# The Alorese Landscape Terminology: Form, Function, and Semantic References in an Austronesian Language in East Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to describe the landscape and seascape terminology of Alorese, an Austronesian language spoken in the Alor archipelago of eastern Indonesia. Alorese uses unique way of expressing landscape terminology by retaining some of its ancestral Austronesian landscape terminology and innovating relatively new forms, functions and semantic references from its neighboring non-Austronesian languages. Previous research show that Alorese has innovated relatively new forms due to contact with its surrounding non-Austronesian languages. The current paper fills the gap where there has not been any discussion regarding the Alorese landscape terminology outside its preposition function. Discussion on cross-linguistic categorization, such as landscapes in areas such as eastern Indonesia is proven to be fruitful. The Alorese linguistic landscapes are expressed through geographical references and some forms appear unique to Alorese's dialectal variations. In general, the reference to elevations and directionalities in Alorese is achieved through geographical references, such as *nala kokar* 'towards Kokar (a town)' or *klou lau* 'seawards (*lau* 'sea')' rather than generic land form terms, suchas *wara* 'westwards' which is also an Indonesian loan *barat* 'west'. Its non-Austronesian borrowed terminologies include words, such as *iti dola* 'mountainwards', containing loanwords from Alor-Pantar (Papuan) languages *dol* 'mountain'. The data of this research were gathered from my 2018 and 2020 fieldwork in 14 Alorese villages located across the northern coast of Alor and Pantar as well as the small islands of Buaya and Ternate. Collections of terminologies show variations in the use of words not only depending on the geographical references, but also relative to the neighboring non-Austronesian languages.

**Key words**: Alorese, Austronesian, landscape terminology, semantic reference

## INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses landscape terminology in Alorese spoken in the Alor Islands, NTT. Alornese is the only Austronesian language spoken in Alor Regency and is surrounded by non-Austronesian languages belonging to the Trans-New Guinean family (Pawley 2005; Schapper 2017). Linguistic studies of Alorese focus more on descriptive linguistic studies (Klamer 2011), language contact (Moro 2018, 2019, 2021; Moro and Fricke 2020), and linguistic history (Sulistyono 2021, 2022). Studies from the linguistic perspective of the Alorese landscape have not been carried out much. Alorese expresses a unique way of expressing landscape terminology by retaining some of its ancestral Austronesian terminology as well as innovations in form, function and relatively new semantic references originating from nearby non-Austronesian languages. This research is based on field data and aims to reveal landscape terminology in Alorese.

The Alorese speaking community in East Nusa Tenggara is a minority Muslim community amidst a majority of Christians. As many as 30% of the population of Alor Regency are Muslims and 66% are Protestant Christians and the rest are Catholics. Even though Islam had already entered Alor since the 16th century, Christianity, which was brought by European proselytizers who first stopped on Timor, is now the majority religion in Alor, even at the provincial level, which is the East Nusa Tenggara Province.
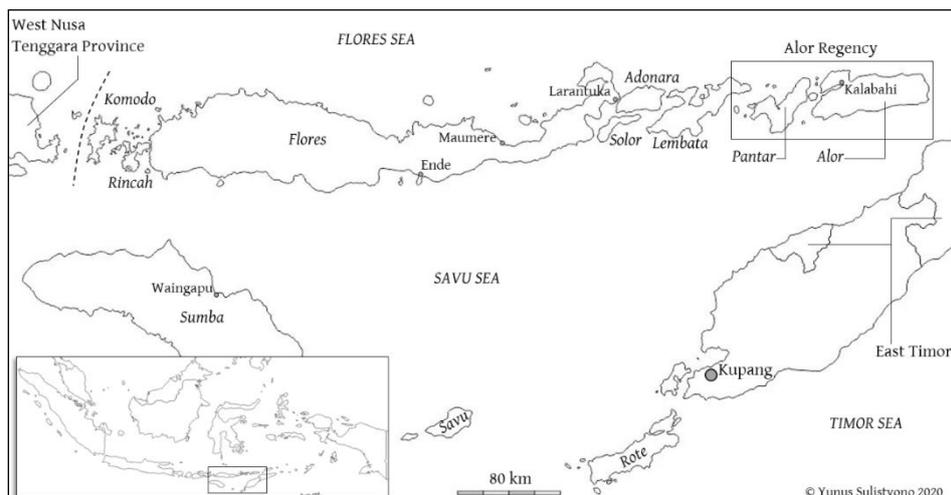
*Figure 1: Location of the Alor-Pantar Islands in Alor Regency,*
*East Nusa Tenggara*

