

Youth Gang Names in Palu City: An Anthropological Study

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ABSTRACT

During the 1990s, Palu City witnessed a notable social phenomenon characterized by the emergence of various youth gangs. These gangs adopted diverse names, incorporating elements such as the Kaili language, foreign languages, and acronyms. The primary aim of this research is to scrutinize the nomenclature of youth gangs in Palu City through the analytical lens of anthropological linguistics. The data collection methodology employed in this study featured the researcher as the principal instrument, involving the recording and observation of youth gang names in Palu City. The analytical approach applied in this research encompassed a systematic and objective content analysis. The outcomes of the study unveiled linguistic phenomena, including (1) the utilization of the Kaili language, (2) the incorporation of foreign languages, (3) the adoption of acronyms, and (4) instances of language resistance evident in the naming practices of youth gangs in Palu City.

KEYWORDS

Gang Names;
Youth;
Anthropological Linguistics.

ABSTRAK

Salah satu fenomena sosial di Kota Palu di era 90-an adalah banyaknya bermunculan geng-geng anak muda. Nama-nama geng tersebut cukup beragam, antara lain ada yang menggunakan bahasa Kaili, bahasa asing dan adapula yang merupakan akronim. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengkaji nama-nama geng anak muda di Kota Palu melalui kajian linguistik antropologi. Teknik pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan peneliti sebagai instrument utama penelitian. Data-data yang dikumpulkan adalah nama-nama geng anak muda di Kota Palu melalui teknik catat dan simak. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah teknik kajian isi secara sistematis dan obyektif. Adapun hasil penelitian adalah adanya fenomena kebahasaan yang meliputi (1) penggunaan bahasa Kaili, (2) penggunaan bahasa asing, (3) penggunaan akronim dan (4) resistensi bahasa) dalam penggunaan nama-nama geng anak muda di Kota Palu.

KATAKUNCI

Nama Geng;
Anak Muda;
Antropologi Linguistik.

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1. Introduction

Most parents have experienced social circles during their adolescence, commonly referred to as gangs. The term “gang” encompasses both positive and negative connotations. Societal norms generally categorize gangs as associations of friends or cliques. In the English-Indonesian Dictionary by Echols & Shadily (2003), a gang is defined as a group that asserts control over a specific locality within their residential area. Alternatively, according to Borba (2008), gangs represent closely-knit friendship groups engaging in various activities together, not necessarily of a negative nature. A gang may also be understood as a gathering of individuals who come together due to shared characteristics like social background, community, or education. Such groups often convene to participate in collective activities and assert influence over particular regions.

In the city of Palu, since the 1990s, various distinctive and intriguing youth gangs have emerged, spreading across different neighbourhoods within the city. These youth gangs' names go beyond mere labels, serving as indicators of group or community identity. This phenomenon reflects a linguistic aspect intertwined with social groups, communities, occupations, and religions. While the presence of these gangs often brings about positive impacts, there are instances where excessive fanaticism among their followers results in negative consequences. It is not uncommon for some gangs to engage in criminal activities or violence, causing distress within the community. Therefore, it would be intriguing to analyse the names of these youth gangs through the lens of linguistic anthropology or anthropological linguistics.

According to Wortham (2008), linguistic anthropology is a branch of linguistics that explores language variation and usage within culture, examining language characteristics associated with social groups, religions, occupations, or kinship. Meanwhile, Hoyer (2006) defines anthropological linguistics as a linguistic branch that investigates the relationship between language and culture, primarily observing how language serves as a tool in everyday social interactions. Linguistic anthropology initiates its investigations from linguistic observations, delving into the culture and perspectives of specific language-speaking communities. The discipline scrutinizes linguistic occurrences not solely within the realm of language but, notably, in connection with culture (Suhandono, 2015).

Among the linguistic tools employed by youth groups or gangs, (1) acronyms, defined as abbreviations in the form of letter or syllable combinations, mirror natural words both in writing and pronunciation, as per the Big Indonesian Dictionary. Additionally, (2) language resistance, also referred to as anti-language, constitutes a form of opposition by groups acting in a repressive manner (Wijana, 2014). Societal language practices, including slang and language games among children and youth gangs, manifest a resistance to standardized language, encompassing both formal and informal educational contexts.



