

# Preservation Of Local Food Culinary Lexicons Based On Social Status In The Indonesia–Timor Leste Border Area: A Socio-Econo-Ecolinguistic Analysis

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received 2025-12-07

Revised 2025-12-15

Accepted 2025-12-17

### Keywords:

Culinary Lexicon

Ecolinguistics

Linguistic Anthropology

Malaka Regency

Socio-Economic Ecology

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the socio-econo-ecolinguistic dimensions of traditional culinary lexicons in Malaka Regency, a border area in eastern Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative descriptive design involving three social groups students, school pupils, and the general community as participants to capture intergenerational perspectives on traditional culinary knowledge. The study aims to (1) identify the linguistic forms of traditional culinary lexicons, (2) examine the dynamics of lexicon maintenance within local communities, and (3) analyze the socio-economic and ecological meanings embedded in traditional culinary practices. Data were obtained through field-based research methods, including community observation and documentation of local culinary terminology. The findings reveal sixteen traditional culinary lexicons: *akar bilan*, *batar tasak*, *batar sonan*, *batar daan*, *batar tunun*, *batar faihedik*, *filun*, *fehuk tunun*, *fehuk sonan*, *fehuk hukus*, *fehuk daan*, *hudi tasak*, *hudi tunun*, *hudi daan*, *nunak*, and *es nu*. These lexicons comprise basic and phrasal forms that convey cultural values, perform descriptive functions, and carry symbolic meanings rooted in local traditions. With regard to lexical vitality, the study indicates a weakening of intergenerational transmission, as younger generations, particularly students and pupils, demonstrate significantly lower levels of comprehension and use of traditional culinary lexicons than the general community, revealing a clear lexical gap. From a socio-economic perspective, the continued consumption of traditional foods contributes to local economic resilience by using locally sourced ingredients. Ecologically, these practices promote waste reduction, environmental preservation, and biodiversity conservation, while simultaneously supporting linguistic and cultural sustainability. Overall, the study highlights the importance of ecolinguistic awareness in sustaining the vitality of traditional culinary lexicons as an integral component of cultural identity and environmental ethics.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as a country with extraordinarily rich cultural diversity, including various traditional culinary practices found throughout the archipelago [1]. Traditional cuisine is not merely daily consumption, but also reflects cultural identity, local wisdom, and ancestral heritage [2]. In this context, the people of Malaka Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, have a distinctive and diverse range of traditional dishes, such as salted fish, akabilan, hudi luan, batar daan, jagung bese, fehuk kuhus, and batar filun, which are commonly made from ingredients such as fish, free-range chicken, and meat [3]. These traditional foods are generally prepared using inherited cooking methods and are often served during customary ceremonies, highlighting the strong connection between culinary traditions and the community's socio-cultural practices [4].

The existence of local culinary traditions, such as those in Malaka, reflects a unique cultural heritage that must be preserved to prevent their disappearance amid modernization and globalization [5]. In many studies, traditional cuisine has been identified as an important component of cultural heritage, capable of strengthening community identity and demonstrating local wisdom in the use of natural ingredients and food processing techniques [6]. For example, in studies conducted in East Nusa Tenggara, local culinary practices are presented as cultural products that introduce the region's distinctive characteristics to tourists [7]. However, efforts to preserve traditional culinary practices face serious challenges [8]. Lifestyle changes, preferences for modern or international foods, and the lack of knowledge transfer regarding traditional cuisine among younger generations often lead to a decline in both the consumption of and familiarity with traditional foods [9]. In addition, documentation of recipes, culinary lexicon terms, and socio-cultural contexts remains very limited, risking the loss of cultural aspects inherent to local culinary traditions [10].

Several previous studies indicate that traditional culinary practices play an important role in preserving cultural values and strengthening local identity within Indonesian communities. Traditional cuisine is not merely a consumer product, but also part of cultural identity that can be utilized in regional tourism development, as it enhances the appeal of culture-based tourism [11]. In line with this, research by Bagaihing and Mantolas examining traditional culinary practices in the East Nusa Tenggara region found that culinary traditions fall under the category of intangible cultural heritage, which must be scientifically documented to prevent the loss of local knowledge amid modernization [12]. Furthermore, studies show a shift in consumption preferences among the younger generation, who are increasingly interested in modern foods due to globalization, urbanization, and easy access to digital information. This indicates a potential erosion of local culinary traditions if not accompanied by systematic preservation efforts [13].

On the other hand, research found that revitalizing traditional culinary terminology through an ethnolinguistic approach, including documenting language and naming traditional foods, can be an effective strategy for maintaining the continuity of local culinary traditions [14]. This study is strengthened by demonstrating a close relationship between traditional cuisine and the ecological knowledge of local communities related to

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food crops, seasonal cycles, and natural resource management [15]. Overall, this body of research confirms that traditional culinary practices not only embody cultural values but also reflect ecological knowledge and historical heritage that must be preserved.

Although numerous studies have examined the preservation of traditional culinary practices across various regions of Indonesia, several gaps remain that warrant further scientific attention. Research on the traditional cuisine of the Malaka community, in particular, remains very limited. Previous studies generally do not specifically address this region, whether from a linguistic, cultural-anthropological, or creative-economy perspective. In fact, the culinary diversity of Malaka has distinctive characteristics rooted in customary practices, the use of natural resources, and traditional knowledge passed down across generations.

