Mapping The Dialect: Exploring The Lexical Variation of The Orang Rimba Dialect and Its Challenges

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Abstract

Endangered languages and dialect documentation is not merely about collecting ancient words but also preserving cultural heritage. When a language dies, people will lose how its speaker views the world. According to UNESCO reports, there are over 40% of the estimated 7,000 languages spoken globally are endangered, with an average of one language vanishing every two weeks. In addition to thousands of languages, Ethnologue (2026) classifies around 527 of 718 languages in Indonesia as endangered. One of them is Kubu, said as indigenous language spoken by Kubu or the Orang Rimba people, an ethnic community who spread on the island of Sumatra. This community lives nomadically, and the population is estimated to be fewer than 10.000 people. Therefore, considering the importance of documenting it as a means of preventing its extinction and as an initial step towards its revitalization, this research conducts the distribution of the Orang Rimba dialect based on its lexical variation in Jambi Province, Sumatra Island, Indonesia. It also elaborates on the challenges faced throughout the dialect mapping process.

This study uses mixed methods, employing several data collection techniques including are questionnaires, interviews, recording, and note-taking. 829 vocabularies items, organized into 20 categories by Bernd Nothofer, modified by Kisyani, are utilized as reference material for a questionnaire. Meanwhile, interviews are conducted with the local Orang Rimba participants from seven regency in Jambi Province.

The findings show there are 429 lexical variations, 291 phonological variations, and 89 zero (ø)/ no differences. There are two main dialects: the Orang Rimba dialect group in eastern Jambi and the Orang Rimba dialect group in central, southern, eastern and northern Jambi in Sarolangun Regency, but outside the TNBD (Southern Jambi), which borders the Orang Rimba dialect in Batanghari (Central Jambi) and the Orang Rimba dialect in Muaro Jambi (Eastern Jambi). Furthermore, the Orang Rimba dialect found in Muaro Jambi (Eastern Jambi) borders the Orang Rimba dialect in Renah Mendaluh, West Tanjung Jabung (Northern Jambi) and the Orang Rimba dialect in Batanghari. These five Orang Rimba dialect groups are in different regencies and are at a considerable distance from one another. In addition, several loanwords from Indonesian are also found in the 'house and its part' category as well as 'tools' category. It is an understandable result of their tradition and culture; they do not have permanent house due to nomadic lifestyle. The same applies to the tools they use in their daily lives. Moreover, the finding also reveals the existence of lexical diffusion in the Orang Rimba dialect in Muaro Jambi. Lastly, during the research conducting, there are several obstacles and challenges encountered. Location access difficulties cultural barriers (local norms) and resistance from the informants toward foreign researcher posed obstacles, whilst a massive volume of data, and building rapport with the community to persuade them to be interviewed proved to be significant challenges.

Keywords: Lexical Variation, Mapping, Challenges, The Orang Rimba