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Kodi (Indonesia) – Language Snapshot

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| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Language Name: | Kodi |
| Language Family: | Austronesian > Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian > Sumba-Hawu |
| ISO 639-3 Code: | kod |
| Glottolog Code: | kodi1247 |
| Population: | 100,000 (2015 Census) ¹ |
| Location: | Sumba Island, Eastern Indonesia |
| Vitality rating: | Vulnerable |

Summary

Kodi is an Austronesian language spoken in Sumba Island, Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, eastern Indonesia. Even though some work has been done on Kodi (Sukerti 2013, inter alia), it remains a largely under-documented language. Further, Kodi is vulnerable or threatened because Indonesian, the prestigious national language, is used in most sociolinguistic domains outside the domestic sphere (e.g., education, public offices, religious services). It has also penetrated almost every Kodi household through such things as media and information technology (e.g., television and smartphones). Current research aims to collect audio-visual data to meet the urgent need for fuller documentation and preservation of Kodi language and culture.

¹ According to Eberhard et al. (2020) Kodi speakers number 20,000, a figure which has not been updated for 23 years. The 2015 Indonesian census reported around 100,000 speakers (BPS Sumba Barat Daya 2015).

Ringkasan

Kodi adalah bahasa Austronesia yang dituturkan di Pulau Sumba, Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia bagian timur. Meski beberapa penelitian linguistik terhadap bahasa Kodi telah dilakukan (antara lain, Sukerti, 2013), bahasa Kodi masih belum terdokumentasi secara memadai. Lebih jauh, bahasa Kodi saat ini berada dalam situasi yang rapuh atau terancam. Ini menimbang bahasa Indonesia, bahasa nasional yang berprestise tinggi, digunakan di sebagian besar rana penggunaan bahasa (e.g., sekolah, kantor-kantor publik, gereja dan masjid). Di samping itu, bahasa Indonesia telah merembes hingga ke hampir setiap rumah tangga di Kodi melalui teknologi informasi, seperti televisi dan ponsel pintar. Penelitian terhadap bahasa Kodi yang dilakukan saat ini oleh peneliti berupaya mengumpulkan data audio-visual bahasa Kodi untuk menjawab mendesaknya kebutuhan akan dokumentasi bahasa Kodi yang lebih lengkap. Oleh karena itu, penelitian yang dilakukan ini penting bagi pelestarian bahasa dan budaya Kodi.

1. Overview

Kodi or Kodhi [ko:di] is the term used by speakers to refer to the Kodi region, but also to signify the ethnic background of the Kodi people, in addition to the language itself (Ghanggo Ate, to appear). Kodi is primarily spoken across three river valleys: Kodi Bokolo (Bhokolo)² ‘Greater Kodi’, Bangedo or Mbangedho, and Balaghar or Mbalaghar on the southwestern tip of the underdeveloped island of Sumba (see Figure 1). The majority of Kodi people live in Kodi Bhokol.

² Kodi Bhokolo is now administratively under two districts: Kodi and Kodi Utara, while Mbangedho and Mbalaghar are administratively under Kodi Bangedo and Kodi Balaghar districts respectively.



Figure 1. Kodi Bhokolo, Mbangedho, Mbalaghar locations³

Kodi society is primarily made up of subsistence farmers who use the land in three ways: ‘as garden (*mango*), as fallow plots (*ramma*), and as pastures for livestock (*marada*)’ (Hoskin 1993: 6). To meet their daily food needs, Kodi people plant rice and corn in their *mango*, which is mixed with beans, tubers, chillies, and vegetables. Nowadays to fulfil secondary needs (e.g., education), they mostly cultivate cashew trees for their profitable and abundant nuts.⁴ In addition to supplying their food source, farming also fulfils a crucial social function of being a prestige component of the economy (Hoskin 1993). In this sense, the prestige economy relates to the social and economic currency of raising herds of buffalo, horses, and cattle in Kodi society. Other common livestock includes chickens and pigs. This livestock is also raised for sacrifice in Marapu ritualised events⁵ such as *paholong*, *woleka* ‘ceremony feast’, and

³ © 2021 Google Map Data, cropping and lines and labels marking the three areas are added.

