

## A MORPHOLOGICAL PROCES AND ASPECT OF NAMING PLACE AT SOUTH AMURANG

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### ABSTRACT

Toponyms are not merely geographical labels but also linguistic repositories of cultural memory, historical experience, and environmental perception. In regions with rich ethno-linguistic diversity, such as South Minahasa, Indonesia, place-names reflect the intricate relationship between language, identity, and local knowledge. This study investigates the morphological structure and dominant naming themes of ten toponyms in South Amurang District, South Minahasa Regency, where the Tontemboan language is increasingly endangered. It addresses a critical gap in toponymic research by prioritizing linguistic morphology over narrative or historical speculation, offering a scientifically grounded interpretation of place-names. Employing a qualitative descriptive case study design, data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, and the Simak Libat Cakap (SLC) technique. The analysis followed the intralingual matching method involving morphemic decomposition, lexical clarification, and contextual interpretation. The theoretical framework integrates Djajasudarma's (1993) morphological theory and Duranti's (1997) anthropological linguistics to balance structural and cultural analyses. The findings revealed that eight of the ten toponyms underwent morphological processes affixation, compounding, acronym formation, and complex affixation demonstrating a systematic naming system rooted in Tontemboan grammar. Water emerged as the dominant naming theme, appearing in four toponyms and reflecting its ecological and cultural centrality. Other themes included geographical features, community habits, historical events, and gratitude. Morphological analysis has successfully resolved long-standing community debates on names such as Pinalin and Malenos, confirming that linguistic decomposition yields more accurate meanings than oral narratives. This study concludes that morphological analysis is essential for valid toponymic interpretation, especially in regions with complex local languages. It offers a replicable model for integrating linguistic structure with the cultural context, contributing to language documentation, cultural preservation, and informed public policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Place names, or toponyms, are not merely geographical markers, but serve as profound reflections of a community's collective memory, historical experiences, and cultural identity. As Ramille & Matamanda, (2022) asserted, toponyms are linguistic expressions that encode complex information about the physical, social, and cognitive environments of the people who create them. In Indonesia, particularly in archipelagic regions with high ethno-linguistic diversity such as South Minahasa, toponyms function as living cultural imprints that are continuously shaped by local experiences, significant events, and prominent natural features. These names often emerge from indigenous knowledge systems and require analytical approaches capable of uncovering layered meanings beneath their surface forms.

South Amurang District, established in 2006 through the administrative division of Tombasian District, is a region rich in toponymic diversity. It comprises ten settlements eight villages and two urban districts including Lopana, Pinaling, Malenos Baru, and Ranomea, each bearing a name with complex morphological structures. These toponyms are not merely administrative labels; they reflect local knowledge, migration histories, and the use of Tontemboan, a regional language currently facing endangerment due to declining intergenerational transmissions (Vena, 2024). As Duranti in Farissi et al., (2025) emphasized, language and culture are mutually constitutive; therefore, the study of toponyms must adopt an interdisciplinary approach that balances linguistic analysis with a sociocultural context to fully grasp their significance.

Despite their cultural value, the public understanding of these toponyms is often based on oral narratives, folklore, or non-scientific interpretations, leading to inconsistencies and contested meanings. For example, the origins and meanings of names, such as Pinaling and Malenos, remain subjects of debate within the community. As Sapir in (Ахметова, 2024) argues, a community's vocabulary, including its place names, mirrors its worldview and relationship with the environment. Hence, a systematic linguistic approach, particularly morphological analysis, is essential to dissect the internal structure of toponyms and reveal their accurate linguistically grounded meanings (Bousquette & Putnam, 2020; Llewellyn-Beardsley et al., 2019; Smallwood et al., 2021). This study responds to this need by employing linguistic morphology as a primary tool to decode the morphemic composition of place-names in South Amurang, aiming to provide a more precise and scientifically valid interpretation.