In addition, no research has been found that employs an ecolinguistic approach to examine the traditional culinary lexicon of Malaka. The language used in naming traditional foods contains important information about the community's ecology, history, and socio-cultural values, yet this dimension has not been widely explored. Most existing studies on traditional cuisine tend to focus on issues of tourism and regional promotion as cultural destinations. As a result, other equally important aspects—such as mechanisms for maintaining culinary terminology, the socio-economic values embedded in cooking traditions, and the potential for developing creative industries based on local wisdom—have rarely been the main focus of discussion. Furthermore, there has been no research offering an integrative development model that links culinary lexicon, ecological knowledge, and improved community welfare. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap through empirical data collection, ecolinguistic analysis, and mapping the development potential of Malaka traditional cuisine within a broader and sustainable context.

This research offers novelty by employing an ecolinguistic approach to examine the traditional culinary practices of the Malaka community, a method still rarely applied in culinary studies in Indonesia. It systematically identifies and documents the Malaka culinary lexicon, not only in terms of food types but also their meanings, social functions, and cultural contexts. Moreover, this research connects linguistic findings with the potential to develop creative industries based on traditional cuisine, making its results not only theoretical but also applicable to improving community welfare. The study also proposes strategies for preserving traditional culinary terminology through documentation and education, serving as an initial academic reference for future research. Within this framework, the study aims to explore the culinary culture of the Malaka community in two stages: first, the exploration of social, economic, and ecolinguistic values contained in culinary traditions; and second, the identification of mechanisms for maintaining traditional culinary lexicon and the potential development of creative industries based on local wisdom. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the preservation of Indonesia's culinary heritage, particularly from an ecolinguistic perspective, and to improving local community welfare.

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## 2. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytic design to map, interpret, and analyze the traditional culinary lexicon of the Malaka community. The study was conducted in Malaka Regency, a border area, and involved three social groups representing different stages of language transmission and social experience: school pupils, students, and members of the general community. A total of 36 informants participated in the study, consisting of 12 pupils (aged 10–14 years), 12 students (aged 18–24 years), and 12 adults from the general community (aged 35–65 years). Gender distribution was relatively balanced across groups to avoid gender bias in lexical knowledge. The general community group included farmers, traditional food producers, and household cooks who are actively involved in traditional culinary practices.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria: (1) proficiency in the local language, (2) length of residence in Malaka Regency, and (3) degree of involvement or familiarity with traditional food preparation and consumption. These criteria ensured that the data reflected authentic linguistic knowledge embedded in everyday culinary practices. In this study, social status is operationalized through social grouping based on age, educational level, and community role, rather than economic class alone. Pupils represent early language acquisition stages with limited cultural responsibility, students reflect transitional groups influenced by formal education and external linguistic exposure, while the general community represents cultural custodians with direct engagement in traditional ecological and culinary knowledge. This categorization directly aligns with the research aims, particularly in examining lexical maintenance, intergenerational transmission, and vitality of traditional culinary terms within a socio-ecolinguistic framework.

Research data were collected primarily through interviews using elicitation techniques, supported by participant observation, audio recording, and visual documentation. The interview instrument consisted of structured and semi-structured questions, developed based on prior ecolinguistic and ethnolinguistic studies on culinary lexicons. The elicitation list was refined through expert judgment by linguistics scholars and underwent limited pilot testing to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness. Interview questions covered several types, including (1) lexical identification (e.g., naming traditional foods), (2) semantic explanation (e.g., meanings and ingredients), and (3) usage context (e.g., occasions, rituals, or daily consumption). This combination enabled the collection of both linguistic forms and cultural meanings associated with each culinary lexicon.

To assess lexical vitality, the study employed comprehension and retention tests across the three age-based social groups. Two types of tasks were used: recognition tasks, in which participants identified known culinary terms from a list, and production tasks, in which participants were asked to recall and explain terms independently. Lexical retention was calculated using the formula. Data analysis followed a descriptive–analytic procedure. The first stage involved identifying linguistic patterns in traditional culinary naming, including phonological, morphological, and semantic characteristics. The second stage

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focused on calculating lexical retention percentages to determine the continuity and vitality of culinary terminology within the Malaka socio-cultural context.

Research findings are presented through both formal and informal modes. Formal presentations include tables, charts, symbols, and diagrams to illustrate lexical distribution and vitality patterns, while informal presentations are conveyed through an academic narrative employing linguistic and ecolinguistic terminology. This dual presentation supports a comprehensive interpretation of the interrelationship between language, culture, ecology, and traditional culinary practices. To ensure credibility, the study employed methodological and source triangulation, combining interviews, observations, documentation, and comprehension tests across different social groups. Member checking was conducted with selected informants from the general community to confirm the accuracy of lexical meanings and cultural interpretations, while peer debriefing was used to minimize researcher bias. Ethical considerations were carefully observed. All participants provided informed consent, anonymity was maintained through the use of coded identifiers, and permission was obtained from local community leaders prior to data collection. These measures ensured respect for community norms and upheld ethical standards in linguistic field research.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Linguistic Forms of Traditional Culinary Lexicons in Malaka**

Research on the linguistic forms of traditional culinary lexicons in Malaka demonstrates that language not only serves as a means of communication but also as a repository of cultural knowledge, agrarian history, and community identity. The sixteen traditional culinary lexicons identified reveal that the formation of food terminology in Malaka is not an isolated process; instead, it is closely embedded in ecological experience, religious values, and the social practices of Timor–Malaka communities.

