

# Language Maintenance and Shift of Flora's Lexicons in Karonese Traditional Food: An Ecolinguistic Perspective

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**Abstract:** This article aims at finding out how flora's lexicons associated with Karonese traditional food are maintained and shifted. A qualitative research design is used to explore the phenomena of such social issues. The data were flora's lexicons associated with Karonese traditional food in seven villages (i.e. Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi) at Salapian Sub-District North Sumatra Indonesia. The data were obtained from 210 informants (30 persons from each of the villages). The informants were classified into six groups to differentiate between generations. The data were collected using three techniques including (i) observation, (ii) interview, and (iii) document. The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014: 31-33). The findings of this research are: (i) two out of three kinds of Karonese traditional foods were no longer recognized by people in these seven villages, and most of the flora's lexicons associated with those foods were shifted. Meanwhile, the other kind of food is still recognized leading to the maintenance of flora's lexicons associated with it; and (ii) the factors motivating language maintenance and language shift of flora's lexicons in Karonese traditional food are (a) whether those lexicons refer to staple food of the local people, and (b) whether the reference of those lexicons is also used in making other kinds of food.

**Keywords:** Ecolinguistics, Flora's Lexicons, Karonese Traditional Food, Language Maintenance, Language Shift

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## 1. Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but it also contains cultural visions that record, preserve, and pass on collective concepts containing historical, religious, philosophical, socio-cultural and ecological values of the local community. Research on language continues to develop with different approaches in order to get deeper understanding about the language. Therefore, research on language has involved other disciplines such as sociology to see social variables (e.g. age, occupation, education) known as sociolinguistics, computer science known as computational linguistics, and so forth. Meanwhile, this research involves the discipline of ecology or environment, known as ecolinguistics. The term ecology was first used by Ernest Haeckel, a German biologist, in 1866 (Haugen, 1972) who, at that time, was not aware of its connection with

language. The term ecology was restored by Haugen in 1970 and connected it with language to coin the term ecology of language. He believes that there is a strong linguistic component in language ecology (Haugen, 2001: 57).

Ecolinguistics studies can be divided into two major parts: environmental discourse analysis and language ecology. The former is often termed eco-critical discourse analysis and the latter is often expressed through lexico-grammatical studies of how humans talk about and adapt linguistically to new and foreign environment (Derni, 2008: 24; Nash, 2013: 45). Halliday's followers focus their research on eco-critical discourse analysis that covers all what characterizes modern life in the age of globalization (Derni, 2008: 24). The German linguist Matthias Jung, for example, uses text corpora from newspapers to investigate changes over time in environmental vocabulary (Fill and Mühlhäusler, 2001: 46). Through these researches, linguistics as a science can contribute to ecosystem or environment improvement

through language.

Meanwhile, Haugen's followers focus their research on the language phenomena referring to the interactions of humans, their brain, and their environment. Besides, language ecology also studies language diversity with the aim at maintaining and preserving the diversity of language. In relation to the classification of ecolinguistics, this research focuses on the maintenance and shift of flora's lexicons used in Karonese language spoken in Salapian Sub-District, Langkat, North Sumatra. From the point of view of ecolinguistics, according to Mbete (2009: 2), language and its community users are considered as an organism living systematically together with other organisms. Responding to Mbete's idea, Karonese language and its community are considered as a community living systematically with other organisms, i.e. the environment around them composed of terrestrial and aquatic habitats. These habitats are organisms containing abiotic and biotic environments that store flora in maintaining the viability of Karonese people in Salapian Sub-District.

However, some of lexicons representing flora used in this sub-district have been shifting; in other words, some of the flora lexicons which used to be recognizable are no longer used by today's Karonese generation. Changes in the language environment (both physical and non-physical ones) result in loss of the register associated with a variety of specific registers. The traditional Karonese houses in Salapian Sub-District, which used to be stilt houses with palm tree roofing, wooden frame, bamboo floors and board/bamboo walls tied in such a way with ijuk (palm fiber) ropes, are now modern houses with zinc roofing, lightweight steel frame, concrete or tile flooring, and brick walls. Certainly, the registers associated with the stilt houses are loss and are no longer recognized by the younger generation.

