

Retention of Balinese Agricultural Vocabulary in Jati Bali Village, South Konawe Regency

Kebertahanan Kosakata Pertanian Bahasa Bali di Desa Jati Bali, Kabupaten Konawe Selatan

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Abstract

Declining mastery of regional-language vocabulary among young speakers indicates a vulnerable point in the intergenerational transmission of ecological knowledge. This study describes the retention of Balinese agricultural lexicon among young Balinese speakers in Jati Bali Village, South Konawe Regency. The study used field research with descriptive quantitative analysis interpreted qualitatively through an ecolinguistic perspective. Data were collected from 50 respondents aged 17-25 years through a questionnaire containing 75 Balinese agricultural lexical items categorized into plant names, animal names, agricultural tools, and farming activities. The findings show that 2,213 of 3,750 responses (59.01%) were actively known and used, 463 responses (12.35%) were known passively, and 1,074 responses (28.64%) were unknown. Plant vocabulary had the strongest retention (74.67%), followed by animal vocabulary (66.37%), tool vocabulary (48.33%), and farming-activity vocabulary (39.44%). The study concludes that lexical retention depends on visible referents, continued agricultural practice, family transmission, and ecological-cultural continuity. This study contributes to ecolinguistic documentation and regional-language maintenance in migrant Balinese communities.

Abstrak

Menurunnya penguasaan kosakata bahasa daerah pada generasi muda menunjukkan kerentanan pewarisan pengetahuan ekologis lokal. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan kebertahanan kosakata pertanian bahasa Bali pada penutur muda di Desa Jati Bali, Kabupaten Konawe Selatan. Penelitian lapangan ini menggunakan analisis kuantitatif deskriptif yang diinterpretasikan secara kualitatif melalui perspektif ekolinguistik. Data dikumpulkan melalui angket terhadap 50 responden berusia 17-25 tahun dengan instrumen 75 kosakata pertanian bahasa Bali yang dikelompokkan menjadi kosakata tumbuhan, hewan, alat pertanian, dan aktivitas pertanian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari 3.750 respons terdapat 2.213 respons (59,01%) yang diketahui dan digunakan secara aktif, 463 respons (12,35%) yang diketahui secara pasif, dan 1.074 respons (28,64%) yang tidak diketahui. Kosakata tumbuhan memiliki kebertahanan tertinggi (74,67%), disusul kosakata hewan (66,37%), alat pertanian (48,33%), dan aktivitas pertanian (39,44%). Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kebertahanan kosakata dipengaruhi oleh keterlihatan referen, keberlanjutan praktik pertanian, transmisi keluarga, dan kesinambungan budaya ekologis. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada dokumentasi ekolinguistik dan pemertahanan bahasa Bali dalam komunitas transmigran.

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INTRODUCTION

A regional language is both a marker of cultural identity and a repository of local knowledge. In agrarian societies, language does not merely serve as a means of communication; it also records the relationship between people and land, water, plants, animals, work tools, seasons, and agricultural rites. Agricultural lexicon must therefore be understood as a trace of ecological knowledge passed down through social practice. As agricultural practices change, the vocabulary attached to those practices is also at risk of weakening.

Ecolinguistic studies position language as part of the social and ecological ecosystem. Stibbe (2020) asserts that language shapes the way humans understand, narrate, and treat the environment, while Mbete (2016) views language change as one symptom of change in the human relationship with ecology. Isti'anah and Suhandano (2023) show that ecolinguistic research in Indonesia has developed as a field that connects language with local wisdom, language endangerment, and ecological awareness. Within this framework, Balinese agricultural vocabulary can be read not merely as a list of words but as a representation of the agrarian experience of the Balinese people.

Language maintenance is closely related to the continued use of a language within social domains. Fishman (1991) positions intergenerational transmission as the core of language maintenance, while Holmes (2001) emphasizes the importance of the family domain, positive attitudes, and community support. In the context of regional languages in Indonesia, Muslihah et al. (2018) show that language maintenance is influenced by language use within the family and social environment, while Yunus et al. (2022) show that adolescents' mastery of regional-language vocabulary can weaken as its domains of use become increasingly limited. The ability of young people to recognize and use agricultural vocabulary is thus an important indicator of a regional language's vitality.

