

HELONGNESE MARINE ECO-LEXICONS AMONG THE STUDENTS OF MENTARI KUPANG VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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Abstract

This research aims at investigating Helongnese marine eco-lexicons among the students of Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School. The problems of the research are: the understanding of SMK Kelautan Mentari Kupang students on Helongnese marine eco-lexicons and the factors of the understanding of Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School students on Helongnese marine eco-lexicons. Helongnese is a regional language spoken by Helongnese ethnic people in Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The research is ongoing and conducted at the school called Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School with considerations that the school is located at marine and fishermen areas called Nitneo, West Kupang District, Kupang Regency; the school has concentration on marine; Helongnese language shows a competition with other regional languages and Indonesian in Kupang Regency. The research methods applied in the research are interview and observation. The result of the research shows that 1) the students of Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School have good understanding on Helongnese marine eco-lexicons, and 2) the factors of their good understanding on Helongnese marine eco-lexicons are language ecology, language transmission, language attitude.

Keywords: *Helongnese marine eco-lexicons, students of Mentari Kupang Maritime, Vocational School, language ecology*

Introduction

Local languages in Indonesia currently face serious challenges in terms of survival, particularly amidst globalization and the dominance of Indonesian as the national language. Globalization has had a significant impact on societal communication patterns, with global languages like English and the national language being used more frequently in education, the media, and formal social interactions. This situation has led many Indonesians to become bilingual or even multilingual. The intermingling of foreign and national languages in Indonesian life has led to language change, a shift in language over time (Kridalaksana, 1993:169). This crucial situation has led to regional languages being increasingly marginalized and experiencing a degradation in their function and value in everyday life (Crystal, 2000).

The impact of globalization has had a significant impact on massive changes in lifestyles, interactions, and community activities. One tangible impact of this phenomenon is the decline in the use and understanding of regional languages among the younger generation. The younger generation tends to prefer speaking Indonesian or a foreign language in their social interactions because it is considered more practical, modern, prestigious, and has higher social value. The shift in communication patterns among the younger generation on digital platforms is also accelerating the decline of regional languages in Indonesia. Furthermore, urbanization, migration, and a formal education system that does not fully support multilingualism complicate the transmission of regional languages from older to younger generations. If this

situation persists, regional languages have the potential to experience serious degradation, leading to their extinction.

This situation results in the loss of local knowledge embedded in language. Language contains symbols and meanings that represent values that are continuously preserved and developed by its speakers. This is supported by Hutton's (2010) statement that a language is a collective property understood as the *volk* or *ethnos* (people) that is historically and continuously passed down through generations. More than just a means of communication, regional languages contain a variety of invaluable local knowledge and values. The values embedded in a regional language influence thought patterns and how individuals understand the world through the cultural perspective of the community of speakers. Therefore, the loss of a language also means the loss of the local knowledge it contains (Mühlhäusler, 2001).

Focusing on one of Indonesia's local languages, rich in vocabulary but threatened by extinction in eastern Indonesia, is the Helong language. Helong is a regional language in the Kupang region, spoken by the Helong ethnic group on the coast of Kupang Regency. This language is an important part of the local community's cultural identity and possesses unique characteristics, particularly in the maritime sector. Moreover, Helong contains a set of lexical items that describe the environment, culture, and ecology (Rahmawati & Widayati, 2021).

The Helong language possesses a rich marine ecolexicon that reflects the close relationship between its speakers and the marine environment. From a linguistic perspective, marine Helong language is more than just naming; it reflects traditional customs, cultural values, and the interaction between language and its marine environment. This rich ecolexicon demonstrates the Helong people's deep understanding of the marine ecosystem and reflects the Helong people's geographical location. Therefore, by delving deeper into the Helong ecolexicon, we can uncover more of the cultural identity of the Helong people.

On the other hand, the number of active Helong speakers continues to decline, especially among the younger generation. This situation endangers the sustainability of the marine ecolexicon. The loss of vocabulary means the loss of cultural and natural knowledge inherent in the terms. For example, certain words can convey specific information about fishing seasons or the characteristics of marine environments that are safe for fishing (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001).

The marine ecolexicon encompasses knowledge about marine life, fishing gear, natural conditions, and shipping activities. The ecolexicon permeates the traditions and culture inherent in the Helong people. This marine ecolexicon is not merely words and sentences, but also the essence of life, reflecting the circumstances and identity of the native speakers of the Helong language.

Therefore, research on the marine ecolexicon in the Helong language is crucial. This study aims to document, analyze, and understand the relationship between language, culture, and the environment in the context of the Helong community. This research is currently ongoing, and the results presented are general in nature and provide a preliminary overview of the current situation. It is hoped that these findings will serve as a foundation for future efforts to preserve the language and local knowledge.

