THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVES ON GASTRONOMY OF NIAS CULINARY

Afore Tahir Harefa[1], Wina Anjelina Harefa[2], Silvan Herniyanti Telaumbanua[3], Putrawan Saleh Laia[4]

1,2,3,4 *University of Nias, Gunungsitoli, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia*

Corresponding author's email: aforetahirharefa@unias.ac.id

Abstract

This research looks at how Nias culinary names represent sociolinguistic meanings in the gastronomy of Nias traditional foods. The study examines three issues: (1) how Nias culinary names function as a symbol of identity, (2) how they reflect variation and change in naming practices, and (3) how they transmit cultural knowledge across generations. As a result, the research seeks to explain the sociolinguistic functions encoded in the naming reasoning for Nias food items. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered from community explanations of thirteen Nias cuisine names and analyzed using theme coding based on wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) sociolinguistic elements. The findings show that all culinary names use local Li Niha/ Nias name naming, which indicates affiliation and group participation. Several names also exhibit systematic variation and change due to process-based naming patterns, contextual use in adat and hospitality contexts, and minimal evidence of modernity and cross-food comparability. Most artifacts also serve as cultural transmission instruments, conserving intergenerational information regarding preservation techniques, traditional culinary skills, customary etiquette, and historical survival practices. These findings indicate that Nias gastronomy is a linguistic cultural archive in which food naming promotes identification, adapts to social settings, and preserves historical values.
Keywords: *gastronomy, sociolinguistics, Nias culinary Naming, Li Niha*

INTRODUCTION

Local cuisines are becoming more popular in Indonesia because of tourism, digital marketing, and culinary company expansion. However, gastronomy is more than just "food culture"; it is also a language and social activity in which people select specific names for meals, ingredients, and cooking processes, and those choices might indicate identity, pride, modernity, or tradition. Culinary conversation and naming in multilingual contexts become areas where local languages contend with national and global languages, as well as where cultural legacy can be preserved or progressively transformed. This is especially important for island communities like Nias Island, whose cultural identity is closely linked to indigenous knowledge systems and oral traditions.

Recent study on culinary legacy highlights the role of cuisine in defining cultural identity and intangible heritage, as well as how

communities represent themselves to outsiders. Lin et al., (2021) point out that cuisine has "identity" value and is frequently used for destination branding and cultural preservation. However, from a sociolinguistics standpoint, the crucial question is how that identity is expressed via language in the terms individuals use, the variations they choose in different settings, and how culinary vocabulary is passed down through generations.

Culinary terminology in Nias Island serves as a specific starting point for studying language-culture interactions. Zai & Daulay (2023) conducted a culinary linguistic study on the vast naming patterns of Nias ethnic dishes, demonstrating that dishes names reflect materials, cooking procedures, tools or places, customary regulations, and cultural values. While this study is crucial for mapping linguistic structures and meanings, it does not yet address sociolinguistic dynamics such as generational variation, code-mixing in public business, or the function of culinary language in everyday identity performance. In various Indonesian contexts, sociolinguistics research suggest that food-talk may convey language attitudes, pride, and lexical borrowing (Seli and wijaya, 2018). Similarly, linguistic landscape research in culinary venues demonstrates that public signboards and menus may index identity and multicultural positioning through language choice Benu et al., (2025). These threads imply that Nias culinary may be studied not just as a cultural product, but also as a sociolinguistics arena in which identity, change, and heritage transmission are contested.

As a result, this research stands at the connection of culinary linguistic documentation of Nias foods and sociolinguistic analyses of language choice, identity, and variation in food-related language. Building on Wardhaugh and Fuller's sociolinguistics theories, this study views language as (1) a sign of identity, (2) a system of variation and change, and (3) a tool for cultural transmission. The research focuses on three connected indicators: the use of Nias language in naming foods, ingredients, processes, and the perceived pride associated with it; differences in food terminology across generations and contexts, including Nias Indonesian code-mixing; and family or community efforts to pass down culinary terms and ritual expressions.