Balinese in Jati Bali Village, South Konawe Regency, has a distinctive sociolinguistic context, as it is spoken by a Balinese community residing outside the island of Bali as a result of the history of transmigration. This condition creates a complex situation of language contact. Young speakers live within a family domain that still has the potential to use Balinese, while also existing within educational, media, and social domains dominated by Indonesian and in contact with the local languages of Southeast Sulawesi. Balinese ethnic identity may well persist, but mastery of specialized agricultural vocabulary is not guaranteed to persist if the ecological practices that sustain it weaken.

Balinese agricultural vocabulary is important to study because agriculture in Balinese culture is bound up with work practices, collective values, water management, and agrarian rites. Windia and Dewi (2017) assert that the subak irrigation system embodies principles of ecological and social balance, while Suwija et al. (2019) show that Balinese has a strong socio-cultural structure in its use of speech levels. Manan and Galba (1989) likewise note that Balinese agriculture cannot be separated from social organization and traditional knowledge. When agricultural vocabulary becomes unfamiliar to the younger generation, what weakens is not only the lexical form but also the agrarian cultural memory that accompanies it.

Previous research shows that ecological lexicon can serve as an indicator of language vitality. Fitriani Sari et al. (2024) found a retention level of 85.24% for dry-field farming vocabulary in the Muna language in Wawesa Village, while Jufri et al. (2025) found a retention level of 85.64% for dry-field farming vocabulary in the Kulisusu language in Waculaea Village. Sari (2020) examined the maintenance of dryland-farming lexicon in the Dawan language and emphasized the importance of agricultural language as an ecological identity marker for the community. Septiana (2018) discussed agricultural lexicon among the Dayak Maanyan community, while Kesuma (2015) showed the endangerment of eco-agrarian

lexicon in the Angkola/Mandailing language. These studies show that change in agrarian practice is closely related to change in vocabulary.

Nevertheless, studies on Balinese agricultural vocabulary within transmigrant communities in Southeast Sulawesi remain limited. Previous research has more often examined regional languages within their own ethnic territories or discussed language maintenance in general terms. The gap addressed by this study lies in mapping the vitality of Balinese agricultural lexicon among young people living outside the region of origin of their language and culture. In other words, this study does not merely ask how much vocabulary is still known, but also why certain categories are retained more strongly than others.

Based on this background, the focus of this study is the retention of Balinese agricultural vocabulary in Jati Bali Village, South Konawe Regency. The research questions addressed are: (1) what is the general level of retention of Balinese agricultural vocabulary among young speakers; (2) how does retention vary across the categories of plants, animals, agricultural tools, and farming activities; and (3) what mechanisms explain the retention or weakening of particular vocabulary categories? This study aims to describe the level of retention of Balinese agricultural vocabulary while also interpreting the socio-ecological mechanisms that influence it. Theoretically, this study strengthens ecolinguistic scholarship and the study of language maintenance; practically, it provides a documentary foundation for Balinese agricultural vocabulary within transmigrant communities.

METHOD

This study is a field study using a descriptive quantitative approach interpreted qualitatively through an ecolinguistic perspective. The quantitative approach was used to calculate the level of vocabulary retention based on respondents' answers, while qualitative interpretation was used to explain the relationship among vocabulary, ecological referents, agricultural practice, family transmission, and cultural change. This design was chosen so that the numerical data would not remain mere statistics but would instead form the basis for explaining the mechanisms of lexical maintenance.

The study was conducted in Jati Bali Village, West Ranomeeto District, South Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The respondents numbered 50 young Balinese speakers aged 17-25 years, selected purposively. The respondent criteria were: residing in Jati Bali Village, having a Balinese family background, having acquired Balinese within the family environment, and being willing to complete the research instrument. This age range was chosen because young people serve as an important indicator for observing the continuity of regional-vocabulary transmission.