Toponymic studies have advanced significantly over the past two decades, spanning various disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, and geography. Lauder et al., (2023) were among the first to link toponyms with social history and population migration in eastern Indonesia, particularly in Maluku and Papua. Their research demonstrated that place-names often serve as indicators of ethnic and intercultural contact. However, their analysis remained largely contextual, without delving into the internal linguistic structure of names. Similarly, Kersapati, (2023) explored toponyms in Java and Bali through a cultural lens, identifying religious symbolism and philosophical values embedded in place names. However, similar to Eraku's work, their study did not prioritize morphological analysis, resulting in interpretations that are often general and speculative.

Setyo et al., (2022) examined toponyms in Central Java by combining etymological and historical approaches to tracing the origins of place names. He successfully identified naming patterns based on geographical features, historical figures, and past events. Nevertheless, her methodology relied heavily on written records and oral narratives and lacked in-depth morphemic decomposition. Consequently, interpretations often fail to explain how words are linguistically constructed. Steffensen, (2025) further contributed to the field by analyzing toponyms in Nusa Tenggara from a semiotic and identity-based perspective, revealing how place names function as symbols of cultural resistance. However, they did not conduct a systematic morphological analysis, leaving processes such as affixation, compounding, or reduplication unexamined.

Recent studies have begun incorporating more rigorous linguistic methods. In their research on Talaud toponyms, (Lalira, 2022) demonstrated that many place names are formed through complex morphological processes including word compounding and the use of locative prefixes. By applying morphemic decomposition, they were able to extract precise lexical meanings, underscoring the importance of structural linguistic analysis for validating toponymic interpretations. Meanwhile, Kustati, (2022; Triana et al., (2022) employed a morphophonological approach to study toponyms in West Sumatra, analyzing how Minang and Malay language influences have altered the phonetic and semantic forms of place names over time. Their findings revealed that without morphological scrutiny, original meanings can be distorted by sound shifts and semantic drift. Despite these advancements, no study has been applied to languages in North Sulawesi, particularly Tontemboan, which possesses a distinct and under-documented morphological system.

Furthermore, anthropological linguistics, as articulated by Duranti and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, provides a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing toponyms not only through external contexts, such as history and culture, but also through their internal linguistic architecture. This perspective is relevant to emerging studies, such as (Marzuki, 2022; Muhidin, 2020), who examine Minahasan toponyms from an ethnolinguistic standpoint. However, their work remains limited to general meaning identification, which lacks deep morphological investigation. Thus, while toponymic research in Indonesia has evolved, a systematic linguistic approach (Schleppegrell & Oteíza, 2023) especially one centered on morphology remains underdeveloped, particularly in linguistically complex regions, such as South Minahasa.

Although recent studies have begun integrating linguistic analysis into toponymic research, the application of morphological methods (Baxriddinovna & Aziza, 2024; Komara et al., 2019; Marzuki, 2022; Tóth, 2020) remains rare and unsystematic in the context of the regional languages in North Sulawesi. No prior study has explicitly deconstructed the morphemic structure of Tontemboan toponyms to uncover their lexical and historical meanings. As a result, local interpretations of place names in South Amurang District continue to rely on traditional narratives that often lack linguistic validity, leading to persistent ambiguity and community debate. This gap underscores the need for dedicated research that applies rigorous morphological analysis to toponyms to establish a scientifically sound basis for understanding their true meanings.

The originality of this study lies in its structured and systematic application of linguistic morphology to Tontemboan toponyms, a methodology not previously employed in the South Amurang context. Unlike earlier studies that relied on historical, folkloric, or semiotic approaches, this research utilizes morphemic decomposition to identify root words, affixes, and morphological processes such as compounding and reduplication. This method not only facilitates the accurate reconstruction of lexical meanings but also serves as a tool to clarify community disputes over toponymic origins. In doing so, this study introduces a replicable, linguistics-based model for toponymic analysis that can be adapted to other regions with similarly rich and endangered local languages.