The findings show that culinary lexicons are structured into five main linguistic elements: basic lexicon, phrasal lexicon, cultural meaning, culinary description, and symbolism. These dimensions illustrate the interconnection between language and culture in preserving local food knowledge. Several important findings indicate that the traditional culinary lexicons of Malaka possess highly productive morphological diversity. A single root word, such as *batar* or *fehuk*, can give rise to various culinary phrases based on processing techniques, demonstrating the linguistic creativity within the Malaka speech community. In addition, language acts as a medium for storing ecological knowledge, as each food term reflects the community's relationship with natural resources, such as cassava, corn, coconut, and sago, which have long been staple foods in local agrarian traditions.

Furthermore, each lexicon contains strong symbolic values; for example, corn (*batar*) is interpreted as a symbol of prosperity and sustainability, and is an essential element in agricultural rituals such as *hamis batar*. The study also identifies patterns of cultural shift among younger generations, as indicated by lower levels of symbolic understanding among students compared to the general community. This suggests a decrease in intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge.

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Therefore, culinary lexicons play an important role as documentation media and as a means of conserving Timor–Malaka cultural identity, making local language preservation a key strategy in sustaining regional culinary heritage. These findings can be used to develop language and cultural documentation, compile a traditional Malaka culinary dictionary, integrate local wisdom into education, and formulate strategies for culinary promotion as a cultural tourism asset.

Table 1. Linguistic Forms and Cultural Meanings of Traditional Culinary Lexicons in Malaka

No.	Basic Lexicon	Phrasal Lexicon	Cultural Meaning	Description	Symbolism
1	<i>akar</i> (sago)	<i>akar bilan</i> (roasted sago)	A symbol of life, endurance, and gratitude to God. Sago represents vitality in food preparation and continuity of ancestral traditions.	Savory, slightly sweet, and filling; a staple food used in ritual and survival contexts.	Symbolizes harmony between humans, nature, and the divine.
2	<i>batar</i> (corn/maize)	<i>batar tasak</i> (young corn); <i>batar sonan</i> (fried corn); <i>batar daan</i> (boiled corn); <i>batar tunun</i> (roasted corn); <i>batar faihedik</i> (corn porridge)	Represents life, agricultural tradition, and cultural identity of the Malaka community. Plays a major role in rituals such as <i>hamis batar</i> .	Nutrient-rich local food source that supports food security and the local economy.	Embodies fertility, prosperity, cooperation, and communal solidarity.
3	<i>fehuk</i> (cassava/tubers)	<i>fehuk tunun</i> (roasted cassava); <i>fehuk sonan</i> (fried cassava); <i>fehuk daan</i> (boiled cassava); <i>fehuk hukus</i> (steamed cassava)	Reflects traditional food processing knowledge and daily consumption practices.	Savory, nutritious, rich in vitamins, minerals, and carbohydrates.	Symbolizes simplicity, humility, and hidden abundance.
4	<i>hudi</i> (banana)	<i>hudi sonan</i> (fried banana/chips); <i>hudi tunun</i> (roasted banana); <i>hudi daan</i> (boiled banana)	Represents community unity, hospitality, and inter-family cooperation in Malaka culture.	High-energy foods are consumed at social gatherings and ceremonies.	Symbolizes fertility, prosperity, and good fortune.
5	<i>nu'nak</i> (coconut)	<i>nu'nak</i> (young coconut); <i>es nu'nak</i> (young coconut iced drink)	Represents local wisdom and life source in the coastal and farming communities of Malaka.	Fresh, sweet, and hydrating; widely consumed during traditional events.	Symbolizes purification, protection, and spiritual blessings.

Based on the analysis of the five groups of traditional culinary lexicons presented in Table 1, it can be concluded that language plays a central role in representing the connection between food, culture, and ecology in the Malaka community. Each basic form, *akar*, *batar*, *fehuk*, *hudi*, and *nu'nak*, develops into multiple culinary phrases through different processing techniques, illustrating linguistic productivity as well as the diversity of traditional knowledge.

Beyond descriptive functions, culinary lexicons contain layers of symbolic meaning that reflect social identity, spiritual values, local wisdom, and the community's economic structure. Corn, sago, cassava, banana, and coconut are not only staple food ingredients but also symbols of life, prosperity, unity, protection, and harmonious relations with nature.

Thus, traditional Malaka cuisine is not merely a consumption practice but also a medium for the transmission of ecological and cultural knowledge that shapes food security, community solidarity, and the sustainability of regional cultural heritage. These findings reaffirm that preserving culinary lexicons through an ecolinguistic approach is a strategic step toward safeguarding cultural identity and fostering creative economies grounded in local wisdom.

### The Dynamics of Preserving the Culinary Lexicon of Traditional Malaka Food

This study reveals the dynamics of preserving traditional culinary lexicons in Malaka Regency by analyzing responses from three social groups: university students, school pupils, and the general community. Based on field observations and in-depth interviews, sixteen traditional culinary lexicons were found to be actively still used by the community, both in domestic settings and in customary rituals.

