

Culinary Characteristics of South Sulawesi: The Traditions of the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja

Dirk Sandarupa¹, Sandra Safitri², Asis Nojeng³, Sumarlin Rengko HR⁴, Eka Yuniarsih⁵

^{1,4}Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia

²Balai Bahasa Sulawesi-Selatan, Makassar, Indonesia

³Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

⁵SMP Negeri 24 Makassar, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:

Dirk Sandarupa

diruku86@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to explore how traditional culinary knowledge and vocabulary among the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja ethnic groups in South Sulawesi contribute to multiple value creation—cultural, economic, linguistic, and touristic—within the context of local business practices, particularly in the promotion of regional gastronomy. This study employs a conceptual and qualitative review approach based on ethnolinguistic analysis, lexicographical categorization, and case observations of culinary practice in community-based businesses. Primary data include local food names, preparation methods, and their sociolinguistic roles; secondary data are drawn from tourism, economic reports, and cultural documentation. This article identifies that culinary vocabulary is not only a linguistic asset but also a marketable cultural product. By organizing the vocabulary based on ingredients and preparation techniques, the study reveals patterns of interethnic culinary exchange and localization. Furthermore, culinary knowledge has supported local enterprises—such as restaurants and food SMEs—in branding, menu development, and cultural storytelling, especially when integrated with visual and narrative aids for visitors. Practically, this work demonstrates how regional businesses can leverage local culinary heritage to boost food tourism and strengthen economic identity through place-based branding. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on multiple value creation by showing how intangible heritage—specifically linguistic and gastronomic—can be transformed into social and economic capital. This chapter contributes to understanding how Asian businesses, particularly in culturally diverse regions like Indonesia, strategically mobilize traditional knowledge for integrated value generation.

Keywords: *South Sulawesi, Bugis–Makassar–Toraja cuisine, culinary heritage, culinary vocabulary, ethnosemantics, gastronomy tourism, cultural identity*

Introduction

South Sulawesi is home to diverse ethnic communities, notably the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja, each of which possesses a vibrant culinary heritage. Food is not only central to daily life but also represents deep cultural, linguistic, and economic values. Traditional foods in this region exhibit a wide array of unique ingredients, preparation methods, and terminologies that are specific to ethnic identity and regional history. The compilation of the *Ensiklopedia Kuliner Sulsel* (2023) offers a valuable inventory of local dishes, culinary vocabulary, and food-related practices that are not only underrepresented in national discourse but also under-documented in linguistic studies. This study draws from the encyclopedic data to explore how traditional foods of South Sulawesi can contribute to cultural preservation, tourism development, and economic empowerment.

South Sulawesi, located on the southwestern peninsula of the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, is a region renowned for its rich cultural diversity and strong ethnic identities. The three dominant ethnic groups in this region—the Bugis, the Makassar, and the Toraja—each possess unique traditions, languages, and cultural expressions, including in the realm of culinary practices. Food is not merely a matter of sustenance in these communities, but an embodiment of history, heritage, and identity. It acts as a medium through which social values are expressed, linguistic elements are preserved, and economic activities are sustained.

Culinary traditions in South Sulawesi reflect complex interrelations between land, sea, spirituality, and kinship. Dishes are often rooted in specific rituals or social events—such as weddings, funerals, or harvest celebrations—and the way food is named and prepared carries deep cultural significance. For instance, *pa'piong*, a traditional Torajan dish prepared by cooking meat inside bamboo, is not only a cooking method but also a reflection of harmony between humans and nature. Likewise, Bugis and Makassar dishes such as *pallubasa*, *coto*, and *barongko* are deeply intertwined with social customs and the use of indigenous spices.

One particularly intriguing aspect of South Sulawesi's culinary heritage is the linguistic richness embedded in its food vocabulary. Many traditional dish names are expressed in local languages and carry meanings or references that have no exact equivalent in Indonesian or other languages. This unique terminology, often tied to ingredients, cooking methods, or cultural contexts, can be viewed as an important form of intangible cultural heritage. Yet, much of this vocabulary remains undocumented or underrepresented in national linguistic resources, such as the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI).

In the context of globalization and mass tourism, there is both urgency and opportunity to preserve and promote this cultural wealth. Businesses in the culinary and tourism sectors are increasingly recognizing the value of authenticity and local identity in attracting visitors and creating meaningful cultural experiences. One such initiative is the compilation of an encyclopedic vocabulary of South Sulawesi's traditional dishes, categorized by main ingredients and cooking methods. This effort not only serves linguistic and lexicographic purposes but also strengthens the positioning of traditional foods as marketable cultural assets.

