

## Voices of Manggarai: A Sociolinguistic Exploration of Dialectal Variations

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### Abstract

*This article examines dialect variations of Manggarai language spoken in West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. Using a sociolinguistic approach and a qualitative descriptive method, the study aims to identify the forms of dialect variations and to describe their functions in everyday communication. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three informants representing each region. The findings reveal four main types of dialect variation: regional (geographic) dialects, social (sociolect) dialects, temporal dialects, and mixed (geosocial) dialects. Regional variations are reflected in differences in vocabulary and pronunciation of greetings, verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Social dialects arise from differences in age, education, and social status, while temporal dialects illustrate generational vocabulary shifts. Mixed dialects appear due to interactions between speakers of different regional and social backgrounds. Furthermore, the study identifies four communicative functions of these dialects: interactional, personal, representational, and heuristic. These functions demonstrate that language variation serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a means of reinforcing identity, expressing emotions, conveying information, and acquiring new knowledge. The results contribute to*

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*sociolinguistic studies of Indonesian regional languages and highlight the importance of dialect documentation for cultural preservation and language education.*

**Keywords:** Dialect, Language variation, Manggarai language, Sociolinguistics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an inseparable part of human life, functioning not only as a medium of communication but also as a reflection of cultural identity, social relations, and historical continuity. Every speech community develops its own linguistic system that evolves dynamically through interaction and adaptation to social and geographical conditions. This dynamic process gives rise to language variation, a phenomenon that has been widely studied in sociolinguistics. Language variation can take the form of differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, or style depending on the context, purpose, and participants of communication. One of the most prominent forms of variation is dialect, which differentiates one community from another even when they share a common linguistic root.

The Manggarai language, spoken by the Manggarai ethnic group in the western part of Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, belongs to the Austronesian family, Malayo-Polynesian branch. It is used across three main administrative regions: West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai. Although these three regions share a common linguistic heritage, each has developed distinctive dialectal features that reflect its geographical isolation, social interaction, and cultural traditions. These dialectal differences are not merely linguistic phenomena but also markers of group identity, tools for social solidarity, and symbols of cultural pride.

In everyday interactions, Manggarai speakers demonstrate significant variation in their use of greetings, verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. For instance, the word “father” may be expressed as *ame*, *ameh*, or *ema* depending on the dialect region. Such variation highlights the role of geographical and social factors in shaping linguistic diversity. Moreover, differences in speech are also influenced by age, education, and social status, giving rise to what sociolinguists call sociolects. Generational change further produces temporal dialects, where younger speakers adopt new forms while older speakers maintain traditional expressions. In urban centers and areas of high mobility, a blending of dialects occurs, resulting in mixed or geosocial varieties.

Scholars such as Chaer and Agustina (2010) emphasize that language variation is inevitable because society itself is heterogeneous. No community is linguistically uniform; instead, language diversity emerges naturally from social differentiation and the multiplicity of communicative functions. Within this framework, dialect variation in Manggarai is not an anomaly but rather a manifestation of the

community's cultural and social complexity. It illustrates how language both adapts to and shapes the dynamics of society.

Despite the richness of this phenomenon, previous studies have focused mainly on localized aspects of Manggarai dialects. Rosmini (2023), for example, investigated dialectal variations in the speech of sellers and buyers at Wae Kesambi Market, revealing both the forms and functions of variation in a transactional setting. Similarly, Muhamad Amin (2021) examined variations in Golo Ndaring Village, West Manggarai, focusing on vocabulary and usage in agricultural and trade contexts. While these studies provide valuable insights, they remain limited in scope, as they concentrate on specific communities or domains. What is lacking is a comprehensive study that compares dialect variations across the three major Manggarai regions West, Central, and East and explores their functions in a broader sociolinguistic context.

This study addresses that gap by investigating central questions: What are the forms and functions of dialect variations found in West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai. Data were collected through interviews with three informants, each representing one of the regions. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns of dialectal difference and interpreting how these differences function in everyday interaction.

The objectives of this study are therefore twofold. First, it seeks to explain the forms of dialect variations across the three regions, focusing on lexical, phonological, and grammatical differences in daily vocabulary. Second, it aims to describe the communicative functions of these variations, such as how they serve interactional, personal, representational, and heuristic purposes in the lives of Manggarai people. By pursuing these objectives, the study not only documents linguistic diversity but also demonstrates the role of dialect in maintaining cultural identity and social cohesion.