The research instrument was a questionnaire covering 75 items of Balinese agricultural vocabulary. The vocabulary was grouped into four categories: 18 plant-name items, 27 animal-name items, 12 agricultural-tool items, and 18 farming-activity items. The vocabulary list was verified through preliminary interviews with local informants who understood agricultural practice and Balinese-language use in Jati Bali Village. This verification was carried out to ensure that the vocabulary tested was relevant to the linguistic experience and agricultural practices of the local community.

Respondents' answers were classified into three categories: (1) not knowing the lexical form and meaning and being unable to use the item in conversation; (2) knowing the lexical form and meaning but not yet able to use it in conversation; and (3) knowing the lexical form and meaning and being able to use it in conversation. The third category was used as an indicator of active retention, since the vocabulary is not merely recognized but still has a domain of use in communication. The second category was understood as passive knowledge, while the first category served as an indicator of vocabulary weakening.

Data were analyzed using the formula $P = f/N \times 100\%$, where P is the percentage, f is the response frequency, and N is the total number of data points. A threshold above 50% was used as the operational majority cutoff for determining whether a vocabulary item or category was still actively retained. For interpretive purposes, categories with a percentage of 70% or above were understood as strongly retained, 51-69% as moderately retained, and 50% or below as vulnerable. Data validity was maintained through recounting of responses, consistency checks of the classification, and theoretical triangulation with the concepts of language maintenance, language shift, and ecolinguistics.

Table 1. Response Categories and Their Analytical Meaning

Response category	Analytical code	Meaning within the study
Does not know the lexical form and meaning and cannot use it	Unknown / inactive	The vocabulary item is in a weakened position because it is no longer recognized by respondents
Knows the lexical form and meaning but cannot yet use it	Passive	The vocabulary item is still retained as knowledge but is not an active part of conversation
Knows the lexical form and meaning and can use it	Active	The vocabulary item is still retained because it is recognized and used in communication

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research findings are presented in four parts: the general distribution of responses, retention by vocabulary category, variation in retention by respondent, and representative vocabulary examples. This presentation is intended to show the data not merely as overall figures, but also to reveal patterns of retention and weakening at the level of category and respondent.

Table 2. Distribution of Retention of Balinese Agricultural Vocabulary

Response category	Number of responses	Percentage	Meaning of finding
Known and actively used	2,213	59.01%	Active retention
Known but not yet used	463	12.35%	Passive knowledge
Unknown and unusable	1,074	28.64%	Weakened vocabulary
Total	3,750	100%	All responses

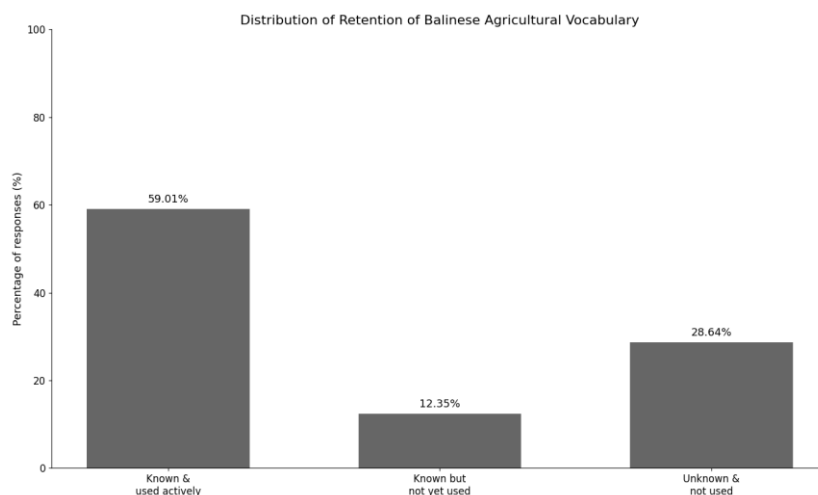


Figure 1. Distribution of retention of Balinese agricultural vocabulary

Of the 3,750 total responses, 2,213 responses, or 59.01%, show that Balinese agricultural vocabulary is still known and used in conversation. However, the presence of 463 passive responses and 1,074 unknown responses shows that this retention is not yet stable. Balinese agricultural vocabulary in Jati Bali Village can thus be described as still alive, but in a vulnerable condition.

