Toponymic Aspects of Caves in Central Buton Regency: Toponymic Study

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Article Info	Abstract
	This study aims to reveal the origins of cave naming in Central Buton. This is carried out by classifying the aspects of toponymy, namely physical manifestation, social aspects, and cultural aspects, so that the close relationship between language, environment, and the culture of the local community can be demonstrated. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with inductive data analysis. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders and local community members who understand the history of the caves. The interviews were conducted using recording and note-taking techniques. The data were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis. The results show that the physical manifestation aspect is reflected in cave names based on their physical conditions and environment, with 6 data findings. The social aspect appears in cave names associated with local figures, with 3 data findings. Meanwhile, the cultural aspect is present through community myths and legends, with 4 data findings. Thus, it can be understood that the toponymy of caves in Central Buton does not merely represent the identity of physical space but also functions as a living archive that records ecological knowledge, social memory, and the cultural heritage of the community.

1. Introduction

Naming is an important part of life because it serves to distinguish objects, living creatures, events, and places as identity. This process is inseparable from the language, culture, and history of the local community. As a sociocultural manifestation, place naming serves as a means of communication that reflects collective thought patterns influenced by the environment and situation. Thus, language and thought are closely interconnected, and through naming practices, a community's identity and cultural heritage can be represented and passed down across generations (Oktaviana, 2020; Aditya, 2020).

Furthermore, (Sudaryat, 2009) emphasized that place naming is the process of assigning identity to a geographical element, commonly referred to as toponymy. Judging from its origin or etymology, the word toponymy comes from the Greek topoi, meaning "place," and onama, meaning "name." Thus, literally, toponymy means "place name." In this case, toponymy is defined as the giving of place names (Sudaryat, 2009). In Indonesian, the term is more commonly referred to as "names of geographic features," "geographical names," or "topographic names."

In Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government, Article 7 mentions "topographic part name" (topography) or "topographic element" name. Since its development, toponymy has become an independent scientific discipline to study the origin, classification, structure, and significance of toponyms, as well as their historical changes, geographic evolution, and cultural development of society (Jiao and Lu, 2024).

People often name places based on their surroundings. People whose daily lives are close to agricultural areas will name their places near agricultural areas, and people whose environments are close to water areas will name their places near water areas. Naming a place based on water is common in West Java, such as the names Cianjur, Cimahi, Cirebon, and Cibinong because the environment in these areas has many rivers. Mursidi and Soetopo (2021: 2) explain that if a place has a lot of water, usually the name will have a name prefixed with ci or leuwi.

Sudaryat (2009) stated that place naming involves various aspects, including process, meaning, and impact on society. He further emphasized that place naming, or toponymy, has three aspects: embodiment, sociality, and culture. This finding aligns with several previous studies (Pertiwi et al., 2020; Jannah et al., 2021; Istighfari & Eraku, 2023).

Toponymy studies in global research show that place names not only function as geographic identities but also reflect the politics, culture, and collective memory of a society. Vuolteenaho and Berg (2009) express critical toponymy, which views place-naming practices as an arena of social contestation, showing that toponymy is not merely a neutral label, but a discursive practice containing power and resistance. Hough, C., & Izdebska, D (2008) added that place names cannot be separated from their cultural meaning. Naming ties language to the landscape and makes it a symbol of identity, not just a geographical label. This view is reinforced

by Azaryahu (2011) who highlights the case of street naming, where toponymy becomes a means of preserving historical memory through spatial markers. This perspective is relevant to the naming of caves in Central Buton, which are also rooted in local figures and social events as a form of collective memory. Meanwhile, Hough (2016), through The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming, provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the study of names, including toponymy, by emphasizing their connection to language, identity, and culture.

Overall, this research demonstrates that toponymy is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing social, economic, cultural, and ecological aspects. These findings provide a strong foundation for viewing cave toponymy research in Central Buton not only as an effort to document names, but also as a gateway to understanding the relationship between communities and nature, collective memory, and local cultural heritage.

