

Linguistic identity construction through the fishermen's lexicon in Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang: An Ethnolinguistic study of the coastal community of Tanjung Pandan

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Abstract: The use of language in fishing communities is closely associated with the knowledge and social experiences developed through sustained interaction with the marine environment. However, fishermen's lexical practices involve more than the identification of marine species, as particular lexical forms may also distinguish members of the community from speakers outside the fishing group. This study aims to examine how fishermen's fish-name lexicon contributes to the construction of linguistic identity in Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang, Tanjung Pandan. An ethnolinguistic approach was employed to analyse 10 fish-name lexicons, with Giles and Johnson's ethnolinguistic identity theory providing the analytical framework, particularly the concepts of psycholinguistic distinctiveness, perceived group boundaries, and ethnolinguistic differentiation. The findings show that the fish lexicon functions as a shared linguistic repertoire through which fishermen organize and communicate knowledge developed from their occupational engagement with the coastal environment. The recognition and use of particular fish names create a form of shared lexical knowledge that distinguishes community members from speakers who do not share the same linguistic repertoire. This lexical distinction becomes more significant in interaction across group boundaries, where local terms may be maintained in in-group communication but adjusted or explained when addressing outsiders. These findings indicate that fishermen's linguistic identity is constructed not simply through the existence of local fish names, but through their shared use, recognition, and differentiation in social interaction. The fish lexicon therefore represents an ethnolinguistic resource through which occupational knowledge is shared and linguistic boundaries are negotiated within the coastal community.

Keywords: ethnolinguistic, linguistic identity; fishermen's lexicon; coastal community

Introduction

Language is a cultural element that serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium through which a society represents its experiences, knowledge, values, and perspectives regarding the environment it inhabits (Roselynn et al., 2025). The relationship between language and culture is particularly evident in communities that rely heavily on specific environments, such as coastal and fishing communities (Afandi et al., 2025). Within the lives of fishing communities, language evolves through intensive interaction with the sea, encompassing fishing activities, weather conditions, marine biota, fishing gear, boats, and fishing grounds, as well as through various social activities linked to maritime life (Mutmainnah & Khotimah, 2026). Consequently, the vocabulary used by fishers cannot be understood merely as a collection of words referring to specific objects or activities; this lexicon captures collective experiences, local knowledge, environmental classification systems, and how the community comprehends and adapts to its ecological space (Mya et al., 2024). This perspective aligns with the field of ethnolinguistics, which examines the interconnections between language, culture, and the social lives of speakers (Susianti et al., 2024). Research on the Tobelo community on Obi Island, for instance, views maritime lexicon as a representation of the community's relationship with the marine environment and as a form of traditional ecological knowledge passed down through generations (Boriri, 2026).

Thus, the central issue in the study of coastal communities' lexicons extends beyond the mere existence of local terms for maritime objects (Sartini, 2022). While documenting linguistic forms is essential for demonstrating lexical richness, a mere inventory fails to explain when and through what mechanisms a lexicon acquires ethnolinguistic significance (Nur et al., 2026). Differing names for the same referent do not in themselves prove the existence of a distinct linguistic identity, as lexical difference does not necessarily equate to ethnolinguistic differentiation. A more fundamental analytical question concerns how knowledge of specific lexical forms becomes shared knowledge, how mastery of these forms is socially distributed, and

how this distribution enables speakers to recognize commonalities with fellow group members while distinguishing themselves from those who do not share the same linguistic and occupational experiences (Nazki, 2025). Consequently, ethnolinguistic analysis must shift its focus from the question of what is named to the question of who knows, recognizes, uses, and negotiates such naming within social interactions (Syam et al., 2023). This issue is particularly relevant within the fishing community of Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang in Tanjungpandan, Belitung Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province. For these fishers, the sea serves as a workplace demanding continuous observation, identification, and classification of resources; consequently, their occupational experience fosters a linguistic repertoire closely tied to fishing practices (Fuad et al., 2024). The research data identifies ten fish names: *builat*, *rintik*, *mingkik*, *jeibong*, *mamong*, *ganas*, *tongkol puitei*, *beibuiluis*, *teinggiri*, and *tongkol itam*. These forms do not exhibit a uniform naming pattern which some display distinct local lexical characteristics, while others such as *tongkol puitei* and *tongkol itam*, combine more widely recognized elements with descriptive terms specific to local naming practices.