Figure 1. The Nero-nero gang perpetrated an act of vandalism on Jalan Anoa in the North Tatura Subdistrict of Palu City

Furthermore, (3) Kaili, the native language with the highest number of speakers in Palu City, finds extensive usage in the names of numerous youth gangs. Lastly, (5) certain youth gangs in Palu City adopt the terminology of musical genres. Diverging from prior research primarily centred on school children's gangs, this study is more comprehensive and intricate. Beyond gangs formed around shared hobbies, friendships, and social communities, there exist gangs of young individuals emerging due to common habits and cultural ties.

2. Method

This research adopts the content analysis methodology to examine the names of youth gangs in Palu City. The focus of the investigation is primarily on analysing the meaning or messages conveyed by these gang names. Consequently, this study is characterized by a descriptive nature, providing a detailed account of the names attributed to youth gangs in Palu City. The analysis of these gang names is approached through the lens of linguistic anthropology, encompassing factors such as social groups, religion, work, and kinship.

The data collection process involved a meticulous examination and documentation of the names of youth gangs in Palu City. Many of these gang names are found inscribed on building walls, constituting a form of vandalism in both vacant structures and public facilities. Semantic validity is applied in this research, ensuring that the data pertaining to the names of youth gangs in Palu City reflects linguistic phenomena, encompassing the use of acronyms, language resistance, the incorporation of the Kaili language, foreign languages, and terminology associated with musical genres.

The data analysis proceeds through content analysis techniques, involving stages such as recording, data reduction, categorization, and inference. Recording is facilitated through the use of data cards, with data units extracted from word units or vocabulary that describe the names of youth gangs in Palu City. The analysis encompasses understanding the meaning of these names and identifying linguistic phenomena such as the use of acronyms, language resistance, the incorporation of Kaili, foreign languages, and musical genre terms. Following the classification of data, a thorough organization, filtration, and elimination of irrelevant information

are undertaken. The inference stage involves the interpretation of linguistic phenomena underlying the names of youth gangs in Palu City.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the findings derived from the research on youth gang names in Palu City, a total of 34 gang names were identified, each carrying diverse meanings. Following the classification process, it was discerned that 11 gang names incorporated the Kaili language, while 12 utilized acronyms in both Indonesian and Kaili. Additionally, 6 gang names employed language resistance, while the remaining 5 drew inspiration from music genres and legendary figures. The subsequent table presents the names of youth gangs in Palu City.

Table 1. The Names of Youth Gangs in Palu City

No	Gang Names	Meaning	Location
1	Tholarez	Individuals from the mountains or individuals from remote areas	Birobuli Village
2	Riboboti	<i>Riumba Boti Risitu Kami</i> (Where there is a party, there we are)	Lere Village
3	Romansa	Great, Acts of Heroism	Balaroa and Bayaoge Village
4	Bongkeng	Figure/Legend of the Brawl King	Besusu Village
5	Golgo 13	Character in a Comic Series (Assassin)	Balaroa Village
6	Chaphizta	(Impudent, Mischievous)	Besusu Village
7	Nero Nero	(Sleeping/Gathering Together)	Nort Tatura Village
8	Doken	(One of the music genres)	South Lolu Village
9	Apastu	Child of the Old Market	Baru Village
10	Pordeo	<i>Porotaka Tenggedeo</i> (Slamming and Knocking His/Her Head.)	Nunu Village
11	Nabanga	Broken Shell	North Lolu Village
12	Pink Pizza	Pink Colored Pizza	Ujuna Village
13	Aurel	Motorcycle Gang Name	Talise Village
14	Akamba	Child of the New Village	Baru Village
15	Tora Tora	Remember	Besusu Village
16	Zinzano	Hanging Out Here and There	Ujuna Village
17	Tr Kids	Joy Park Kids	Lere Village
18	Sepodonk	Around Kedondong Street	Donggala Kodi Village
19	Kantata Pleaset	(One of the music groups)	Besusu Village
20	Mazholank	Destroyer (Troublemaker)	North Tatura Village
21	Rumbeska	Where There Are Women, There We Are	Nunu Village
22	Grand Funk	Music Genre	Besusu Village
23	Mandarin	Children of Mandar Bayam	Balaroa Village
24	Potlot	Band Group	Lolu Village
25	Spock Crazy	One of the figures/legends	Besusu Village
26	Gangster	Criminal Organization	North Lolu Village
27	Loto	Toraja Alley	South Lolu Village
28	Mancaner	Future Hell-bound Person	Tondo Village
29	Pio Pio	Children	Ujuna Village
30	Valhala Valanguni	House of God (a kind of tree)	Talise Village
31	Timpozou	<i>Monitor Lizard</i>	Tatura Village
32	Speak Camp	Band Group	Lolu Utara Village
33	Anuta	Children of Nunu Tawanjuka	Tawanjuka Village
34	Kurempe	(Thrower)	Balaroa Village
35	Rascal	(Scoundrel/Cruel)	Birobuli Village