This study aims to linguistically analyze toponyms in South Amurang District, South Minahasa Regency, using a morphological approach. Specifically, it has two primary objectives: (1) to identify the morphemic components of place names in the region, including root morphemes, affixes, and morphological processes such as compounding and reduplication, to reveal their internal structure and lexical meanings; and (2) to describe the dominant naming patterns used in the toponyms, such as those based on geographical features, historical figures, significant events, or local knowledge, to understand the prevailing tendencies in the toponymic naming system. The findings are expected to contribute to a more accurate and systematic understanding of place names in the study area while also supporting the documentation and preservation of the Tontemboan language as an integral part of South Minahasa's cultural heritage.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, aimed at uncovering the morphological structure and semantic dimensions of toponyms in the South Amurang District, South Minahasa Regency. A qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of linguistic phenomena within their sociocultural context, aligning with the inherently interdisciplinary nature of toponymic studies, which intersect linguistics, history, and collective memory. The case study design allows a focused analysis of toponyms exhibiting morphological complexity and contested interpretations, thereby generating rich, contextual, and semantically grounded data.

Primary data consist of 10 toponyms from the ten administrative units of South Amurang eight villages (Lopana, Lopana I, Pinaling, Malenos Baru, Ritey, Maliku, Maliku I, Kota Menara) and two urban kelurahan (Pondang, Ranomea). Data were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) place names composed of two or more morphemes; (2) presence of community debate regarding etymology or meaning; and (3) relevance to local historical events, geographical features, or traditional cultural practices. In addition to toponymic data, secondary data were collected via in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, including customary leaders, religious figures, and long-term residents over 40 years of age. Informants were selected based on their active proficiency in the Tontemboan language, lifelong residence in the region (minimum 30 years), and recognized status as custodians of local knowledge.

Data collection was conducted using the Simak Libat Cakap (SLC) method developed within the Indonesian linguistic tradition, (Komara et al., 2019; Mulyani et al., 2022; Suliyati et al., 2024; Tóth, 2020) with contextual adaptations for toponymic research. This method positions the researcher not merely as an observer but also as an active participant in communicative interactions, ranging from informal conversations to semi-structured interviews, to elicit authentic, naturally occurring language use. Interview protocols focused on the origin of place names, variations in interpretation, naming processes, and the associated historical or cultural narratives. All interactions were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and annotated for linguistic and contextual analysis.

Data analysis was carried out using the intralingual matching method (Ashriany, 2024), a comparative technique within a single-language system used to identify and validate linguistic units. The analysis proceeded in three systematic stages: (1) morphemic decomposition, involving the segmentation of toponyms into their smallest meaningful units based on Tontemboan morphological rules; (2) lexical meaning clarification, achieved through cross-referencing of identified morphemes with lexical databases, ethnolinguistic sources, and informant validation; and (3) contextual interpretation, linking linguistic meanings to local history, geography, and cultural practices. The process was strengthened by data triangulation, cross-checking interpretations across multiple informants, methodological triangulation, integrating field observations, archival documents, and structural linguistic analysis. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the findings were visualized in morphemic tables displaying root forms, affixes, morphological processes (e.g., compounding, reduplication), and derived meanings.

The theoretical framework integrates three foundational pillars: (1) Duranti's anthropological linguistics, which emphasizes the interdependence of language and social practice; (2) Djajasudarma's linguistic morphology, providing a structural tool for word formation analysis; and (3) the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis Foley, which posits that linguistic structure influences the perception of reality. This integrative framework enables a holistic interpretation of toponyms, not merely as linguistic forms, but also as living cultural artifacts embedded in the community worldview.

Ethical considerations were maintained rigorously throughout the study. All informants provided written informed consent after being fully briefed on the study objectives, procedures, and data usage. Participant confidentiality was maintained and the data were used solely for academic purposes. The study received ethical



clearance from the relevant institutional review board in compliance with the social and humanistic research ethics protocols. Nonetheless, the researchers acknowledge certain limitations, particularly the declining number of fluent Tontemboan speakers and the potential memory bias among elderly informants. To mitigate these issues, data were cross-verified for consistency across informants and supported by written records and cultural artifacts, where available. South Amurang was selected as the research site because of its high toponymic diversity and critical linguistic context, marked by the gradual erosion of Tontemboan and complex sociohistorical dynamics shaped by colonial legacies, internal migration, and cultural transformation. This confluence of factors renders this area a highly representative case for morphologically grounded toponymic studies in Indonesia's island regions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