The relationship between lexicon and group membership can be explained through the Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory developed by Giles and Johnson (1987). This theory views ethnolinguistic identity as something related to how linguistic characteristics gain relevance when speakers perceive them in relation to social groups (Hryshchuk & Kovalenko, 2019). In this study, three concepts are important such as psycholinguistic distinctiveness, perceived group boundaries, and ethnolinguistic differentiation. Psycholinguistic distinctiveness allows for an explanation of how linguistic forms become salient when linked to shared experiences; perceived group boundaries explain how the distribution of linguistic knowledge can create boundaries between those who share a repertoire and those who do not (Febiola & Susanti, 2025). Ethnolinguistic differentiation explains the social significance of maintaining or using certain linguistic forms when groups interact with speakers outside their group (Mukhtar et al., 2024). This framework allows this study to go beyond describing lexical forms and to examine the processes by which the lexicon functions as an identity resource (Zulianti, 2024). This distinction is also important to avoid claims that every fish name found in Juru Seberang is exclusive to that community. The geographic exclusivity of a form requires comparative evidence from other communities and cannot be inferred solely from its presence in a single research location. Instead, ethnolinguistic significance may lie in how a form is recognized and used as part of shared occupational knowledge, even if certain elements are also known to speakers outside the community (Canestrino et al., 2022). Therefore, the focus of analysis needs to be on the relationship among form, knowledge, users, and interaction context, rather than solely on claims of lexical uniqueness.

Several previous studies have shown that lexical choice is closely related to the social and cultural organization of the speaking community. Sere & Suryadi (2026), for example, showed that lexicon variations in the Wabula community's traditional communication serve as markers of status, respect, identity, and social relationships. Forms such as *tabea*, *mande*, and *amanto* do not have identical social functions, but their use depends on the position and relationship between the speaker and the addressee. This study importantly demonstrates that the significance of a lexical form cannot be separated from its social distribution and the context of its use; even the acceptability of a particular construction depends on the appropriateness between the form of respect, the target audience, and the social structure of the Wabula community. Thus, this research reinforces the principle that lexical analysis needs to move beyond denotative meaning to the social functions produced through language use.

In the coastal community context, Sartini (2022) more specifically linked the maritime lexicon to the linguistic identity of coastal communities in Tuban Regency. The study showed that several fish names and maritime terms differed in understanding between coastal communities and speakers outside the community, thus allowing differences in lexical knowledge to contribute to the group's linguistic distinctiveness. Erniati et al., (2022), through their study of the Haogumi lexicon of the Galogalo community on Morotai Island, also demonstrated the connection between linguistic forms and the community's local knowledge. A study

of the maritime traditions of the Biak community further demonstrated that maritime expressions and vocabulary can convey local knowledge and social meanings that are shaped in the lives of coastal communities (Hengki et al., 2025). These studies collectively emphasize that the maritime environment not only generates economic practices but also provides a domain of experience that is categorized and represented through language.

Broader ethnolinguistic research also shows similar tendencies. Studies on toponymy, proverbs, oral traditions, and cultural lexicons show that language forms can store a community's knowledge, values, environmental perspectives, and social experiences (Darheni (2018); Dalyan et al., (2025). Meanwhile, studies on the Tobelo maritime lexicon place coastal vocabulary as part of the relationship between language, the environment, and the community's social life (Boriri, 2026). Based on these tendencies, previous research has provided a strong basis for arguing that lexicons can represent cultural and environmental knowledge. However, the strong focus on the lexicon's representational function also leaves open questions about the social mechanisms that transform lexical knowledge into identity resources (Portilla, 2020).