This chapter aims to explore the culinary characteristics of the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja through their traditional food vocabulary and preparation techniques. It investigates how this culinary lexicon contributes to cultural identity, economic empowerment, and tourism development. The discussion will also analyze how local businesses, such as **Arum Pala Resto in Barru**, have successfully integrated local seafood traditions, linguistic heritage, and sustainable partnerships with fishermen to create a unique dining and cultural experience.

By documenting and analyzing the culinary lexicon of South Sulawesi, this chapter contributes to a broader understanding of how traditional knowledge systems can support **multiple value creation**—social, economic, linguistic, and cultural—within the framework of Asian businesses. It also highlights the potential for local food to serve not only as a product but as a platform for education, heritage preservation, and regional pride.

Literature Review

Cultural and Linguistic Background

South Sulawesi is home to several prominent ethnic groups whose cultural systems have persisted through centuries of trade, migration, colonization, and modernization. Among them, the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja are the most well-known, each with distinct social structures, belief systems, languages, and culinary traditions. Understanding their cultural and linguistic contexts is crucial for interpreting the values encoded in their food practices.

1. The Bugis: Maritime Traders and Culinary Innovators

The Bugis people are historically known as seafarers and traders, with settlements spread along the coastal regions of South Sulawesi. Their maritime orientation has significantly shaped their food habits. Fish and other marine products form the cornerstone of their diet, often complemented with rice, coconut, and spices. Bugis cuisine is also characterized by symbolic presentation and communal sharing, especially during ceremonies such as *mappacci* and *pengantin* (wedding rituals).

Linguistically, the Bugis language (*Basa Ugi*) is rich with culinary vocabulary that encapsulates techniques, textures, and ingredients. Terms like *buras* (rice cooked in banana leaves), *barongko* (steamed banana cake with coconut milk), and *sop saudara* (a peppery beef soup) illustrate the intimacy between daily life, rituals, and local ecology. These terms carry cultural weight and emotional memory beyond their culinary meanings.

2. The Makassar: Urban Traders and Culinary Bridges

The Makassar people, traditionally centered in the port city of Makassar (formerly Ujung Pandang), have historically played a central role in regional trade networks, including those connected to the spice routes. Their cuisine is influenced by diverse interactions with Arab, Chinese, and European traders—resulting in complex flavor profiles.

Makassar dishes are typically bold and spicy, such as *coto Makassar* (beef offal soup with peanuts), *pallubasa* (a richer, spicier variant), and *konro* (grilled beef ribs in black broth). The Makassar language has distinct culinary terms and idiomatic expressions that reflect their deep connection to food, honor, and hospitality.

3. The Toraja: Highland Agriculturalists and Ritual Cuisines

In contrast to the coastal Bugis and Makassar, the Toraja people inhabit the mountainous regions of northern South Sulawesi. Renowned for their elaborate funeral rituals and unique social hierarchy, the Toraja hold food as a sacred element within life-cycle ceremonies. Their culinary practices are inseparable from belief systems that honor ancestors and the natural world.

Torajan cuisine emphasizes earthy flavors and traditional cooking methods, such as bamboo cooking (*pa'piong*) and woodfire roasting. Meat from buffalo, pigs, and chicken is commonly used in ceremonial dishes. The Toraja language contains specific food-related vocabulary tied to ritual contexts—terms like *dangkot*, *deppa tori*, and *tedong pa'silaga* not only identify dishes but also evoke stories of social structure and ancestral law.

4. Interethnic Influences and Culinary Syncretism

Despite their differences, these three ethnic groups have also shared and adapted culinary knowledge across generations, especially through intermarriage, migration, and religious conversion. Shared dishes may have different names or variations in seasoning and preparation, depending on ethnic context. For example, *nasi bambu* (bamboo-cooked

rice) may exist in both Torajan and Bugis settings but under different names and ceremonial purposes.

Language plays a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting culinary knowledge. Many traditional terms remain orally transmitted and are at risk of disappearing if not documented. Furthermore, the increasing use of Indonesian in urban menus often dilutes the richness of regional culinary vocabulary. Thus, this chapter underscores the urgency of recording and revitalizing food terms as part of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Culinary Vocabulary Inventory and Ethnosemantics

The culinary landscape of South Sulawesi is rich not only in flavors but also in linguistic diversity. Each traditional food item carries with it a unique set of vocabulary deeply rooted in the cultural and environmental context of the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja ethnic groups. This inventory of culinary vocabulary serves as a foundation for understanding how language and food interrelate in these communities.