⁴ Cashew crops are compatible with Kodi semi-arid land.

⁵ Marapu is an ancestral religion. It is not only practised in Kodi, but in other regions in Sumba Island.

rituals of petitions (e.g., for abundant harvest of rice fields or *kanuru* ‘blessing’) to *ndewa ambu-ndewa nuhi* ‘the ancestors’ and *a ma=wolo-a ma=rawi* ‘the creators’.⁶ Moreover, they are used during exchanges, for example, in customary marriage proposals where pigs, horses, and buffaloes are required for bride-wealth payment.

Regarding its linguistic classification, Kodi belongs to the Central-Eastern subgroup of Austronesian, related to Sumba-Hawu languages.⁷ Eberhard et al. (2020) divide Kodi into three dialects: Kodi Bokolo, Kodi Bangedo, and Garo or Nggaro. However, based on linguistic fieldwork observations by the author, it may be tentatively concluded that there are only two Kodi dialects: Kodi Bhokol and Mbangedho-Mbalaghar, while Garo is a separate language. Key linguistic features distinguishing Kodi Bhokol from Mbangedho-Mbalaghar include pronunciation differences (Lovestrand & Balle 2019) and lexical differences. In terms of the former, Kodi Bhokolo typically uses back vowels (e.g. [wo:toro] ‘corn’) in contexts where Mbangedho-Mbalaghar uses front vowels (e.g. [‘wa:tarō] ‘corn’]). Lexically, each dialect makes use of a few different items, e.g. ‘to make someone point out something’ [pa’hondoŋo] in Kodi Bhokol, [pa’hij:a] in Mbangedho-Mbalaghar, and ‘hoe’ [pa’ŋali] in Kodi Bhokol, [‘to:ndo] in Mbangedho-Mbalaghar.

In relation to neighbouring languages, Kodi is surrounded by Garo and several dialects of Weyewa or Wewewa such as Ede, Rara, Western Weyewa, and Mbukambero dialects, as shown in Figure 2. This means that Kodi speakers in the border areas are bilingual in these neighbouring languages. According to Eberhard et al. (2020), Kodi is most similar to Weyewa, however, Kodi and Weyewa are not mutually intelligible, except in border areas where language contact has occurred.⁸ Garo can be excluded as a Kodi dialect since Mbangedho-Mbalaghar dialect speakers who dwell on the border of Garo and Mbalaghar consider Garo to be a distinct language, and not a dialect of Kodi. This is supported by Lovestrand (to appear) whose personal communication with Garo speakers shows that they also view Kodi as a separate language. Further research on the nature of the relationships between Kodi and Garo is needed.

⁶ *Paholong* or *pasola* is a spear-fighting battle played out on horseback between two groups of men from different *parona* ‘traditional villages’ or different *kabihu* ‘traditional alliances’ in Kodi (Deta Karere 2020). It is held annually, between February and March.

⁷ <https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kodi1247> (accessed 2021-01-28)

⁸ Language contact occurs as people learn to understand each other’s languages or because of inter-ethnic marriage.