Although previous ethnolinguistic studies have linked local lexicons to cultural knowledge and community identity, less attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which lexical forms become socially meaningful identity resources (Aliyeva, 2025). Addressing this gap, this study examines ten fish-name lexicons used by fishermen in Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang, shifting the analytical focus from *lexicon as an inventory of local terms* to *lexicon as socially distributed knowledge*. Drawing on Giles and Johnson's (1987) *Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory*, the study investigates how maritime and occupational experiences develop into *shared lexical knowledge* and contribute to *psycholinguistic distinctiveness*, *perceived group boundaries*, and *ethnolinguistic differentiation*. It argues that fishermen's linguistic identity is not inherently embedded in local fish names but is relationally constructed through their shared recognition, use, and negotiation within social interaction, positioning the fishermen's lexicon as an ethnolinguistic resource connecting maritime experience, occupational knowledge, and linguistic identity (Almos & Ladyanna, 2019).

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with an ethnolinguistic approach to analyze the lexicon of fish names and their relationship to the construction of linguistic identity of the fishing community of Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang, Tanjungpandan, Belitung Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province. Primary data were obtained through direct interviews with fishing figures who were selected purposively based on their knowledge and involvement in fishing activities in the area (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Data collection was carried out by documenting the fishermen's catch through photographs, then asking informants to identify and name the names used for each fish and provide information on the use of these terms in the fishing community (Maxwell, 2016). This procedure resulted in ten lexicons of fish names, namely builat, rintik, mingkik, jeibong, mamong, ganas, tongkol puitei, beibuiluis, teinggiri, and tongkol itam, which were then used as the main corpus of the study.

The data were analyzed through a process of ethnolinguistic identification, classification, and interpretation. In the first stage, each lexical form was recorded and paired with a documented fish referent; then, the data were classified based on their naming characteristics to identify local forms, specialized lexical knowledge, and forms that combine local and descriptive elements. Interview information was then used to interpret the relationship between lexicon use, fishermen's occupational experience, and shared knowledge within the community, particularly to examine how familiarity with specific terms differentiates speakers who share fishing experience from those who do not. This analysis enabled the study to distinguish lexical difference as a difference in naming forms from ethnolinguistic differentiation as the social significance that arises when knowledge and use of the lexicon are related to experience and group membership

Data interpretation employs Giles and Johnson's (1987) *Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory*, particularly the concepts of psycholinguistic distinctiveness, perceived group boundaries, and ethnolinguistic differentiation. This framework traces how the marine environment shapes fishermen's occupational experiences, which inform linguistic categorization and develop into shared lexical knowledge and a communicative repertoire that contributes to ethnolinguistic differentiation. Thus, linguistic identity is understood not as inherently embedded in lexical forms, but as socially constructed through their shared recognition, use, and distribution within the fishing community. The concept of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality was not used as an analytical category because the research data did not specifically measure perceptions of group status, demographic strength, or institutional support needed to operationalize these dimensions (Giles & Johnson, 1987). Thus, the analysis focused on aspects that can be demonstrated by lexical and interview data, namely the relationship between maritime experience, shared lexical knowledge, psycholinguistic distinctiveness, perceived group boundaries, and ethnolinguistic differentiation.

Findings and discussion

The findings identified 10 fish-name lexicons in the fishing context of Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang, Tanjungpandan: builat, rintik, mingkik, jeibong, mamong, ganas, tongkol puitei, beibuilis, teinggiri, and tongkol itam. These forms refer to fish encountered within the fishermen's occupational environment, but their significance extends beyond their function as labels for marine species. The lexicons represent forms of occupational knowledge through which fishermen identify and distinguish fish relevant to their everyday activities. The variation in the forms also indicates different naming practices. Some terms function as locally established lexical forms, such as builat, rintik, mingkik, and mamong, while others combine local and more descriptive elements, as reflected in tongkol puitei and tongkol itam. The selected lexical data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The 10 fish-name lexicons