Furthermore, research on toponymy in Indonesia has recently become popular, but unfortunately, the objects of toponymy research in Indonesia are currently still focused on administrative toponymy such as villages (Musyayyab 2024), sub-districts (Narhan & Lubis 2023), districts (Prasetyo & Abdullah 2017), cities (Rustinar & Kusmiarti 2021; Anam et al. 2023). In addition, toponymy such as islands (Muhidin & Aprilina 2017), rivers (Felecan, O., & Felecan, N 2019), beaches (Hidayah 2019), mountains (Abdullina, A. G et al. 2019; Djindan & Lauder 2021). Unfortunately, none of the current toponymy researchers have focused on researching the toponymy of hills, valleys, and caves. Finally, research on cave toponymy is currently considered very important to conduct.

Central Buton Regency in Southeast Sulawesi Province is known as the "land of a thousand caves" because nearly every village has a cave with a unique name. The names of these caves are generally related to folklore and oral traditions passed down through generations, making the study of cave toponymy in Central Buton an interesting topic. Through this study, researchers can trace and identify the origins of these names.

Although Central Buton is rich in caves, knowledge of the origins of cave names has been neglected due to the changing times. Caves are important objects in toponymic studies because their names not only indicate natural conditions but also reflect the social life, history, and culture of the local community. Therefore, the study of cave toponymy can provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans, language, and the environment. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the toponymic aspects underlying the names of caves in Central Buton Regency and to reveal how these names reflect environmental, social, and cultural meanings within the local community.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with inductive data analysis. The qualitative approach aims to examine the research object in its natural context, with the researcher acting as the main instrument in the process of data collection and analysis. According to Sugiyono (2009:15), qualitative research is used to understand phenomena in depth based on the participants' perspectives. In this study, the qualitative descriptive approach is used to describe and understand the background of cave naming in Central Buton Regency. The research process was conducted through three stages: data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the analysis results.

Data Sources

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from informants who met certain criteria, namely adults, native residents of Central Buton who live in the area, and individuals who possess knowledge about the caves in Central Buton Regency. The informants in this study consisted of thirteen individuals who are respected village elders with deep knowledge of the history and background of cave naming. These thirteen informants were directly recommended by the village head in the area where the caves are located.

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using the conversational method or interviews with the informants. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher could obtain more in-depth information regarding the origins and meanings of cave names. During the interview process, elicitation techniques were used to explore information from the informants, as well as recording and note-taking techniques to ensure that the data obtained were well documented and accurate.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted inductively based on the data obtained from interviews. The collected data were then classified and analyzed to identify the background of cave naming in Central Buton Regency. The results of the analysis show that the caves studied are divided into several aspects: the physical manifestation aspect, reflected in cave names based on physical conditions and the surrounding environment, with 6 data findings; the social aspect, related to local figures, with 3 data findings; and the cultural aspect, associated with community myths and legends, with 4 data findings. The results of this analysis are then presented using the informal presentation method, namely in the form of a narrative description (Sudaryanto, 1993:145).

3. Result

Based on interviews with several traditional figures familiar with the origins of cave names in Central Buton Regency, the toponymy of caves in this region can be classified into three main aspects: manifestation, social aspect, and cultural aspect. The following are the research findings:

Table: Cave Toponymy in Central Buton Regency

No.	Cave Name	Lexical Components	Lexical Meaning	Toponymic Category
1	Lia Wandoke	Lia + Wandoke	Cave + monkey	Physical manifestation (fauna)
2	Lia Wakahohondo	Lia + Wakahohondo	Cave + dark	Physical manifestation (visual)
3	Gua Bulawa	Bulawa	Gold	Physical manifestation (mineral)
4	Gua Walet	Walet	Swiftlet bird	Physical manifestation (fauna)
5	Gua Ponda	Ponda	Pandan plant	Physical manifestation (flora)
6	Gua Kontu Molepe	Kontu + Molepe	Stone + flat	Physical manifestation (geomorphological)
7	Lia Lapomahaka	Lia + Lapomahaka	Cave + name of a figure	Social aspect
8	Gua Mabolosi	Mabolosi	Name of a figure	Social aspect
9	Gua Latandahali	Latandahali	Name of a figure	Social aspect
10	Gua Air Raja	Air + Raja	Water + king/ruler	Cultural aspect
11	Gua Ma'Obu	Ma'Obu	Legendary	Cultural aspect

			figure	
12	Gua Koo	Koo	Name of a legendary figure	Cultural aspect
13	Gua Wadarila	Wadarila	Name of a legendary figure	Cultural aspect