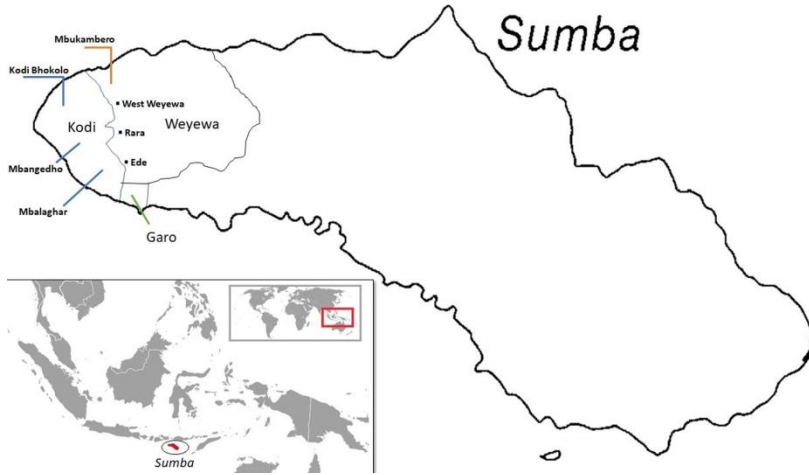


Figure 2. Kodi, Weyewa and Garo language locations⁹

Based on fieldwork observations, Kodi meets the UNESCO criteria as ‘vulnerable’ (i.e., use in restricted domains) and the EGIDS level 6b (i.e., threatened) in that the language is losing users in urban areas, but EGIDS level 6a (vigorous) in the villages, even though certain domains (e.g., Marapu) are going out of use. Several pieces of evidence can be given to support this assessment: although Kodi is mostly used among adults, between children, and in child-directed speech in *desa-desa* ‘rural villages or sub-districts’, it is used side-by-side with Indonesian among adults and children and in child-directed speech in the four *kota kecamatan* (‘city districts’).¹⁰ These districts are diverse in terms of ethnicities, which then leads Kodis to use Indonesian. In *kota kabupaten* ‘cities’ (e.g., Sumba Barat Daya Regency, which administratively controls four Kodi districts), Kodi is entirely replaced by Indonesian in daily use. Secondly, Kodi is only spoken in restricted domains such as within the family, local social circles, and ritual ceremonies in the

⁹ © 2018 Google Map Data (map of Sumba), cropping, boundaries, and labels marking the areas by the author.

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¹⁰ Village or subdistrict is the fourth-level subdivision below a district, which itself refers to the third-level administrative subdivision, below regency or city. Districts are formed by the government of a regency or city in order to improve the coordination of governance, public services, and empowerment of urban/rural villages.

villages. Kodi is not used in religious domains, education, work, mass media (both print and online), nor in public offices in villages, districts, and cities. In those domains, Kodi is only used when necessary to clarify particular things that are not understood in Indonesian. Thirdly, Indonesian, the national language, has proliferated through television, the internet, and smartphones in the Kodi villages (Simanjuntak 2018). Thus, Facebook groups of the Kodi community demonstrate that the younger generation mostly uses Indonesian to exchange messages, and to post and comment on statuses, including the statuses of people living both in the villages and cities. To investigate message use on Facebook, I conducted short interviews with 20 users (equally young males and females from age teens to 20s) from ten villages in four Kodi districts. These showed 95% of interviewees said that they use Indonesian when exchanging messages, however, they use Kodi when making a voice call, suggesting that lack of literacy in Kodi is probably a factor favouring written Indonesian. It is possible that there is currently a stable diglossic situation between Kodi and Indonesian outside the cities. Finally, there is a low level of support for preservation of Kodi, especially among elders. The primary concerns of Kodi speakers, particularly elders, often involve meeting their basic needs—daily survival (e.g., food, housing, day-to-day finances, and jobs)—rather than the fate of their heritage language. These economic obstacles suppress their eagerness to support the language.

Note also that Kodi has a ritual variety, which is mostly employed by Marapu followers, and this is now moribund. Massive Christian evangelization in Kodi has led to a major decrease in Marapu followers. Approximately 80% of Kodi speakers identified themselves as followers of Marapu during the 1980s (Hoskin 1988), however, in a 2020 study this proportion had reduced to only 3% (BPS 2020). Since a ritual variety of Kodi was used by *leti Marapu* (Marapu priests) and *rato Marapu* (Marapu leaders), the decrease in Marapu followers has resulted in middle-aged adults and youngsters today having no mastery of this Kodi variety (Ghanggo Ate & El-Khaissi 2021).