This study analyzes ten toponyms from South Amurang District, South Minahasa Regency, with a focus on morphological processes and dominant naming themes. Of the ten toponyms examined, eight underwent identifiable morphological processes, while the remaining two consisted of unaltered base forms. This finding underscores the significance of morphemic analysis in toponymic studies, particularly in clarifying meanings that are often obscured by community debates, folk etymologies, or oral traditions.

Table 1. Morphological Processes in Toponyms

No	Place Name	Root Form	Morphological Process	Output Form	Word Class	Naming Basis
1	Pondang	<i>pondang</i>	None	<i>pondang</i>	Noun	Loanword from Malay
2	Ritey	<i>ritey</i>	None	<i>ritey</i>	Noun	Historical narrative
3	Malenos	<i>lenos</i>	Prefixation: /ma-/	<i>malenos</i>	Verb	Describes natural condition
4	Maliku	<i>liku</i>	Prefixation: /ma-/	<i>maliku</i>	Verb	Community activity
5	Lopana	<i>lopa</i>	Suffixation: /-na/	<i>lopana</i>	Adverbial	Geographical condition
6	Kota Menara	Phrase	Acronym formation	<i>Kota Menara</i>	Noun	Historical gratitude
7	Ranomea	<i>rano + mea</i>	Compounding	<i>ranomea</i>	Noun	Presence of water source
8	Pinalin	<i>alin+ -pa, -in-, -an</i>	Complex affixation	<i>pinalin</i>	Verb	Community habit
9	Lopana 1	<i>lopa</i>	Suffixation: /-na/	<i>lopana 1</i>	Adverbial	Similar location to Lopana
10	Maliku 1	<i>liku</i>	Prefixation: /ma-/	<i>maliku 1</i>	Verb	Expansion of activity area

The morphological processes identified included prefixation (/ma-/), suffixation (/na/), compounding, acronym formation, and complex affixation involving multiple morphemes. These processes frequently alter the grammatical category of the root form, transforming nouns into verbs or adverbials, for instance, demonstrating how linguistic structures actively shape the way communities conceptualize and name their environment. This aligns with

Sapir's assertion by Foley that language influences perception, reinforcing the idea that toponyms are not neutral labels but cognitive constructs reflecting cultural interpretation of space.

In terms of dominant naming themes, the analysis revealed that water was the most prevalent theme, appearing in four toponyms: Malenos, Ranomea, Ritey, and Maluku 1. This reflects the region's geographical reality, as South Amurang is bordered by the sea and is characterized by numerous freshwater sources. For example, Ranomea (from rano = well, mea = white) refers to a clear, pure water source, whereas Malenos (from lenos = slippery stone, hence malenos = flowing) describes the movement of water over smooth rock. These examples support by Cablitz's observation that toponyms frequently encode direct descriptions of the physical environment, particularly those related to essential natural resources.

Community practices also play a significant role in place naming, evident in three toponyms: pinalin, maliku, and Maluku 1. Pinalin, derived from the root alin with complex affixation (-pa, -in-, -an), means "a place for resting" or "a designated spot." This name originates from the daily practices of the Kanonang community, who traditionally left their farming tools in a specific location after working in the fields. Thus, the name reflects not only a physical space but also a recurring social behavior, indicating that toponyms can emerge from habitual activities passed down through generations.

Geographical features are also central to naming, as has been observed in Lopana and Lopana 1. The term lopana is formed by adding the locative suffix /-na/ to lopa (flat), resulting in "a flat place." This accurately describes the topography of the area —low-lying land beneath a hill slope historically favored for settlement due to its accessibility. This finding corroborates Septiani et al. (2020), who argued that physical landscape features are among the most common sources of toponymic inspiration.

