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## SHOULD VILLAGE NAMES CHANGE? A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF REJANG-LANGUAGE VILLAGE NAMES

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perubahan nama desa dari bahasa Rejang ke bahasa Indonesia yang sudah mengalami pergeseran bentuk secara morfologis dalam sistem penamaannya. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode deskriptif analisis. Penelitian ini menganalisis 18 nama desa dari perspektif morfologisnya dan kemudian melihat dampaknya dalam berperan untuk menghilangkan makna asli dalam bahasa Rejang. Analisis mengungkapkan bahwa toponimi nama desa di Kabupaten Kepahiang yang menggunakan bahasa Rejang di dominasi oleh kata polimorfemis, meskipun ada 1 desa yang mengikuti pola monomorfemis. Perubahan nama desa dari bahasa Rejang ke bahasa Indonesia berpotensi besar dalam menghilangkan makna budaya dan historis yang ada dalam nama desa berbahasa Rejang. Selain itu perubahan nama desa ini juga menandai adanya perubahan secara administratif yang menuntut bahasa Rejang untuk menyesuaikan dengan bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa nasional. Sebagai kesimpulan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa peran nama desa di tengah masyarakat tidak hanya sebagai penanda linguistik saja, akan tetapi memiliki makna yang dalam, terutama dalam membentuk budaya kolektif masyarakat dan membangun memori kolektif yang tersimpan dalam bentuk nama asli berbahasa Rejang. Berdasarkan hal tersebut maka, perlu adanya pertimbangan yang komprehensif dan mendalam bagi pemerintah setempat untuk mempertimbangkan kembali agar dapat mengakomodir nama desa berbahasa Rejang sebagai nama asli dalam sistem penamaan baik secara administratif maupun dalam keseharian, hal ini bertujuan untuk tetap menjaga keberlangsungan budaya dan historis dalam nama desa asli berbahasa Rejang sebagai bentuk konservasi budaya dan bahasa nasional di Indonesia.

**Kata Kunci:** bahasa, rejang, morfologi, nama, budaya.

### Abstract

This study aims to examine the changes in village names from Rejang to Indonesian that have undergone morphological shifts within the naming system. Using a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical methods, the study analyzes 18 village names from a morphological perspective and then explores the impact of these changes on the loss of original meanings in the Rejang language. The analysis reveals that Rejang-language village toponyms in Kepahiang Regency are predominantly polymorphemic, although one village follows a monomorphemic pattern. The change of village names from Rejang to Indonesian has a strong potential to erode the cultural and historical meanings embedded in Rejang toponyms. Moreover, this renaming process reflects administrative changes that require the Rejang language to conform to Indonesian as the national language. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that village names function not merely as linguistic markers but carry profound meanings, particularly in shaping collective culture and constructing collective memory preserved through original Rejang-language names. Therefore, a comprehensive and critical consideration is needed from local governments to reconsider and accommodate Rejang-language village names as original names within both administrative systems and everyday usage, in order to sustain cultural and historical continuity as part of language and cultural conservation in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** language, Rejang, morphology, place names, culture

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Names play a crucial role in various aspects of human life, including identity formation, culture, and social interaction. They function as primary means through which individuals and communities are recognized and identified (Johnson et al., 2021; Raheem & Akande, 2019). Within a cultural context, names reflect the values, beliefs, and worldviews of a society. For instance, in Ibibio culture, personal and place names encapsulate traditional epistemologies and communal values (Mensah et al., 2024). Consequently, every act of naming contains cultural knowledge and local wisdom that cannot be readily replaced by alternative names lacking equivalent contextual meaning.

The phenomenon of name change often results in shifts in how individuals and communities understand their collective and individual identities. Renaming is not merely an administrative act; it is deeply intertwined with identity, social norms, and power structures. Changes in names may alter how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others, thereby influencing social integration, emotional well-being, and cultural identity. This underscores the complex interaction between group identity and societal expectations, highlighting the central role of naming within broader social and cultural dynamics.

Renaming practices also carry profound linguistic, social, and cultural implications. Such processes affect how communities conceptualize both individual and collective identities, as each society assigns names to places and spaces based on its own language (Arifoğlu, 2020). In the context of Kepahiang Regency, the shift of village names from Rejang to Indonesian reflects a dynamic tension between administrative policy and local cultural values. Language standardization within governmental domains is often intended to support national integration; however, it may simultaneously obscure the

historical and symbolic meanings embedded in local languages. One field of study that specifically examines naming practices is toponymy.