No	Local fish name	Scientific name	Ethnolinguistic significance
1	Builat	<i>Gnathanodon speciosus</i>	Local lexical designation
2	Rintik	<i>Caranx Ignobilis</i>	Shared occupational vocabulary
3	Mingkik	<i>Neotrygon kuhlii</i>	Specialized lexical knowledge
4	Jeibong	<i>Abalistes stellatus</i>	Local lexical distinctiveness
5	Mamong	<i>Caranx papuensis</i>	Community-shared terminology
6	Ganas	<i>Lutjanus vitta</i>	Local naming practice
7	Tongkol puitei	<i>Auxis thazard</i>	Local + descriptive naming
8	Beibuilis	<i>Sillago aeolus</i>	Lexical distinctiveness
9	Teinggiri	<i>Scomberomorus commerson</i>	Local occupational lexicon
10	Tongkol itam	<i>Euthynnus affinis</i>	Hybrid/general + local naming

Table 1 indicates that the fishermen's lexicon constitutes a structured linguistic repertoire through which marine resources are recognized and classified within the fishing environment. The 10 lexical forms identified in the study show variation in lexical specificity and in the relationship between local naming practices and shared occupational knowledge. Terms such as Mingkik, Jeibong, and Beibuilis represent specialized lexical knowledge associated with the identification of particular fish species within the fishing context. Similarly, Rintik, Mamong, and Teinggiri function as part of the occupational vocabulary through which fishermen communicate about their catches and the marine environment. Other forms, such as Tongkol puitei and Tongkol itam, combine more recognizable or descriptive elements with local naming practices. The coexistence of these forms indicates that the fishermen's lexicon is not based on a single naming pattern but reflects different ways of categorizing marine resources developed through occupational experience.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this variation is significant because the function of the lexicon extends beyond the naming of fish. A lexical form becomes ethnolinguistically relevant when it is embedded in shared knowledge and recognized through communication within a particular social group. In this context, Builat, Rintik, Mingkik, Jeibong, Mamong, Ganas, Tongkol puitei, Beibuilis, Teinggiri, and Tongkol itam represent linguistic resources through which fishermen organize and communicate their occupational knowledge. The different lexical patterns identified in Table 1 therefore reflect the ways in which marine knowledge is embedded in everyday communication. This connection between vocabulary and occupational experience contributes to linguistic distinctiveness because the recognition and appropriate use of particular forms depend partly on shared knowledge of the fishing environment. In line with Giles and Johnson's (1987) ethnolinguistic identity perspective, shared linguistic resources may contribute to the symbolic boundaries through which a group maintains a distinctive linguistic repertoire in relation to speakers who do not share the same occupational experience (Giles & Johnson, 1987). The significance of the fishermen's lexicon, therefore, lies not simply in the lexical forms themselves but in the shared knowledge and communicative practices associated with their use. Selected fish specimens documented in the fishing environment are presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Fish specimens photographed in the coastal fishing context of Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang

The ethnolinguistic significance of these forms lies in their relationship with shared knowledge and occupational experience. A fish name becomes meaningful within communication when speakers share knowledge of the referent and understand how the term is used in the fishing environment. Thus, the lexicon can be viewed as a shared linguistic repertoire rather than a collection of isolated vocabulary items. This interpretation is consistent with previous research on coastal communities, which shows that marine and fisheries lexicons may develop as linguistic features that distinguish coastal speech communities from surrounding groups. In particular, fish names may reflect the community's way of classifying and interpreting the marine environment through repeated interaction with it. The same perspective is relevant to the Tanjung pandan data. The lexical forms are connected to an occupational environment in which fishermen routinely encounter, recognize, and communicate about different types of fish. Their linguistic significance therefore emerges from use within a particular social context. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, the relationship can be understood in this diagram.



Figure 2. The ethnolinguistic process underlying fishermen's lexical categorization

Once these categories become shared among community members, they form part of a common communicative repertoire. The lexicon consequently provides a linguistic representation of the fishermen shared experience of the coastal environment. The ethnolinguistic relevance of the fish lexicon becomes clearer when linguistic knowledge is considered in relation to group membership. Knowing a particular fish

name involves more than knowing its dictionary equivalent. It also involves recognizing the referent within the context in which fishermen use the term. This shared knowledge can distinguish speakers who participate in the same occupational environment from interlocutors who do not possess the same repertoire. The distinction is therefore not created by the lexical form alone but by the distribution of knowledge surrounding its use. This finding corresponds to Giles and Johnson's concept of perceived group boundaries, in which linguistic characteristics may become socially meaningful when they are associated with distinctions between an ingroup and an outgroup (Giles & Johnson, 1987). In the present context, a fisherman who recognizes a specialized form such as *mingkik*, *jeibong*, or *beibuiluis* participates in a communicative repertoire that may not be equally accessible to people outside the fishing environment. The lexical difference thus has a social dimension: it provides an observable indication of shared knowledge and occupational experience.