4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the naming of caves in Central Buton Regency does not merely function as a geographical marker but also represents the relationship between the community and the natural environment, social figures, and cultural systems preserved in oral traditions. These findings show that cave toponymy constitutes a form of local knowledge that has been transmitted from generation to generation through language and community narratives.

In the perspective of critical toponymy, place names are not simply geographic labels but also social constructions that reflect the relationship between humans and space, symbolic power, and the cultural identity of a community. Thus, the naming of caves in Central Buton Regency can be understood as a representation of the community's knowledge of their natural environment and social history.

Physical Manifestation Aspect

The physical manifestation aspect in this study is the most dominant category in cave naming. This indicates that the people of Central Buton have a strong connection with the natural environment surrounding them. From the perspective of cultural geography, this phenomenon reflects how humans interpret natural landscapes through language.

Names such as Lia Wandoke, Gua Walet, and Gua Ponda demonstrate that the presence of fauna and flora plays an important role in the naming process. This finding aligns with Sudaryat (2009), who states that the manifestation aspect often relates to hydrological, geomorphological, or biological elements of the natural environment.

From an anthropolinguistic perspective, the use of fauna, flora, and natural landforms in place naming indicates that communities utilize the most prominent environmental characteristics as spatial identifiers. Place names function as a means of remembering locations and marking specific characteristics of a particular area.

The dominance of the physical manifestation aspect in cave naming can also be explained by the fact that caves are natural phenomena closely related to physical environmental conditions. Therefore, communities tend to name caves

based on observable characteristics, such as rock formations, the presence of animals, or the lighting conditions inside the caves.

These findings are consistent with several toponymic studies in Indonesia that show natural elements as the primary factor in place naming. For example, toponymy studies in West Java and Sulawesi reveal that many place names originate from vegetation, animals, landforms, or water sources. Similar patterns are also found in toponymic studies in countries such as Japan and Finland, where place names often relate to natural landscape conditions.

Social Aspect

In addition to natural factors, the naming of caves in Central Buton Regency is also influenced by social aspects, particularly those related to figures or events that hold important meaning for the community. Examples include Lia Lapomahaka, Gua Mabolosi, and Gua Latandahali.

From the perspective of critical toponymy, the use of personal names in place naming can be understood as a form of social recognition of individuals considered to have played an important role in local history. Such naming practices serve as a way to preserve the community's collective memory of certain events.

From an anthropolinguistic viewpoint, place names also function as a medium for preserving cultural knowledge. When a cave is named after a particular figure, the community indirectly preserves stories about that individual through language.

This phenomenon is also found in many toponymic studies in Indonesia, where place names are often derived from community leaders, traditional authorities, or individuals who played important roles in local history. This demonstrates that toponymy not only reflects natural conditions but also records the social dynamics of a community.

Cultural Aspect

The cultural aspect in the naming of caves in Central Buton Regency is related to myths, legends, and the community's belief systems. Names such as Gua Air Raja, Gua Ma'Obu, Gua Koo, and Gua Wadarila show that folklore has a significant influence on the formation of toponymy.

In anthropolinguistic studies, folklore is part of a cultural system that functions to explain natural phenomena or social events that are difficult to understand rationally. Through these narratives, communities construct symbolic meanings associated with particular places.

For example, in the story of Gua Air Raja, the community believes that a supernatural ruler guards the cave. This belief contributes to the cultural identity of the place. Similar phenomena are found in many traditions across Indonesia, where caves are often associated with spiritual realms or supernatural forces.

From the perspective of cultural geography, myths and legends attached to certain places also function as a way for communities to regulate their relationship with the natural environment. These stories may influence how people treat certain places, for example by protecting or respecting specific locations.

