

DIALECTAL DIVERGENCE IN ALORESE: EVIDENCE FROM LEXICAL, PHONOLOGICAL, AND MORPHOLOGICAL VARIATION ACROSS ALOR AND PANTAR

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Abstract

This paper investigates the dialectal divergence within Alorese, an Austronesian language spoken across the Alor and Pantar islands in eastern Indonesia. Based on primary fieldwork conducted in 2018 and 2020, this study analyzes lexical, phonological, and morphological data collected from 13 Alorese-speaking villages. The primary aim is to determine whether the language varieties spoken on Alor and Pantar constitute distinct dialects, and to identify the linguistic features that define them. The analysis reveals consistent patterns of variation: eastern Alor varieties exhibit conservative phonological traits, such as the retention of Proto-Alorese *f and the use of glottal stops, while Pantar varieties display innovations including *f > w and morphophonological restructuring. Morphologically, personal pronouns and demonstratives differ systematically between the two groups, with Pantar showing greater diversity and borrowing from Indonesian. Lexically, several key items, such as terms for *all*, *many*, and *person*, reflect parallel divergence. These linguistic patterns correlate with geographic distribution, historical trade routes, and sociolinguistic contact, particularly with Papuan and Malay-speaking populations. The findings provide robust evidence for distinguishing between the Alor and Pantar dialects of Alorese and contribute to broader discussions of dialect formation and contact-driven change in eastern Indonesia.

Keywords: Alorese, dialectology, phonological variation, morphological divergence, lexical comparison

Abstrak

Makalah ini mengkaji perbedaan dialektal dalam bahasa Alor (Austronesia) yang dituturkan di pulau Alor dan Pantar di Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur. Berdasarkan kerja lapangan yang dilakukan pada tahun 2018 dan 2020, studi ini menganalisis data leksikal, fonologis, dan morfologis yang dikumpulkan dari 13 desa penutur bahasa Alor. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menentukan apakah variasi-variasi bahasa Alor yang dituturkan di pulau Alor dan Pantar dapat dibedakan menjadi dua dialek yang berbeda. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga bertujuan mengidentifikasi ciri-ciri linguistik yang membedakan kedua dialek. Analisis menunjukkan pola variasi yang konsisten, yaitu variasi di wilayah timur (dialek Alor) yang mempertahankan ciri fonologis yang konservatif, seperti pemertahanan fonem Proto-Bahasa Alor *f dan keberadaan glotal [ʔ]. Sementara itu, variasi di wilayah barat (dialek Pantar) menunjukkan inovasi seperti perubahan *f menjadi [w] dan ditemukannya restrukturisasi morfofonologis. Secara morfologis, pronomina persona dan demonstratif menunjukkan perbedaan sistematis antara kedua kelompok, dengan dialek Pantar menampilkan lebih banyak variasi dan pengaruh dari bahasa Indonesia. Secara leksikal, sejumlah kosakata penting, seperti semua, banyak, dan orang, mencerminkan perbedaan paralel. Pola linguistik ini memiliki korelasi dengan distribusi geografis, jalur perdagangan historis, dan kontak sosiolinguistik, khususnya dengan penutur bahasa-bahasa Papua (Non-Austronesia) dan

Melayu di sekitar wilayah tutur bahasa Alor. Hasil penelitian ini memberikan bukti kuat untuk membedakan dialek Alor dan Pantar dalam bahasa Alor serta berkontribusi pada diskusi yang lebih mendalam tentang pembentukan dialek dan perubahan bahasa akibat kontak penutur bahasa-bahasa daerah di wilayah timur Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Bahasa Alor, dialektologi, variasi fonologis, perbedaan morfologis, perbandingan leksikal

INTRODUCTION

The Alorese language (ISO 639-3 Code: alz), spoken in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia, represents a compelling case of contact-induced variation, migration history, and dialectal diversification within the Austronesian language family (Klamer, 2012). While spoken by a relatively small population, Alorese displays remarkable linguistic heterogeneity across villages, particularly in the islands of Alor and Pantar, where its varieties differ in phonology, lexicon, and morphology. This paper aims to investigate the dialectal structure of Alorese through a comparative analysis of lexical and phonological data from 13 village varieties, with a focus on establishing a clear binary dialectal split between an Alor dialect and a Pantar dialect. Alorese is classified within the Central Malayo-Polynesian subgroup of Austronesian (R. Blust, 2013; Klamer, 2011), although this subgroup remains debated (R. Blust, 2013; R. A. Blust, 1999; Cho, 2020; Springs, 2011). Figure 1 below illustrates the region where Alorese is spoken, highlighting it as the only Austronesian language in the area.

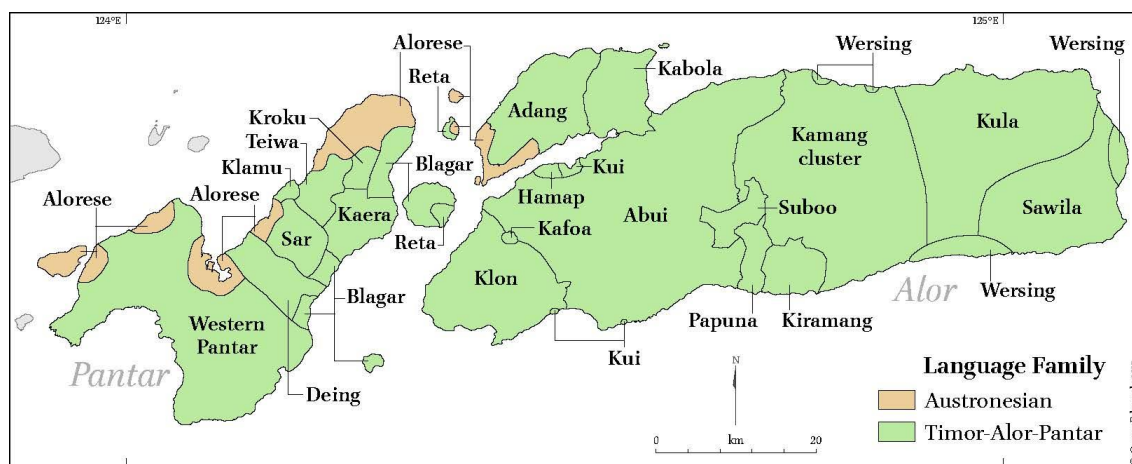


Figure 1. Linguistic map of the Alor Archipelago indicating the area where Alorese is spoken (Edwards, 2019)

The linguistic ecology of this region is characterized by extensive multilingualism, language shift, and inter-island mobility, all of which contribute to the complex variation seen in languages like Alorese (Holton et al., 2012; Klamer, 2012). Alorese serves both as a heritage language for certain coastal communities and as a lingua franca in some areas, especially in Pantar. Its speakers are found along the northern and eastern coastal zones of Alor Island, the western coastal areas of Pantar Island, and scattered across smaller satellite islands such as Pulau Buaya and Ternate. Despite its modest number of native speakers (estimated under 20,000), Alorese functions across several ethnolinguistic boundaries, often co-existing with non-Austronesian languages and regional varieties of Malay (Baird et al., In prep). This sociolinguistic

environment has inevitably shaped its internal variation and raised the possibility that Alorese is not a monolithic language but instead comprises distinct regional dialects.

