of Maritime Lexicons

1) Lexicons of Boats and Their Components (Maritime Technology)

Lexicons such as *Lopi*, *Sambo*, and *Guling* represent not just technical nomenclature but an internalized ethnotechnological knowledge system. From an ecolinguistic perspective, this phenomenon can be explained through Gibson's (1979) concept of "environmental affordances," where the marine environment provides and limits

possibilities for human action, driving the innovation of adaptive boat designs. The terminological distinction between *Lopi* (traditional boat) and *Sambo* (the outrigger) reflects an empirical understanding of hydrodynamics maintaining stability, buoyancy, and balance in dynamic wave conditions.

1) Lexicons of Fishing Gear (Ecological Adaptation)

The presence of lexicons such as *Roroo*, *Panyambaq*, and *Bubu* reflects ecological adaptation strategies that are both technical and ethical. In this context, language serves as an ecological classification system containing detailed knowledge of fish behavior, sea currents, and benthic characteristics. Lexicon *Bubu* (a bamboo trap), for instance, indicates the use of local materials and suggests a principle of sustainability due to its biodegradable nature. This signifies an integration of economic practice and ecological awareness inherited through language.

2) Lexicons of Navigation and Natural Phenomena (Spatial Cognition)

Lexicons like *Bittoeng*, *Bara'*, and *Lino* are manifestations of a maritime spatial cognition system based on empirical experience and long-term ecological observation. *Bittoeng* (stars) are not merely astronomical objects but "navigational texts" read to determine course. Similarly, *Bara'* (west monsoon) and *Lino* (calm sea conditions) reflect the interpretation of natural phenomena as communicative entities providing "signals" for human activity.

2. Ecolinguistic Analysis

1) Interdependence of Language and Environment

In Haugen's (1972) ecology of language, language is a mediating system between humans and their environment. Stibbe (2015) reinforces this through "stories we live by," asserting that linguistic structures contain ideological narratives directing environmental actions. For instance, *Anging Timoroq* (the East Wind) is not just a directional marker but a semiotic system integrating meteorological knowledge and ecological cycles.

2) Sociocultural Dimensions and Knowledge Transmission

Generational variation in lexical mastery reflects language shift and attrition influenced by social restructuring. Older generations serve as repositories of ecological knowledge, while the youth, facing intensification of national and global language contact, undergo semantic simplification and domain loss. This correlates with Nettle and Romaine's (2000) finding of a strong link between language extinction and biodiversity loss.

3) Lexical Shift and the Threat of Linguistic Extinction

The shift from traditional terms to modern terminology reflects the dominance of modern epistemology over local ecological knowledge. The marginalization of *Bittoeng* in favor of GPS reflects a move toward potentially exploitative discourses. Linguistic extinction is co-extensive with ecological extinction (Maffi, 2005); when a species disappears, the lexicon referring to it vanishes as well.

4. Novelties

This study contributes significantly to ecolinguistics through several key novelties. Spatially, it deconstructs the tendency of previous research to focus on Mandar endemic areas in West Sulawesi by examining the Mandar diaspora on Gili Tapan. This captures the phenomenon of linguistic adaptation in a new ecological space. The study reveals lexical hybridity and linguistic plasticity, where the integration of local Sumbawa vocabulary into Mandar structures occurs through systematic phonological and semantic adaptation. Most crucially, it proves a linear

causality between ecosystem degradation and lexical erosion. The loss of maritime wealth in the lexicon serves as a bio-indicator of declining environmental health..

5. Conclusion

This research concludes that the maritime lexicon of coastal communities functions as a complex ecological classification system and adaptive ethnotechnological representation. However, ecolinguistic findings highlight a serious threat of lexical erosion. Modernization and ecosystem degradation have caused a linguistic shift, resulting in the loss of ecological literacy among the younger generation. Therefore, marine conservation is inseparable from language preservation; maintaining local lexicons means safeguarding vital fragments of knowledge and environmental ethics necessary for the future resilience of maritime cultures and ecosystems.

References

- Bang, J. C., & Trampe, W. (2014). Aspects of an ecolinguistic theory of language. In A. Fill & P. Mühlhäusler (Eds.), *The ecolinguistics reader: Language, ecology and environment*. Continuum.
- Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (1985). *Culture and the evolutionary process*. University of Chicago Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Fill, A., & Mühlhäusler, P. (Eds.). (2001). *The ecolinguistics reader: Language, ecology and environment*. Continuum.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1990). New ways of meaning: The challenge to applied linguistics. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6, 7–36.
- Haugen, E. (1972). The ecology of language. In A. S. Dil (Ed.), *The ecology of language: Essays by Einar Haugen* (pp. 325–339). Stanford University Press.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lapian, A. B. (2009). *Orang laut, bajak laut, raja laut: Sejarah kawasan laut Sulawesi abad XIX*. Komunitas Bambu.
- Maffi, L. (2005). Linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34, 599–617. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.34.081804.120437>.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Mühlhäusler, P. (2003). *Language of environment, environment of language: A course in ecolinguistics*. Battlebridge Publications.
- Mühlhäusler, P. (1996). *Linguistic ecology: Language change and linguistic imperialism in the Pacific region*. Routledge.
- Nettle, D., & Romaine, S. (2000). *Vanishing voices: The extinction of the world's languages*. Oxford University Press.
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language: An introduction to the study of speech*. Harcourt Brace.
- Silverstein, M. (1976). Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. In K. H. Basso & H. A. Selby (Eds.), *Meaning in anthropology* (pp. 11–55). University of New Mexico Press.
- Steffensen, S. V., & Fill, A. (2014). Ecolinguistics: The state of the art and future horizons. *Language Sciences*, 41, 6–25.

- Stibbe, A. (2021). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by*. Routledge.
- Sudaryanto. (2015). *Metode dan aneka teknik analisis bahasa: Pengantar penelitian wahana kebudayaan secara linguistik*. Sanata Dharma University Press.
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. MIT Press.