Toponymic studies provide comprehensive insights into the interrelationship between language, culture, geography, and history within a given region (Ainabek et al., 2024). From a linguistic perspective, toponymy is not merely understood as spatial labeling but as a linguistic system that represents space and location while simultaneously reflecting how humans perceive, interpret, and organize their environments (Perono Cacciafoco, Francesco, 2023). Therefore, toponymic analysis must also consider linguistic form, including morphological structure, as such forms preserve traces of collective experience and worldview among speech communities.

In the case of Rejang-language village toponyms in Kepahiang Regency, morphological analysis reveals that monomorphemic forms are extremely limited, with only one instance identified in the data. A monomorphemic form or single morpheme according to Kentjono, (1982), is a word consisting of one morpheme as the smallest free grammatical unit. Monomorphemic words are characterized by their ability to stand alone, possess complete meaning, and exhibit a clear grammatical category (Chaer, 2014).

In contrast, the majority of Rejang-language village toponyms in Kepahiang Regency are polymorphemic in form. Polymorphemic words emerge through word-formation processes involving more than one morpheme, including compounding (Sudaryanto, 1991). Bauer, (1988) defines compound words as lexical units composed of two or more lexemes, while Keraf, (1980) identifies five defining features of compounds: the creation of new meaning, the presence of a central semantic nucleus governing the entire construction, formation from base words, high frequency of

use, and generally endocentric structure governed by the Modifier–Head (DM) principle.

In the Rejang language, compound words are classified into coordinate (equal) and subordinate (non-equal) compounds (Napsin et al., 1981). Coordinate compounds are exocentric constructions in which both elements function as semantic heads, such as *maq* ‘mother’ + *bapaq* ‘father’ forming *maqbapaq* ‘parents’, or *duay* ‘two’ + *kelamin* ‘sex’ forming *duay kelamin* ‘husband and wife’. Subordinate compounds are likewise exocentric but involve hierarchical semantic relations, where one element functions as the head and the other as a modifier, typically following the DM structure, as in *tun* ‘person’ + *maling* ‘thief’ forming *tun maling* ‘thief’. The dominance of polymorphemic forms in Rejang village toponyms demonstrates that place naming is not arbitrary but is constructed through linguistic mechanisms that encode semantic relations, social experience, and ecological knowledge within the community.

Previous studies on toponymy have emphasized the importance of examining cultural, social, and historical dimensions in place-naming practices. Such studies highlight that place names are not merely geographic labels but also repositories of cultural values, traditions, and historical events that shape community identity. Research by Herawati et al., (2024), Melin et al., (2024), and Muharna et al., (2024) demonstrates that understanding social and historical contexts is essential for uncovering the meanings embedded in toponyms and for explaining how naming practices reflect social structures and communal interactions within specific regions.

Although the studies discussed above present diverse perspectives on toponymic research, none has specifically examined the cultural dimensions of toponymy in Kepahiang Regency, a region characterized by unique challenges related to village naming practices. Consequently, this study offers a distinct

contribution by exploring morphological changes in village names in Kepahiang Regency that have undergone language shift from Rejang to Indonesian.

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-analytical research design aimed at providing an in-depth account of the phenomenon under investigation, namely the language shift in toponymy from Rejang to Indonesian. The research adopts a qualitative approach, which emphasizes the collection, analysis, and interpretation of narrative data, texts, and lived experiences in order to understand the meanings underlying the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A qualitative design was chosen because the objectives of the study extend beyond data quantification to include a detailed exploration of the morphological aspects embedded in village names.

Data collection and analysis were conducted using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles & Huberman, (1994), which conceptualizes qualitative data analysis as an iterative and continuous process involving data collection, reduction, and interpretation until saturation is achieved. The data collection process involved the following steps: (1) field data collection through semi-structured interview guides developed in accordance with the research questions; and (2) data reduction, involving the selection, focusing, and simplification of the data. From a total of 117 villages in Kepahiang Regency, the dataset was reduced to 18 villages whose names have undergone a language shift from Rejang to Indonesian.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The village names analyzed in this study were selected through a systematic data reduction process oriented toward the primary objective of exploring morphological changes in toponymy. This selection procedure ensured that only village names that had undergone a language shift from

Rejang to Indonesian were included as data, in accordance with the research aims. The classification table presented groups the

toponyms based on morphological formation patterns, such as monomorphemic and polymorphemic structures.