Karonese language spoken in Salapian Sub-District has experienced ecological changes significantly due to several factors. First, the arrival of new comers with different languages certainly influences the Karonese speech community in Salapian Sub-District. Second, the electronic devices together with their own registers coming to this sub-district introduce new lexicons that must be adopted by the local people due to the absence of their equivalents in the local language. Third, the rapid growth of electronic games replaces the traditional games of Karonese people that used to be played by utilizing the objects around their environment as the game tools. Fourth, the school policy requiring children in the kindergartens to communicate in bahasa Indonesia affects the children's acquisition of the Karonese language. As a result, a variety of languages coming into Salapian Sub-District may gradually "kill" the Karonese language.

In Salapian Sub-District there are seven desa (villages) composed of Karonese community; they are Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi. The Karonese community in these villages migrated from Karo Highland (known as Karo Gugung) during the Dutch colonization (Reid, 2014: 83). The Karonese language in these villages has a unique community

due to the diversity of its speakers. The native Karonese speakers in these villages, for example, have ever interacted with Dutch, Chinese and Javanese communities during Dutch colonization, with Japanese community during Japanese colonization, and with Javanese community in the recent days. Nevertheless, in such diversity, Karonese people keep maintaining their native language and showing their high social tolerance with people from different languages. Environmentally, these villages are abiotically temperate areas with fresh weather due to a large area of forests and fresh water in the rivers which both serve as their living sources.

However, recently, forest clearance in these villages has contaminated the ecosystem badly. Converting forests into plantations by cutting down the trees and burning the land still continues until now. When the dry season comes, smoke always pops up in various places that comes from forest burning. In addition, the rivers are full of both biodegradable waste (e.g. old vegetables, deceased animals, paper, etc.) and non-biodegradable waste (e.g. plastics, electronic components, bottles, etc.). Such activities are the largest contributors to the occurrence of natural phenomena such as global warming, climate change, sea levels rising, floods, droughts and so forth (Maffi, 2001); at the same time, such ecological changes are also the largest contributors to the loss of local language (Hult, 2003; Maffi, 2001; Sachdev and Hanlon, 2001; Sallabank, 2010; Steciag, 2010; Zunino, 2008).

To maintain the survival of the Karonese language in these villages together with their ecological environments is not only the duty of the local government but also the responsibility of the Karonese speakers who have a direct contact with these ecological environments. They should also promote their self-awareness in maintaining the Karonese language in these villages and its ecological environments. Concerns over the survival of local languages and the loss of their life diversity have triggered concerns about (i) the language in its relationship with the environment in which the indigenous people live (United Nations, 2009), (ii) the relationship between human, environment and language (Fill and Mühlhäusler, 2001), and (iii) the maintenance of accurate ecological or environmental balance contained in the language (International Council for Science, 2015).

In relation to the phenomena of language and ecology elaborated above, this research investigates the Karonese language maintenance and shift of flora's lexicons of traditional foods spoken in seven villages (i.e. Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi) at Salapian Sub-District North Sumatra Indonesia including the factors leading to such maintenance and shift. The combination of linguistics and ecology theories (Fill, 1993; Fill and Mühlhäusler, 2001; Haugen, 1972; Lechevrel, 2009; Sallabank, 2010) is applied to investigate such maintenance and shift. This research contributes to the efforts of maintaining Karonese traditional foods in these villages because maintaining traditional foods means maintaining Karonese flora's lexicons associated with them.