Previous work on Alorese has noted dialectal variation but often in passing. For instance, Klammer (2011) alludes to phonological and lexical differences between Alorese spoken on Alor and Pantar, suggesting possible dialectal stratification. Sulistyono (2022) also suggest that dialect divergence in Alorese reflects broader sociolinguistic divisions between the islands, with Pantar varieties showing more innovation and influence from Papuan languages and Alor varieties retaining more conservative Austronesian features. However, these observations are largely impressionistic and not backed by systematic comparative data.

In this paper, I aim to fill this empirical gap by applying principles of comparative dialectology and historical phonology to analyze variation across 13 village varieties of Alorese. The 13 villages include: Dulolong, Alor Kecil, Alor Besar, Ternate, Buaya, Munaseli, Bana Onong, Pandai, Helangdohi, Wailawar, Baranusa, Beang Onong, and Marica. Drawing on a core vocabulary spreadsheet collected across these locations, I employ a bottom-up analytical approach based on sound correspondences, morphological forms, and lexical divergence. By triangulating these linguistic features with geographical and historical data, I provide concrete evidence for a dialectal bifurcation within Alorese, resulting in the classification of two primary dialects: the Alor dialect and the Pantar dialect.

This study is grounded in the tradition of comparative-historical linguistics, particularly the identification of regular sound correspondences and morphological isoglosses to determine dialect boundaries (Chambers & Trudgill, 2004). Additionally, the approach is informed by the principles of lexical variation analysis, which has long been used in dialect geography to establish linguistic domains and divergence zones (Nerbonne, 2010). The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) What is the evidence for the grouping of the Alorese varieties into two distinct dialects based on phonological, morphological, and lexical evidence? (2) How do phonological innovations and retentions define the dialectal boundary? (3) How do these dialects correlate with the geographical and historical context of Alor and Pantar islands? These questions are addressed through detailed analysis, beginning with the identification of consistent sound correspondences, morphological divergences, and key lexical items that mark semantic differentiation or borrowing.

This research contributes to our understanding of micro-dialectal variation in lesser-studied Austronesian languages and offers one of the first systematic attempts to define dialect boundaries within Alorese. It provides a replicable model for dialect classification in small language communities where standardization and written corpora are lacking but oral variation is rich.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alorese has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention, particularly as a contact language in a predominantly Papuan linguistic environment. Early documentation of Alorese can be traced to Stokhof (1975), who provided foundational insights into the historical role of Alorese as a *lingua franca* in the Alor-Pantar region. Stokhof argued that Alorese served as the dominant regional trade language prior to the widespread adoption of Indonesian in the 1960s. Based on oral traditions and local historical accounts, he posited that the Alorese-speaking population migrated from northeast Pantar to the Alor mainland in successive waves beginning in the 14th

century, with intensified settlement by the 16th century. This migratory history, based on both genealogical memory and settlement patterns, provides the basis for interpreting the contemporary distribution of Alorese-speaking communities across the two islands.

The formal linguistic description of Alorese has since been expanded through the work of Marian Klamer, whose research has laid the groundwork for understanding Alorese grammar, typology, and contact-induced change. In her seminal work *A Short Grammar of Alorese* (2011), Klamer classifies Alorese as a member of the Flores–Lembata subgroup of Austronesian, but notes its significant divergence from its closest genealogical relative, Lamaholot. One of her key findings is that Alorese shares only about half of its basic vocabulary with Lamaholot, a level of divergence that, combined with morphological and phonological simplifications, warrants its classification as a distinct language rather than a dialect of Lamaholot. This insight is especially important for dialectological studies, as it positions Alorese as a language that underwent major restructuring, possibly influenced by its role as a contact variety in a multilingual environment.

Klamer’s subsequent work has further contextualized the development of Alorese in relation to its surrounding Papuan languages. In her 2012 article on Austronesian–Papuan contact, she emphasizes that the morphological simplification observed in Alorese, particularly the loss of inflectional morphology typical of Lamaholot, can be attributed to language shift by adult Papuan speakers (Klamer, 2012). Klamer argues that the restructuring of Alorese reflects the kind of typological convergence seen when a language is acquired primarily by adult second-language learners, a view supported by the rapid disappearance of complex verbal morphology and the emergence of more analytic constructions. This scenario is further supported by Moro (2018), who discusses the Alorese plural marker *hire* as evidence of Papuan influence on the language. Subsequently, Moro (2019) introduced additional evidence for structural change in Alorese, arguing that typological convergence—particularly the loss of inflectional morphology—can be attributed to adult second-language acquisition.

The broader implications of this contact situation are elaborated in *The Alor–Pantar Languages: History and Typology* (Klamer, ed., 2014), where Alorese is discussed as an Austronesian outlier in a predominantly Papuan (non-Austronesian) linguistic landscape. In this volume, the Alor–Pantar region is described as a contact hotspot where languages exhibit converging features despite differing genealogical affiliations. Alorese is thus presented not only as a case of Austronesian retention but also as a language that has integrated structural features of neighboring Papuan languages.

Recent work by Klamer and Moro (2023), in a chapter from *Traces of Contact in the Lexicon*, extends this analysis to the lexical domain. The authors document the presence of Papuan-derived vocabulary in Alorese, offering concrete examples of borrowing and semantic shift that likely occurred through sustained contact and bilingualism. These findings are relevant for identifying internal variation within Alorese and understanding the extent to which different Alorese-speaking communities have incorporated Papuan features into their linguistic repertoire.