**Table 1. Village Names and Linguistic Forms**

Name in Rejang	Linguistic Forms	Morphological Process	Name in Indonesian	Linguistic Forms	Morphological Process
<i>Tajung Balai</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Tajung + Balai</i>	Sosokan Cinta Mandi	Polymorphemic	Sosokan + Cinta + Mandi
<i>Cito Menei</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Cito + Menei</i>	Cinta Mandi	Polymorphemic	Cinta + Mandi
<i>Cito Menei Beleu</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Cito + Menei + Beleu</i>	Cinta Mandi Baru	Polymorphemic	Cinta + Mandi + Baru
<i>Limuh Pet</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Limuh + Pet</i>	Limbur Lama	Polymorphemic	Limbur + Lama
<i>Limuh Beleu</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Limuh + Beleu</i>	Limbur Baru	Polymorphemic	Limbur + Baru
<i>Buteu Kalung</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Buteu + Kalung</i>	Batu Kalung	Polymorphemic	Batu + Kalung
<i>Buteu Belehek</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Buteu + Belehek</i>	Batu Belarik	Polymorphemic	Batu + Belarik
<i>Buteu Banung</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Buteu + Banung</i>	Batu Bandung	Polymorphemic	Batu + Bandung
<i>Tehtik Bioa</i>	Monomorphemic	<i>Tehtik</i>	Tertik	Monomorphemic	Tertik
<i>Hamen</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Bioa + Hamen</i>	Air Raman	Polymorphemic	Air + Raman
<i>Muaro Lakap</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Muaro + Lakap</i>	Muara Langkap	Polymorphemic	Muara + Langkap
<i>Kemang Serei</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Kemang + Serei</i>	Kembang Seri	Polymorphemic	Kembang + Seri
<i>Tajung Benakat</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Tajung + Benakat</i>	Taba Air Pauh	Polymorphemic	Taba + Air + Pauh
<i>Tajung Pajang Dahet</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Tajung + Pajang + Dahet</i>	Penanjung Panjang Atas	Polymorphemic	Penanjung + Panjang + Atas
<i>Tanjung Pajang Bes</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Tanjung + Pajang + Bes</i>	Penanjung Panjang Bawah	Polymorphemic	Penanjung + Panjang + Bawah
<i>Dan Bijea</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Dan + Bijea</i>	Peraduan Binjai	Polymorphemic	Peraduan + Binjai
<i>Ujen Mas Kauk</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Ujen + Mas + Kauk</i>	Ujan Mas Bawah	Polymorphemic	Ujan + Mas + Bawah
<i>Tabah Beleu</i>	Polymorphemic	<i>Tabah + Beleu</i>	Taba Baru	Polymorphemic	Taba + Baru



## Rejang-Language Village Toponymy Based on Morphological Structure

The analysis of the morphological structure of Rejang-language village toponyms in Kepahiang Regency shows that monomorphemic forms are very limited, while polymorphemic forms dominate the naming system. Of the entire dataset, only one village name is monomorphemic, namely *Tehtik*. A monomorphemic form, or single morpheme, is a word consisting of one morpheme as the smallest free grammatical unit (Kentjono, 1982) and has a complete meaning and a clear grammatical category (Chaer, 2014). The name *Tehtik* is not found in the Indonesian–Rejang bilingual dictionary because it is derived from the name of a local river. This indicates that the village name is based on a local geographical element, thus reflecting a direct relationship between language, space, and the natural environment of the Rejang community.

In contrast, most Rejang-language village toponyms are polymorphemic, primarily formed through compounding processes. Polymorphemic words are created by combining two or more lexemes, resulting in new meanings (Bauer, 1988; Sudaryanto, 1991). In Rejang, compound words can be divided into coordinate compounds and non-coordinate compounds (Napsin et al., 1981)

Coordinate compounds are characterized by the equal status of their constituent elements, with each element functioning as a semantic head. This form is found in several toponyms, such as *Tajung Balai*, *Bioa Hamen*, *Kemang Serei*, and *Tajung Benakat*. These names generally represent geographical conditions or social activities associated with the area, such as riverbank locations, the presence of a hall, or particular natural features. The equality of elements in coordinate compounds indicates that place naming is carried out through the combination of concepts that are equally important in the community's spatial experience.

Meanwhile, non-coordinate compounds are the most dominant form in the data. In this construction, one element functions as the head, while the other serves as a modifier, following the Modifier–Head (DM) pattern. This form is found in toponyms such as *Cito Menei*, *Limuh Pet*, *Buteu Banung*, *Muaro Lakap*, *Tajung Pajang Dahet*, *Dan Bijea*, and *Tabah Beleu*. The head element generally refers to primary objects such as stone, fruit, location, or landscape, while the modifier provides additional information related to qualities, conditions, spatial orientation (upper–lower), or administrative status (new–old).

The dominance of non-coordinate compounds indicates that village naming in Rejang is descriptive and contextual, and is highly dependent on semantic relations between humans, the natural environment, and collective experience. In addition, several toponyms contain symbolic meanings that cannot be understood solely through lexical analysis, but are instead related to folklore, historical events, or oral traditions. Thus, the morphological structure of Rejang-language village toponyms not only reflects linguistic conventions but also functions as a medium for preserving cultural knowledge and the collective memory of the local community.