Figure 1 shows East Nusa Tenggara Province and Alor Regency shown in the North East. Alor Regency is located in the northeast of NTT province and borders Lembata Regency to the west, Wetar and Atauro Islands to the east, the Flores Sea to the north, and the Ombai Strait to the south. There are two main islands in Alor Regency, namely Alor Island which at first glance looks green and fertile; and Pantar Island, which at first glance looks drier. The capital of Alor district is Kabahi city and this city can be accessed by air or sea transportation from the provincial capital, Kupang. To reach Kalabahi, there are daily flights from Kupang to Kalabahi with a flight time of around one hour. Apart from that, the city known as Kenari City can also be accessed via sea transportation for one night. On Pantar Island, there is also an airport which is still under construction and ready to be used in the future since this article was published. To reach Pantar Island, there is sea transportation in the form of a ferry or bus which departs every day from Kalabahi or from Alor Kecil.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Previous researches suggested that the Alorese language has shown relatively recent form of innovations caused by contact with surrounding non-Austronesian languages and also through a stage of simplification that led to the loss of some of its original complex morphology (Ewing and Klamer 2010; Moro 2019; Moro et al. 2023). Discussions about cross-linguistic categorization, such as landscape linguistics in this region, have proven fruitful as shown in the study of the landscape linguistics of the West Pantar language (Holton 2011, 2014). In this study, variations in the form, function and referent of the terminology of geographic direction words oriented towards land and sea from the West Pantar language are shown.

Studies on landscape linguistics, especially on regional languages in Indonesia, have not been carried out much. One thing that can be used as a reference is a study of landscape linguistics in the West Pantar language by Holton (2011) which examines the West Pantar language in NTT from a landscape linguistics perspective. This study found that the West Pantar language-speaking community is unique in viewing the surrounding images as outlined, not only in terms of land landscapes but also seascapes. This finding shows that there is a

certain uniqueness in the use of linguistic concepts in the landscape terminology of a language.

Based on previous studies on landscape linguistics, most of them are based on a sociolinguistic perspective which looks at the use of terminology in a particular language community into the perspective of its speakers. In this research, landscape linguistics which is used as a reference is more about the use of linguistic terminology in a particular community so that we can get an idea of the uniqueness of the use of certain vocabulary to indicate cardinal directions or a place in a particular geographical situation.

**UNDERLYING THEORIES**

The discussion regarding the theoretical basis used in this paper is inseparable from previous studies regarding landscape linguistics. Landscape linguistic studies depart from a social linguistic perspective (or can also be included in the field of sociolinguistic studies) which raises the study of language in terms of social symbols for communication (Backhaus 2006). However, the landscape linguistic perspective does not actually have a strong core theory and is mostly used as a reference in social studies, geography, psychology and media (Duizenberg 2020). The focus of this study initially departs from the cultural identity of a particular community group which is reflected, for example, through the choice of words in describing the surrounding environment, such as the landscape. Over time, this field of study developed into the study of the use of terminology in naming locations and directions in urban environments which is connected to the field of sociolinguistic studies.