However, the presence of local fish names should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of ethnolinguistic identity. A lexical form becomes identity-relevant when it is socially distributed, recognized by members of a group, and differentiated from forms used or understood beyond that group. This distinction is important because it shifts the analysis from the existence of local vocabulary to the social function of vocabulary. In this sense, identity is not contained in the lexical form itself but emerges through its social use and recognition. The findings also support the distinction between lexical difference and ethnolinguistic differentiation. Lexical difference refers simply to the use of different words for the same or related referents, whereas ethnolinguistic differentiation concerns the social significance of maintaining particular linguistic forms in relation to other speakers. The fish lexicon becomes relevant to ethnolinguistic differentiation when its use contributes to distinguishing community-shared terminology from terminology that is more widely accessible. This interpretation is consistent with findings from coastal communities in Tuban, where several fish names were reported to be less readily understood by speakers outside the coastal community. The study treated such restricted intelligibility as part of the linguistic distinctiveness of the coastal speech community (Sartini & Sanubianto, 2022). Similarly, research on the Biak community demonstrates that maritime vocabulary can encode local knowledge and social meanings, highlighting the close relationship between language, culture, and coastal life (Giles & Johnson, 1987; Jihad Saleh et al., 2025a; Taha & Febriningsih, 2022). Other studies also demonstrate that ethnolinguistic expressions, including maritime lexicons, oral traditions, proverbs, and toponyms function as repositories of cultural knowledge, worldview, social values, and community identity (Agus, 2026; Dalyan & Andini, 2025; Darheni, 2018; Jihad Saleh et al., 2025). For Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang, the same analytical principle can be applied without claiming that the 10 terms are exclusively used in the community. Their ethnolinguistic significance is more appropriately located in their relationship to shared occupational knowledge and the communicative practices of fishermen.

Giles and Johnson's concept of psycholinguistic distinctiveness provide a further explanation of how the fishermen's lexicon may contribute to identity construction. Linguistic forms can become salient as markers of group identity when speakers associate them with membership in a particular social group (Giles & Johnson, 1987). In the present context, the use of a shared fish name may simultaneously identify a marine referent and activate shared knowledge between interlocutors. A local term can therefore function as a linguistic resource through which speakers recognize common occupational experience. The significance of this process becomes more apparent when communication occurs across group boundaries. Among fishermen who already share the relevant lexical knowledge, a local fish name can be used without additional explanation. When the interlocutor does not share the same knowledge, the speaker may need to explain the term, provide a more general name, or reformulate the expression. Such variation is important because it demonstrates that ethnolinguistic differentiation is not necessarily permanent. It depends on the communicative situation and on the relationship between the participants.

This pattern corresponds to Giles and Johnson's view that speakers may maintain linguistic distinctiveness in interactions where group membership is salient but may also accommodate their speech

when communication with an outgroup requires greater mutual intelligence. In the fishing community, therefore, the use of local fish names should not be understood as a fixed boundary separating fishermen from outsiders. Instead, the boundary is permeable and interactionally negotiated. Local forms may be maintained when shared occupational identity is relevant, while broader or explanatory forms may be preferred when the primary concern is communicative clarity. The distinction is particularly relevant to forms such as *tongkol puitei* and *tongkol itam*, which contain elements that are more transparent to speakers familiar with broader fish terminology. Such forms demonstrate that local lexical identity does not necessarily depend on completely opaque vocabulary.