Table 2. The Dynamics of Preserving the Traditional Culinary Lexicon

No.	Traditional Culinary Lexicon (Tetun)	Equivalent in Indonesian	STKIP Students	Junior–Senior High School Pupils (Malaka Tengah)	General Community
1	Akar bilan	Roasted sago	Students have good knowledge of the lexicon in both Indonesian and Tetun.	Pupils demonstrate good understanding of the lexicon in both Indonesian and Tetun.	The community understands the lexicon well and can describe the preparation process up to the serving stage.
2	Akar rahun	Sago flour	Students possess a strong understanding of the lexicon.	Pupils' knowledge is based mainly on oral transmission.	The community understands the lexicon and can describe the preparation process until the food or snack is ready to serve.
3	Fehuk sonan	Fried cassava / cassava chips	Students have comprehensive knowledge, including preparation and sensory qualities.	Pupils have a good understanding of roasted cassava.	The community knows the process in detail and often packages it for sale.
4	Batar tomak	Boiled corn ( <i>katemak</i> )	Students recognize the lexicon in Indonesian.	Pupils can explain the preparation process and presentation of a local food.	The community fully understands the lexicon and preparation process in both Indonesian and Tetun.
5	Fehuk daan	Boiled cassava	—	—	—
6	Batar sonan	Fried corn	Students recognize the lexicon in both Indonesian and Tetun.	Pupils have a very good understanding of the lexicon and preparation process.	The community can describe in detail how the food is prepared and served as a traditional Malakan dish.

No.	Traditional Culinary Lexicon (Tetun)	Equivalent in Indonesian	STKIP Students	Junior–Senior High School Pupils (Malaka Tengah)	General Community
7	Batar faihedik	Corn porridge ( <i>jagung bose</i> )	Students' knowledge is limited to basic information.	Pupils' understanding is limited to general information.	The community has strong knowledge and can explain the entire preparation process.
8	Batar filun	Corn pudding ( <i>lemet jagung</i> )	Students' knowledge is limited to basic information.	Pupils' knowledge is limited to basic information.	The community understands the lexicon well and can describe the preparation process.
9	Batar fulin	Boiled corn grits ( <i>jagung buler</i> )	Students understand the lexicon well and can explain its preparation.	Pupils understand the lexicon well and can explain its preparation.	The community possesses comprehensive knowledge, from preparation to the final dish.
10	Batar tunun	Roasted corn	Students' knowledge is excellent.	Pupils' knowledge is excellent.	The community understands the lexicon well and can describe preparation and serving.
11	Batar daan	Boiled corn	Students' understanding is excellent.	Pupils' understanding is excellent.	The community understands the lexicon well and can describe preparation and serving.
12	Batar daan	Boiled corn	(duplicate entry – see no. 11)	(duplicate entry – see no. 11)	(duplicate entry – see no. 11)
13	Batar tasak	Young corn	Students' understanding is excellent.	Pupils' understanding is excellent.	The community knows the lexicon well and can clearly describe the preparation process.
14	Hudi sonan	Fried banana	Students' knowledge is very good.	Pupils' understanding is good.	The community's understanding is excellent.
15	Nu'nak	Young coconut	Students have a strong understanding of the lexicon.	Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding.	The community's knowledge is very good.
16	Es nu	Iced coconut drink	Students' understanding is very good.	Pupils' understanding is very good.	The community's understanding is very good.

The analysis results show variations in understanding of the sixteen traditional culinary lexicons of Malaka across three respondent groups: STKIP students, junior–senior high school pupils in Malaka Tengah, and the general community. For the lexicon *akar bilan* (roasted sago), both university students and school pupils possess adequate knowledge in Indonesian and Tetun, while community members can explain the preparation process up to the serving stage. A similar pattern is seen in *akar rahun* (sago flour), where university students show strong comprehension, pupils obtain knowledge mainly through oral transmission, and community members can describe how the product is processed into ready-to-serve food.

For cassava- and corn-based terms such as *fehuk sonan* (fried cassava/chips), *batar tomak* (boiled corn/*katemak*), *batar sonan* (fried corn), and *batar faihedik* (corn

porridge/*jagung bese*), the general community exhibits the most comprehensive understanding, including cooking techniques, sensory characteristics, and presentation practices as local food. University students, although familiar with these terms, tend to have only basic knowledge, while pupils fall into an intermediate category, able to describe general processing procedures.

The lexicons *batar filun* (corn pudding), *batar fulin* (boiled corn grits), *batar tunun* (roasted corn), *batar tasak* (young corn), *hudi sonan* (fried banana), *nu'nak* (young coconut), and *es nu* (iced coconut drink) also demonstrate similar tendencies. Students and pupils recognize these terms, but community members have more profound knowledge, particularly in explaining the detailed preparation steps based on local traditions. The single duplicate entry (*batar daan* – boiled corn) shows consistent findings: all respondent groups understand this lexicon very well in terms of language and serving techniques.

Overall, the table confirms that the general community serves as the primary custodian of traditional culinary knowledge, while university students and pupils are knowledge recipients who have not yet gained full practical experience. These findings indicate a hierarchical, experience-based transmission of knowledge, in which lexical understanding weakens among younger generations—potentially affecting the sustainability of local languages and culinary traditions if systematic preservation efforts are not undertaken.