## 2. Methodology

This is a qualitative research for its purpose of exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012: 16), i.e. the Karonese language maintenance and shift of flora's lexicons spoken in Salapian Sub-District. The data are flora's lexicons of Karonese language spoken in 7 villages at Salapian Sub-District, they are Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi. These seven villages were chosen as the research location because they are the destinations of early Karonese's migration to Salapian Sub-District. Besides, as they built their houses around Gelugur Langkat Plantations who employed people from various areas in Indonesia and from foreign countries, they frequently had a contact with people from different languages. This language contact may lead to gradual change of the Karonese language spoken in these villages. The data were obtained from 210 informants (30 persons from each of the villages) selected based on the criteria suggested by Milroy and Gordon (2003: 15). The informants of this research are 5 to 60 years old and not too well-educated persons who have lived in the 7 villages, namely Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi, for the greater part of their life and have had comparatively little contact with people from other places. Considering the variable of age, the informants are classified into six groups to differentiate between generations: 5-10 years of age, 11-20 years of age, 21-30 years of age, 31-40 years of age, 41-50 years of age, and 51-60 years of age.

The data were collected using three techniques that include (i) observation, (ii) interview, and (iii) document. The observation technique used in this research was nonparticipant observation because the researcher only recorded what he observed without interacting directly with the informants. The interview conducted in this research was an unstructured, open-ended interview; the interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The document technique was conducted in this research to collect the documents supporting the data obtained through observation and interview.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014: 31-33). The flora's lexicons that have been collected were condensed to get the real data. Then, the data were displayed. Before the findings were formulated, the data had been verified. In the data verification, the researcher returned to the field twice for the purpose of not missing any useful data of this research. Then, the findings were formulated and the conclusions were drawn based on the findings.

## 3. Findings and Discussions

The data analysis focuses on three kinds of Karonese traditional food which used to be recognizable in the seven villages, namely cimpa, rires, and onggal-onggal. Based on

its cooking method, there are three kinds of cimpa, i.e. cimpa matah, cimpa onong-onong, and cimpa tuang. Cimpa matah is made of rice flour, brown sugar and brown (mature) coconut. Usually, for a kilogram of flour, a kilogram of brown sugar and two brown coconuts that have been grated are needed. The three ingredients are, then, mixed and stirred evenly without having to be cooked. Simply, cimpa matah is ready to be served.

Cimpa onong-onong is made of sticky rice flour, brown sugar and brown (mature) coconut. A kilogram of flour and two brown coconuts that have been grated are mixed and stirred evenly; while a kilogram of brown sugar is sliced. Then the mixture (dough) containing the flour and grated coconuts is cooked. After that, the sliced brown sugar is covered with the cooked dough, and then it is wrapped with banana leaves. Finally, the dough that has been wrapped is steamed for about thirty minutes, and cimpa-onong onong is ready to be served.

Meanwhile, cimpa tuang is also made of sticky rice flour, brown sugar and coconut milk. A kilogram of flour is stirred evenly in a container containing a kilogram of brown sugar and coconut milk. Then, a pan that has been smeared with sufficient grease is heated. Once the pan is hot, five tablespoons of the mixture of flour, brown sugar and coconut milk are poured into the pan. After two minutes, cimpa tuang is ready to be served.

Based on the data analysis, it was found that the three kinds of cimpa have no longer been recognized by people in Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi since 20 years ago. The informants within 21-60 years old recognize cimpa, while the informants within 5-20 years old do not recognize cimpa anymore. Cimpa used to be one of Karonese traditional food served in the final day of merdang merdem tradition (annual Karonese folk celebration usually held after paddy growing) lasting in six days. However, such tradition has been simplified, and cimpa is no longer served during the celebration. Besides, cimpa used to be a dish served in mengket rumah mbaru event (a traditional ceremony when people move in their new house). The Karonese people in these 7 villages used to hold this ceremony before six in the morning. After the owner opens his/her new house, the invitees are served with breakfast, i.e. cimpa. This ceremony is still maintained; however, the invitees are no longer served with cimpa, other cookies are served instead.