The landscape linguistics approach that is used as the theoretical basis for this research is landscape linguistics which departs from the concept of natural landscapes. Although this concept can be said to be a bit metaphorical because it refers to a group of words that have meanings that are not actual, landscape linguistics which refers to the concept of natural landscape actually has its own challenges and is able to reveal more about the speaking community or its use. (Blommaert 2013). According to studies from Gorter (2013, 1), landscape consists of two different concepts; one is a visual concept that can be observed with the sense of sight; one is a picture or portrait from a particular point of view that is unique. When combined with language studies, landscape linguistics focuses on the study of form, function, meaning, referents, and terminology of landscape vocabulary in a particular language.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is a quantitative descriptive type and is based on research data obtained directly from the field. This research data was collected from field research in 2018 and 2020 in 14 Alor villages located on the north coast of Alor and Pantar as well as the small islands of Buaya and Ternate. The fourteen villages are the villages of Marisa, Kayang, Beang Onong, Baranusa, Wailawar, Pandai, Bana Onong, Munasli, Helangdohi, Ternate, Buaya, Alor Besar, Alor Kecil, and Dulolong, as shown in Figure 2. However, landscape vocabularies, as the collected data, were not obtained from all research locations. From the fourteen villages visited, landscape vocabularies were collected from nine villages, each of which is discussed in the next section. Fieldwork in this research was carried out in the context of collecting descriptive data on the Alorese language in a doctoral research project on the history of Alorese (2017-2022) funded by LPDP (Sulistyono, 2022). The data in this research can be accessed openly via https://dataverse.nl/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.34894/APQDTX. The data include written notes on the directionals used in the fourteen Alorese villages.
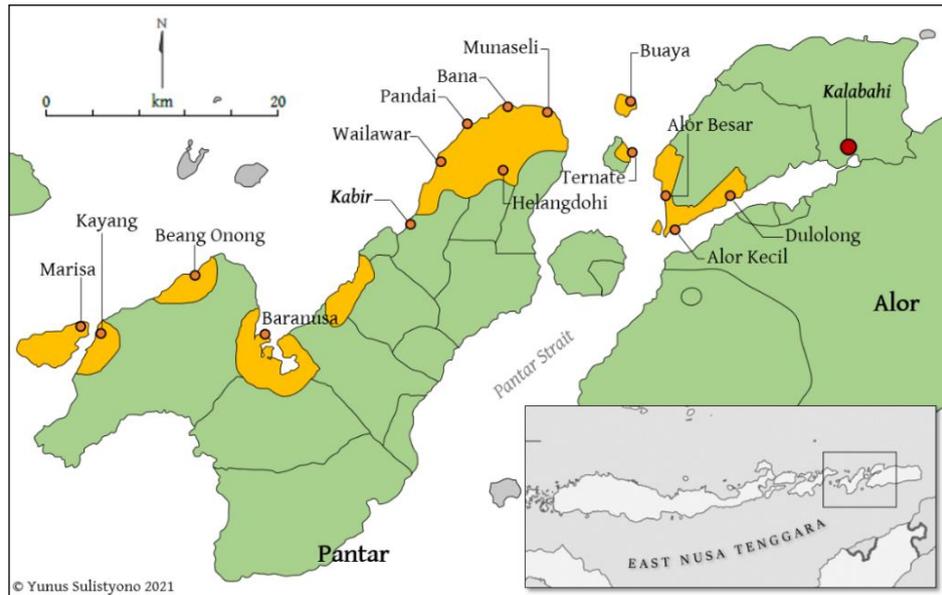
*Figure 2: Data Collection Locations in 14 Alorese-speaking Villages in the Alor-Pantar Islands, Alor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara*

The collected data includes the vocabulary used by Alorese speakers to indicate directions and cardinal points, such as north, east, west and south. In Figure 2, the yellow area shows the area occupied by Alorese speakers. It can be seen that Alor speakers are scattered on the north coast of the Alor-Pantar archipelago and the surrounding small islands. This has become a characteristic that Austronesian languages are identical to the spoken area on the coast, while non-Austronesian languages are identical to the spoken area in the mountains. Data collection is focused on indicating the four cardinal directions and is not limited to the use of the adverbial word pointing which in Alorese, can be the word pointing which depends on the distance, visibility of the object being pointed to, and the referent of the object (Klamer 2011; Sulistyono 2022).

Although the data in this study is focused on the use of the word pointing to the cardinal directions in Alorese, it is necessary to first understand the use of demonstratives in Alorese to avoid double understanding regarding the use of the word pointing to the cardinal points in Alorese. Table 1 shows the use of the word pointing as a preposition in Alorese based on studies by Sulistyono (2022).