These findings are also consistent with toponymic studies in several other countries, where many place names originate from folklore or local myths. This indicates that toponymy is part of cultural heritage that contains symbolic and historical values.

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the research data heavily depend on oral narratives obtained from informants. Although the informants were selected based on their knowledge of local history, variations or differences in stories cannot be completely avoided.

Second, the number of informants in this study is relatively limited, consisting of thirteen village elders. Although they are considered to have deep knowledge about the history of cave naming, this number may not fully represent all perspectives of the community in Central Buton Regency.

Third, this research also faced limitations due to the lack of historical written sources that could be used to verify the origins of cave names. Therefore, most of the information relies on the community's collective memory passed down through oral tradition.

The findings of this study have several important implications, particularly in efforts to preserve cultural heritage and develop local tourism. Cave names that contain historical, cultural, and mythological elements can become part of the regional cultural identity that should be preserved.

In the context of cultural preservation, documenting cave toponymy in Central Buton Regency can help maintain local knowledge so that it does not disappear as generations change. Toponymy can also serve as an important source of information for future research in history, linguistics, and anthropology.

Furthermore, the folklore associated with cave names also has the potential to be developed as a cultural tourism attraction. Narratives about the origins of cave names can be used as part of tourism interpretation, allowing visitors not only to enjoy the natural beauty of the caves but also to understand the historical and cultural values embedded within them.

Thus, this study not only contributes to the fields of linguistics and toponymy but also provides practical benefits in supporting the preservation of local cultural heritage and the development of tourism potential in Central Buton Regency.

5. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that cave toponymy in Central Buton Regency serves not only as a geographical marker but also as a record of collective knowledge reflecting the community's connection to nature, social life, and culture. The research concludes that cave naming in this region can be understood through three main aspects: embodiment, social context, and culture.

The manifestation aspect is evident in the caves whose names are born from the natural and physical conditions of the surrounding environment, such as the presence of fauna in Lia Wandoke and Gua Walet, pond plants in Gua Ponda, geomorphological forms in Gua Kontu Molepe, visual conditions in Lia Wakahohondo, and the clarity of the water associated with gold in Gua Bulawa. This shows that the people of Central Buton use nature as a primary source of inspiration in giving identity to places.

The social aspect is evident in the naming of caves closely related to figures or social events, such as Lia Lapomahaka, named in memory of a figure who died inside the cave; Lia Mabolosi, named after a figure who hid from pirates; and Latandahali Cave, named after the cave's discoverer who cleared the surrounding plantation. Through these naming practices, the community not only marks space but also perpetuates collective memory and honors individuals deemed to have made significant contributions.

Meanwhile, cultural aspects are evident in the cave names, which are rooted in myths, legends, and local belief systems. For example, Gua Air Raja is believed to be inhabited by a supernatural king; Gua Koo is related to the mythological figure La Koo; Gua Wadarila is based on the story of a woman's mysterious disappearance; and Gua Ma'Obu is derived from the legend of the forbidden marriage of La Pasi and Waunda. These names demonstrate that oral traditions, myths, and folklore still play a strong role in shaping the spatial identity of the Central Buton community.

Academically, this research contributes to the development of onomastic linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural studies by affirming that toponymy functions as a living archive that records ecological knowledge, local history, and community belief systems. Thus, this research enriches linguistic studies and opens up new understandings of the relationship between language, environment, and culture.

For the community, this research is crucial for preserving local wisdom. Each cave name not only marks a physical space but also represents identity, history, and collective values passed down through generations. This documentation is expected to raise public awareness of preserving cultural heritage while strengthening regional identity.

Thus, this research not only contributes to the academic realm but also provides practical benefits for the community in understanding and preserving cultural heritage. The cave toponymy in Central Buton Regency ultimately serves

as concrete evidence that place names are a gateway to understanding the history, identity, and civilization of a community. However, research on cave toponymy in Central Buton Regency still has great potential for development through various aspects and approaches, such as ecolinguistics, socio-onomastics, geosemantics, and so on.

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