The data provided above indicates the existence of 35 distinct youth gang names in Palu City. The linguistic characteristics underlying these numerous gang names predominantly feature acronyms, along with the incorporation of Kaili and English. In addition to these, there is a notable presence of language resistance, references to legends or idolized figures, and influences from various musical genres or groups. The diverse array of gang names is undoubtedly influenced by the residents of Palu City, who hail from a range of socio-cultural, educational, and social community backgrounds.

Palu City is not exclusively inhabited by the indigenous Kaili tribe; it also accommodates individuals from diverse ethnicities such as Javanese, Balinese, Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, and others. Interactions among these varied ethnic groups foster social connections, leading to the formation of friendships and, subsequently, the conception of groups, organizations, and even gangs. Almost every Village within Palu City boasts its own gang name, reflecting a multitude of motivations for the establishment of these gangs.

3.1. Use of Acronyms

An acronym denotes an abbreviation constituted by a combination of letters, syllables, or other components, both written and pronounced as a complete word (Moehkardi, 2016). The names adopted by youth gangs in Palu City predominantly adhere to the utilization of acronyms, which represent abbreviated forms combining syllables or letters pronounced as integral words. Illustrative examples include Brimob (mobile brigade), posyandu (integrated service post), warkop (coffee shop), and Kopassus (special forces command). The subsequent section delineates the various types of acronyms identified in the nomenclature of youth gangs in Palu City.

a. Syllabic Fusion with Complete Words

Data regarding the appellations of youth gangs in Palu City, employing acronyms that amalgamate syllables and full words to constitute the gang's name, include the following examples:

- Pordeo (Porotaka Tenggedeo), a collective of young individuals situated in Nunu Village.
- Loto (along Toraja), a group of youths located along Jalan Swadaya in North Lolu Village.

b. Unrestricted Fusion of Word Components

Several youth gang titles in Palu City showcase a fusion of word components in an unrestrained manner, exemplified by:

- Sepodonk (Around Kedondong Street), denoting a gang of young individuals situated on Jalan Kedondong in Donggala Kodi Village.
- Mandarin (Children of Mandar Bayam), the designation for a gang of youth located on Jalan Bayam in Balaroa Village.

- Apastu (Old Market Children), representing a youth gang in the Tua Market Complex in Baru Village.
- Akamba (New Village Children), the appellation for a youth gang in Baru Village.
- Anuta (Children of Nunu Tawanjuka), the collective name for a group of young individuals hailing from Tawanjuka and Nunu Villages.

3.2. Linguistic Resistance

The term “language resistance” is synonymous with “anti-language,” referring to a distinct language employed by those who are subjugated. Anti-language fundamentally serves as a form of resistance from groups acting oppressively (Baihui & Fengjie, 2017). Consequently, societal language practices, including slang and language use among young people, including youth gangs, represent a form of rebellion against the standardized language taught in educational institutions (Eriksen, 1992; Neshkovska, 2020).

Upon examining the nomenclature of youth gangs in Palu City, manifestations of linguistic resistance become evident in the deliberate distortion or misspelling of Indonesian, regional languages, and foreign languages. As a means of resisting these languages, alterations such as changing the letter ‘g’ to ‘k’ and the letter ‘s’ to ‘z’ are observed. This resistance is exemplified in the names of the youth gangs listed below:

- Sepodonk (Around Kedondong street) in Donggala Kodi Village
- Mazolank (masolang, damaged) in Ujuna Village
- Pakazolank (pakasolang, destroyer) in North Tatura Village
- Chaphizta (naughty, impudent) in West Besusu Village
- Tholarez (people from the mountains/inland) in Birobuli Village
- Zinzano (hanging out here and there) in Ujuna Village.