Moro’s papers, which explores the contact scenarios of Alorese, provides significant contributions to the study of Alorese. In her study on plural marking in Alorese, Moro demonstrates how the plural clitic *hire* was innovated under the influence of Papuan contact languages, reflecting structural convergence and lexical borrowing (Moro, 2018). Her 2019 article offers a more comprehensive argument for contact-induced simplification, showing how adult acquisition by Papuan speakers led to the rapid erosion of Lamaholot-style morphology in Alorese. Moro concludes that adult learners were the primary agents of this grammatical change,

reshaping the structure of the language in a direction more typical of analytic languages (Moro, 2019). These conclusions are especially pertinent for understanding the morphological variation observed among dialects of Alorese today. Her 2021 work further expands the context by analyzing shifting multilingual regimes in Eastern Indonesia. She notes that traditional balanced multilingualism, where Austronesian and Papuan languages coexisted symmetrically, is being replaced by asymmetrical multilingualism dominated by Indonesian. However, during earlier phases of contact, Austronesian languages like Alorese incorporated Papuan elements in ways that shaped not only their lexicon but also their syntax and phonology (Moro, 2021). This dynamic has important implications for interpreting the regional spread and diversification of Alorese, as dialectal variation may be tied to the intensity and nature of Papuan contact in different villages.

While these linguistic studies provide strong structural accounts of Alorese development, other researchers have approached the language from ethnographic and historical angles. Rodemeier (2006) documents cultural practices and oral traditions in Pandai and Munaseli, two western Alor villages that are also home to Alorese-speaking communities. Her work highlights how language variation and social identity are intertwined, providing evidence for the idea that dialect boundaries may correlate with community-specific histories and cultural norms.

Complementary to this, Laura Robinson's (2015) typological survey of Austronesian–Papuan contact in the eastern archipelago includes Alorese as a primary case study. The paper emphasizes that Alorese shows structural convergence not only in its lexicon but also in its typological profile, often aligning with nearby Papuan languages in constituent order, pronominal usage, and verb structure. In addition, her earlier co-authored work with Gary Holton (Holton & Robinson, 2014) offers a historical linguistic framework for understanding the Alor-Pantar language family, which indirectly supports the classification of Alorese as a language shaped by prolonged and multidirectional contact.

Sulistyono's research builds directly upon these foundations. In his 2021 article, he presents oral histories from various Alorese-speaking communities, showing that migration narratives consistently trace the origin of these groups to the northeast coast of Pantar (Sulistyono, 2021). These testimonies, collected from elders across both islands, describe seafaring movements and inter-island trade that facilitated the spread of Alorese across both Alor and Pantar. His doctoral research integrates oral data with phonological and lexical evidence, arguing that successive waves of contact have shaped the Alorese lexicon, resulting in the current linguistic landscape characterized by numerous loanwords from neighboring Papuan (non-Austronesian) languages (Sulistyono, 2022). Additional work by Sulistyono on landscape terminology illustrates how semantic fields related to geography, such as mountain, river, and valley, have undergone lexical innovation in different Alorese-speaking communities (Sulistyono, 2023). This suggests a deeper relationship between environmental knowledge and lexical variation, which may also contribute to dialectal distinctions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative-historical linguistic approach to analyze dialectal variation within Alorese. The primary objective is to determine whether the speech varieties in these villages cluster into two distinct dialects, namely the Alor dialect and the Pantar dialect, by examining systematic phonological, morphological, and lexical differences. The analysis is grounded in a comparative dataset based on the 200-item Swadesh list (Swadesh, 1955), which

consists of core vocabulary items assumed to be resistant to borrowing and thus particularly valuable for establishing genealogical relationships and identifying dialectal variation. The Swadesh list includes terms for basic objects, actions, body parts, natural phenomena, and numerals.

Data were collected during two periods of fieldwork: the first in 2018 and the second in 2020. Fieldwork was conducted in thirteen Alorese-speaking villages: Dulolong, Alor Kecil, Alor Besar, Munaseli, Bana, Helangdohi, and Pandai (all on Alor Island); two smaller islands: Buaya and Ternate; and Baranusa, Beang Onong, Marica, and Wailawar (on Pantar Island). These sites were selected based on previous descriptions of the Alorese-speaking region and their relevance to understanding both coastal and inland variation. In each village, data were collected through direct observation, structured elicitation, and in-depth interviews with native speaker consultants. Consultants were typically adult speakers over the age of 40, chosen to represent the more conservative features of the local speech varieties. Most interviews were conducted in Indonesian.

The elicitation sessions were designed to generate equivalent lexical forms across all varieties. Each consultant was presented with a structured word list and was asked to provide the local term for each concept. Where variation existed within a single village (e.g., multiple forms used in free variation or for stylistic reasons), all variants were recorded. Data were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and care was taken to note tone, vowel length, glottalization, and other phonetic features that might be phonologically relevant across dialects. In cases where multiple consultants were available in the same village, cross-checking was conducted to ensure consistency.

Following data collection, the lexical items were aligned and compiled into a comparative spreadsheet organized by semantic concept. Each row corresponds to one of the 200 Swadesh items, and each column represents a different village. This structure allowed for a systematic examination of phonological correspondences, morphological markers, and lexical replacement patterns across the thirteen varieties.

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, we performed a comparative lexical analysis, identifying patterns of lexical similarity and divergence among the villages. We looked for cases where the same concept is expressed with clearly different lexical roots or morphological constructions, as such cases often signal dialectal boundaries (Chambers & Trudgill, 2004). Second, we examined phonological correspondences to identify regular sound changes that may distinguish clusters of varieties. For example, we noted how the reflex of Proto-Alorese *f appears as [f] in some villages and as [w] in others, indicating a potential phonological isogloss. In this phase, sound correspondences were tested for regularity, following the comparative method standard in historical linguistics (Campbell, 2014). Third, we conducted a morphological comparison, focusing on pronouns, affixes, and clitics. We look for features which tend to be more resistant to borrowing and can therefore reflect deeper structural differences (Bynon, 1979). For instance, pronominal paradigms were compared across all varieties, and innovations such as the use of *kame* or *tite* for the first-person plural pronoun were carefully traced.

After these analyses, we proceeded with dialect classification by grouping villages that shared common phonological innovations, morphological structures, and consistent lexical forms. The patterns that emerged revealed a clear east-west division. Five villages in the eastern region form one cluster, while the remaining nine villages form another. This geographic clustering aligns with prior sociolinguistic observations (Holton & Robinson, 2014; Klamer, 2011), suggesting a correspondence between spatial distribution and linguistic divergence. The

conclusion is based on converging lines of linguistic evidence which, when considered together, demonstrate that the internal variation within Alorese is not merely idiolectal or geographically incidental, but systematic and linguistically significant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

We present the results of a comparative analysis of lexical data collected from thirteen Alorese-speaking villages located on Alor and Pantar islands in eastern Indonesia. The central aim of this investigation is to determine whether the speech varieties represented in the dataset can be classified into two distinct dialects, hereafter referred to as the Alor dialect and the Pantar dialect, based on systematic linguistic evidence. The analysis proceeds by examining three principal types of linguistic features: (1) regular sound correspondences, (2) morphological variation, particularly in pronominal paradigms and affixation patterns, and (3) lexical divergences, especially in core vocabulary items. The study adopts the initial working hypothesis that geographic distribution may correlate with dialectal divergence (Chambers & Trudgill, 2004). The detailed linguistic analysis is used to demonstrate that, while internal variation exists within both dialect groups, the cumulative differences between the Alor and Pantar clusters are sufficiently systematic and significant to justify a dialectal classification. Through a close examination of correspondences across these dimensions, I argue that the observed patterns of divergence reflect not only geographic separation but also historical processes of linguistic innovation and retention unique to each dialect group.