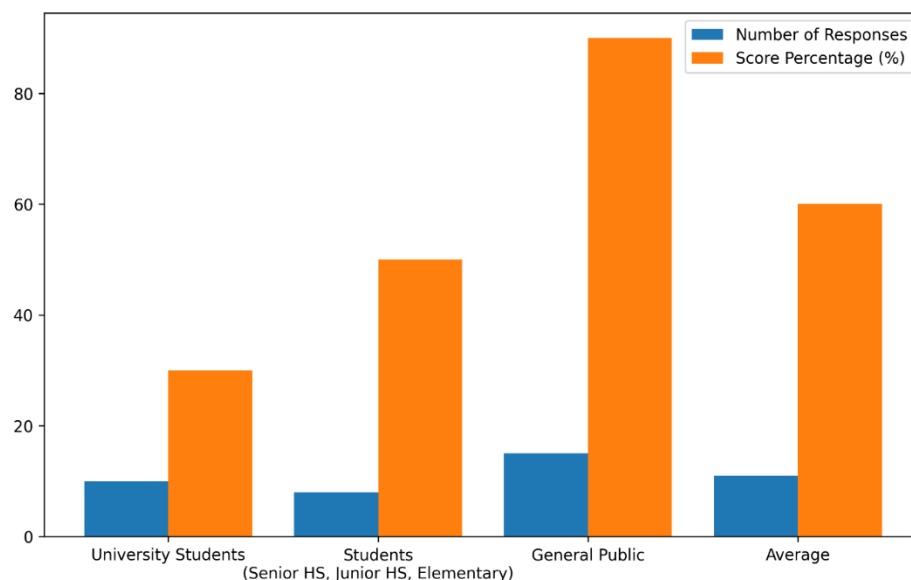


Figure 1. Percentage of Average Knowledge and Maintenance of Culinary Lexicons

In general, the wider community demonstrates the highest level of understanding of traditional culinary lexicons in both Indonesian and Tetun. They can describe the food preparation process in detail up to the serving stage. This aligns with the characterization of culinary culture as knowledge inherited through direct experience, involvement in household activities, and participation in customary ceremonies. Conversely, university and school students tend to possess only lexical knowledge at the recognition level but lack

competence in production, particularly in traditional cooking techniques, local utensils, and the cultural context of food presentation.

These differences are associated with a generational gap in the transmission of culinary knowledge. University students and school students are more exposed to modern foods due to urbanization, school canteens, and the penetration of popular culture through social media. Their consumption patterns tend to shift toward fast food rather than foods made from corn, banana, coconut, sago, and tubers commonly consumed by older generations. This phenomenon indicates a cultural shift in cuisine, which may weaken the vitality of traditional culinary lexicons. From an ecolinguistic perspective, these findings illustrate that language not only names food, but also records local ecological knowledge. Terms such as *batar tunun* (roasted corn), *fehuk sonan* (fried cassava), or *akar rahun* (sago flour) represent the community's close relationship with local natural resources. Traditional food processing generally involves techniques adapted to the local ecological environment, such as roasting, boiling, and steaming, which do not require modern energy or chemical additives. This demonstrates that traditional Malaka cuisine simultaneously serves as an unwritten record of agricultural patterns, crop varieties, and systems for managing natural produce based on local wisdom.

In addition, data analysis reveals that several culinary lexicons contain symbolic values connected to beliefs and social rituals. For example, *batar* (corn) is considered a symbol of prosperity and family unity in the *hamis batar* ritual. Likewise, *nu'nak* (young coconut) is often used as a symbol of purification in customary ceremonies and religious events. Thus, culinary lexicons are not merely food terms, but also representations of identity, social solidarity, and spirituality within the Malaka community. From a practical standpoint, the data highlight the need for educational intervention within families, schools, and local communities. Digital documentation programs, the development of a Tetun-based culinary dictionary, and the promotion of culinary tourism can help preserve traditional terminology while strengthening the region's creative economy. Moreover, collaboration among local governments, educational institutions, and MSME actors can reinforce the transmission of culinary knowledge, ensuring it is not only held by older generations but also becomes part of young people's lifestyles in creative and sustainable ways. In conclusion, this research not only identifies the lexical forms of traditional culinary terms in a linguistic context but also reveals the socio-cultural dynamics that shape the vitality, transmission, and preservation of culinary knowledge within the Malaka community. These findings may serve as a scientific foundation for cultural preservation programs, ethnolinguistic documentation, and the development of culinary promotion strategies based on local wisdom.

### **The Significance of the Social, Economic, and Ecological Meanings of Traditional Local Culinary Practices**

Research findings on the social, cultural, economic, and ecological meanings of traditional culinary practices among university students, school students, and the general community in Malaka Regency.

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Table 3. Social, Economic, and Ecological Meanings of Traditional Local Culinary Practices

Participants	Social Meaning	Economic Meaning	Ecological Meaning
University Students	Strengthens positive relationships with various parties such as neighbors, sellers, and buyers.	Purchasing local food directly can increase local residents' income while reducing dependence on imported products.	Choosing traditional, locally sourced food helps reduce waste and maintain a cleaner, more eco-friendly environment.
School Students	Involves warm, friendly, and supportive communication with surrounding individuals, including sellers and neighbors.	Contributes to increasing the local community's income.	Helps preserve biodiversity and safeguard traditional culinary heritage.
General Community	Enhances social cohesion and solidarity with neighbors, sellers, and local farmers.	Reduces household spending while supporting the economic well-being of farmers, sellers, and families involved in local food production.	Plays a role in conserving natural resources while reducing dependence on imported products.

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that traditional culinary practices are not merely associated with food consumption, but also represent interconnected systems of social, economic, and ecological values within the lives of the Malaka community. The three participant groups—university students, school students, and the general public—share relatively similar perceptions regarding the importance of traditional food, despite differences in their levels of understanding and direct experience in accessing, preparing, and interpreting local cuisine.

