

FROM LOCAL VOCABULARY TO DIGITAL LITERACY: DEVELOPING A TORAJA CULTURAL GLOSSARY FOR INDONESIAN LANGUAGE ENRICHMENT

Marylin Lasarus

Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, Indonesia

lasarusmarlin@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The diversity of regional languages constitutes an important part of Indonesia's linguistic heritage. In the midst of technological development and changing communication patterns among younger generations, documenting regional vocabulary can no longer rely solely on printed resources but needs to be developed in accessible and digitally relevant forms. The Toraja language contains a rich vocabulary associated with social life, cultural practices, the natural environment, traditional objects, community activities, and local knowledge. This article aims to analyze the potential of Toraja cultural vocabulary as a resource for enriching Indonesian and to formulate a framework for developing a digital glossary that can support language and cultural literacy. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach based on documentary analysis and literature review. Data sources included linguistic literature, documentation of Toraja vocabulary, publications concerning dictionary digitization, and official documentation related to regional vocabulary inventory and Indonesian vocabulary enrichment. The analysis focused on identifying vocabulary characteristics, the relationship between local terms and Indonesian, and the components required for developing a digital cultural glossary. The findings indicate that Toraja cultural vocabulary functions not merely as a collection of lexical units but also as a representation of cultural knowledge and identity. A digital glossary should therefore include the local term, its meaning in Indonesian, category, context of use, example sentence, cultural information, and, where possible, audio and visual documentation. Such a model can expand access to local vocabulary while positioning Indonesian as a medium for understanding and documenting regional cultural knowledge. A digital cultural glossary can thus serve as a bridge between regional language preservation, Indonesian vocabulary enrichment, and the strengthening of digital literacy.

Keywords: *Toraja language, cultural vocabulary, digital glossary, Indonesian language, digital literacy*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is characterized by remarkable linguistic diversity. Regional languages function not only as means of communication within their respective communities but also as repositories of knowledge concerning the environment, history, social systems, cultural practices, and community identity. UNESCO reports that Indonesia has more than 700 languages and emphasizes the importance of strengthening the presence of local languages in digital spaces as part of efforts to maintain linguistic diversity. This issue has become increasingly important as digital communication technologies influence the ways in which younger generations access and exchange information. Languages with limited digital representation may face difficulties in reaching younger users who increasingly rely on digital platforms as sources of knowledge. Digitalization can therefore become an important strategy for maintaining the visibility and accessibility of regional languages. Toraja is one of the cultural communities in Indonesia with a distinctive linguistic heritage. The Toraja language contains vocabulary associated with traditional objects, social relationships, food, environmental knowledge, arts, community activities, and other aspects of everyday life. These lexical resources provide valuable evidence of the relationship between language and cultural knowledge.

Documentation of Toraja vocabulary is not a new initiative. The existence of *Kamus Toraja-Indonesia* demonstrates that efforts to document Toraja vocabulary and provide

Indonesian equivalents have been undertaken for decades. The dictionary was published by Yayasan Perguruan Kristen Toraja in 1971 and contains extensive Toraja-Indonesian lexical information. However, printed dictionaries have limitations in terms of accessibility, flexibility, and multimedia integration. Previous research on the digitization of the Toraja dictionary proposed a database capable of supporting Toraja-Indonesian and Indonesian-Toraja translation as well as synonym information. More recent developments indicate continued efforts to bring Toraja vocabulary into digital environments.

A web-based Toraja dictionary has also been developed to improve access to linguistic information. In addition, the South Sulawesi Language Office has conducted an inventory of Toraja vocabulary as part of efforts to document local vocabulary and contribute to the enrichment of Indonesian vocabulary. The inventory includes vocabulary associated with cultural environments in North Toraja, including traditional weaving, batik, *tau-tau* statues, woodcarving, and stone burial sites. These developments reveal two closely connected needs. First, Toraja vocabulary needs to be systematically documented and made accessible to future generations. Second, regional vocabulary can contribute to the enrichment of Indonesian, particularly when local terms represent cultural concepts or objects that do not have sufficiently precise equivalents in Indonesian. Enriching Indonesian through regional languages does not mean replacing regional languages with Indonesian. Rather, Indonesian can serve as a broader communicative medium through which regional linguistic and cultural knowledge can be documented, explained, and shared with wider audiences. Within this context, a glossary offers an important possibility. Unlike a conventional dictionary that primarily provides lexical definitions, a cultural glossary can present vocabulary within a broader cultural context. A single entry can contain the local term, Indonesian meaning, category, context of use, example sentence, cultural explanation, visual representation, and related terminology. Based on this background, this article aims to analyze the potential of Toraja cultural vocabulary as a resource for Indonesian language enrichment and to formulate a framework for developing a digital cultural glossary as a resource for language and cultural literacy.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach based on documentary analysis and literature review to identify and analyze the potential of Toraja vocabulary as a resource for Indonesian language enrichment. The data were obtained from four main sources: Toraja-Indonesian dictionaries and other lexical references, previous studies on Toraja lexical resources, publications related to the digitization of Toraja dictionaries, and official documentation concerning Toraja vocabulary inventories and Indonesian vocabulary enrichment. Previous studies on Toraja lexical resources, particularly those examining vocabulary related to traditional tools and equipment, were also used to provide a broader understanding of the diversity of vocabulary associated with Toraja community life and cultural knowledge. The analysis was conducted in three stages, namely identification, categorization, and modeling. The identification stage focused on determining vocabulary related to cultural knowledge and community life, while the categorization stage grouped the identified vocabulary according to semantic and cultural domains, including traditional objects and equipment, environmental terms, food and beverages, community activities, arts and cultural practices, social relationships, cultural terminology, flora and fauna, and cultural concepts and values. The final stage, modeling, focused on formulating the information components required for developing a digital cultural glossary, such as lexical forms, meanings, categories, contexts of use, and cultural information. The study does not claim to have generated a new vocabulary database through fieldwork; therefore, the findings are presented as a conceptual analysis of existing documentation and previous studies.