As a result, the problem addressed in this research is that the sociolinguistic dimensions of Nias gastronomy, such as how culinary language indexes identity, how it varies across social groups and settings, and how it is transmitted, have received little attention in comparison to studies that focus on naming structures or cultural meanings. This gap is significant since less intergenerational transmission of culinary lexicons has been found in other Indonesian settings, where younger speakers demonstrate worse knowledge and usage of traditional food terminology than older community members. If comparable tendencies emerge in Nias, culinary vocabulary loss will not only lower lexical richness but may also degrade culturally imprinted information about ingredients, preparation procedures, and customary values.

The goal of this research is to analyze Nias culinary gastronomy through a sociolinguistics lens, by: (1) examining how Nias culinary terms function as identity symbols in community discourse; (2) identifying variation and social meaning in food-related language use across

generations and communicative contexts (home, community events, and culinary commerce); and (3) describing how Nias culinary language is maintained or shifted through cultural transmission. This article provides an empirically supported account of how local gastronomy is socially and linguistically constructed, with implications for cultural preservation efforts, community-based tourism narratives, and language maintenance initiatives that acknowledge food vocabulary as a living part of linguistic heritage.

METHODS

This research used a qualitative research approach to investigate how Nias culinary practices create social meaning through language, in keeping with the article's focus on The Sociolinguistics Perspectives on Gastronomy of Nias Culinary. Following Creswell (2018), a qualitative method is appropriate because it allows researchers to evaluate cultural practices by paying close attention to participants' meanings, social circumstances, and naturally occurring language usage. More precisely, the study was designed as a qualitative descriptive inquiry, which seeks to produce a full, practical account of a phenomenon by methodically identifying patterns in participants' experiences and interpretations (Ayton, 2023). In our setting, the "phenomenon" encompasses not only the meal itself, but also the sociolinguistic activity accomplished through culinary labeling, narrative, interaction, and local words associated with Nias gastronomy.

The data included (1) spoken accounts from community members (e.g., food sellers, home cooks, cultural practitioners, and consumers) and (2) supporting cultural texts (e.g., menu names, labels, brief written descriptions from local promotion materials, and relevant documentation related to Nias culinary events). Purposive sampling was used to pick participants since the research requires information rich speakers who actively practice, disseminate, and understand Nias culinary culture (Ayton, 2023). When access was limited, recruitment might be expanded by recommendations (snowball sampling), which Ayton (2023) defines as beneficial when participants are more easily accessible through existing community networks. The ultimate number of participants was selected flexibly based on informational sufficiency and repeating patterns rather than a predetermined statistical need, in accordance with Ayton (2023)'s qualitative sampling logic.

Data were mostly collected using semi-structured interviews, which allow researchers to learn how individuals perceive events and explain cultural meanings in their own words (Dursun, 2023). The interview protocol was developed directly from the study's analytical framework and indicators, which were included in the project file. It was then operationalized into guiding questions that addressed the three sociolinguistics elements used in the analysis.

In practice, we approached interviews as collaborative meaning-making interactions. Beyond "asking questions," we urged participants to narrate, provide examples, and explain local words, as this is where sociolinguistic evidence is frequently obvious (Dursun, 2023). As a result, the interviewer employed probing and follow-up questions to extract full explanations rather than brief affirmations. Brief field observations were

also employed to increase contextual validity (for example, how dishes are introduced in cultural settings), and documentation was collected as needed. Combining various sources aligns with triangulation as a credibility approach since it allows interpretations to be tested across methodologies and data kinds rather than depending on a single source of evidence (Ayton, 2023).

Data analysis used thematic analysis because it is adaptable for discovering structured meaning across a dataset while yet allowing for context-based interpretation (Ayton, 2023). Analytically, the study combined deductive and inductive logic: deductively, coding began with the three framework elements specified in the project indicators. Inductively, sub themes were developed from participants' recurring explanations and examples (Ayton, 2023). The approach followed Ayton's (2023) practical phase of familiarization (repeated reading/listening), initial coding, theme creation, refining, and reporting, with themes backed by many data extracts rather than a single tale.