From a social perspective, traditional food functions as a unifying mechanism that strengthens human relationships and social networks. University and school students reported that consuming local food fosters positive interactions with neighbors, sellers, and buyers, creating spaces for warm, reciprocal communication. This is even more evident in the general community, where activities such as cooking, sharing, and selling traditional food are part of daily rituals that reinforce social solidarity, build trust, and cultivate a sense of belonging. Thus, local cuisine is not only transmitted as a family tradition, but also as a collective identity that supports social sustainability—particularly in agrarian societies such as Malaka.

From an economic perspective, the consumption of traditional food supports the continuity of family-based local economies. University students recognize that purchasing locally produced foods can increase community income while reducing dependence on products from outside the region. Meanwhile, school students perceive consuming local foods as a tangible contribution to the welfare of surrounding communities. For the general community, traditional food even serves as a household economic strategy, especially since raw materials are inexpensive and easily accessible. The operationalization of economic values extends beyond consumption to production, distribution, and marketing. Practices such as processing corn, cassava, bananas, and sago into various types of traditional foods demonstrate a persistent yet straightforward economic value chain amid modernization. In this sense, cuisine functions as cultural capital that can be transformed into economic capital.

From an ecological perspective, all participants recognize that consuming local food supports the preservation of natural resources and sustainable living practices. University and school students believe that choosing locally sourced food ingredients can reduce plastic and packaging waste, as well as the use of synthetic materials in industrial food products. The general community shows the most comprehensive understanding, particularly regarding agricultural management and the use of seasonal food systems—practices that represent traditional ecological strategies in Malaka. This ecological value also aligns with the concept of ecolinguistics, in which language and culinary lexicons record environmental knowledge, such as corn planting cycles, sago processing, or the sustainable use of coconut and banana as staple food ingredients.

These findings suggest that local cuisine is an arena where language, culture, economy, and ecology converge, forming an integrated system of knowledge and social practice. Within an ecolinguistic framework, preserving culinary lexicons means preserving biocultural diversity, thereby ensuring the sustainability of both biodiversity and cultural diversity. By maintaining traditional food practices, the Malaka community indirectly supports local food security, reduces dependence on imported products, protects culinary skills across generations, and strengthens ethnolinguistic identity.

However, the findings also highlight serious challenges: the transmission of culinary knowledge is weakening among younger generations, especially school students who tend to possess only basic knowledge without direct experience in food preparation. If left unaddressed, this condition could lead to lexical erosion and the long-term disappearance of traditional ecological knowledge. Therefore, preserving traditional cuisine requires more than consumption practices; it necessitates local wisdom-based educational programs, documentation of the lexicon through regional culinary dictionaries, and revitalization through cultural tourism, food-based MSMEs, and culinary festivals. Overall, the findings affirm that preserving traditional culinary practices is essential to creating inclusive social development, community-based economic systems, and sustainable ecological practices. Local cuisine is not merely “food,” but a body of knowledge that links the past, present, and future of the Malaka community.

### 3.2 Discussion

#### **Linguistic Forms of Traditional Culinary Lexicons in Malaka. This study identified sixteen traditional culinary lexicons from the Malaka Regency.**

The findings of this study confirm that traditional culinary lexicons in Malaka function not merely as linguistic labels for food, but as cultural repositories that encode ecological knowledge, agrarian history, and collective identity of the Timor–Malaka community. The identification of sixteen traditional culinary lexicons demonstrates that language plays a central role in preserving food-related knowledge systems and sustaining the interrelationships among humans, nature, and culture. This supports ecolinguistic perspectives, which argue that language reflects and shapes how communities conceptualize their environment and sustain ecological balance [16].

From a linguistic standpoint, the results reveal a high degree of morphological productivity within Malaka culinary lexicons. Basic lexical forms such as *batar* (corn) and

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*fehuk* (cassava) expand into multiple phrasal lexicons according to food-processing techniques, including roasting (*tunun*), frying (*sonan*), boiling (*daan*), and steaming (*hukus*). This pattern indicates that lexical formation is deeply embedded in everyday practices and experiential knowledge. In many traditional societies, lexical structures develop in close alignment with subsistence activities, particularly agriculture and food preparation [17]. Similar findings have been reported in Southeast Asian linguistic studies, where culinary lexicons reflect indigenous technological knowledge and cultural adaptation to local environments [18].

Culturally, each culinary lexicon identified in this study carries strong symbolic meanings that go beyond nutritional value. Corn (*batar*), for instance, represents prosperity, fertility, and communal cooperation, particularly in ritual contexts such as *hamis batar*. This aligns with anthropological research suggesting that staple foods often serve as symbolic anchors of social identity and spiritual values in agrarian communities [19]. In the Indonesian context, Indra et al. [20] emphasize that traditional food practices are integral components of local wisdom, embedding moral values, religious beliefs, and collective memory within everyday language.

Moreover, lexicons such as *akar* (sago), *nu'nak* (coconut), and *hudi* (banana) reflect the ecological embeddedness of the Malaka community. These food-related terms encode knowledge of local natural resources, seasonal availability, and sustainable food management practices. Language thus functions as a medium for storing ecological intelligence, reinforcing the argument that linguistic diversity is closely linked to biodiversity and environmental sustainability [21]. Indonesian studies further demonstrate that local food lexicons contribute to community-based food security and resilience by maintaining traditional ecological knowledge [22].