Table 3. Retention by Vocabulary Category

Vocabulary category	No. of items	Mean retention	Retained items (>50%)	Vulnerable items ($\leq 50\%$)	Interpretive status
Plant names	18	74.67%	15	3	Strongly retained
Animal names	27	66.37%	18	9	Moderately retained
Agricultural tools	12	48.33%	6	6	Vulnerable
Farming activities	18	39.44%	6	12	Vulnerable
Total / Mean	75	59.01%	45	30	Moderate-to-vulnerable

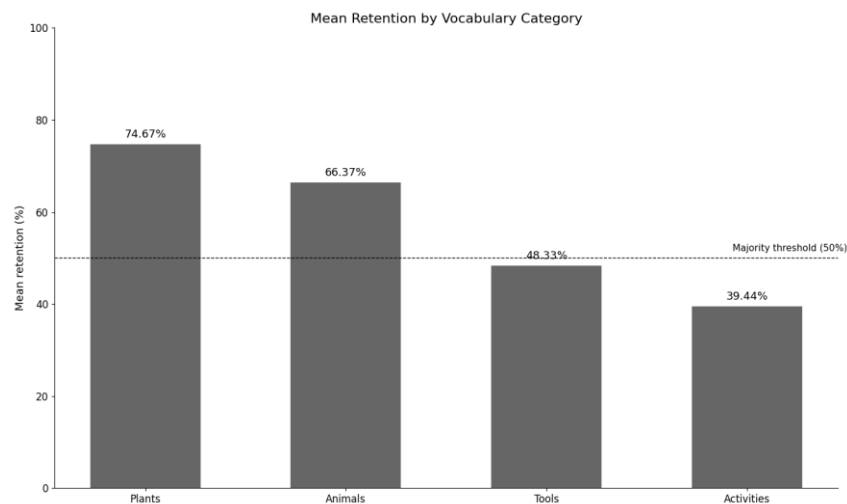


Figure 2. Mean retention by vocabulary category

The pattern in Table 3 and Figure 2 shows a clear contrast between vocabulary whose referents are close to everyday life and vocabulary related to specialized agricultural practice. Plant and animal vocabulary is retained more strongly, while tool and farming-activity vocabulary falls below the majority threshold. This shows that the vitality of vocabulary is determined not only by ethnic identity but also by the continuity of referents and socio-ecological practice.

Table 4. Summary of Retention Level by Respondent

Indicator	Number/Score	Percentage	Note
Respondents above 50%	34 people	68%	Vocabulary relatively retained among the majority of respondents
Respondents at 50% or below	16 people	32%	Indication of weakening among some young speakers
Highest retention	R16 = 65/75 items	86.67%	Very good mastery
Lowest retention	R4 = 9/75 items	12%	Very low mastery

At the respondent level, 34 people, or 68%, had a vocabulary mastery level above 50%, while 16 people, or 32%, were at a level of 50% or below. The range between R16, who mastered 65 vocabulary items, and R4, who mastered only 9 items, shows a sharp variation within the younger generation. This variation shows that youth is not a homogeneous category; family experience, involvement in agriculture, and the intensity of Balinese-language use likely play a role in differences in vocabulary mastery.

Table 5. Representative Vocabulary by Retention Pattern

Category	Example vocabulary	Data status	Interpretation
Plants	biu, poh, nyuh	Biu and poh reach 100%; the plant category averages 74.67%	Referents remain close to home, garden, and family conversation
Animals	cicing, sampi, celeng, siap	The animal category averages 66.37%	Animal names remain recognized because some referents are present in domestic life
Agricultural tools	angkeb, lampit, kedetan	The tool category averages 48.33%	Traditional tools are becoming rarely used or are being displaced by new tools/terms
Farming activities	padi beleng, mebayukukung, ngusaba	The activity category averages 39.44%	Specific agricultural activities and rites are no longer part of the direct experience of some young speakers

Table 5 shows that the vocabulary that is most strongly retained is vocabulary whose referents still exist in everyday living space. Conversely, poorly retained vocabulary is associated with tools, stages of work, or agricultural rites that are not always part of the direct experience of the younger generation.