Ethnolinguistic distinctiveness may also emerge through the particular ways speakers modify, combine, and conventionalize familiar lexical elements within their community. The identity function of the lexicon therefore lies not simply in whether a word is 'local' or 'general', but in how the form is recognized and used within social interaction (Giles & Johnson, 1987). Fish Lexicon and the Construction of Linguistic Identity Taken together, the findings indicate that the 10 fish-name lexicons function as linguistic resources connecting marine knowledge, occupational experience, and social identity. The process can be summarized as follows: shared fishing experience produces shared lexical knowledge; shared lexical knowledge forms a common communicative repertoire; and the common repertoire creates the potential for linguistic differentiation when contrasted with speakers who do not share the same knowledge. This process provides a more precise explanation of how linguistic identity is constructed through fishermen's lexicon. The analysis also clarifies the extent to which Giles and Johnson's ethnolinguistic identity theory can be applied to the present data. The fish-name data provide direct grounds for discussing shared linguistic knowledge, perceived group boundaries, psycholinguistic distinctiveness, and ethnolinguistic differentiation.

By contrast, the concept of subjective vitality cannot be established from lexical data alone because it concerns perceptions of a group's status, demographic strength, institutional support, and future prospects (Giles & Johnson, 1987). The present findings therefore support the boundary and differentiation dimensions of the theory without extending the analysis beyond what the lexical data can demonstrate. The findings further indicate that linguistic identity in the fishing community is not represented by a fixed inventory of local words. Rather, it is constructed through repeated use, shared recognition, and contextual differentiation. The significance of *builat*, *rintik*, *mingkik*, *jeibong*, *mamong*, *jasa*, *tongkol puitei*, *beibuilis*, *teinggiri*, and *tongkol itam* lies not solely in their reference to particular fish species, but in their connection with a shared occupational world. Through these lexical forms, knowledge of the marine environment becomes organized into categories that are communicatively meaningful within the community. Therefore, the central finding is not simply that fishermen use local names for fish. More importantly, the fish lexicon provides a linguistic mechanism through which shared maritime experience is transformed into shared community knowledge. When this knowledge is recognized and maintained within interaction, it contributes to the visibility of linguistic boundaries between community members and speakers outside the fishing environment. The fishermen's lexicon thus represents an ethnolinguistic resource through which occupational knowledge and linguistic identity intersect.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the 10 fish-name lexicons function as an ethnolinguistic repertoire connecting the fishermen's marine environment, occupational experience, and linguistic identity. The lexicons reflect shared knowledge developed through fishing activities and become socially meaningful through their recognition and use within the community. This shared repertoire contributes to linguistic distinctiveness by creating perceived boundaries between speakers who share the same occupational knowledge and those who do not. The findings further show that such boundaries are not fixed, as the use of local terms may be maintained or adjusted according to the communicative context. In relation to Giles and Johnson's (1987) ethnolinguistic identity theory, the findings particularly support the roles of psycholinguistic distinctiveness, perceived group boundaries, and ethnolinguistic differentiation in the construction of linguistic identity. Thus, the fishermen's lexicon represents not merely a system for naming

fish, but a linguistic resource through which shared maritime experience is transformed into community knowledge and identity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the fishermen's fish-name lexicon in Kampung Bugis Juru Seberang constitutes an important part of the community's occupational linguistic repertoire. The study identified 10 fish-name lexicons that reflect different naming practices and shared knowledge of marine resources. The findings demonstrate that these lexical forms are closely connected to fishermen's experience of the coastal environment, as the recognition and use of particular terms develop through repeated occupational interaction with marine resources. The lexicon therefore serves not only to identify fish species but also to organize and communicate knowledge within the fishing community. The study further finds that fishermen's lexical practices contribute to the construction of linguistic identity through shared lexical knowledge, psycholinguistic distinctiveness, perceived group boundaries, and ethnolinguistic differentiation. In accordance with Giles and Johnson's (1987) ethnolinguistic identity theory, linguistic identity emerges through the social recognition and use of linguistic forms rather than from the forms themselves. The findings also indicate that linguistic boundaries are contextual and may be maintained or adjusted depending on the interlocutor and communicative situation. Thus, the fishermen's lexicon connects marine experience with occupational knowledge and provides an ethnolinguistic resource through which linguistic identity is constructed and negotiated within the coastal community.

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