A significant finding of this research is the indication of an intergenerational cultural shift, evidenced by lower levels of symbolic understanding among students and university participants compared to members of the general community. This suggests a weakening of intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge. Globalization and modernization often disrupt the continuity of intangible cultural heritage, including food traditions and language use [23]. Supporting this view, Hasnidar et al. [24] report that younger generations in Indonesia tend to perceive traditional foods primarily as consumable products, rather than as carriers of cultural and philosophical meaning. If left unaddressed, this trend may lead to the erosion of both linguistic heritage and cultural identity.

In this context, traditional culinary lexicons in Malaka play a strategic role in cultural documentation and identity preservation. Systematic documentation of culinary lexicons, the development of thematic culinary dictionaries, and the integration of local knowledge into formal education are essential steps toward safeguarding this heritage. Language revitalization efforts are most effective when they are grounded in culturally meaningful domains such as food, rituals, and everyday practices [25]. Additionally, strengthening culinary lexicons can support culture-based tourism and creative economy initiatives, as culinary heritage has increasingly been recognized as a valuable asset in sustainable tourism development [26]. Overall, this study reinforces the view that Malaka traditional cuisine should be understood not merely as a pattern of consumption but as a linguistic and

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cultural system that mediates ecological knowledge, symbolic values, and social cohesion. The findings highlight the relevance of an ecolinguistic approach in preserving culinary lexicons as part of the broader effort to maintain cultural sustainability, food security, and regional identity in the face of ongoing socio-cultural change.

### **The Dynamics of Preserving the Culinary Lexicon of Traditional Malaka Food**

This study reveals the dynamics of preserving traditional culinary lexicons in Malaka Regency by analyzing responses from three social groups: university students (STKIP), secondary school students, and the general community. Field observations and in-depth interviews identified 16 traditional culinary lexicons still in use, both in domestic settings and in ritual practices. These findings highlight that language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a repository of ecological knowledge, culinary heritage, and social identity, consistent with previous research on the role of language in cultural preservation [16].

The analysis shows variations in the level of understanding of culinary lexicons among the three respondent groups. For instance, *akar bilan* (roasted sago) and *akar rahun* (sago flour) are well recognized by both university and secondary school students in Indonesian and Tetun, while the general community demonstrates comprehensive knowledge, including detailed preparation and serving processes. Similarly, for cassava- and corn-based lexicons such as *fehuk sonan* (fried cassava/chips), *batar tomak* (boiled corn), *batar sonan* (fried corn), and *batar faihedik* (corn porridge), the general community possesses the most complete understanding, encompassing cooking techniques, sensory qualities, and presentation as local dishes. Students often show only basic recognition, while secondary school pupils display intermediate knowledge of preparation methods. This pattern persists across other lexicons, including *batar filun* (corn pudding), *batar fulin* (boiled corn grits), *batar tunun* (roasted corn), *batar tasak* (young corn), *hudi sonan* (fried banana), *nu'nak* (young coconut), and *es nu* (iced coconut drink), emphasizing the role of the general community as primary custodians of traditional culinary knowledge.

The differences in understanding highlight a generational gap in knowledge transmission. University and secondary school students are increasingly exposed to modern foods, urbanized environments, and popular culture via social media, leading to a preference for fast food over traditional staples such as corn, banana, coconut, sago, and cassava. This aligns with studies on culinary modernization, which suggest that globalization and urbanization disrupt the intergenerational transfer of culinary knowledge and linguistic vitality [27]. If left unaddressed, this generational gap may threaten the sustainability of both traditional lexicons and the broader cultural practices they represent.

From an ecolinguistic perspective, the study confirms that language encodes local ecological knowledge. Lexicons such as *batar tunun* (roasted corn), *fehuk sonan* (fried cassava), and *akar rahun* (sago flour) reflect the community's close relationship with local natural resources. Traditional food processing methods, including roasting, boiling, and steaming, rely on locally available materials and techniques, requiring minimal modern energy inputs or chemical additives. This illustrates that Malaka's traditional cuisine functions as an unwritten record of agrarian practices, local crop varieties, and sustainable

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resource management, reinforcing the interconnectedness of language, ecology, and culture [18].

Furthermore, several culinary lexicons carry symbolic meanings linked to social and ritual practices. Corn (*batar*), for example, symbolizes prosperity and family unity in the *hamis batar* ritual, while young coconut (*nu'nak*) is used as a purification element in local religious ceremonies. This finding resonates with studies emphasizing the symbolic role of food in reinforcing communal identity and social cohesion in traditional societies [19]. By integrating linguistic, ecological, and symbolic dimensions, traditional culinary lexicons function as carriers of both material and intangible cultural heritage.

This study also expands on previous research by including linguistic vitality indicators and by measuring understanding of culinary lexicons across generations. Unlike prior studies that primarily documented food types, this research demonstrates the hierarchical nature of knowledge transmission: the general community acts as the principal custodian, while younger generations are recipients whose practical engagement remains limited. These insights have implications for designing cultural preservation strategies, including digital documentation, Tetun-based culinary dictionaries, and culinary tourism initiatives, which can strengthen both intergenerational knowledge transfer and the local creative economy [28].

In summary, the dynamics of preserving traditional Malaka culinary lexicons illustrate that food terminology is deeply embedded in ecological, social, and spiritual contexts. The findings underscore the importance of proactive interventions to support language-based cultural preservation, ensuring that culinary heritage remains a living part of community identity while fostering sustainable local economic development.