Phonological Evidence for the Alorese Dialectal Divergence

This section presents three phonological evidences: (1) the reflex of Proto-Alorese initial *f as either [f] or [w] in the Alorese varieties, (2) the shift from Proto-Alorese *n > [r] in the third-person singular pronoun, and (3) the presence or absence of final glottal stops.

The most prominent phonological patterns distinguishing the Alor and Pantar dialects involves the reflex of Proto-Alorese *f in initial position. In several Alor varieties, particularly those situated in the eastern part of the island such as Dulolong, Alor Kecil, and Pulau Buaya, the word for ‘water’ retains the voiceless labiodental fricative, surfacing as *fe* or *fei* ‘water’. For instance, Dulolong exhibits *fe*, while Alor Kecil and Pulau Buaya both have *fei*. This indicates that the eastern Alor varieties have preserved the historically conservative form of this proto-phoneme. In contrast, all Pantar varieties, Wailawar, Baranusa, Beang Onong, and Marica, consistently display a voiced labio-velar approximant [w] in the same lexical item, with *wai* being the uniform reflex for ‘water’. Interestingly, a similar shift is also found in some western Alor villages, namely Munaseli, Bana, Helangdohi, and Pandai. This distribution suggests that the sound change *f > w has diffused from west to east across Alor, with the eastern region maintaining the conservative form, and the western region adopting the innovative form that is otherwise characteristic of Pantar. This pattern constitutes a phonological isogloss that cuts across the Alor-Pantar strait but is more clearly and consistently aligned with the dialect boundary when aggregated across features, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Reflexes of Proto-Alorese *f in all Alorese varieties

Village	Island	Word for ‘water’	Reflex of *f
Dulolong	Alor	fe	f
Alor Kecil	Alor	fei	f
Alor Besar	Alor	fei	f
Buaya	Alor	fei	f
Ternate	Alor	fei	f
Munaseli	Pantar	wai	w
Bana Onong	Pantar	wai	w
Helangdohi	Pantar	wai	w
Pandai	Pantar	wai	w
Wailawar	Pantar	wai	w
Baranusa	Pantar	wai	w
Beang Onong	Pantar	wai	w
Marica	Pantar	wai	w

Table 1 shows a clear dialectal distinction emerges, with eastern Alor villages (Dulolong, Alor Kecil, Alor Besar, Buaya, and Ternate) preserving the conservative form [f] in *fe* or *fei* ‘water’. In contrast, all Pantar villages (Munaseli, Bana Onong, Helangdohi, Pandai, Wailawar, Baranusa, Beang Onong, and Marica) exhibit the innovative form [w], producing *wai* ‘water’. This pattern suggests a phonological isogloss reflecting a historical sound change *f > w that began in the western Alor region and spread into Pantar, while eastern Alor retained the original form. The shift thus provides a key phonological marker distinguishing the two dialectal zones.

A second phonological feature that supports the dialectal distinction involves variation in the pronoun for third person singular (3SG). Table 2 below illustrates the comparison of pronoun for the third singular person in Alorese.

Table 2. The third singular pronouns in all Alorese varieties

Village	Island	3SG Pronoun	Initial Consonant
Dulolong	Alor	no	n
Alor Kecil	Alor	no	n
Alor Besar	Alor	no	n
Pulau Buaya	Alor	no	n
Ternate	Alor	no	n
Munaseli	Pantar	ro / no	r / n
Bana	Pantar	rɔ	r
Helangdohi	Pantar	-	-
Pandai	Pantar	ro	r
Wailawar	Pantar	rɔ	r
Baranusa	Pantar	rɔ	r
Beang Onong	Pantar	rɔ	r
Marica	Pantar	ro	r

In the Alor dialect, there is observable variation between [n] and [r] as the initial consonant. Villages such as Alor Kecil, Pulau Buaya, and Dulolong employ forms like *no* ‘3SG’, reflecting the conservative nasal onset. In the Pantar dialect, the 3SG form appears as *ro* ‘3SG’, marking a clear distinction. However, in the variety of Munaseli, 3SG appear as *ro* or *no*, indicating an ongoing shift from *n to *r. While the feature *ro* is not exclusive to the Pantar dialect, the fact that the *n > r shift is both more advanced and more consistent there strengthens the case for identifying it as a defining phonological innovation of the Pantar branch. Its presence in some Alor dialects further supports the notion of a transitional zone or dialect continuum within the island of Alor itself.

Another relevant phonological difference concerns the presence or absence of final glottal stops, particularly in function words such as the negative marker *lahe* ‘not’. In the Alor dialect, villages, such as Dulolong and Alor Kecil, maintain a final glottal stop [ʔ], producing forms like [laheʔ] or [laheʔ]. This retention suggests that final glottal stops remain phonologically productive or at least morphologically marked in these varieties. In contrast, the Pantar varieties, with the exception of Marica, generally lack the final glottal stop in the equivalent form. In Baranusa, Beang Onong, and Wailawar, the negative marker is realized as [lahe], reflecting either a simplification process or a prosodic restructuring in final positions. Marica, however, diverges lexically, using *take* ‘not’ as its negative marker, a form that bears no clear phonological resemblance to the *laheʔ root and may represent a localized lexical innovation or borrowing. The reduction or loss of the glottal stop in Pantar thus suggests a phonological simplification trend that is either absent or only partially attested in the Alor varieties. Table 3 below show the comparison of the word for ‘not’ and the final glottal stop in the Alorese varieties.