*Table 1: Prepositions in Alorese of Pantar Dialect*

| Preposition | Gloss |
|---|---|
| *oro* | locative |
| *kali* | locative low |
| *keti* | locative high |
| *klou/klau/lau* | direction: sea |
| *kerai/kre/ke* | direction: mountain |

These prepositions in Alorese are used in the context of directions in Alorese, including cardinal directions, which are discussed in this paper. In Alorese, the

preposition *oro* 'in/at' is a generic preposition and can be used in various contexts for indicating directions. Meanwhile, other prepositions, such as *kali, keti, lau,* and *kre* refer to geographic designations which also apply in indicating cardinal directions. This is interesting to study more deeply from a landscape linguistics perspective because it shows the way Alorese speakers think in perceiving the natural surroundings.

**DISCUSSION**

**Form, Function and Semantic References of Alorese Landscape Terminology**

The linguistic landscape in Alorese is expressed through geographical references and several unique forms. In general, references to some landscape terminology in Alorese are obtained through geographical references, such as *nala kokar* 'towards Kokar (a city)' or *klou lau* 'towards the sea (lau 'sea')'. Landscape expressions are also expressed in more general borrowed forms, such as *wara* 'barat' (Indonesian western 'barat'). Non-Austronesian loan terminology includes words, such as *iti dola* 'towards the mountain', containing loanwords from the non-Austronesian language *dol* 'mountain'.

The next description is a discussion regarding the use of cardinal direction vocabulary in Alorese in each village that has landscape data. The first location is Dulolong village on the south coast of the Alor peninsula which is located on the north coast of Alor Island, as shown in Figure 2. This village is located on the edge of Teluk Mutiara, the main port in Kalabahi City, which is the regencial capital of Alor. Geographically, Dulolong village is located near the coast and on relatively sloping land. Historically, this village is a village that has a younger history because Dulolong Village is the result of the expansion of Alor Kecil Village which has a relatively older history (Sulistyono 2022). Figure 3 shows the cardinal directions used by Alorese speakers in Dulolong Village.



*Figure 3: Cardinal Directions in Dulolong Village*
*(Image edited from Google Maps [2023])*

The vocabulary related to cardinal directions in Dulolong Village is illustrated in the form of the lexicon *iti dola, iti timung, ali fara,* and *fale gale*. The form *iti dola* is actually a derivative form of combining a preposition in Alorese, *keti* 'high locative' and a loanword from the Alor-Pantar language *dola* 'mountain'. This derivative form can be directly interpreted as 'mountain direction'. Meanwhile, *iti timung* also consists of the precision *keti* and a loanword from the Alor Malay language (or Kupang Malay language) *timur* 'east' which was adopted into Alorese to become *timung* 'east'. The form *ali fara* has the prepositional referent *k-ali* 'low locative' and the loanword from Malay *fara* 'west' (Malay *barat*). The *fale*

*gale* form has slightly different terminology because it does not involve prepositions in Alorese, but only involves the demonstrative word *fale* 'in/at; to/towards' which is only used in Alorese of the Alor Kecil/Dulolong dialect combined with a loanword whose source is unknown, *gale* 'sea'. The function of these lexical forms is as words for pointing and cardinal directions, just as in Malay there are words for pointing to the cardinal directions of east, west, north and south.

The next discussion includes the use of directional vocabulary in Alor Kecil and Alor Besar Villages which are located to the west of Dulolong Village. Alor Kecil Village has a long history because according to local oral narratives, the history of Alor Kecil Village goes back to the time when there was a migration of people from kingdoms in the islands to the west who were displaced due to the natural disaster of floods and caused the population in the west of the Alor-Pantar Islands to move to Alor. In subsequent developments, the cultural center in this area moved to Alor Besar Village which has a kingdom that still has historical records, namely the Bungabali Kingdom which is famous for its al-Quran manuscripts that have existed since the 16th century (Gogo 1984). Figure 4 below shows the use of cardinal directions in the villages of Alor Kecil and Alor Besar.