Methodology

This research has a qualitative research design. The qualitative design was realized in observation method to observe the Helongnese ecology at the areas around Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School. The information about the language ecology is certainly very important to support the analysis of this research. The observation method was also completed with interview to gain information from the key informant about maritime ecolexicons used by the Helongnese speakers at the areas of Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School. The interview was also done to the students of Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School as the subject of this research. They were interviewed about their knowledge about Helongnese in particular about maritime ecolexicons. Both the data from the observation and interview methods were analysed with qualitative descriptive method to explain the data in relation to the theory applied in this research.

Finding and Discussion

Helong is an Austronesian language of the Malayo-Polynesian branch spoken on the southwestern tip of Timor Island (Bolak Village) and Semau Island, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) (Balle & Mai, 2017). Helong was once the primary language in Kupang City (the capital of NTT Province), but the migration of some Helong ethnic groups to Semau Island in the 17th and 18th centuries due to colonial warfare resulted in the language being abandoned (Utomo, 2022). Helong has speakers living in three regions within the territory of East Nusa Tenggara Province: Kupang City, the west coast of Timor Island, and Semau Island (Edward, 2018; Semau et al., 2013).

In the 2015 Kupang Regency regional statistics publication published by the Kupang Regency Central Statistics Agency, the capital of Kupang Regency is located in the city of Oelamasi since October 22, 2010. The number of sub-districts in Kupang Regency is 24 with 17 sub-districts and 160 villages. which has an area of 5,298.13 km consists of 24 islands with three inhabited islands (Timor, Semau and Kera) and 21 uninhabited islands. The area of its waters is 3,278.25 km² with a coastline of 442.52 km. Geographically, this regency is located between -9 0 15'11.78'' - -100 22'14.25'' South Latitude and between 123 0 16'10.66''-124 0 13'42.15'' East Longitude and is flanked by two oceans namely the Sabu Sea and the Indian Ocean. Topographically, Kupang Regency is largely hilly, mountainous, and includes some lowlands. The average elevation of the regency ranges from 0 to 500 meters above sea level. (BPS Kupang Regency, 2015).

Kupang Regency has a dry tropical climate, with two main seasons: a long dry season and a relatively short rainy season. In 2024, the highest temperature in Kupang Regency reached 29.8°C in November, while the lowest temperature was in July (26.7°C). The highest rainfall in Kupang Regency in 2024, at 483.6 mm, occurred in March, while the lowest rainfall was in August. Rainfall patterns in 2024 were similar to those of the previous two years, with high rainfall ending in February and increasing again in November (BPS Kupang Regency, 2025).

Furthermore, the natural potential of Kupang Regency, which is an inseparable part of NTT Province, is very diverse, such as agriculture, fisheries, plantations, livestock, and tourism. In the publication of BPS Kupang Regency (2025) in the plantation sector, coconut is the largest plantation production in Kupang Regency in 2024 amounting to 7,244 tons with a land area of 12,233.50 hectares. In the agricultural sector, in 2024 Kupang Regency produced 5.04 tons/hectare. Next, the livestock sector, cattle are the largest population in the category of large livestock population with a total population in Kupang Regency in 2024 of 322,336. Pigs are the largest population in the category of small livestock population cultivated in Kupang

Regency. Then, in the fisheries sector, the following table shows the volume of fishery production produced by Kupang Regency in 2025;

Table 1. Marine Capture Fisheries Production in Kupang Regency in 2025

Kecamatan <i>District</i>	Tuna	Cakalang	Tembang	Tenggiri	Kembung	Selar
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
01. Semau	3,03	44,02	18,2	8,57	245,9	92
02. Semau Selatan	2,12	51,08	9,91	6,49	110,29	85,26
03. Kupang Barat	3,89	153,14	45,83	10,25	23,4	2,54
04. Nekamese	-	24,07	9,73	1,9	-	-
05. Kupang Tengah	-	25,14	26,12	1,9	90,12	60,01
06. Taebenu	-	-	-	-	-	-
07. Amarasi	-	-	-	-	-	-
08. Amarasi Barat	-	35,17	13,03	1,27	121,25	-
09. Amarasi Selatan	-	-	4,23	0,1	-	-
10. Amarasi Timur	-	52,02	3,12	0,12	1,3	-
11. Kupang Timur	-	45,52	9,1	35,2	-	-
12. Amabi Oefeto Timur	-	-	-	-	-	-
13. Amabi Oefeto	-	-	-	-	-	-
14. Sulamu	3,43	170,2	49,32	32,5	34,62	225,2
15. Fatuleu	-	-	-	-	-	-
16. Fatuleu Tengah	-	-	-	-	-	-
17. Fatuleu Barat	-	-	2,44	0,87	-	2,68
18. Takari	-	-	-	-	-	-
19. Amfoang Selatan	-	-	-	-	-	-
20. Amfoang Barat Daya	-	105,12	2,3	1,07	1,53	2
21. Amfoang Tengah	-	-	-	-	0,2	-
22. Amfoang Utara	1,1	-	3,07	2,53	2,5	3,12
23. Amfoang Barat Laut	-	-	2,6	0,64	0,15	-
24. Amfoang Timur	1,13	-	2,25	0,93	1,92	2,13
Kabupaten Kupang <i>Kupang Regency</i>	14,7	705,48	201,25	104,34	633,18	474,94