Table 3. The third singular pronouns in all Alorese varieties

Village	Island	Word for "Not"	Final Glottal Stop
Dulolong	Alor	laheʔ	Yes [ʔ]
Alor Kecil	Alor	lahe	No
Alor Besar	Alor	lahe	No
Pulau Buaya	Alor	laheʔ	Yes [ʔ]
Ternate	Alor	lahe	No
Munaseli	Pantar	lahe / laheʔ	Yes [ʔ] / No
Bana	Pantar	laheʔ	Yes [ʔ]
Helangdohi	Pantar	laheʔ	Yes [ʔ]
Pandai	Pantar	lahe	No
Wailawar	Pantar	lahe	No
Baranusa	Pantar	lahe	No
Beang Onong	Pantar	lahe	No
Marica	Pantar	take	No (different lexeme)

Table 3 captures the treatment of final glottal stops in the negation marker "not." The Alor dialect, especially in villages like Dulolong and Pulau Buaya, tends to preserve a final glottal stop, as seen in forms such as [laheʔ] and [laheʔ]. In contrast, Pantar dialect villages—Wailawar, Baranusa, and Beang Onong—show forms without a glottal stop (e.g., [lahe]). While some Alor varieties also show a lack of final glottal stop (e.g., Alor Kecil, Alor Besar, Pandai), the retention

of the glottal stop is more typical of Alor, indicating a phonological tendency that differentiates it from Pantar.

Taken together, these three phonological features converge to support the existence of a systematic phonological divide between Alorese as spoken on Alor and Pantar islands. While some variation is evident within Alor itself, particularly between eastern and western villages, the consistency and frequency of these features in Pantar varieties indicate a distinct trajectory of phonological innovation.

Morphological Evidence: Personal Pronouns and Demonstratives

A second line of evidence supporting the division of Alorese into two dialects—Alor and Pantar—comes from morphological analysis, particularly the paradigms of personal pronouns and demonstratives. These morphological markers are often resistant to borrowing and thus provide valuable insight into internal language change.

The clearest morphological distinction is found in the second person plural (2PL) pronoun. In the Alor dialect, this pronoun is relatively conservative and uniform, predominantly appearing in the form *mi* ‘2PL’ or its variants. For example, Alor Kecil uses *mi* and Ternate uses an extended form *mi hire*. Dulolong and Pulau Buaya, though less typical, still show morphologically related forms *punaun* and *təpu namun*, respectively, which appear to be compound or periphrastic constructions involving the same core morpheme. In contrast, the Pantar dialect presents a set of forms for the 2PL pronoun that are morphologically unrelated to those in Alor. Wailawar uses *we ire*, Baranusa uses *kame*, Beang Onong uses *tite sakali*, and Marica has the most innovative form, *sekali*, which may have originated from the Malay word *sekali* meaning ‘together’ or ‘at once’. These forms do not appear to reflect a single shared origin and instead suggest divergent morphological innovations within Pantar. Table 4 below shows the second plural pronouns in the Alorese varieties.

Table 4. The second plural pronouns in all Alorese varieties

Village	2PL Pronoun	Dialect
Dulolong	<i>punaun</i>	Alor
Alor Kecil	<i>mi</i>	Alor
Pulau Buaya	<i>təpu namun</i>	Alor
Ternate	<i>mi hire</i>	Alor
Munaseli	<i>mi</i>	Pantar
Pandai	<i>mi</i>	Pantar
Wailawar	<i>we ire</i>	Pantar
Baranusa	<i>kame</i>	Pantar
Beang Onong	<i>tite sakali</i>	Pantar
Marica	<i>sekali</i>	Pantar

The next morphological distinction is found in the first plural inclusive pronouns, which offers additional morphological clues.

Table 5. The second plural pronouns in all Alorese varieties

Village	1PL Inclusive Pronoun	Dialect
Dulolong	<i>tite</i>	Alor
Alor Kecil	<i>kame</i>	Alor
Alor Besar	<i>ite</i>	Alor
Ternate	<i>ite</i>	Alor
Munaseli	<i>tite / ite</i>	Pantar
Bana	<i>tite</i>	Pantar
Pandai	<i>tite</i>	Pantar
Wailawar	<i>tite</i>	Pantar
Baranusa	<i>kame</i>	Pantar
Beang Onong	<i>tite</i>	Pantar
Marica	<i>kan:a-kan:a</i>	Pantar

The two dialects exhibit overlapping forms, but with distinctive distribution. In Alor, speakers use *tite*, *ite*, and *kame*. In Pantar, both *tite* and *kame* are also found, indicating some degree of shared heritage or diffusion across the dialect boundary. However, the variety spoken in Marica, a Pantar village, shows a unique form: *kan:a-kan:a*. This reduplicated structure is morphologically distinct from other forms in both dialects and may point to a local innovation specific to Marica. Table 5 below shows first plural inclusive pronouns in the Alorese varieties. The presence of both *tite* and *kame* across dialects suggests they belong to an older shared pronominal inventory, whereas the emergence of a unique form in Marica could be seen as evidence of independent morphological innovation. Moreover, the distribution of *kame* across both dialects highlights that some pronominal forms remain in use on both islands, though their frequency and social indexation may differ.

Beyond personal pronouns, demonstrative morphology also points to dialectal differences, particularly in the demonstratives for proximal and distal deixis. Table 6 below shows the demonstrative for ‘this’ and ‘that’ in all the Alorese varieties.

Table 6. The demonstrative for ‘this’ and ‘that’ in all the Alorese varieties

Village	<i>This</i> Demonstrative	<i>That</i> Demonstrative	Dialect
Dulolong	<i>h̃adʒa</i>	-	Alor
Alor Besar	<i>hã</i>	<i>kəte</i>	Alor
Pulau Buaya	<i>ha</i>	<i>kete</i>	Alor
Ternate	<i>ni:</i>	<i>iti</i>	Alor
Munaseli	<i>ke</i>	<i>kət:e / kwəl:i</i>	Pantar
Bana	<i>ke</i>	-	Pantar
Pandai	-	<i>kwəl:i / kte</i>	Pantar
Wailawar	<i>ke:</i>	<i>kal:i</i>	Pantar
Baranusa	<i>kat:e</i>	<i>kia</i>	Pantar
Beang Onong	<i>oro kia</i>	<i>oro kete</i>	Pantar
Marica	<i>ro bəkat:e</i>	<i>ro bəkal:i</i>	Pantar

For the demonstrative meaning ‘here’ or ‘this’, Alor varieties tend to use shorter or nasalized forms such as *hã*, *ha*, or *hãdʒa*, with minimal affixation or syntactic modification. In contrast, the Pantar varieties tend to employ longer, more morphologically complex forms. For instance, Baranusa uses *kat:e*, and Marica has *ro bəkat:e*, which combines a demonstrative root with a preceding morpheme *ro* and a possible affix *bə-*, forming a syntactically compound demonstrative. Similarly, for the demonstrative meaning “that”, a contrast is observed between simpler forms in the Alor dialect and more morphologically elaborate forms in the Pantar dialect. For instance, Alor Besar uses *kəte*, a simple root with minor affixation. Meanwhile, Marica employs the complex *ro bəkal:i*, combining multiple morphemes to construct the distal demonstrative. This increased morphological complexity in demonstratives further distinguishes Pantar varieties from their Alor counterparts.