The compilation is organized based on main ingredients, preparation methods, and ethnolinguistic references. For example, terms like *lawa*, *barobbo*, *pallu basa*, *kapurung*, and *pa'piong* are not easily translatable into standard Indonesian, as they embody indigenous preparation methods, symbolic meanings, and communal eating traditions. These lexical items reflect the ecological knowledge of the people—such as seasonal availability, local plant usage, and traditional preservation techniques.

In the Bugis context, vocabulary related to rice-based dishes such as *songkolo* and *sokko* are prevalent, indicating the centrality of rice in their agrarian lifestyle. In contrast, Makassarese culinary lexicons often involve complex spice blends and terms related to meat stews, like *coto* and *konro*. Meanwhile, the Torajan lexicon features words such as *pa'piong* (bamboo-cooked meat) and *dangkot* (spicy meat curry), which denote ritualistic and celebratory meals prepared during communal feasts.

From an ethnosemantic perspective, the vocabulary used to describe food not only classifies ingredients and techniques but also conveys cultural values, identity, and social cohesion. For instance, *pa'bugis* is more than just a cooking technique; it is a marker of ethnic pride. The frequent use of plant-based terminologies, such as *daun kelor* (moringa leaves) or *lauk burasa*, demonstrates an ecological intimacy between language and the natural environment.

This inventory, when further categorized and documented, becomes instrumental in semantic analysis and lexicography. It offers insights into how culinary knowledge is preserved through oral traditions and how it shapes intergenerational knowledge transfer. Moreover, the documentation of these terms contributes to the broader effort of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, especially those at risk of erosion due to modernization and language shift.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative-descriptive design grounded in conceptual and ethnolinguistic approaches. The study focuses on analyzing and categorizing culinary vocabulary from the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja ethnic groups while exploring the cultural meanings embedded in traditional food terms.

The primary data were obtained from the *Ensiklopedia Kuliner Sulawesi Selatan* (2023), which documents traditional foods, ingredients, and preparation methods across ethnic communities in South Sulawesi. This source served as the main reference for compiling the culinary vocabulary inventory.

To complement the literature-based analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted in selected culinary regions, including Barru, Makassar, and Tana Toraja. Informants consisted of local cooks, food vendors, and cultural practitioners who provided explanations regarding food names, preparation techniques, and their linguistic interpretations. This field data helped validate and enrich the documented sources.

The data were categorized based on four main dimensions: (1) ethnic group (Bugis, Makassar, Toraja); (2) main ingredients (rice, sago, banana, fish, coconut, and meat); (3) preparation techniques (steamed, boiled, grilled, fermented, roasted, and bamboo-cooked); and (4) linguistic uniqueness, particularly indigenous culinary terms without direct equivalents in Bahasa Indonesia. This framework enables an in-depth understanding of the relationship between language, food practices, and cultural identity

Results and Discussion

The study identifies distinctive culinary terms and practices among the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja. These terms reflect historical context, rituals, and ecological adaptation. Restaurants like Arum Pala Resto in Barru represent a modern integration of local seafood, linguistic heritage, and sustainable business practices. Culinary vocabulary contributes to value creation through identity branding and cultural tourism.

Table 1. Traditional Foods by Ethnic Group in South Sulawesi

Ethnic Group	Dish Name	Main Ingredient	Cooking Method	Cultural Function
Bugis	Barongko	Banana, coconut milk	Steamed	Rituals (wedding, adat)
Bugis	Buras	Rice, coconut milk	Steamed in banana leaves	Daily, travel, ceremonies
Bugis	Utti'	Sago pearls	Boiled	Dessert, traditional snacks
Bugis	Songkolo'	Sticky rice, grated coconut	Steamed	Breakfast, sacred offerings
Makassar	Coto Makassar	Beef, peanuts, spices	Boiled	Daily and special occasions
Makassar	Pallubasa	Beef, coconut, spices	Boiled, sautéed garnish	Culinary heritage, daily
Makassar	Konro	Beef ribs	Boiled/Grilled	Eid celebration, events
Makassar	Sop Saudara	Beef or buffalo, rice cake	Boiled	Popular in gatherings
Toraja	Pa'piong	Chicken/pork, spices, bamboo	Roasted in bamboo	Rituals (funeral/wedding)
Toraja	Dangkot	Chicken, chilies	Braised/Stewed	Rituals, feasts
Toraja	Deppa Tori'	Rice flour, palm sugar	Fried	Ritual dessert/snack
Toraja	Pokon	Banana, coconut, sugar	Roasted/Baked	Traditional snack/dessert

The findings indicate that culinary vocabulary functions not merely as a naming system for food, but as a cultural code that reflects social structure, ritual practice, and environmental adaptation. Among the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja, food terminology preserves collective memory and ancestral knowledge, particularly through terms associated with ceremonial dishes. The continued use of indigenous culinary terms reinforces ethnic identity and sustains intergenerational transmission of cultural values.