The significance of this research extends to both theoretical and practical dimensions. Theoretically, it contributes to the study of dialectology and sociolinguistics by providing empirical evidence from an under-researched linguistic community in Indonesia. It demonstrates how dialect variation can be classified into regional, social, temporal, and mixed forms, thereby enriching the typology of language variation. Practically, the findings hold value for local stakeholders, including educators, cultural activists, and policymakers, as they highlight the importance of preserving the Manggarai language as part of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage. In a globalized era where regional languages face the risk of decline, documenting dialect diversity is crucial for cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission of local knowledge.

The scope of this study is limited to three regencies: West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai. While the Manggarai language is known to encompass seven dialects namely Kempo, Lembor, Biring, Kolang, Meler, Kolor, and Rongga. this research narrows its focus to broader categories of variation

observed in the three main regencies. The study is also limited by its reliance on a small number of informants, which means the findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than exhaustive. Nevertheless, the data provide a valuable starting point for future research involving larger samples and broader geographic coverage.

Key concepts used in this research require clarification. Sociolinguistics is defined here as the study of the relationship between language and society, particularly how social factors such as age, gender, and social class influence language use. Language variation refers to the diversity of language forms that arise from geographical, social, and situational differences. Dialect is understood as a variety of language distinguished by place, time, or social class, encompassing differences in phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. These definitions provide the theoretical foundation for analyzing the empirical data of this study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The present research foregrounds Halliday's systemic functional linguistics as its main theoretical framework. Halliday (1970, in Chaer 1995) identifies six core functions of language: instrumental, regulatory, representational, interactional, personal, and heuristic. These functions illuminate how dialect variation operates not merely as a linguistic distinction but as a social resource. For instance, dialects serve instrumental purposes in fulfilling communication needs, regulatory functions in maintaining social norms, and interactional functions in reinforcing relationships. They also embody personal identity, represent knowledge, and enable heuristic exploration of meaning. By situating dialect variation within Halliday's functional model, this study emphasizes that language is both a medium of communication and a mechanism of social reproduction. Fishman's (1972) notion of dialect choice as a social strategy complements this view, underscoring how speakers adapt their linguistic repertoire to interlocutors and contexts. Thus, dialect variation is understood here as a dynamic practice that simultaneously reflects and reshapes cultural belonging, social hierarchy, and identity formation.

Several previous studies provide insights relevant to this research. Rosmini (2023) analyzed dialect variations in buyer-seller interactions at Wae Kesambi Market, West Manggarai, and identified 74 instances of variation, covering aspects of speakers, usage, formality, and medium, along with multiple language functions. Muhamad Amin (2021) examined Manggarai language use in Golo Ndaring Village, highlighting vocabulary variation in idiolects, sociolects, and registers within agriculture and trade. Meanwhile, Hasmi (2021) studied Minangkabau dialect variation in West Sumatra, focusing on phonological differences between two communities and finding 52 phonemic variations from a 200-word corpus. These studies demonstrate the breadth of dialect research across Indonesian communities, though each differs in focus: interactional use in markets, village social life, or phonological analysis.

From the literature, dialect variation reflects both linguistic diversity and sociocultural dynamics. It manifests regionally, socially, and temporally, and serves multiple communicative functions. This study builds upon previous research by

examining dialect variations in the Manggarai community across three regencies West, Central, and East Manggarai focusing not only on the forms of variation but also on their social functions within community interactions.

### **3. METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The purpose of this approach was to describe naturally occurring data about dialect variations used by the Manggarai people without manipulating or controlling the research setting. As Syamsuddin (2007) states, qualitative methods are essential for understanding social phenomena and participants' perspectives. In this case, the focus was on identifying and analyzing the forms and functions of dialect variation in West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai. The qualitative descriptive method allowed the researcher to capture detailed patterns of language use, contextual meanings, and cultural aspects embedded in daily communication.

The data of this study consisted of words, expressions, and speech forms that represent dialect variations used by the Manggarai community. The primary data were obtained from three informants who originated from the three main regencies: West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai, all of whom currently live in Surabaya. These informants were selected because they were native speakers of their respective regional dialects and still actively used them in daily communication. The data included lexical items such as greetings, verbs, adjectives, nouns, and adverbs, which were analyzed to reveal regional, social, temporal, and mixed dialects.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, supported by recording and transcription. Following Sugiyono (2017), interviews are considered a strategic method in qualitative research because they allow researchers to obtain rich and relevant data directly from participants. During the interviews, the researcher engaged in conversations with each informant, asking questions about how they expressed certain concepts in their dialect. These interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. The recordings were then repeatedly played back and transcribed into written form to facilitate detailed analysis.