As cimpa is no longer recognized by Karonese people in these 7 villages, the lexicons, particularly flora's lexicons, associated with it also experience changes. Although some lexicons have been shifting, others are maintained. The lexicons such as tualah (coconut), bulung galoh (banana leaves), and pola (tree sap) are not recognized by people within 5 to 20 years old. These words have been replaced by the Indonesian words: kelapa for coconut, daun pisang for banana leaves, and nira for tree sap. This finding implies that the lexicons are not dead from Karonese language, but are replaced by loan words. Meanwhile, such other lexicons as page (paddy) and beras (rice) are maintained, or they are still recognized by today's Karonese generation in the 7 villages. The factors motivating this language maintenance are: (i) those lexicons refer to staple food of the local people, and (ii)

the references of those lexicons are also used in making other kinds of food.

The position of *cimpa* has been replaced by *dodol*, a sweet sticky toffee-like candy. This is not a typical Karonese food because it is widely known by people all over Indonesia; almost every region in Indonesia has its own *dodol*. Even though *cimpa* and *dodol* share few similarities in terms of their ingredients, they look and taste differently. Certainly, the lexicons associated with these two kinds of food are also different.

Another kind of Karonese traditional food which is no longer recognized in Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi is *onggal-onggal*. This food is made of sticky rice flour or tapioca flour, brown sugar and grated coconut. A kilogram of flour needs a kilogram of brown sugar and three pieces of grated coconut. The flour is used as dough, while the brown sugar that has been finely sliced and the grated coconut are mixed and cooked in a *senggayah* (crock) without water. When done, the mixture is put into another container. Then a tablespoon of the mixture is taken and wrapped in the dough sufficiently. It is then fried until it turns yellow which indicates that *onggal-onggal* is ready to be served.

Based on the data analysis, it was found that *onggal-onggal* has no longer been recognized by people in the 7 villages since 50 years ago because this food is known only by the informants within 51 to 60 years old. Unlike *cimpa*, there is no specific celebration in which *onggal-onggal* is served. In making *onggal-onggal*, the flora's lexicons used are *gadung* (cassava), *tualah* (coconut), *pola* (tree sap), *page* (paddy) and *beras* (sticky rice). The first three lexicons experience changes and are not recognized by people within 5-20 years old; they have been replaced by Indonesian words: *ubi* for cassava, *kelapa* for coconut, and *nira* for tree sap. Meanwhile, the other two lexicons are still recognized by people in the 7 villages as they are not particularly associated with *onggal-onggal*.

The position of *onggal-onggal* has been replaced by *onde-onde* (a sweet chewy coconut coated ball). *Onde-onde* is one of popular home-made foods in Indonesia, but it is more popular in Mojokerto, one of the towns in East Java. Mojokerto has been well-known as the *onde-onde* town since the time of Majapahit Kingdom (Mahesa, 2014: 1). Nevertheless, *onggal-onggal* and *onde-onde* are obviously different, especially in the way how they are cooked; *onggal-onggal* is fried, while *onde-onde* is boiled.

The last kind of typical Karonese food in Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi is *rires*. This food is made of sticky rice and coconut milk. The sticky rice is filled into the hollow of a bamboo segment. The filled bamboos are then placed standing up over a slow burning wood fire. The bamboo is turned every few minutes to make sure it cooks evenly and does not get burnt. After being cooked for about an hour, *rires* is ready to be served.

Based on the data analysis, it was found that *rires* is still recognized by people of all ages in these seven villages;

nevertheless, it is more well-known as *lemang*, the Indonesian lexicon having similarities with *rires*. Despite their similarities, they share a few differences. In cooking *lemang*, the hollow of a bamboo joint is lined with banana leaves before it is filled with the sticky rice and coconut milk, while in cooking *rires*, the hollow of a bamboo joint is not lined. This certainly results in different taste.