From an economic perspective, the integration of traditional culinary vocabulary into modern business practices enhances product differentiation and cultural branding. Restaurants and local food enterprises that retain indigenous food names—rather than replacing them with generic Indonesian or foreign terms—offer a sense of authenticity that appeals to cultural and gastronomic tourists. The case of Arum Pala Resto in Barru illustrates how local seafood traditions, indigenous terminology, and storytelling can be combined to create a distinctive dining experience rooted in place-based identity.

Furthermore, the documentation and categorization of culinary vocabulary contribute to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. As globalization and language shift increasingly marginalize regional languages, culinary lexicons serve as one of the most resilient cultural domains. By embedding traditional food terms in menus, tourism narratives, and educational materials, local communities not only safeguard linguistic heritage but also transform it into social and economic capital. Thus, culinary vocabulary becomes a strategic resource for sustainable tourism development and cultural empowerment in South Sulawesi.

Conclusion

The culinary vocabulary of South Sulawesi, as reflected in the dishes of the Bugis, Makassar, and Toraja, is a testament to the region's cultural diversity. When systematically documented and integrated into economic platforms like tourism and gastronomy, these traditions can provide both identity affirmation and economic benefit.

References

- Al Jumah, Ais. (2019). *Lawa Bale dari Tanah Sulawesi Selatan*. <https://etnis.id/lawa-bale-dari-tanah-sulawesi-selatan/>
- Apriana, Erni. (n.d.). *Lawa Jantung Pisang Khas Makassar*. <https://cookpad.com/id/resep/16974027-lawa-jantung-pisang-khas-makassar>
- Dapur Bugis Sedunia. (2024). *Dadara Belanda*. Facebook Dapur Bugis.
- Emvusahseven. (2018). *Makanan Khas Kota Kuda Jeneponto*. <https://emyehaseven.blogspot.com/>
- Hakim, Eka. (2021). *Enam Fakta Menarik tentang Bulukumba, Lokasi Pembuatan Pinisi yang Melegenda*. <https://www.liputan6.com/lifestyle/read/4479334/6-fakta-menarik-tentang-bulukumba-lokasi-pembuatan-pinisi-yang-melegenda>
- Isman, Andi Nur. (2022). *11 Makanan Khas Sulawesi Selatan Paling Dicari. Wajib Coba Nih!*. <https://www.detik.com/sulsel/kuliner/d-6009074>
- Ismail, Risdavanti. (2023). *10 Makanan Khas Palopo yang Populer dan Wajib Dicoba*. <https://www.detik.com/sulsel/kuliner/d-6589101>
- Isni. (2018). *Bayao Nibalu*. <https://budaya-indonesia.org/Bayao-Nibalu>
- Jaya, T. (2023). *Makna Semiotics Makanan Adat Subetnis To Limola (Angka)* [Thesis, Universitas Hasanuddin].
- Kompasiana. (2021). *Nikmatnya Berbuka Puasa dengan Makanan Khas Toraja 'Dangkot'*. <https://www.kompasiana.com/metirimayanti/60738fc6d541df342050a1a2>
- Media Center. (2016). *Sokko Tumbu Makanan Khas Bugis untuk Lebaran*. <https://mc.tanahbumbukab.go.id>
- Nugraha, Ario Seno. (n.d.). *6 Kuliner dan Makanan Khas Rantepao Toraja Utara*. <https://seringjalan.com>
- Pratama, Muhammad Agung Putra. (2023). *Resep Lammang Bambu Bakar Kuliner Khas Kabupaten Jeneponto yang Gurih*. <https://makassar.tribunnews.com>

- Sandarupa, D. (2021). *Ritual Resung pare Tallu penanian dan Tumbang Datu: Studi di Toraja* [Dissertation, Universitas Hasanuddin].
- Yohanes, Markus. (2021). *8 Kuliner Khas Toraja dengan Cita Rasa Menarik*. <https://www.traveloka.com>
- Language Center of South Sulawesi Province. (2023). *Ensiklopedia kuliner Sulawesi Selatan*. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.