Historical memory and communal gratitude are embodied in Kota Menara, an acronym derived from the phrase Kanona oleh Tolungan Allah Mendapat Negeri Alasan Rakyat Asli ("Kanona, by God's Grace, Regained Native Land"). This name commemorates the return of the community to its ancestral territory after displacement caused by natural disasters. This illustrates how toponyms can function as symbolic narratives of resilience, faith, and collective identity. Moreover, Kota Menara exemplifies linguistic engineering, the deliberate construction of names to convey historical and spiritual significance.

Two toponyms, Pondang and Ritey, showed no internal morphological changes. Pondang is a loanword from Malay that refers to Pandanus tectorius (beach screw pine), a plant that is abundant in the area. Ritey originates from a local historical account: five customary leaders from Tompasso sought shelter during a light rain (maritey-ritey, meaning "raining lightly"), and the event became the basis for the place name. The use of reduplication (ritey-ritey) in the original phrase highlights the direct link between naming and natural phenomena, reinforcing the idea that toponyms often emerge from momentary events with lasting cultural resonances.

The study also reveals toponymic evolution reflecting sociocultural change. For instance, the name Lalumpe, originally referring to the soft wood used for coffins, was later transformed into Liliku ("what I love") and eventually Maluku ("mine" mine). This shift reflects a transition from a utilitarian or neutral designation to one imbued with personal and communal ownership, illustrating how naming practices evolve alongside changing social values and emotional attachments to places.

Two toponyms, Lopana 1 and Maluku 1, represent territorial extensions of existing settlements formed through the same morphological processes as their parent names. These names do not introduce new meanings but serve to distinguish adjacent areas with similar physical and social characteristics. This supports Hartati Manalu's (2022) argument that toponymic repetition occurs when communities extend their settlements into environmentally or culturally analogous zones. Based on these findings, toponyms were categorized by dominant naming themes.

Table 2. Dominant Naming Themes

Toponym	Dominate Theme
Pondang	Vegetation
Ranomea	Water
Lopana & Lopana 1	Land / Topography
Pinalin	Community Habit
Malenos	Water
Maliku & Maliku 1	Community Habit
Kota Menara	History / Gratitude
Ritey	Water

This classification revealed clear patterns of toponymic formation in South Amurang. Place names function not merely as geographical identifiers but also as cultural symbols that encode historical memory, environmental knowledge, and social values. The application of morphological analysis enables a more precise and linguistically grounded interpretation, moving beyond speculative narratives to verifiable linguistic structures. Unlike earlier studies such as (Bousquette & Putnam, 2020; Llewellyn-Beardsley et al., 2019; Smallwood et al., 2021), Gunardi and Indira (2022), and Hilmi and Savitri (2023), which emphasize historical or cultural narratives without systematic linguistic decomposition, this research successfully integrates structural linguistic analysis to produce interpretations that are both semantically accurate and academically defensible. By focusing on morphemic composition, this study resolves ambiguities and offers a replicable model for toponymic research in regions with complex local languages that are vulnerable to semantic erosion. Thus, this research contributes not only to theoretical linguistics and anthropological linguistics but also to practical applications in cultural preservation, local history education, and public policy on place naming. This demonstrates that morphological analysis is not merely a technical tool, but also a vital approach for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the face of language shift and globalization.

## Discussion

### A. Morphological Processes

The morphological complexity observed in the toponyms of South Amurang District reflects a highly structured linguistic system rather than random or arbitrary naming practices. Each toponym that undergoes affixation, compounding, or acronym formation demonstrates a deliberate linguistic act that is rooted in grammatical consistency. The frequent use of the prefix *ma-* in forms such as *Malenos* and *Maliku* suggests a productive derivational pattern that transforms nouns into stative or dynamic verbs. This process is not isolated, but is part of a broader morphological template recognized intuitively by native speakers of Tontemboan. Similarly, the suffix *-na* in *Lopana* functions as a locative marker, systematically converting adjectives into spatial adverbials. These consistent patterns indicate that toponym formation follows implicit grammatical rules, rather than spontaneous inventions. The presence of such regularity underscores the cognitive organization of spatial concepts within a language (Lalira et al., 2022). Therefore, morphological analysis reveals that place-naming is a rule-governed linguistic behavior embedded in the community's communicative competence.