### **The Significance of the Social, Economic, and Ecological Meanings of Traditional Local Culinary Practices**

The results of this study highlight that traditional local culinary practices in Malaka Regency embody a complex interplay of social, economic, and ecological meanings. Participants from three social groups—university students, secondary school pupils, and the general community—shared a sense of the importance of local food, though their levels of understanding and direct engagement varied. These findings underscore that food is not merely a consumable item but a medium through which cultural values, economic practices, and environmental knowledge are transmitted and maintained [29].

From a social perspective, traditional culinary practices serve as mechanisms that strengthen interpersonal relationships and foster communal solidarity. University students and school pupils reported that consuming local foods involves positive interactions with neighbors, vendors, and fellow consumers, creating spaces of warm, reciprocal communication. These social interactions are even more pronounced among the general community, where cooking, sharing, and selling traditional foods are embedded in daily rituals, reinforcing trust, cooperation, and a sense of belonging. This aligns with previous studies that highlight food as a vehicle for social cohesion and identity formation in agrarian communities [30].

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Economically, traditional culinary practices support local livelihoods and household economies. Purchasing local food directly benefits farmers, vendors, and producers, reducing dependence on imported or mass-produced food items. Students recognized this economic dimension as a way to sustain local income, while school pupils viewed it as a tangible contribution to community well-being. For the general population, local culinary practices serve as an economic strategy, using affordable, accessible ingredients such as corn, cassava, banana, coconut, and sago. These practices create a simple value chain—from production and processing to distribution and sale, illustrating how cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital [31].

From an ecological standpoint, all participant groups acknowledged that consuming traditional local foods contributes to environmental sustainability. University and school students noted that selecting locally sourced ingredients reduces plastic waste, packaging residues, and reliance on industrial food additives. The general community demonstrated the most sophisticated ecological understanding, particularly regarding seasonal food systems and traditional agricultural cycles, which optimize resource use and minimize ecological impact. These observations are consistent with the principles of ecolinguistics, which recognize that language, including culinary lexicons, encodes local ecological knowledge and sustainable practices [16].

The study further demonstrates that traditional culinary practices integrate social, economic, and ecological dimensions into a cohesive system of knowledge and practice. Preserving culinary lexicons, therefore, contributes to biocultural diversity, encompassing both biodiversity and cultural diversity. Maintaining these practices helps sustain local food security, reduces reliance on imported products, preserves intergenerational culinary skills, and strengthens ethnolinguistic identity. However, the research also identifies a significant challenge: the transmission of culinary knowledge is weakening among younger generations, particularly school pupils, who often possess only basic recognition without hands-on experience. Without intervention, this trend could lead to the erosion of culinary lexicons and the loss of traditional ecological knowledge over time [19].

To address these challenges, the preservation of traditional culinary practices must extend beyond mere consumption. Effective strategies include local wisdom-based education programs, documentation of culinary lexicons in regional dictionaries, and revitalization through cultural tourism, community-based food enterprises, and culinary festivals. Such approaches not only safeguard intangible cultural heritage but also foster inclusive social development, community-centered economic growth, and ecologically sustainable practices. Overall, local cuisine in Malaka should be understood as a living knowledge system that links the past, present, and future of the community while sustaining cultural, economic, and ecological resilience.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that traditional local culinary practices constitute the cultural heritage of the Malaka community, passed down from generation to generation. These culinary traditions reflect a balanced food system that uses

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plant- and animal-based ingredients from both cultivated sources and natural resources in the surrounding environment.

The study successfully identified sixteen lexical units referring to local traditional foods, namely: *akar bilan*, *batar tasak*, *batar sonan*, *batar daan*, *batar tunun*, *batar faihedik*, *filun*, *fehuk tunun*, *fehuk sonan*, *fehuk hukus*, *fehuk daan*, *hudi tasak*, *hudi tunun*, *hudi daan*, *nunak*, and *es nu*. The linguistic forms of these culinary lexicons can be analyzed in terms of basic lexical components, phrase structure, cultural meanings, descriptive features, and symbolic interpretations, as representations of Malaka's culinary identity. Furthermore, the dynamics of knowledge regarding traditional culinary lexicons indicate generational differences. Variations in familiarity, comprehension, and lexical usage—particularly among younger generations—demonstrate a linguistic and cultural gap in the transmission of traditional culinary knowledge.

The interpretation of these traditional culinary lexicons shows a shared understanding among university students, school students, and the general community. From an economic perspective, direct purchase of local food increases community income and strengthens a community-based economic resilience system. From an ecological perspective, the preference for local and traditional food helps reduce waste, maintain environmental cleanliness, and support the conservation of natural resources. This practice simultaneously reduces dependence on imported products while preserving biodiversity and culinary cultural diversity. These findings are consistent with the ecolinguistic perspective, which emphasizes the importance of harmony between language, culture, and the natural environment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher sincerely expresses gratitude to all parties who have provided support during the implementation of this study. Special appreciation is extended to the community of Malaka Regency for their willingness to serve as informants and share their knowledge regarding traditional culinary lexicons and the accompanying cultural practices. Thanks are also conveyed to the students at both the university and secondary school levels, as well as to local community members who actively participated in the data collection process through interviews, observations, and in-depth discussions.

The researcher also wishes to acknowledge the educational institutions and community leaders who granted permission, access, and assistance throughout the research process, enabling the study to be completed. Furthermore, heartfelt thanks are extended to colleagues who provided valuable suggestions, scholarly input, and moral support during the preparation of this research report.

It is hoped that this modest contribution may serve as a tangible effort to preserve the language, culture, and local wisdom of the Malaka community, while also advancing knowledge in linguistics, ecolinguistics, and cultural studies.

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