The table above shows that Kupang Regency has enormous potential, supported by its waters covering approximately 299,000 km². The table shows that the main commodities in Kupang Regency are tuna, skipjack tuna, tembang, mackerel, mackerel, and selar. According to the 2025 publication of the Kupang Regency Statistics Agency (BPS), skipjack tuna is the most abundant fish produced in Kupang Regency, with a production of 705.48 tons. This situation

attracts coastal communities to become fishermen. Data from the Kupang Regency Statistics Agency (BPS) (2025) shows that 2,092 people work as full-time fishermen, 2,120 as part-time fishermen, and 2,069 as part-time fishermen.

A significant portion of the coastal community in Kupang Regency relies on traditional fishing for their livelihood. As traditional fishermen, their knowledge is not only technical but also based on local wisdom, such as understanding ocean currents, wind direction, fishing seasons, and the types of marine life. In an article published by The Voics for Just Climate Action (2023), he recounted his experience of reading the situation through local folklore, "*We look at the current. If the current is strong, it means there is wind, and we move to a shady place in the hope that the wind will pass quickly. To get good results, we usually look at the current, fishing when there are waves and good currents, the results are better, but if the water is calm but the current is strong, the results are useless. If the sea water is murky, well, we don't need to go down to catch fish because the results will definitely be small.*" not only the older generation, the younger generation also goes to sea, this is explained in (Kobesi et al., 2019) many students to school children go to sea during school holidays and during the west season (December - March), because during that season the sea currents are only good in the afternoon so as not to disrupt school. This local knowledge is passed down from generation to generation and expressed in local languages, including the Helong language.

Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School is a vocational educational institution focusing on maritime affairs, specifically the nautical expertise program. Students in this major are prepared to possess basic maritime competencies such as navigation, ship operation, safety lessons, and an understanding of sea conditions. The school's proximity to the coastal area means they frequently interact with maritime terminology. However, the majority of students at Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School tend to understand maritime terms in Indonesian rather than regional languages, particularly Helong. This aligns with the ongoing degradation of the Helong language among the younger generation in Kupang.

The marine ecolexicon is a specialized vocabulary related to the marine environment, encompassing names of marine life, fishing gear, natural conditions, and shipping activities. In the context of the Helong language, this ecolexicon reflects the close relationship between the community and its coastal environment. This relationship will continue to thrive as the Helong marine lexicon continues to thrive. The following are some examples of the Helong marine ecolexicon:

Table 2. Helongnese Marine Eco-Lexicons

No.	Bahasa Helong	Terjemahan
1	<i>Atuil lui</i>	Boat helmsman
2	<i>Atuil tasi</i>	Fisherman
3	<i>Batu tasi</i>	Coral/sea rock
4	<i>Ikan</i>	Fish
5	<i>Ika tasi</i>	Sea fish
6	<i>Ika Teri</i>	Anchovies
7	<i>Lamun tasi</i>	Seagrass (a type of seaweed)

8	<i>lelat ikan</i>	Fish arrow
9	<i>Len</i>	Waves
10	<i>Lolon tasi</i>	Waves
11	<i>Lui</i>	Boat
12	<i>Oras</i>	Season
13	<i>Otot</i>	Dry season
14	<i>Manu Hnanga</i>	Seaweed
15	<i>Matan tasi</i>	Bay/estuary
16	<i>Tasi</i>	Sea or open sea

Based on data analysis, the meaning of the Helong community's marine ecollexicon was found to refer to objects, ecology, climate, fauna, flora, and professions that have a close relationship with the Helong community's maritime activities. The word *Tasi* in the Helong language refers to the Sea. This word is closely related to the life of the Helong people who live in coastal areas, where their daily activities are highly dependent on marine products, such as fishing, gathering seaweed, and utilizing other marine resources to support economic and social life. In a cultural context, the word *Tasi* is not only refers to the sea as a geographical space, but also has a symbolic meaning that reflects the spiritual relationship between humans and nature. In several traditional practices in the East Nusa Tenggara region, this term is often associated with traditions such as *Maccera Tasi*, a ritual of gratitude to the sea for the results it provides as well as a form of request for safety for fishermen. In addition, *Tasi* is also often used in various traditional expressions that describe local wisdom, the outlook on life of coastal communities, and respect for the sea as a source of life that must be protected and preserved.