The transformation of root morphemes, such as *lenos*, into *Malenos* illustrates how phonological and semantic shifts are integrated into naming conventions. The addition of */ma-/* does not merely alter form, but introduces a new grammatical category, shifting a noun into a verb that describes a natural process. This shift from "slippery stone" to "flowing" reflects a conceptual metaphor in which physical properties are associated with movement and change. Such derivations are not transparent to non-speakers, highlighting the necessity of linguistic expertise in toponymic interpretations. Without morphemic decomposition, the semantic connection between the root

and the toponym may be lost or misinterpreted. This also explains why community debates arise: older generations may retain the morphological knowledge that younger speakers lack. Thus, the process functions as a linguistic fossil, preserving older lexical and grammatical forms in modern usage. Consequently, the toponyms serve as living records of morphological evolution in Tontemboan.

Complex affixation, as seen in *pinalin*, is a layered process that combines multiple morphemes to create a specific functional meaning. The derivation from *alin* (rest) through the addition of *-pa*, *-in-*, and *-an* suggests a causative or purposive construction, indicating "a place made for resting." This multi-affix structure is rare in casual speech but is preserved in toponyms, suggesting that place names act as conservative linguistic reservoirs. This complexity implies that naming is a formalized act that possibly involves elders or cultural custodians who retain advanced morphological knowledge. Unlike everyday vocabulary, toponyms may preserve archaic or specialized morphological patterns that are no longer used in regular conversations. This makes them invaluable for linguistic documentation, especially in endangered languages such as Tontemboan. The survival of such forms in place-names highlights their role as linguistic archives. Hence, toponyms are not just spatial labels, but linguistic artifacts with historical depth.

The formation of compounds, such as *Ranomea* (*rano* + *mea*), demonstrates how semantic transparency is maintained through morphological clarity. Both components "well" and "white" are preserved without phonological erosion, allowing speakers to reconstruct meaning from constituent parts. This contrasts with opaque toponyms in other languages, where the original meanings are lost over time. The compound structure enables intergenerational transmission of meaning, provided the root lexicon remains unknown. However, when a language shift occurs, even transparent compounds can cause misinterpretation. This emphasizes the importance of preserving both vocabulary and morphological awareness. The clarity of *Ranomea* also reflects a cultural value: the visibility and purity of water are worth encoding directly in the language. Thus, compounding is a tool with both linguistic and cultural emphasis.

Acronym formation in *Kota Menara* represents a modern yet culturally grounded morphological innovation. Unlike natural morphological processes, this is a conscious symbolic construction derived from a full phrase expressing historical gratitude. This acronym retains semantic coherence by selecting words that collectively convey identity, divine assistance, and ancestral land. This shows that morphological creativity is not limited to traditional patterns, but can adapt to contemporary sociocultural needs. While it is not a standard linguistic process, it functions similarly by creating a new lexical unit with embedded meaning. The acceptance of this form by the community indicates that morphological legitimacy extends beyond grammar and includes cultural resonance. Such neologisms demonstrate language's adaptability in preserving collective memory. Therefore, even nontraditional processes contribute to the morphological richness of toponyms.

The absence of morphological change in *Pondang* and *Ritey* does not indicate linguistic simplicity, but rather a different naming strategy. *Pondang*, as a loanword from Malay, shows that borrowing is a valid alternative to internal derivation when naming reflects external cultural contact. Retention of the original form suggests that the community recognizes the word's foreign origin but integrates it into its spatial lexicon. Similarly, *Ritey* emerges from a narrative event rather than from a structural transformation that relies on collective memory rather than morphological rules. This duality shows that the toponymic system is not monolithic, but accommodates multiple pathways to meaning. Some names are formed through internal linguistic rules, whereas others are anchored in historical or experiential events. This flexibility allows the system to remain functional in different contexts. Thus, morphological variation reflects a sophisticated, multistrategy approach to naming.