RESULTS

Toraja Vocabulary as a Repository of Cultural Knowledge

The analysis indicates that Toraja vocabulary cannot be understood merely as a collection of words with equivalent meanings in Indonesian, as many lexical items are closely associated with the social and cultural environment in which they are used. Previous research on Toraja lexical resources has identified vocabulary related to traditional tools and equipment and has revealed semantic relationships among groups of nouns. These findings demonstrate that vocabulary provides insight into how the Toraja community conceptualizes, categorizes, and interprets objects and experiences within its cultural environment. Therefore, documenting Toraja vocabulary requires more than providing Indonesian translations. A comprehensive glossary entry should include the Toraja term, its Indonesian equivalent, function, material, method of use, cultural context, example of usage, and visual documentation. Through this approach, each lexical item can be understood not merely as a linguistic unit but as a unit of cultural information that represents particular knowledge and practices within the Toraja community.

Vocabulary Inventory and Indonesian Language Enrichment

The inventory of Toraja vocabulary has an important relationship with the development and enrichment of the Indonesian language. The South Sulawesi Language Office has identified vocabulary enrichment through regional languages as one of the purposes of regional vocabulary inventory activities, including the documentation of Toraja vocabulary found in cultural environments containing distinctive local knowledge. Such efforts demonstrate that regional languages can serve as valuable sources for expanding Indonesian vocabulary and cultural references. In this context, the relationship between Toraja and Indonesian can be understood as a process beginning with the identification and documentation of Toraja vocabulary, followed by the provision of explanations and meanings in Indonesian, and subsequently the wider dissemination of the documented knowledge. Indonesian is therefore not positioned as a replacement for Toraja but as a medium through which Toraja linguistic and cultural knowledge can be communicated to a broader audience. This relationship creates an opportunity for regional language preservation and Indonesian language enrichment to develop simultaneously.

From Dictionary to Digital Cultural Glossary

A dictionary and a cultural glossary serve related but different functions. A dictionary generally provides systematic lexical information, whereas a cultural glossary can be designed thematically and provide more contextual information about the terms being documented. In the context of the Toraja language, a digital cultural glossary can organize vocabulary according to specific cultural domains and provide users with information beyond simple translation. Each glossary entry can include the Toraja term, pronunciation, Indonesian equivalent, category, meaning, context of use, example sentence, cultural significance, visual representation, audio recording, and information source. Such a structure enables users to understand a lexical item from linguistic, functional, and cultural perspectives. Consequently, the digital glossary can become a more comprehensive resource for documenting Toraja vocabulary while also facilitating access to cultural knowledge through Indonesian.

Digitalization as a Strategy for Expanding Access

Previous research on the digitization of the Toraja dictionary demonstrates the potential of digital databases to support two-way translation between Toraja and Indonesian. This

development indicates that documentation of Toraja vocabulary does not need to remain limited to printed dictionaries but can be transformed into more accessible and interactive digital resources. A contemporary digital glossary can be developed through various platforms, including websites, mobile applications, interactive electronic books, QR-code-based resources, digital learning materials, and multimedia platforms. Digitalization also makes it possible to incorporate features that are difficult to provide adequately in printed dictionaries, such as audio pronunciation, photographs, video, hyperlinks, and other interactive content. In this way, digital technology can expand access to Toraja linguistic resources while simultaneously supporting the preservation, dissemination, and learning of local language and cultural knowledge. UNESCO has likewise emphasized the importance of digital initiatives in increasing the presence and visibility of Indigenous and local languages in cyberspace.

DISCUSSION

The preservation of regional languages and the development of Indonesian should not be regarded as competing objectives because they can function as complementary resources in linguistic, cultural, educational, and digital contexts. In Toraja, the regional language serves as an important marker of cultural identity and community communication, while Indonesian provides a broader medium for documenting, interpreting, and disseminating Toraja linguistic and cultural knowledge. Within this relationship, a digital cultural glossary can serve as a bridge by presenting Toraja vocabulary together with Indonesian equivalents, pronunciation, meanings, examples of use, cultural contexts, visual representations, and related terms. Such a resource responds to the changing nature of literacy in the digital era, in which users interact not only with written texts but also with images, audio, video, hyperlinks, and interactive media.