The reason why *rires* is said to have been maintained in these seven villages, although it is more well-known as *lemang*, is that its meaning and uses remain similar with its past meaning and uses. Like *cimpa*, *rires* is served in *mengket rumah mbaru* event (a traditional ceremony when people move in their new house). A night before the Karonese people in these seven villages move in their new house, the people in their neighborhood voluntarily come to their house to cook *rires* which will be served in the next morning after the house opening ceremony. In addition, *rires* is also served as a traditional food in a Karonese wedding ceremony. Unlike *mengket rumah mbaru* event, *rires* is cooked a night after the wedding ceremony.

As *rires* is still recognized by Karonese people in these 7 villages, most of the flora's lexicons associated with it that include *tualah* (coconut), *beras pulut* (sticky rice) and *buluh rires* (a kind of bamboo used to make *rires*) are still recognized by the people of all ages. Among these three lexicons, *tualah* (coconut) is no longer recognized by a group of informants within 5-20 years old. Nevertheless, it does not die, it is merely replaced by the Indonesian lexicon 'kelapa'. This finding is quite surprising considering that coconut is one cultivated plants in these villages, and can be found in almost every local people's house yard. One of the problems leading to this phenomenon is the use of bahasa Indonesia in a classroom context. At school, these young Karonese people are introduced to the names of plants in bahasa Indonesia. In addition, home environment does not support the use such lexicon as they use the lexicon 'kelapa' instead of 'tualah'.

The interesting finding of the lexicons associated with *rires* is that all of the informants still recognize the word 'buluh rires'. In Karonese language spoken in these seven villages, there are 10 words associated with bamboo; they are *buluh belangke* (a bamboo with long and big segments), *buluh belin* (a big, thick and solid bamboo), *buluh cina* (a bamboo as small as a pencil), *buluh duri* (a thorny bamboo), *buluh awar* (a good looking bamboo for its yellow strip), *buluh kai* (a yellow bamboo with green strip), *buluh kayan* (a bamboo with short segments), *buluh kerapat* (a thin bamboo with relatively long segments), *buluh laga* (a bamboo with straight thin segments), and *buluh rires*. Among these 10 lexicons, 6 of them are still recognized by people in these villages, i.e. *buluh belin*, *buluh cina*, *buluh duri*, *buluh kerapat*, *buluh laga* and *buluh rires*. Meanwhile, the other four lexicons, i.e. *buluh belangke*, *buluh awar*, *buluh kai*, and *buluh kayan*, are no longer recognized.

This finding indicates that bamboo is one of the important plants for the people living in these seven villages. It is used for many purposes, including in making several kinds of traditional Karonese food. Besides, bamboo in these villages

belongs to cultivated plants meaning that bamboos are easy to find near the people's houses.

In addition, the findings show that the shift taking place on the flora's lexicons associated with Karonese traditional foods is also motivated by the weakness of the local people and the local authority to maintain the traditional foods in these seven villages. Traditional foods are closely related to traditional ceremonies because they are mainly created as the main dishes to be served in such ceremonies. Each of the traditional foods certainly contains a particular meaning in different traditional ceremonies, especially spiritual meaning. Wajik (one of traditional foods in Minangkabau culture served in a traditional wedding party), for example, symbolizes manti who is believed as a savior for every problem that the couple may encounter in their marriage life as a reflection of its local wisdom "there is no problem which cannot be resolved" (Rony, 2001: 40). Therefore, replacing a traditional food in a traditional ceremony reduces an essence of the ceremony itself. The awareness and eagerness of the local people supported by the local authority to maintain the existence of local traditional foods are the key factors to avoid losing the local lexicons, particularly flora's lexicons.

#### 4. Conclusions

Most of traditional foods in Lau Kambing, Turangi, Penungkiren, Buluh Pering, Lau Dayang, Gunung Merlawan, and Seribu Jadi are no longer recognized by people living there. One of the leading factors is less appreciation to the traditional ceremony which used to be held in these villages. Traditional food is closely related to traditional ceremony; therefore, once the traditional ceremony is not maintained, the traditional food associated with such traditional ceremony cannot be maintained. In a similar way, the flora's lexicons associated with the ingredients of the traditional food in Karonese language spoken in these seven villages cannot be maintained.

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