According to the researchers, this rubric helped keep the interpretation disciplined: rather than claiming that a dish "represents identity" in a vague way, the analysis had to show how strongly identity meanings were evidenced in naming, narrative, or social use, as well as what linguistic/cultural proof supported that claim.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS
FINDING

This section reports and interprets the updated findings by applying Wardhaugh and Fuller's (2015) three sociolinguistics elements: (1) language as a symbol of identity, (2) language as a system of variation and change, and (3) language as a tool for cultural transmission. The dataset now includes 13 Nias culinary terms (Li Niha and locally used labels) with participant explanations of naming motivations. Overall, the findings show that Nias culinary naming is a sociolinguistics practice: it encodes social respect and identity, highlights process based naming and adaptation, and preserves intergenerational knowledge about tools, techniques, and historical living conditions.

Table 1. Nias Culinary Names and Naming Motivations

No	Culinary Name (*Li Niha*)	Key Meaning	Main Naming Motivation (From Participants' Explanation)
1	Ni'owuru	Salted/preserved pork	Preservation technique, pre-refrigeration survival (3–5 months)
2	Fakhe Ni'falõgu	Rice "placed face-down"	Social symbolism of unity, served for respected guests and cooked in clay pot (*bowoa tambu*)
3	Babae	Mung bean-based dish	Restricted to ceremonies / honored guests (adat)
4	Gowi Ni'fufu	Pounded tuber (sweet potato/cassava)	Process based naming; staple substitution when rice was expensive; traditional

			pounding
5	Löma	Sticky rice cooked in bamboo	Sticky rice cooked in young bamboo; used in forests/travel; durable without pots.
6	Gia Ni'fale	Fish "burned/roasted in young banana leaf"	Technique to remove sap/enable consumption linked to farming context
7	Gae Ni'bogö	Banana roasted on embers	Banana roasted on embers; linked to shifting cultivation and campfires.
8	Lehedalö Ni'fange	Taro leaves in thick coconut milk gravy	Banana roasted on embers; linked to shifting cultivation and campfires.
9	Bulu Gowirio Ni'tutu	Pounded cassava & cassava leaves	Process based naming; traditional mortar (*la tandraolo*) / in modern sometimes people use blender
10	Fakhe Bulu Damo	Rice served on wide "belalang leaf"	Serving medium; aroma; etiquette/adab and adat value
11	Bawi Ni'bini'õgõ	Pork seasoned with spices grilled on banana leaf	Ingredient choice (young piglets); quick-cook for adat/limited supplies
12	Galametura	Steamed cake in banana leaf	Soft steamed cake; wrapped banana leaf; "like nagasari without banana"; simple ingredients
13	Godo-godo	Sweet cassava staple balls	Sweet potato staple shaped into balls; name follows shaping/forming process.

After presenting the list of culinary names and their naming motivations in Table 1, the analysis moves beyond description to examine how these names function sociolinguistically. The naming explanations show that a single culinary term often carries more than literal meaning: some names index cultural values and social respect, others highlight processes and historical adaptations to mobility or scarcity, and many encode inherited knowledge about traditional tools, preparation rules, and community practices. Therefore, Table 2 classifies the 13 culinary items according to Wardhaugh and Fuller's (2015) three elements identity, variation or change, and cultural transmission to clarify which sociolinguistics functions are most salient in the dataset. Because culinary naming can simultaneously signal identity, reflect change, and transmit cultural knowledge, several items are interpreted as overlapping across elements.