*Figure 4: Cardinal Directions (directions) in Alor Kecil and Alor Besar Villages (Image edited from Google Maps [2023])*

The forms used in Alor Kecil and Alor Besar Villages are more or less the same and some parts are not much different from the forms used in Dulolong Village which is located not far from Alor Kecil Village. The form for pointing the direction of the mountain remains the same, namely *oro dola*, as used in Dulolong. However, in these two villages, the term to refer to Kalabahi City or to Dulolong Village is *oro lara gere*, which consists of the demonstrative *oro* 'in/at; to/towards' which is followed by the particle *lara* 'afternoon; day; road' and *gere* 'down'. The *gere* particle 'down' indicates that the Alor Kecil and Alor Besar areas are considered to be a culturally superior area because this area has a longer history than Dulolong Village.

The interesting thing is that in the villages of Alor Kecil and Alor Besar, the *oro lara gere* form is used to indicate more than one direction. This can be seen from the use of this shape which is used to point towards Mutiara Bay in Alor

Kecil Village as well as towards Dulolong. Meanwhile, in Alor Besar Village this form is only used to indicate the direction of Alor Kecil Village and the direction of the sea is indicated with the *oro tatang* form which is a derivative of the demonstrative *oro* 'in/at; to/towards' and *tatang* 'beach; coastal area'.

In Bana Onong Village, the use of the cardinal form is simpler because it is a derivative form of a more complex expression. Bana Onong Village is located at the tip of the Pantar peninsula to the north of Pantar Island. Figure 5 below shows the location of Bana Village and the use of directional word choices. To indicate the north direction, Alorese speakers in Bana Village use the form *klou* which is a shortened form of *kali lau*. The form *lau* refers more to a loanword from Malay, *laut* 'sea'.



*Figure 5: Cardinal Directions (Directions) in Bana Onong Village*
*(Image edited from Google Maps [2023])*

Other forms used to indicate the cardinal directions in Bana Village are the low locative *kali*; the locative towards mountain *kre*; the locative high *keti*; and the locative towards mountain *kre*. In the grammatical description of Alorese by Sulistyono (2022), these forms are seen as generic prepositions in the Alor dialect of the Pantar language spoken, mainly in the villages of Bana, Munaseli, and Wailawar.

Not far from Bana Village, Munaseli Village has a vocabulary of cardinal directions that is not much different from that in Bana Village. In Munaseli Village, the word for pointing towards the sea undergoes false reduplication by repeating the word *selatan* or *lau* 'sea' to *klou lau* or when it is said completely it becomes *kali lau lau*. The word for pointing to a mountain gets a loan word which is an affix from the non-Austronesian language *woto* 'mountain; island'. The form *kwellipapa* is a complex form of *kelli* (a variant of *kali*) 'low locative' and *papa* 'side'.

In the western Pantar region, the use of cardinal directions involves different terminology. One example is the use of the word pointing to the cardinal directions in Beang Onong Village in West Pantar District. In this village, the direction of the sea is expressed in the form of *beang onong* or the name of the village which is located right on the beach.

*Figure 6: Cardinal Directions (Directions) in Munaseli Village*
*(Image edited from Google Maps [2023])*

Of course, this form is not only used in Beang Onong Village, but also in other villages on the mountain which are located not far from Beang Onong Village. This means that the form of *beang onong* as an expression of the word for pointing the cardinal directions has been used across languages and across communities in the West Pantar area. Other forms also used in this village include *watang kisu* 'small beach', *bota bang* 'big mountain', and *baso laung* 'Baso Family towards the sea'. These references also show that the use of form, function and cardinal direction references in Beang Onong Village is unique compared to other villages where Alorese speakers live.



*Figure 7: Cardinal Directions (Directions) in Beang Onong Village*
*(Image edited from: Google Maps [2023])*

On the islands that are separated from the mainland of the Alor-Pantar Islands, the use of functional form, and references to cardinal directions refer to the use of the loanword from Malay *angi* 'wind'. However, it can also be hypothesized that this form of *angi* is a derivative form of the Austronesian word *angi* 'wind'. For example, in a village on Buaya Island which is located about 15 minutes by boat from the west of Alor Besar Village, the use of cardinal directions is as illustrated in Figure 8 below.