The procedure of data collection followed several steps. First, the researcher identified suitable informants from each region of Manggarai. Second, interviews were conducted in Surabaya, where informants currently reside, ensuring a natural but controlled environment for communication. Third, the conversations were recorded and later transcribed into textual data. The researcher carefully read and reviewed the transcripts multiple times to gain a deeper understanding. Verification of the data was also carried out by cross-checking with informants, ensuring that the transcription and interpretation remained faithful to their intended meanings.

Data analysis was performed using a content analysis approach. Krippendorff (1980) defines content analysis as a technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data by interpreting its context. The researcher systematically examined the transcripts to identify recurring lexical patterns and variations. The analysis consisted of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused only on relevant utterances that contained dialectal features. The data display involved

organizing findings into tables and narrative explanations to highlight variations across regions and functions. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by comparing findings across informants and ensuring consistency with theoretical frameworks.

Through this methodological process, the study sought to provide a comprehensive description of dialect variations in the Manggarai language and their functions in community interactions. The qualitative descriptive method, combined with careful data collection and systematic analysis, allowed the researcher to capture both the linguistic diversity and the sociocultural significance of Manggarai dialects.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the interviews with informants from West Manggarai, Central Manggarai, and East Manggarai revealed significant patterns of dialect variation that reflect both linguistic and sociocultural diversity. Four major forms of dialect variation were identified: regional dialects, social dialects, temporal dialects, and mixed dialects. In addition, the findings highlight how these variations function in daily communication, strengthening group identity and facilitating adaptation across different social settings.

The first forms of dialect variation observed was the regional or geographic dialect. This form was evident in the differences of vocabulary and pronunciation used in greetings, verbs, adjectives, nouns, and adverbs across the three regions. For example, the word for “father” appears as *ameh* in West Manggarai, *ema* in Central Manggarai, and *ame* in East Manggarai. Similarly, verbs such as “to come” varied between *tuah*, *tu’a*, and *tua*. Such variations demonstrate how geographical distance has shaped distinct phonological and lexical features within the same language family. Moreover, the similarities between Central and East Manggarai indicate closer linguistic interaction compared to West Manggarai.

The second forms of variation was the social dialect (sociolect), which emerged due to differences in age, social status, and levels of formality. The interviews revealed that younger speakers often used different greetings and verb forms compared to older speakers. For instance, in West Manggarai, young people use the greeting *keh*, while elders are addressed with *keha*. In Central Manggarai, young people use *ka’e*, while older speakers are addressed as *kraeng tu’a*. These differences highlight the role of sociolects in signaling respect, hierarchy, and social relationships within the community.

The third form of variation identified was the temporal dialect, which reflects generational shifts in vocabulary use. Older speakers tended to use traditional terms that were less common among the younger generation. For example, older informants employed expressions such as *mehang* for “yesterday,” while younger speakers increasingly adopted newer lexical forms. This suggests that language in Manggarai continues to evolve across generations, influenced by social change, modernization, and interaction with Indonesian as the national language. Temporal

variation therefore illustrates the dynamic nature of Manggarai dialects, where certain words risk being replaced or forgotten over time.

Overall, the findings confirm that Manggarai dialects are not static but dynamic, shaped by geography, social structure, generational change, and intercultural contact. The variations identified in this study not only reveal linguistic diversity but also reflect the cultural richness and adaptability of the Manggarai people in maintaining their identity across changing times and contexts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study found four types of dialect variations that developed in the Manggarai community, namely regional dialects (geographic), social dialects (sociolects), temporal dialects, and mixed dialects (geosocial). Regional dialects show quite striking differences in vocabulary in the three research areas, seen in the use of greetings (*Ameh, Ema, Ame*), verbs (*Ghang, Hang, Ghan*), nouns (*Hekang, Mbaru*), adjectives (*Mesik, Meci'k*), and adverbs (*gho, Danong, ho*). These differences show the influence of geographical factors on the development of vocabulary and pronunciation of the Manggarai language. Social dialects are formed due to differences in age, social status, and relationships between speakers. The younger generation usually chooses simple forms of address such as *Keh* or *Ka'e*, while the older generation, or in formal situations, more often uses the greetings *Kraeng Tu'a* or *Mekas*. This proves that social stratification plays a significant role in language choice. Temporal dialects are evident in the differences in vocabulary use between the older and younger generations, where the older generation still maintains traditional words rich in cultural values, while the younger generation tends to use shorter vocabulary or is influenced by Indonesian. Mixed dialects emerge due to social interactions between speakers from various regions and the influence of Indonesian. In everyday conversation, words from two dialects are often found mixed, such as *gang-lompong* for the verb 'to eat'. This phenomenon shows that the Manggarai language is flexible and continues to adapt to social developments.

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