3.3. Utilization of the Kaili Language

The Kaili language, native to the Kaili tribe, serves as a prevalent means of communication within the community, including the younger demographic, in Palu City. It is noteworthy that many youth gangs in Palu City incorporate vocabulary from the Kaili language, particularly terms indicative of habits, communities, or age groups.

- Kurempe (throwing): A gang in Balaroa Village characterized by a penchant for disturbing or throwing objects at people’s residences.
- Riboboti (where there's a party, there's us): A youth gang in Balaroa Village known for regularly attending wedding celebrations.
- Pio Pio (children): A gang consisting specifically of children in Baru Village.
- Pordeo (porotaka tenggedeo - slam and knock on the head): A group of young individuals in Nunu Village frequently involved in disturbances and altercations.
- Timpozou (lizards): A youth gang in North Tatura Village.
- Nabanga (Cracked Shell): A gang in North Lolu Village notorious for causing disturbances.

- Rumbeska (Riumba Bereintona Risitu Kami - Where There Are Women, There We Are): A youth gang in Nunu Village recognized for consistently socializing with girls.
- Tora Tora (Remember Remember/Remind Each Other): A youth gang in Besusu Village.
- Tholarez (people from the interior/mountains): A gang of young individuals in Birobuli Village associating themselves as children from the interior or mountains.
- Nero Nero (Sleeping/Gathering Together): A gang in North Tatura Subdistrict known for its frequent involvement in brawls and violent activities.

3.4. Incorporation of Legendary Names

The nomenclature of youth gangs in Palu City appears to draw inspiration from idols or legendary figures, even when the revered figure possesses malevolent traits. Among all the youth gang names in Palu City, there are instances where the names are inspired by legendary figures, as evident in the following examples:

- Golgo 13 (Assassin)
- Bongkeng (King of Brawl)
- Aurel (Motorcycle Gang)

3.5. Adoption of the English Language

The naming practices of youth gangs in Palu City extend beyond the use of regional languages (Kaili and Bugis), with some gangs also incorporating English names. These English names often emulate gang names that previously existed internationally. Noteworthy examples include:

- Spock Crazy (legend)
- Pink Pizza (band)
- Gangster (gang group)
- Grand Funk (music genre)
- TR Kids (Taman Ria Children)
- Speak Camp (Band Group)
- Rascal (Cruel/Bastard).

3.6. Utilization of Music Genres/Groups

In addition to employing regional languages, foreign languages, linguistic resistance, and legendary figures, the naming of youth gangs in Palu City is also influenced by the musical genres or groups they engage with and admire. This is due to the fact that many young individuals in Palu City possess hobbies and talents in the realm of musical arts. A considerable number of Palu's youth have successfully become renowned artists and musicians in Jakarta. As exemplified in the following gang names:

- Doken (music genre)
- Potlot (Band Group)
- Grand Funk (music genre)
- Kantata Pleaset (Band Group)

- Speak Camp (Band Group)

The proliferation of youth gangs in Palu City serves as both a social phenomenon and a challenge. Not all of these youth groups garner positive perceptions and evaluations from society. Some of these youth groups bear a negative stigma due to their frequent involvement in clashes and violent activities. Several areas in Palu City are still considered precarious and unsafe due to the presence of youth gangs, such as Jalan Anoa, North Tatura Subdistrict, Nunu Village, South Lolu Village, and Besusu Village.

According to Spergel (1995), the presence of gangs is often associated with violent activities and disruptive behaviour for various reasons. Firstly, conflicts with rival gangs triggered by territorial power struggles can lead to violence. Additionally, territorial claims fuelled by a desire to demonstrate status, such as through graffiti, can escalate tensions. When one gang writes graffiti in the territory of another, it is often perceived as an intervention or invasion, leading to retaliatory violent actions to defend territorial honour. Secondly, acts of violence are developed as a means of seeking and maintaining group identity. For gang members, the reputation of the gang is frequently considered a consequence of their courage in engaging in violent actions (Esbensen et al., 2001; O'Brien et al., 2013). This dynamic is evident in the interactions between two neighbouring gangs in Palu City, namely Nero Nero (North Tatura Subdistrict) and Doken (South Lolu Village).