## DISCUSSION

Changing village names has significant and wide-ranging impacts on various aspects of society, including historical, cultural, social, and political dimensions. This can be seen in village names in Kepahiang Regency that originally used Rejang as the local language of the community and were later translated into Indonesian. This phenomenon affects not only linguistic aspects; changes in village names can also sever connections with historical and cultural heritage. This is particularly problematic when changes are made without thorough research, resulting in the loss of historically significant names and the



erasure of cultural memory (Guyot & Seethal, 2007; Kütükoğlu, 2012).

Names are an integral part of a place's identity. Changing them can bring about transformations in how communities perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. This can be observed in the case of South Africa, where name changes reflect a multicultural and multilingual context aimed at addressing past injustices (Guyot & Seethal, 2007). In addition, the process of renaming can influence the social structure of a village. For example, in rural villages in Korea, the introduction of tourism and accompanying name changes have led to the emergence of new local identities, sometimes even undermining existing ones (Joo, 2012).

In Kepahiang Regency, the shift of village names from Rejang to Indonesian indicates a shift in the understanding of cultural meaning through village names, where transformations in linguistic form influence community perceptions of local identity. This shift is not merely a replacement of words but also entails the loss of historical, symbolic, and cultural meanings embedded in the original toponyms. Thus, changes in the linguistic forms of village names in Kepahiang can be understood as a complex process in which identity, culture, and social structures interact with administrative demands and modernization.

The shift of village names from Rejang to Indonesian in Kepahiang reflects broader sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics. This phenomenon is part of a wider trend in Indonesia, where regional languages are increasingly being replaced by Indonesian, the national language, as it is perceived to offer greater social, cultural, and economic advantages (Abtahian & Cohn, 2022; Andriyanti, 2019; Pramuniati et al., 2025). This shift is not merely linguistic but also affects identity and cultural perceptions.

The adoption of Indonesian instead of regional languages such as Rejang can weaken the intergenerational transmission of cultural and

linguistic heritage. This has been demonstrated in other regions of Indonesia, such as Yogyakarta, where young people increasingly identify with the national language rather than their regional language, Javanese, ultimately strengthening national identity at the expense of local identity (Andriyanti, 2019). Furthermore, the transformation of village names from Rejang into Indonesian can alter how communities perceive their cultural identity. Language is a crucial marker of identity, and its shift can lead to a redefinition of belonging and cultural heritage (Abtahian & Cohn, 2022; Andriyanti, 2019).

The shift of village names from Rejang to Indonesian in Kepahiang represents a microcosm of a broader national trend in which local languages and identities are increasingly marginalized by the national language. This shift affects cultural perceptions and identities, highlighting the need for balanced language policies that promote national unity while also preserving local heritage.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of village names in Kepahiang Regency from Rejang into Indonesian has significant impacts on the linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions of the community. Morphological analysis reveals that the majority of the toponyms are polymorphemic, composed of more than one morpheme conveying geographical, historical, and social information, while monomorphemic names are relatively rare. This language shift not only alters linguistic forms but also leads to the loss of historical, symbolic, and cultural meanings embedded in the original names. Such transformations reflect a complex interaction between modern administrative demands and the preservation of linguistic traditions and local identity.

The shift in village names reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics in Indonesia, where the national language increasingly replaces

regional languages, potentially affecting perceptions of cultural identity and the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of managing village names carefully and sensitively with respect to cultural values, so that a balance can be achieved between administrative modernization and the preservation of local identity.

This research highlights the need for efforts to preserve regional languages as a strategy for protecting cultural identity, especially amid the growing influence of globalization. Furthermore, future studies are needed to explore more critically the socio-political factors influencing this linguistic shift, such as government language policies, pressures of modernization, and migration. To address these challenges, integrating regional languages into contemporary naming practices represents a strategic step to maintain the relevance of local languages in the modern era. This approach is expected not only to preserve the Rejang language but also to enrich Indonesia's overall linguistic landscape. By retaining local elements in geographical naming, regional languages can remain an integral part of a diverse and dynamic national identity, while also serving as a symbol of respect for invaluable cultural heritage.

At the end of this conclusion, the researcher acknowledges that this study still has limitations, both methodologically and theoretically. Therefore, future research may further and more critically investigate the causal factors and how communities perceive changes in their village names. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that this study also makes a significant contribution, particularly in documenting an endangered regional language and in providing considerations for policymakers regarding the restoration of village names to their original forms.

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