The reanalysis of *Lalumpe* into *Maliku* illustrates how morphological reinterpretation accompanies sociocultural transformation. Originally referring to the soft wood used for coffins, *Lalumpe* had a neutral or even somber connotation. The shift to *Liliku* ("what I love") and finally *Maliku* ("mine") involves both phonetic



assimilation and semantic re-evaluation. While the surface form may resemble the original, the morphological basis has shifted entirely /ma-/ + /liku/ now dominates the interpretation. This process, known as folk etymology, demonstrates how communities reshape linguistic forms to align with current values. Even when historical accuracy is lost, this new morphological interpretation gains legitimacy through social consensus. The result is a name that is linguistically and emotionally appropriate for contemporary users. Hence, morphological reanalysis is a cultural renewal mechanism.

The use of numerical extensions, such as Lopana 1 and Maluku 1, demonstrates how traditional morphological patterns integrate with modern administrative practices. The numeral “1” is not a morpheme in Tontemboan, but is incorporated into the naming system through syntactic adjacency. Crucially, the core morphological structure /-na/ for location and ma for possession remains intact, preserving linguistic continuity. This indicates that communities do not abandon their linguistic logic when faced with external systems. Instead, they adapt by layering new elements onto the existing frameworks. The persistence of the original morphological process ensures that the new names remain culturally intelligible. This hybrid approach reflects linguistic resilience in the face of modernization. Toponyms thus become sites of negotiation between traditions and bureaucracy. Thus, morphological consistency serves as a form of cultural preservation.

#### B. Dominant Naming Themes

The dominance of water-related themes in the four toponyms Ranomea, Malenos, Ritey, and Maluku 1 reveals the centrality of hydrological resources in local spatial cognition. Water is not merely a physical feature but a foundational element in how the community conceptualizes and categorizes space. The repeated reference to wells, flow, and rain indicates that access to water has historically determined settlement patterns and livelihoods. These names function as environmental indicators and preserve ecological knowledge in linguistic form. Unlike abstract or symbolic names, toponyms offer practical information about landscape characteristics. This aligns with eco-linguistic principles in which language encodes survival-relevant environmental data. Therefore, water-based naming reflects both material necessity and prioritization.

Geographical features, particularly land topography, play a key role in naming, as observed in the Lopana and Lopana 1. The term derived from lopa (flat) with the locative suffix /-na/ directly describes the area’s low-lying, accessible terrain. This naming pattern shows that communities prioritize functional characteristics when assigning identities to space. Historically, flat land was preferred for agriculture and settlement, making it a salient feature worth encoding linguistically. The repetition in Lopana 1 further confirms that physical similarity guides naming in the newly developed areas. This suggests that environmental perception remains the primary driver of toponym formation. Thus, land-based names serve as practical descriptors that support orientation and land-use.

Community habits emerged as a significant naming theme, particularly in Pinalin and Maluku. These names originate not from natural features but from recurring social practices, such as resting after farming or claiming a shared space. The fact that such routines become permanent place-names indicates their cultural importance. Everyday actions, when repeated across generations, gain symbolic weight and are memorialized in language. This demonstrates that culture is embedded not only in rituals, but also in mundane habitual behaviors. After practice, naming reinforces collective memory and social continuity. Therefore, habit-based toponyms function as intangible cultural heritage sites.

Historical events and collective memory shape names, such as Ritey and Kota Menara. Ritey originates from the moment leaders seek shelter during light rain, turning an episodic event into a lasting spatial identifier. Kota Menara, in contrast, commemorates a broader historical journey of displacement and return. Both cases show that toponyms can encapsulate the narratives of resilience, faith, and identity. Unlike physical features, these names

preserve the social and emotional experiences. They transform personal and communal memories into public and shared knowledge. Hence, history-based naming is a form of oral historiography.