To sum up, while some forms such as *tite* and *kame* span both dialects, their usage patterns and local innovations (especially in Marica) reveal distinct morphological trajectories. The divergence in second person plural pronouns, particularly the presence of forms like *sekali* and *tite sakali* in Pantar, further emphasizes the innovative morphological character of the dialect. Likewise, the longer and syntactically complex demonstratives found in Pantar contrast with the shorter, more conservative forms in Alor, pointing to deeper grammatical differences between the two varieties.

Lexical Evidence

Lexicon, while more susceptible to borrowing than phonology and morphology, often reflects contact histories, diffusion patterns, and zones of innovation. Alorese basic vocabulary across 13 Alorese-speaking villages reveals systematic patterns of lexical divergence that mirror the dialectal division previously established on phonological and morphological grounds.

One of the clearest lexical distinctions emerges in the word for ‘all’. In the eastern Alor varieties such as Dulolong and Alor Kecil, the indigenous form *punamuŋ* or a close variant like *punaumu* is consistently used. This contrasts sharply with the Pantar dialects, where the Malay/Indonesian-derived *sakali* is dominant. Interestingly, several Pantar villages such as Munaseli and Bana also exhibit the *sakali* form, suggesting either borrowing or contact-induced lexical convergence. The appearance of *sakali* in these western Alor varieties may indicate diffusion from Pantar or from wider Malay/Indonesian influence through trade, education, or religious networks. The Marica variety in Pantar also presents a local innovation *kan:a-kan:a*, which, although distinct, aligns with the Pantar pattern of lexical innovation and divergence. Table 8 below shows the lexical forms for the Alorese word for ‘all’, ‘many’, and ‘person’.

Table 8. The Alorese word for ‘all’, ‘many’, and ‘person’

Village	Word for <i>all</i>	Word for <i>many</i>	Word for <i>person</i>	Dialect
Dulolong	<i>punamuŋ</i>	<i>mafa</i>	<i>ata</i>	Alor
Alor Kecil	<i>punamuŋ</i>	<i>ma:fa</i>	<i>ata</i>	Alor
Pulau Buaya	<i>punaumu</i>	<i>mafa</i>	<i>fe:</i>	Alor
Ternate	<i>punamuŋ</i>	<i>mafa</i>	<i>ata</i>	Alor
Munaseli	<i>sekali</i>	<i>rasa</i>	<i>mə'sia</i>	Pantar
Bana	<i>səkali</i>	<i>lebiħ</i>	<i>ata</i>	Pantar
Pandai	<i>sekali</i>	<i>labi</i>	<i>ata</i>	Pantar
Wailawar	<i>sakali</i>	<i>labi</i>	<i>ata</i>	Pantar

Village	Word for <i>all</i>	Word for <i>many</i>	Word for <i>person</i>	Dialect
Baranusa	<i>sakali</i>	<i>lab:i</i>	<i>mansia</i>	Pantar
Beang Onong	<i>sakali</i>	<i>ləbiŋ</i>	<i>we</i>	Pantar
Marica	<i>kan:a-kan:a</i>	<i>ləbiŋ</i>	<i>we</i>	Pantar

This table shows a clear lexical boundary. The Alor dialect conserves the indigenous term *punamuj* ‘all’ and the Pantar dialects use *sakali* or its innovations. This pattern suggests that lexical borrowing from Malay/Indonesian has had a significant influence in Alor and Pantar, possibly due to higher levels of contact with the national language or sociolinguistic prestige associated with Indonesian lexemes.

A similar division is evident in the word for *many*. In Alor, speakers consistently use *mafa* or its lengthened variant *ma:fa*. These forms are of local origin and are not attested in Pantar dialects. All Pantar dialects, however, prefer forms clearly derived from Malay/Indonesian *lebihi* or *rasa*, such as *labi*, *lab:i*, and *ləbiŋ*. The transition from *mafa* to these borrowed forms marks an isogloss that runs through Alor and encompasses all of Pantar, reflecting the spread of Indonesian influence and perhaps functional convergence due to bilingualism or language shift. The pattern in the concept for *many* supports the same dialect boundary found in the previous examples. Alor dialects retain native lexical material, while Pantar dialects areas adopt modified or borrowed forms that align with Malay/Indonesian, emphasizing their innovative character.

Another lexeme showing interesting dialectal variation is the word for *person*. In Alor, speakers frequently use forms like *ata*, which appear to be conservative or inherited terms. Pantar shows some variation, including *məsia* (likely from *manusia*) and *fe:*. In Pantar, lexical diversity increases significantly. While Wailawar still uses *ata*, other Pantar villages have adopted Malay-based terms such as *mansia* and innovative forms like *we*. This variety suggests multiple sources of lexical innovation and possible influence from different languages or dialects in Pantar. While *ata* is present in both dialects, its frequency and consistency differ. The Pantar varieties, except for Wailawar, diverge with creative or Indonesian-influenced lexical forms. The presence of *mansia* in Baranusa and *we* in Beang Onong and Marica reflects not only lexical borrowing but also internal relexification processes, possibly tied to identity, or language shift.

In sum, Alor dialect displays a cohesive and conservative lexical inventory that retains indigenous forms for high-frequency and semantically basic items. On the other hand, Pantar dialect reveals a greater degree of borrowing and innovation, often aligning with Malay/Indonesian lexical material. These patterns reinforce the conclusions drawn from phonological and morphological data, suggesting a robust dialectal distinction between Alor and Pantar varieties of Alorese.

Geographical and Historical Contexts as Correlates of Dialectal Divergence in Alorese

The dialectal variation between the Alor and Pantar varieties of Alorese is not only a matter of internal linguistic evidence (phonological shifts, morphological innovations, and lexical divergence) but is also deeply rooted in the geographical, social, and historical context in which the language is spoken. A comprehensive understanding of how dialects diverge must go beyond structural evidence and examine the extralinguistic forces that shape speech communities over time (Chambers & Schilling, 2013; Nerbonne, 2010; Trask, 1994). In the case of Alorese, geography plays a fundamental role, beginning with the simple fact that the two dialects are

spoken on two separate islands. Figure 2 below shows the dialectal boundaries of Alor dialect and Pantar dialect as well as the geographical profile of Alorese.