*Figure 8: The Cardinal Directions (Directions) on Buaya Island*
*(Image edited from Google Maps [2023])*

The illustration above shows that the use of the *angi* form is relatively generic on Buaya Island. To indicate the north cardinal direction, Alorese speakers on Buaya Island use the form *angi lewa* 'village wind'; angi wara 'west wind' to indicate the direction of the west wind*; angi tana leing* 'foot land wind' to designate the south cardinal direction; and *angi timung* 'east wind' to indicate the direction of the east.

The form of *angi lewa* 'village wind' refers to the direction where the village on Buaya Island is located. This shows that the referent used is a geographical referent that is commonly found in other Alorese-speaking villages. The *angi wara* form involves a loanword from the Malay word *wara* 'barat'. In this part, the form *angi tana leing* deserves further discussion. The village on Buaya Island is located to the north of Ternate Island, which was once the place of origin of the population on Buaya Island. According to the oral history of the local community, the people on Buaya Island moved from Ternate Island in the south to Buaya Island in the north in 1930 and the residents on Buaya Island still think that they come from Ternate Island, although some traditional leaders consider that their ancestors actually came from Reta Island. The form of *tana leing* refers to the southern direction where the people of Buaya Island come from.

**CONCLUSION**
In this paper, natural landscape terminology in Alorese has been presented which includes the cardinal direction terminology used in Alorese. The landscape terminology collection of Alorese shows variations in word usage that depend not only on geographical reference, but also relative to nearby non-Austronesian languages. Although most of the landscape terminology in Alorese leads to the use of loan words, both from Malay and surrounding non-Austronesian languages, there are several forms that show derivative forms from Austronesian language ancestors. In this discussion, several forms of lexemes are shown which are borrowed forms and original forms of Alorese or its ancestors.

Some of the forms that are included as loans include dola 'mountain' which is a form of loan from non-Austronesian languages in the Alor-Pantar islands. The

form *dola* 'mountain' is used in the Klon language *dedol* 'mountain', the Wersing language *dol* 'mountain', and the Adang language *doi* 'mountain'. In Sulistyono (2022), It is stated that the form of *dola* 'mountain' in Alorese is a form of loan word whose direction of borrowing is not clear between loan words from Alorese to non-Austronesian languages or vice versa. However, considering that Alorese speakers are immigrants who recently settled on the Alor-Pantar islands approximately half a millennium ago and the equivalent in other Austronesian languages is slightly different, namely *wolo* 'mountain' in Rongga language and *wolon* 'mountain' in Sika language. The significant differences between the consonant phonemes in the penultimate syllable /d/ in Alorese and /w/ in other Austronesian languages indicate that the form of *dolo* 'mountain' in Alorese has undergone changes. This change could result from the influence of nearby non-Austronesian languages which had previously borrowed the form *wolo* 'mountain' from other Austronesian languages (ancient contact). This ancient form of borrowing then influenced the form of dola 'mountain' in Alorese. Therefore, in this paper it is proposed that the form of *dola* 'mountain' in Alorese is a form of borrowing from nearby non-Austronesian languages, especially Klon and Wersing.

The forms of vocabulary for directions in Alorese, which are the original form derived from the ancestors of Alorese, include the use of the form *watang* 'coast' to indicate the direction of the beach, although not all of the direction of *watang* points to the sea because the direction of the wind is to the deep sea. Alorese only uses the form *lau* which is a loan form from Malay *laut* to indicate the direction of the sea.

The cardinal system like that of Alorese is not something unique, but is a direction system that can also be found in other languages. Although in Alorese these lexical forms of cardinal directions are used as prepositional demonstratives, this demonstrative system is also equivalent to cardinal directions to replace the cardinal system of north, east, south and west. Other languages that also have a non-cardinal cardinal system, such as Alorese, are also found in languages in the Pacific, as well as several other regional languages in the archipelago, although further research is needed to draw more specific conclusions.

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