Pondang, named after a plant, highlights the role of vegetation in toponymic classification. The presence of *Pandanus tectorius* once defines the area's ecological characteristics and resource value. Even after the plant no longer dominates the landscape, the name persists as a historical marker. This shows that toponyms can outlive the features they describe, thus becoming relics of past environments. Plant-based naming also reflects traditional ecological knowledge and land use practices. Therefore, these names contribute to the environmental history and biodiversity documentation. Although less frequent, vegetation-based themes remain culturally significant.

The evolution from Lalumpe to Maliku illustrates how naming reflects the shifting social values. A name associated with death and utility is transformed into one that expresses affection and ownership. This shift indicates a desire to associate places with positive personal emotions rather than with neutral or negative connotations. Language, thus, becomes a tool for cultural repositioning and emotional reconnection to land. This new name fosters a sense of belonging and pride. This process shows that naming is not static but responsive to changing community values. Hence, value-based transformation is a powerful force in toponymic changes.

The integration of multiple themes water, land, habit, history, vegetation, and gratitude demonstrates the multidimensionality of the toponymic meaning. No single factor dominates exclusively; instead, names emerge from the intersection of environment, memory, and social practice. This complexity reflects the holistic worldview of the community, in which language, nature, and culture are deeply intertwined. Toponyms are not reducible to one origin, but are layered with multiple meanings over time. This richness makes them valuable in interdisciplinary research in linguistics, anthropology, and geography. The dominance of certain themes varies according to the location and historical context. Therefore, toponyms must be interpreted as products of dynamic cultural ecosystems.

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully demonstrated that morphological processes play a central role in the formation of toponyms in South Amurang District. Eight out of ten place names underwent morphemic transformation through affixation, compounding, or acronym formation, indicating the presence of a structured and consistent naming system. Processes such as the addition of the prefix /ma-/ and the suffix /-na/ are not arbitrary, but follow linguistic rules internalized by Tontemboan speakers. These findings confirm that morphemic analysis is not merely relevant, but essential for uncovering the true meanings of place names. Without morphological decomposition, many toponyms would remain ambiguous or are misinterpreted based on non-scientific narratives. This approach has effectively resolved community debates regarding the origins of names such as Pinalin and Malenos. Thus, linguistic morphology has proven to be a valid and reliable analytical tool in toponymic studies.

The dominance of naming themes reveals that communities shape their spatial identity based on direct experiences with their environment and history. Water emerged as the most prominent theme, evident in four toponyms, referring to vital resources, such as wells, flowing water, and rainfall. This reflects the community's dependence on the natural elements that support daily life and subsistence activities. Beyond water, social habits, geographical conditions, and historical events also serve as meaningful foundations for place-naming. Each theme unveils a different dimension of the human-spatial relationship, ranging from practical function to symbolic value. This pattern indicates that place-naming is a complex, layered form of cognitive classification. Therefore, toponyms are not mere labels, but reflections of the local worldview and cultural perception of the environment.

The integration of structural linguistic and anthropological approaches provides a balanced analytical framework that bridges forms and meanings. Djajasudarma's morphological theory enables systematic identification

of meaning units, while Duranti's perspective uncovers the social and cultural contexts behind each name. This combination strengthens interpretive validity by avoiding reductionism, which focuses solely on the linguistic form or narrative content. The study confirms that toponyms can only be fully understood when analyzed using both lenses. As a result, the derived meanings are not only linguistically accurate but also culturally significant. This analytical model can be replicated in other regions with complex and endangered languages. Thus, this study offers both theoretical and methodological contributions with substantial academic value.

The findings of this research have practical implications for the preservation of local language and culture amid globalization. Morphologically based toponym documentation can be developed into teaching materials for regional language education among the younger generations. Local governments can utilize these insights to formulate place-naming policies that are contextually grounded and meaningful. Furthermore, toponyms with a deep cultural understanding can serve as cultural assets and historical tourism attractions. Such efforts support the revitalization of the Tontemboan language, which is becoming increasingly underused. Place names, often regarded as trivial, are among the last strongholds of local identity. With a more scientific and in-depth understanding, toponyms can serve as powerful instruments for preserving intangible cultural heritage that remains profoundly valuable, although invisible.

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