In terms of linguistic features, Kodi is a head-marking language with rich pronominal expression on the predicate, pronominal clitics, and prepositions employed with non-core dependent NPs (Sukerti & Ghanggo Ate 2015). Free pronouns that usually fill the subject and object slots in other Austronesian languages are optional in Kodi since the pronominal clitics hosted by the head predicate are not simply grammatical relation markers, but are also possibly core arguments by themselves (Ghanggo Ate & Arka 2021). Secondly, bound pronominal arguments show a split alignment depending on the grammatical category of the predicate: SUBJ of verbal predicates shows an accusative (S/A) pattern, whereas nominal predicates show an ergative (S/P) pattern, as shown in the following (Ghanggo Ate & Arka 2021: 10-11):

- (1) [dhi] na=la la hakola
 3SG 3SG.NOM=go prep school
 ‘S/he went to school’
- (2) [dhi] na=palu=ya [dhi]
 3SG 3SG.NOM=hit=3SG.ACC 3SG
 ‘S/he hit him/her’
- (3) [dhi] ngguru=ya
 3SG teacher=3SG.ACC
 ‘S/he is a teacher’

Kodi also shows loss of Austronesian voice morphology. For instance, the homorganic nasal prefix, which marks actor voice in other languages such as Balinese (Arka 2002) is absent. Likewise, while Kodi may have a passive, it does not morphologically mark the passive voice on the verb as typically found in Indonesian-type languages (Arka 2002).

2. Existing literature

Kodi society has been well-studied in the anthropological literature, especially Kodi rituals and social practices (Hoskin 1984, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2002). While some attention has been given to Kodi’s phonemic inventory (Hoskin 1993), a rigorous full linguistic study is largely absent. The following paragraphs briefly summarise all existing linguistic works on Kodi.

In 2003, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture published a lexical list of 1,500 items and a literacy primer for Local Content learning materials for *Sekolah Dasar* ‘primary school’. The latter provides an overview of Kodi phonology and morphosyntax, however, it is not strictly a linguistic work which leaves many unanswered questions (Lovestrand 2019). In 2018-2019, *Suluh Insan Lestari*, a non-profit foundation based in Jakarta, in cooperation with INOVASI (Australian-Indonesian government partnership), developed children’s literacy materials in Kodi. Kodi people were involved in this great initiative, in support of which phonological research was conducted as a basis for Kodi orthography design (Balle & Lovestrand 2019; Lovestrand & Balle 2019). This resulted in orthography notes and literacy books with 40 children’s stories in Kodi. The corpus of recorded audio is restricted to a 790-

item wordlist and phrases which were transcribed and translated and then deposited in the Paradisec archive.¹¹

There have been a handful of linguistic studies on Kodi, in the form of MA theses. Sukerti (2013), for instance, investigates grammatical relations in Kodi from the perspective of syntactic typology. Tangkas (2013) provides an eco-linguistic overview of Kodi, focusing on verbal repertoires in the context of rice farming. Ghanggo Ate (2018) focused on reduplication processes, a description of the interface between morphology and phonology, semantics and syntax. Other works include articles (Ekayani, Mbete & Putra 2015; Sukerti & Ghanggo Ate 2016; Ghanggo Ate, to appear) and conference papers (Shibatani, Artawa & Ghanggo Ate 2015; Lovestrand & Balle 2019). However, since these works only describe fragments of the grammar and draw upon minimal archived data, much work remains to be done to document and preserve the Kodi language.

3. Current research

As part of the *Documentation of Kodi Project*, a pilot project funded by the Endangered Language Fund, I have compiled an initial corpus of video-recorded folktales, oral histories, and songs.¹² The transcribed videos and recordings form an essential foundation for a much-needed full-scale documentation of Kodi. Further, it will form the basis for future linguistic research that will support mother-tongue literacy. The recorded and transcribed materials will be deposited with Paradisec and made publicly accessible.

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¹¹ See <http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/repository/JL4> (accessed 2020-01-28)

¹² See http://www.endangeredlanguagefund.org/ll_2020.html (accessed 2021-01-28)

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