Table 2. Classification of Nias Culinary Items across the Three Elements

No	Element	Number of Food Included	Short Reasons (why each fits the element)	Percentages
1	Identity and Social Meaning	13	All of the items use local Li Niha / Nias community naming, which signals a sense of belonging and group membership.	100%
2	Linguistic Variation & Naming Strategy	7	1. Fakhe Nifalogu (context of honoring respected guests / a symbol of togetherness) 2. Babae (adat context / served for honored guests) 3. Fakhe bulu damo (etiquette/adat context) 4. Bulu Gowirio ni tutu (shift from traditional to modern tools) 5. Gowi Nifufu (socio-economic condition: "rice used to be expensive") 6. Galametura (comparison with "nagasari" language contact/terminological variation) 7. Loma (past livelihood context: travel/forest journeys)	53.8%
3	Cultural Transmission & Historical Memory	11	1. Ni'owuru (preservation practice before refrigerators) 2. Fakhe Nifalogu (clay-pot requirement and banquet/hospitality etiquette) 3. Babae (customary/adat rule) 4. Gowi Nifufu (history of substituting rice) 5. Loma (heritage bamboo-cooking technique)	84.6%

			6. Gia ni fale (knowledge of removing sap) 7. Gae nibogö (older practice linked to shifting farming) 8. Lehedalö nifange (slow-cooking technique to reduce sap) 9. Bulu Gowirio ni tutu (traditional tools and processing technique) 10. Fakhe bulu damo (etiquette/adat values + belief about aroma) 11. Bawi binogo (knowledge of ingredient selection and adat context)	

While Table 2 provides a concise classification and justification for each dish, Figure 1 offers a visual summary of the distribution of the elements across the dataset. The figure therefore helps readers quickly see which elements are most widely represented among the 13 culinary names.
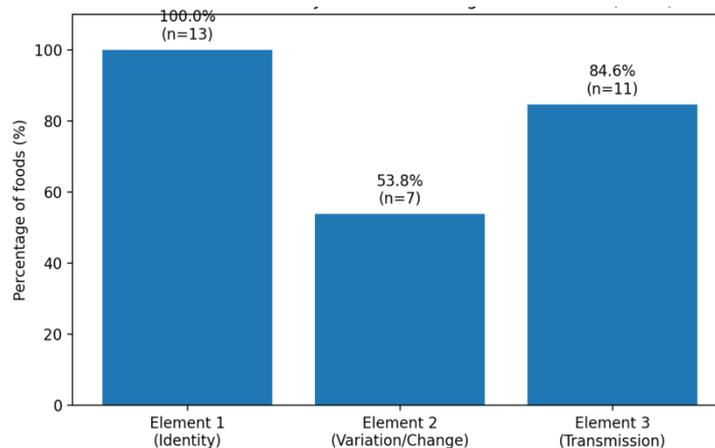

Figure 1. Distribution of Nias Culinary Names across Sociolinguistic Elements

DISCUSSION

The data reveal that Nias culinary naming is more than just identifying food; it is a sociolinguistic process with cultural significance. According to Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015), language may serve as identity marking, organized variation, and cultural transmission all at the

same time, and Table 2 demonstrates this multifunctionality in the Nias culinary lexicon.

First, the fact that all 13 names suit Language as a marker of identification shows that *Li Niha* culinary phrases substantially correlate with group affiliation and cultural standing. Names like Fakhe Nifalogu and Babae do more than just identify foods; they also represent social ties (unity, respect, and honor) and cultural norms for presenting food to important visitors. This is consistent with larger language and identity study, which sees linguistic choices as "indexical resources" through which communities express affiliation and cultural meaning. Lin et al., (2021) describe gastronomy as a fundamental marker of destination identity and cultural legacy, implying that food terminology and narratives are frequently crucial to how communities define themselves.

Second, the 7 names defined as language as a system of variation and change demonstrate that data has regular structural patterns in the way culinary acts and processes are represented. Recurrent forms such as ni fale, ni tutu, nifufu, and nifange show that naming is not arbitrary, but rather follows identifiable patterns that associate linguistic form with culturally meaningful processes (e.g., "processed by roasting," "processed by pounding," "processed in thick coconut gravy"). This lends credence to sociolinguistics' claims that variation is systematic, with various forms encoding social and environmental meaning rather than being inaccurate or unintentional. A cross cultural sociolinguistics perspective also stresses the importance of interpreting variation within its cultural context (not only from dominant-language assumptions), which fits approach in reading *Li Niha* morphology as meaningful cultural organization. Moreover, studies of rapid linguistic change in modern communication (e.g., digital contexts) still reinforce the general point that linguistic forms shift and adapt due to context and social practice supporting the idea that food naming conventions can also evolve while remaining systematic.