DISCUSSION

The main finding of this study is that the retention level of Balinese agricultural vocabulary in Jati Bali Village is 59.01%. This figure shows that Balinese agricultural vocabulary is still actively used by the majority of respondents, but occupies a moderate and vulnerable position. From the perspective of language maintenance, this condition indicates that vocabulary transmission is still occurring, but is not yet stable. Fishman (1991) asserts that a language will persist if the process of intergenerational transmission remains active; in this data, the presence of 12.35% passive responses and 28.64% unknown responses points to a gap in transmission that warrants attention.

The strongest retention among plant and animal vocabulary reveals a mechanism of referent visibility. Words such as biu, poh, nyuh, cicing, sampi, celeng, and siap are more strongly retained because the objects or creatures they refer to are still present in the home, the garden, or everyday conversation. Within an ecolinguistic framework, the persistence of a lexical form is tied to the continuity of the human relationship with the environment. Stibbe (2020) and Mbete (2016) both position language as part of a community's ecological story. A word thus persists when the world to which it refers remains present and experienced by its speakers.

Conversely, the low retention of tool and farming-activity vocabulary reveals a mechanism of practice weakening. Words such as angkeb, lampit, kedetan, padi beleng, mebayukukung, and ngusaba show low mastery because they refer to tools, stages of work, or agrarian rites that are not always experienced by the younger generation. As traditional tools are replaced by new technology, as farming work is no longer a primary experience, and as agricultural rites are followed less and less often, vocabulary loses its domain of use. The loss

of this domain of use causes vocabulary to shift from active to passive, and then risks becoming unknown.

The 12.35% passive-knowledge category is an important finding because it reveals a transitional phase between maintenance and shift. Respondents in this category still recognize the form and meaning of the vocabulary but are not yet able to use it in conversation. Sociolinguistically, this passive phase shows that the vocabulary has not entirely disappeared, but requires reinforcement of use. If a vocabulary item has only ever been heard from parents or grandparents without being used again, it is at risk of being lost to the following generation. Maintenance strategies therefore cannot rely solely on documenting word lists; they must also bring back contexts of use.

This finding extends previous research on dry-field farming vocabulary in the Muna and Kulisusu languages. Fitriani Sari et al. (2024) and Jufri et al. (2025) found retention levels above 85%, whereas this study finds a figure of 59.01%. This difference can be explained through community context. The Muna and Kulisusu languages in previous studies were examined within ethnic territories closer to their ecology of origin, whereas Balinese in Jati Bali Village exists within a transmigrant community. The condition of transmigration allows speakers to maintain Balinese identity, but does not automatically maintain every layer of specialized vocabulary, particularly agricultural lexicon that requires specific ecological practices.

These data also reveal a distinction between ethnic identity and lexical competence. Young speakers can continue to identify themselves as part of the Balinese community without necessarily mastering traditional agricultural vocabulary. Identity can be maintained through ceremony, naming, food, and community solidarity, while specialized vocabulary persists only when used in concrete activity. Balinese-language maintenance within transmigrant communities must therefore be understood as a layered process: the general language may persist through the family, but specialized vocabulary requires sustained practice, referents, and domains of use.

To clarify the mechanism behind these findings, this study formulates four analytical factors. First, referent visibility—the presence of the referenced object within the everyday environment. Second, practice involvement—young speakers' direct experience of agricultural activity. Third, family transmission—the use of the vocabulary by parents and the older generation in household conversation. Fourth, technological and cultural change—the shifting of tools, ways of working, and domains of communication, which can reduce the need to use traditional vocabulary.