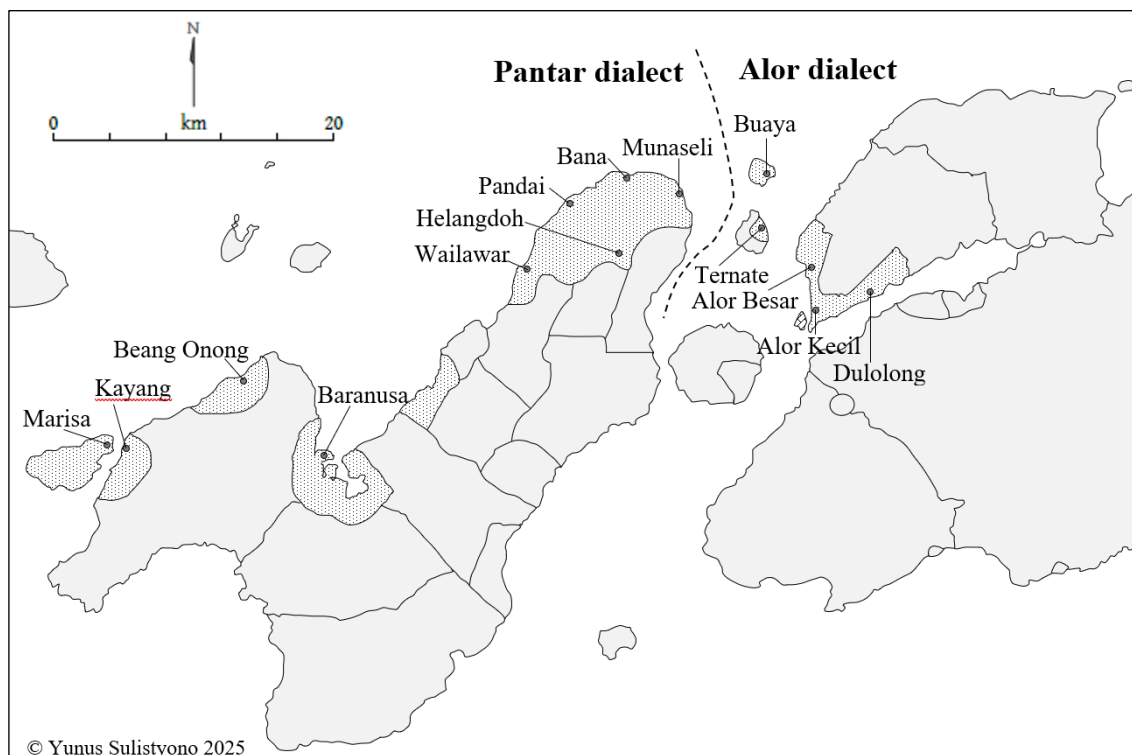


Figure 2. Dialectal boundaries of Alor dialect and Pantar dialect as well as the geographical profile of Alorese

Alorese speakers on Alor are spread across northern part of Alor as well as on the two small islands between Alor and Pantar. Varieties from villages such as Dulolong, Alor Kecil, Alor Besar, Pulau Buaya, and Ternate have been grouped as forming the Alor dialect cluster. In contrast, Pantar varieties are represented by speech forms from Munaseli, Pandai, Bana Onong, Helangdohi, Wailawar, Baranusa, Beang Onong, and Marica. This east–west geographic split reflects a physical boundary, with the Alor Strait serving as a natural delimiter. However, it also mirrors linguistic distinctions, where conservative features such as the retention of Proto-Alorese *f, or simpler demonstrative structures, are clustered in eastern Alor, while innovations like *w* for *f, pronoun shifts, and longer lexical compounds appear in Pantar.

The geographical distribution of linguistic features aligns remarkably well with this spatial division. Alor dialect maintains many archaic forms, while Pantar dialect show signs of linguistic innovation and influence from neighbouring speech communities. One factor contributing to this is multilingual contact. On Alor, especially in villages like Dulolong and Alor Kecil, Alorese speakers live in close proximity to Papuan language speakers such as those of Abui (Kratochvíl, 2007; Saad, 2020), Adang (Haan, 2001), and Kabola (Robinson, 2010). These interactions create contact zones where phonological changes and lexical borrowings may become embedded. Similarly, on Pantar, Alorese speakers coexist with Papuan language speakers, particularly of Western Pantar (Holton, 2014), Blagar (Steinhauer, 2014) and Teiwa (Klamer, 2010), creating another set of contact-induced dynamics. However, there are differences: while

Alor's multilingualism is often shaped by inland communities and traditional networks, Pantar's Alorese is more heavily influenced by Malay/Indonesian due to education, administration, and trade.

This influence can be seen in the lexicon. Forms like *sakali* (from Indonesian *sekali*, meaning 'all'), *labi* or *lab:i* (from *lebih*, 'more'), and *mansia* (from *manusia*, 'human') dominate the Pantar dialect and some Pantar varieties, especially Munaseli and Bana. In contrast, eastern Alor villages retain indigenous forms like *punamuŋ* for 'all' and *mafa* for 'many'. This lexical split mirrors both the historical diffusion of Indonesian as a language of wider communication and the cultural orientation of the respective regions. Put together, the geographical and the historical contexts correlating to the dialectal divergence in Alorese are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9. Geographical and historical contexts correlating to the dialectal divergence in Alorese

Factor	Alor Dialect	Pantar Dialect
Geographic span	Widely distributed across Alor and two small islands in the strait	Widely distributed across Pantar
Language contact	Papuan languages (Adang, Abui, Kabola)	Papuan languages (Western Pantar, Sar), Malay/Indonesian
Historical influence	Islamic trade, missionary schools	Local networks, limited institutional influence
Lexical conservatism	Retains indigenous words: <i>punamuŋ</i> , <i>mafa</i>	Adopted Malay words: <i>sakali</i> , <i>labi</i>
Morphosyntactic innovation	Monomorphemic forms: <i>ha</i> , <i>ni</i>	Compounded forms: <i>ro bəkat:e</i> , <i>oro kia</i>
Social prestige and education	Higher in coastal Alor (Alor Kecil, Alor Besar)	Less historical educational development

Historical developments further clarify these dialectal patterns. Alorese, as an Austronesian language, was introduced to the region during a later wave of migration, following the earlier settlement of Papuan-speaking communities. Alorese-speaking populations typically settled along the coast and engaged in maritime activities, which helped to disseminate the language but also exposed it to varying degrees of contact pressure. Alor Kecil and Alor Besar, for instance, were prominent coastal settlements historically tied to Islamic trade routes and Islamic education. These villages served as cultural and linguistic centres, likely supporting the preservation of conservative linguistic traits. Features like *mi* or *kame* for second person plural pronouns and the reflex of *f as *f* in "water" (*fei*) were probably reinforced by religious schooling and coastal prestige. On the other hand, Pantar has historically remained more peripheral in terms of administrative and religious networks. With less formal education and infrastructural integration until recent decades, Pantar communities developed in relatively greater isolation from central Alorese-speaking norms. This allowed for local innovations, such as *kan:a-kan:a* in Marica for 1PL inclusive pronouns and complex demonstrative forms like *ro bəkat:e*. These forms likely emerged from internal morphosyntactic processes, possibly influenced by substrate Papuan patterns or through sustained intra-island interaction among Pantar villages.