Third, the 11 names under language as a medium for cultural transmission provide compelling evidence that culinary naming preserves intergenerational knowledge. The names frequently maintain practical "how-to" cultural memory: preservation without freezers (*Ni'owuru*), bamboo cooking while traveling (*Loma*), slow-cooking to extract sap and thicken coconut sauce (*Lehedalö nifange*), or presenting with specific leaves and etiquette standards (*Fakhe bulu damo*). In heritage and tourism study, Kalenjuk Pivarski et al., (2023) underline that culinary heritage is important for sustainability and regional development since it conveys cultural knowledge and local value beyond simply consumption. Similarly, Aguirre et al., (2024) emphasize that gastronomic legacy encompasses traditions, authenticity, and transmission throughout time, supporting the idea that names operate as condensed cultural narratives of skill, tools, and values.

Importantly, the findings suggest that a single dish name may serve as both an identification marker and a means of cultural transmission. This overlap is common in sociolinguistics because a single linguistic sign can have many social meanings at once. Naming is often regarded in gastrolinguistics as a means of conveying cultural meaning. Nurlina et al., (2025) demonstrate that food names may convey cultural cognition,

values, and symbolic purposes rather than just serving as labels, similar to how Li Niha names communicate cooking logic and social values. Similarly, Nurlina et al., (2024) define culinary terminology and practices as culturally semantic resources in traditional rituals, supporting the decision to regard Nias food naming as discourse that contains social meaning rather than just language.

To summarize, Nias culinary names serve as (1) a marker of Nias identity, (2) a patterned linguistic system connecting form to culturally relevant processes, and (3) a tool of cultural transmission that preserves traditional knowledge and values.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESSTION
CONCLUSIONS

This research shows that the sociolinguistics meanings of Nias culinary naming extend beyond simple food labeling. Based on Wardhaugh and Fuller's (2015) framework, the findings indicate that Nias culinary names function as a symbol of identity because all items employ local Li Niha/community naming that signals cultural belonging and group membership. The analysis also demonstrates that a substantial portion of the names reflect systematic variation and change, as several terms encode patterned linguistic forms and socially shaped naming practices (e.g., naming based on process, tool shifts from traditional to modern, and cross-food comparisons). At the same time, most items serve as a tool for cultural transmission, because their naming rationales preserve intergenerational knowledge about preservation methods, traditional cooking techniques, customary etiquette, and historical living conditions. Therefore, the sociolinguistic perspective helps clarify that Nias gastronomy is not only a culinary tradition but also a linguistic resource that maintains cultural identity, records social and historical experience, and sustains cultural knowledge through everyday language. Documenting and interpreting these culinary names is important for strengthening cultural awareness and supporting the preservation of Li Niha based heritage meanings amid ongoing modernization.

SUGGESSTION

The findings of this research suggest several implications for cultural preservation, education, and future research. First, community stakeholders and cultural institutions are encouraged to actively document and promote Nias culinary terminology in Li Niha as part of language maintenance efforts, since culinary naming has been shown to function as a carrier of identity and intergenerational knowledge. Second, educational institutions may integrate local culinary vocabulary and narratives into language and cultural learning materials to strengthen students' awareness of linguistic heritage in meaningful everyday contexts. Third, future researchers are recommended to expand the scope of investigation by examining language use in culinary discourse across broader communicative domains such as tourism promotion, digital media, and intergenerational interaction patterns. Through these efforts, Nias culinary language can continue to function not only as a cultural symbol but also as a living sociolinguistic resource.

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