Toraja cultural vocabulary therefore has considerable potential as contextual material for Indonesian language learning, enabling students to identify local terms, investigate their meanings, interact with community members, and transform the information obtained into descriptive, narrative, explanatory, or report texts before publishing the results in a digital glossary. Based on this perspective, the proposed digital Toraja cultural glossary can be developed through six interconnected stages: inventory, verification, classification, entry development, digitalization, and literacy integration. The novelty of this approach does not lie in creating the first Toraja dictionary, since previous studies have already addressed the documentation and digitization of Toraja lexical resources, but rather in shifting lexical documentation from a predominantly translation-oriented dictionary toward a culturally contextualized digital glossary for literacy. The proposed glossary therefore goes beyond explaining what a word means in Indonesian by also presenting its cultural representation, context of use, embedded knowledge, and relevance to Indonesian-speaking audiences, positioning the glossary as a repository of linguistic and cultural knowledge that supports regional language preservation, Indonesian language enrichment, cultural awareness, and digital literacy.

CONCLUSION

Toraja cultural vocabulary has considerable potential to contribute to Indonesian language enrichment while simultaneously supporting the documentation of local cultural knowledge. These lexical resources do not merely represent isolated meanings but are connected to objects, environments, activities, social relationships, and cultural experiences. This study proposes a digital cultural glossary as a strategy for connecting regional language

documentation with contemporary literacy needs. Rather than limiting entries to local terms and Indonesian translations, the glossary can incorporate categories, definitions, contexts of use, example sentences, cultural information, photographs, and audio recordings. The proposed model consists of six stages: inventory, verification, classification, entry development, digitalization, and literacy integration. Such a model positions Toraja and Indonesian as complementary linguistic resources. Toraja provides local linguistic and cultural knowledge, while Indonesian provides a broader medium through which that knowledge can be understood and disseminated. Therefore, a digital Toraja cultural glossary has the potential to develop beyond a linguistic product into a meeting point between regional language, Indonesian, culture, education, and digital technology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja for providing academic support and an environment that facilitated the completion of this study. Appreciation is also extended to the South Sulawesi Language Office and other institutions that have contributed to the documentation, preservation, and development of regional languages, particularly the Toraja language. The author also acknowledges the contributions of researchers, language practitioners, cultural communities, and other sources whose previous studies and documentation provided valuable references for this article. Their contributions have supported the development of the ideas presented in this study, particularly regarding Toraja vocabulary, Indonesian language enrichment, cultural preservation, and digital literacy.

REFERENCES

- Baan, A., & Suyitno, I. (2020). Cultural representation of Toraja ethnic on the use of vocabulary in Singgi' speech. *LITERA*, 19(2), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.21831/ltr.v19i2.32074>
- Garing, J. (2017). Analisis semantik cerita Lakipadada. Sawerigading.
- Hanan, S. S., Charmilasari, C., & Pertiwi, L. (2025). Kamus bergambar Bahasa Indonesia-Makassar-Bugis-Toraja-Mandar. Balai Bahasa Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan.
- Hastianah. (2010). Pemerian semantik kata kerja “mengambil” dalam bahasa Toraja. *Sawerigading*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.26499/sawer.v16i1.295>
- Mappau, R., & Jemmain. (2021). Leksikon alat dalam bahasa Toraja. *Sawerigading*, 27(2), 261–275. <https://doi.org/10.26499/sawer.v27i2.729>
- Pasinggi, E. S., & Palelleng, S. (2018). Digitalisasi kamus bahasa Toraja: Perancangan basis data. *Prosiding Semkaristek*, 1(1).
- Pasinggi, E., & Pongdatu, G. A. N. (2024). Kamus bahasa daerah Toraja–Indonesia berbasis web. *AnoaTIK: Jurnal Teknologi Informasi dan Komputer*, 2(2). <https://doi.org/10.33772/anoatik.v2i2.60>
- Patiung, D. (2017). Budaya Toraja dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia. *Idaarah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.24252/idaarah.v1i1.4132>
- Rismayani, R., Wahyuni, S., Layuk, N. S., Loly, R. H., & Daud, A. N. (2021). Desain sistem speech recognition penerjemah bahasa Toraja menggunakan Hidden Markov Model. *Jurnal Penelitian Pos dan Informatika*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.17933/jppi.v11i2.286>
- Seldi, Y., & Handoko, K. (2024). Perancangan aplikasi kamus bahasa Toraja menggunakan metode Rapid Application Development. *Computer and Science Industrial Engineering (COMASIE)*.

- Tammu, J. (1971). Kamus Toraja-Indonesia. Rantepao: Yayasan Perguruan Kristen Toraja.
- UNESCO. (2020). Making Indonesian Indigenous language scripts available online. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2024). UNESCO's digital initiatives promoting linguistic diversity in Indonesia. UNESCO.