Furthermore, the marine ecollexicon data demonstrates the degradation or decline in the use of marine Helong language among the younger generation, particularly students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School, in their daily lives. The school's coastal location is not a definitive reason for students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School to use this vocabulary in their daily lives. This is influenced by the use of Indonesian as the official language in education, resulting in a more dominant exposure to Indonesian in the daily lives of students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School. Furthermore, the influence of digital globalization has also impacted students' knowledge, understanding, and use of language in this modern era. In this digital era, the younger generation tends to use languages considered more highly regarded in their region, such as Indonesian and Kupang Malay.

On the other hand, some students still use and understand the marine ecollexicon of Helong language, especially those from families or environments that still speak these regional languages. This supportive environment allows students to continue being exposed to and interacting with marine vocabulary, thus maintaining their understanding of the terms inherent in the Helong language, particularly maritime Helong. This ecollexicon has not completely disappeared, but its condition is starting to be threatened. The following factors influence the understanding of the marine ecollexicon of the Helong language by students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School:

First, the linguistic environment of the Helong language among students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School. The linguistic environment plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of a language. Students who live in a family or community environment that actively uses Helong will certainly differ from those who passively use it. Additionally, according to Fishman (in Caher & Agustina, 1995: 204), language choice can be assessed by examining specific institutional contexts called domains. These domains include family, neighbors, friends, and even the workplace. Within the family environment, if parents no longer use Helong in everyday conversation, students will have difficulty understanding specific terms, especially the maritime ecollexicon. Therefore, further research is needed to understand this phenomenon.

Second, the transmission of the Helong language from the older generation and adults to children and adolescents. The process of language inheritance from the older generation to the younger generation is a key factor in maintaining the Helong language, particularly the marine ecollexicon. Currently, the transmission of the Helong language is degrading, as many older generations do not consistently teach and use the Helong language, and/or many older generations have fewer speakers. As a result, the younger generation, including students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School, do not receive sufficient exposure to the marine ecollexicon from an early age. This has resulted in a reduced level of understanding and mastery of these terms.

Third, the linguistic attitudes of students at Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School toward the Helong language, particularly the marine ecollexicon. In language, attitudes are closely linked to one's achievements (Nasira & Hamzah, 2014). This situation is evident in their understanding, liking, and use of the marine ecollexicon in the Helong language. In Kupang, Helong is not the only language spoken by the community; rather, it is multilingual. Therefore, a positive attitude is needed to continue preserving the Helong language. Several students at Mentari Kupang Maritime Vocational School demonstrated a positive attitude in understanding the marine ecollexicon, using it in certain contexts. However, there were also students who had less positive attitudes, considering the Helong language less relevant for everyday use. Therefore, attitude is the most influential factor in someone's decision to learn a language. If students have a positive attitude, such as awareness of the importance of the language they are learning, then they will try to learn and use the Helong language.

Fourth, the influence of other languages: The dominance of Indonesian and Kupang Malay in daily interactions in Kupang City has resulted in the decline of Helong. The use of Indonesian as the official language in education has undoubtedly played a role in destabilizing Helong's position as a regional language, and Kupang Malay as a lingua franca in social interactions, making students more accustomed to and comfortable using it in everyday life. Consequently, the frequency of Helong language use, including its marine ecollexicon, increasingly indicates a decline in Helong-speaking communities. Therefore, it is necessary for Helong speakers to be fully aware of the importance of incorporating Helong into their daily communication.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Helong, as a regional language in Kupang, possesses a rich marine ecollexicon that reflects the close ties between coastal communities and their marine environment. This ecollexicon not only serves as a means of communication but also contains cultural values, local knowledge, and traditional wisdom inherent in the Helong language, particularly marine Helong. However, the ecollexicon

possessed by students of Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School regarding knowledge of objects, ecology, climate, fauna, flora, and professions is lacking regarding the maritime environment in Kupang.

The marine ecolexicon of the Helong language is currently degrading, especially among young people exposed to modernization, such as students of Mentari Kupang Marine Vocational School. Although they live and study in a coastal environment close to marine activities, this does not justify their continued use of it in everyday communication. Most students understand and use Indonesian and Kupang Malay terms better than Helong, although a small number still maintain their use of these languages.

This decline is influenced by several key factors: a linguistic environment that is less supportive of the use of Helong, the weakening of the language transmission process from older generations to younger generations, students' diverse linguistic attitudes toward Helong, and the dominance of Indonesian and Kupang Malay in daily life. These four factors are interrelated and contribute to the decline in understanding and use of the marine ecolexicon of the Helong language.

Thus, more serious preservation efforts are needed by raising public awareness, strengthening the use of the Helong language in families and educational settings, and fostering positive attitudes toward the local language among the younger generation. This is crucial to ensure the preservation of the Helong language and its rich marine ecolexicon and preventing future extinction.

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