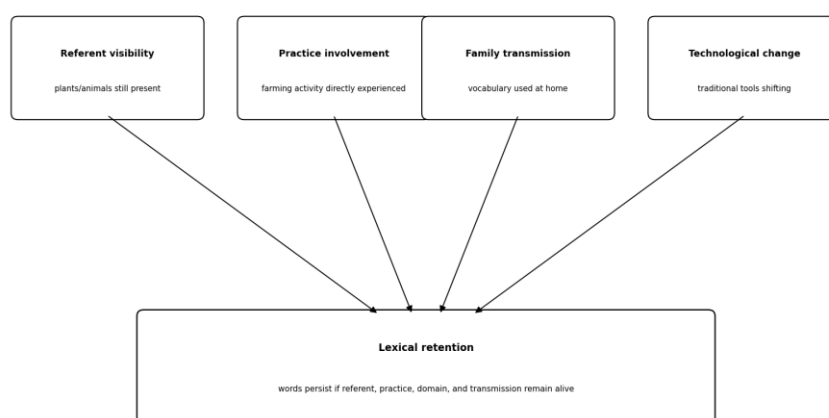


Figure 3. Map of the mechanisms underlying the retention of Balinese agricultural lexicon

Figure 3 confirms that lexical retention is the outcome of the intersection among word, referent, practice, and transmission. A vocabulary item will be strongly retained if its referent remains visible, its associated practice is still carried out, it is used within the family environment, and it is not displaced by new terms or technology. Conversely, a vocabulary item will weaken if its referent is absent, its practice is not experienced, or it is retained only as a memory of the older generation.

The practical implication of this study is the need for maintenance strategies that revive context rather than merely archiving vocabulary. Because the farming-activities category is the most vulnerable, documentation should include not only word lists but also videos of farming practice, family stories, recordings of terms used in conversation, illustrated digital glossaries, and locally-relevant, activity-based teaching materials. In this way, vocabulary is treated not as an inert object but as part of a cultural practice that can be relearned by the younger generation.

The contribution of this study lies in mapping the vitality of Balinese agricultural lexicon within a transmigrant Balinese community. The findings show that the maintenance of a regional language cannot be assessed solely by the presence of ethnic identity or a general ability to use the regional language. Specialized lexical layers, such as agricultural vocabulary, can weaken more quickly when the ecological practices and domains of use that sustain them change. Ecolinguistic research therefore needs to attend to the relationship among language, environment, work, technology, and family transmission when reading the vitality of vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Balinese agricultural vocabulary in Jati Bali Village, South Konawe Regency, remains retained, but falls within the moderate-to-vulnerable category. Of the 3,750 responses obtained from 50 respondents across 75 vocabulary items, 2,213 responses, or 59.01%, show that the vocabulary is still known and can be used in conversation. A total of 463 responses, or 12.35%, show passive knowledge, while 1,074 responses, or 28.64%, show vocabulary that is unknown and unusable.

By vocabulary category, plant vocabulary has the highest retention at 74.67%, followed by animal vocabulary at 66.37%. The agricultural-tools category stands at 48.33%, while farming-activity vocabulary is the most vulnerable category, with a mean of 39.44%. This pattern confirms that vocabulary with referents close to everyday life is more strongly retained, while vocabulary related to traditional tools, specialized activities, and agricultural rites is more prone to weakening.

Substantively, this study confirms that the maintenance of Balinese agricultural vocabulary cannot be separated from referent visibility, young people's involvement in agricultural practice, family transmission, and technological change. The maintenance of a regional language within a transmigrant community must therefore be understood not merely as a matter of ethnic identity, but also as a matter of the continuity of ecological knowledge. Vocabulary preservation should be directed toward active documentation through illustrated digital glossaries, recordings of farming practice, family stories, locally-relevant teaching materials, and community activities that bring agricultural vocabulary back into use. Future research may extend this study through cross-age comparisons, analysis of language-use domains, and examination of the social factors influencing low mastery of particular vocabulary items.

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