Postcolonial changes, particularly increased mobility and access to media in the 20th and 21st centuries, have introduced new sources of convergence. Nevertheless, despite the pervasive reach of Indonesian, the core distinctions between Alor and Pantar dialects remain intact. The island-based distinction continues to condition speech patterns, and local village variation is robust enough to resist complete levelling. Each dialect trajectory has been influenced not only by its contact ecology but also by the broader sociopolitical framework of the islands. The Alor dialect, with its ties to coastal trade, formal education, and Islamic networks, has maintained structural conservatism. Meanwhile, the Pantar dialect, shaped by limited institutional oversight and intense local interaction, exhibits innovation and structural elaboration. These forces operate alongside geographic isolation to entrench and maintain the dialectal split. The division of Alorese into Alor and Pantar dialects is not simply the result of phonological and morphological divergence; it is a reflection of the ecological, historical, and social conditions in which the language evolved. The separation of islands, the differential contact with Papuan and Malay languages, and the contrasting historical roles of key villages have all played a role in shaping the varieties observed today. Understanding this linguistic landscape thus requires a holistic approach—one that considers not only words and sounds but also the people, movements, and histories that produced them.

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted in this study affirms the dialectal division of the Alorese language into two distinct but related varieties: the Alor dialect and the Pantar dialect. Drawing on primary linguistic field data collected from 13 villages, five on Alor (including two surrounding islands) and eight on Pantar Island, this study systematically examined three types of linguistic evidence: phonological, morphological, and lexical. In addition to structural evidence, sociolinguistic and historical data contextualized the divergence of the dialects.

Phonologically, a salient isogloss centers on the reflex of Proto-Alorese *f. In the Alor dialect, the form *f is retained as *f* in words like *fei* ‘water’. In contrast, all Pantar varieties show *w*, indicating an innovation (*f > w). Similarly, the presence of final glottal stops in words like *laheʔ* ‘not’ is more stable in Alor, while Pantar shows glottal simplification. The initial consonant alternation in the 3SG pronoun, *no* in Alor and *ro/rɔ* in Pantar, marks an additional dialectal diagnostic. Vowel realizations and word structure differences, including compound demonstratives like *ro bəkət:e* in Marica and simple forms like *ha* in Alor, further strengthen the phonological contrast.

Morphologically, personal pronouns and demonstratives reveal significant divergence. The 2PL pronoun *mi* is widely retained in Alor but has diversified into forms like *kame*, *we ire*, and *sekali* in Pantar. First-person plural inclusive forms such as *tite* and *kame* are shared across both dialects, yet Marica introduces the innovative *kan:a-kan:a*. Demonstratives also differ, with Alor favoring short, nasalized forms *hã*, *ni:* and Pantar employing polysyllabic or compounded forms. These variations highlight not only dialectal contrast but also potential morphophonological restructuring in Pantar.

Lexical data further reinforce the dialect distinction. The word for *all* appears as *punamuy* in eastern Alor but has been replaced by *sakali* in Pantar, likely due to Indonesian influence. Similarly, while *mafa* ‘many’ remains in Pantar to mean ‘many’, *labi*, *lab:i*, or *labinj* appear in Pantar. Even core vocabulary like *anaŋ*, *anak* ‘child’ has undergone substitution in some Pantar

varieties (e.g., *bai* and *bahire*). The word for *person* reflects a similar trend, with conservative *ata* forms in Alor and contact-driven innovations like *mansia* in Pantar.

These linguistic distinctions correlate closely with the geographical and historical contexts of the speech communities. The Alor dialect is spoken in a broader and more topographically diverse area. Pantar varieties are more geographically concentrated but internally varied due to intense inter-village contact. Sociolinguistic dynamics, such as contact with Papuan languages and Indonesian, differential exposure to Islamic trade and missionary education, and historical migration patterns, further explain the divergence. Table 10 below summarizes the major distinguishing features between the two dialects.

Table 10. Distinguishing features between Alor and Pantar dialects

Linguistic Feature	Alor Dialect	Pantar Dialect
Phoneme Reflex (Proto *f)	<i>f</i> retained in Alor	w in all varieties
3SG Pronoun	no, ro (mixed)	ro, rɔ (consistent)
Final Glottal Stop	Present in <i>lahe?</i> 'not'	Absent or restructured
2PL Pronoun	<i>mi, punamuŋ, tɔpu namuŋ</i>	<i>kame, we hire, sekali</i>
Lexeme for 'all'	<i>punamuŋ</i>	<i>sakali, kan:a-kan:a</i>
Demonstrative for 'this'	<i>ha, ni:, hã</i>	<i>ro bəkat:e, kat:e, oro kia</i>
Word for 'person'	<i>ata</i>	<i>we, mansia</i>
Historical prestige center	Alor Kecil, Alor Besar	None dominant
Lexical Borrowing (Malay)	Low	High
Word Structure	Simple, short lexical forms	Compounded, morphologically complex

This table illustrates the coherence of the Alor and Pantar dialects as two structurally distinguishable varieties, grounded not only in linguistic data but in social and historical patterns. The conservative traits of Alor, phonemic retentions, morphologically simple forms, and lower levels of borrowing, contrast with the innovative, Indonesian-influenced, and contact-rich nature of Pantar speech varieties.

The conclusion drawn from these observations is that the dialectal boundary between Alor and Pantar varieties of Alorese is both valid and linguistically motivated. It is not merely a matter of regional accent or vocabulary preference but is underpinned by systematic differences in phonological processes, morphological constructions, and lexicon. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the broader understanding of dialect geography and language contact within Eastern Indonesia, a region noted for its linguistic diversity and dynamic contact zones. The Alorese case is exemplary in showing how geography and history, specifically island separation, trade routes, and educational institutions, can shape dialectal differentiation even within what is nominally considered a single language. The presence of both innovation and conservatism, often side-by-side, illustrates the non-linear nature of dialectal evolution.

Furthermore, this research provides a framework for future dialectological and documentation work. While the current analysis has focused on lexical, phonological, and morphological traits, further work could include syntactic comparison, discourse features, and sociolinguistic interviews to track language attitudes, prestige, and intergenerational transmission.

NOTE

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