Spergel also posits the existence of five primary strategies for addressing adolescents involved in gangs and their communities through the Comprehensive Gang Model OJJDP approach Burch & Kane (1999), as follows: Firstly, community mobilization involves rallying local residents, youth, community groups, leaders, and institutions to plan, strengthen, or create opportunities or new relationships with existing organizations for youth involved in gangs and at-risk individuals. Secondly, social intervention entails identifying street outreach, providing programs and social services (through youth service agencies, schools, religious-based organizations, and others) to gang-involved youth and those at high risk of gang involvement. Thirdly, opportunity provision involves supplying and facilitating access to targeted educational and training programs and employment opportunities for gang-affiliated teenagers and those at high risk of gang involvement. Fourthly, suppression involves conducting suppression activities through formal and informal social control mechanisms and holding accountable adolescents involved in gangs for their actions and behaviours, including close supervision or monitoring of gang-involved youth by criminal justice institutions as well as community-based institutions, schools, and grassroots communities. Fifthly, organizational change and development entail facilitating changes and development in organizations to assist community institutions in addressing gang issues more effectively through a consistent “problem-solving” approach consistent with community-oriented policing philosophy. This involves addressing issues and developing and implementing policies and processes that result in the effective use of available and potential resources within and between institutions.

Despite the negative connotations associated with gangs, their existence can offer positive values for teenagers or young individuals. Joining a gang allows them to develop a strong sense of self-awareness and engage in peer interactions. They form robust social

connections and solidarity, transcending differences in ethnicity and religion (Leverso & O'Neill, 2022). However, it is crucial for young people to exercise caution regarding the motivations behind gang formation, such as seeking popularity, following charismatic but exclusive leaders, and adherence to restrictive rules.

Over time, the landscape of youth gangs in Palu City has undergone a paradigm shift since the 2000s, significantly influenced by changes in civilization, particularly in the realms of science and technology. This shift has redefined the meaning of these groups of young individuals or gangs, giving rise to new perspectives and social attitudes. The term "community" has emerged as a novel social entity that is more readily accepted by society, contrasting with gangs that prioritize solidarity. Communities emphasize positive aspects related to the creativity and potential of individuals/members in an organized manner.

This transformation has led to the dissolution of several youth gangs in Palu City, as their followers or members departed. In fact, some of these gangs have undergone a name change, now identifying themselves as communities and community organizations (ormas). Several gang names have undergone a shift in mindset and paradigm, exemplified by the following cases:

a) Pordeo (Porotaka Tengge Deo)

Established in 1983 and notorious for anarchic acts and brawls, Pordeo, based in Nunu Village in Palu City, has transformed its identity. Since 2019, Pordeo 83 has evolved into a community organization active in the social sector. The abbreviation Porambangan Ntodea Oge (Pordeo) now symbolizes unity within the residents of Nunu Village, signifying a positive shift in meaning. In the Kaili language, it conveys togetherness with people and leadership.

b) Nero Nero

This youth gang, present since the 1980s, gained prominence in Palu City, particularly in North Tatura Village. Its name has sparked debates, with potential origins from the Kaili language ("Nerou" meaning sleeping/gathering together) or the name of a notably cruel Roman Emperor. Known for frequent brawls and violent acts, Nero Nero was respected among other gangs. However, since 2018, it has gradually faded due to socio-cultural changes and reduced cadre formation. Community and youth leaders in North Tatura Subdistrict have altered their mindset, aiming to eliminate negative stigma. They introduced the new name "Nero Nero Hijrah," focusing on religious activities and nurturing young talents, particularly in the arts, redirecting youths toward positive endeavours.

c) Aurel

A motorcycle gang prominent in Palu City during the 2000s, known for the slogan "Senggol Bacok," engaged in street brawls and violence. Drawing strict police actions due to public disturbance, the Aurel motorcycle gang's influence waned, and its followers diminished. The negative stigma associated with motorcycle gangs prompted youths in Palu City to shift towards community engagement. These communities, often adopting the names of renowned

motorcycle manufacturers, have garnered a positive response. Notably, members come from various professions, encompassing both young and older individuals.

There is a noteworthy aspect concerning these youth gangs, particularly the emergence of a group known as Anuta (Children of Nunu Tawanjuka). Diverging from the typical narrative of gangs asserting dominance or engaging in conflict, Anuta was established in 2017 with the objective of fostering peace and resolving a longstanding communal dispute that has persisted for decades. The conflict between residents of Nunu and Tawanjuka villages dates back to the 90s, resulting in numerous casualties. Intriguingly, the opposing groups of young individuals from these adjacent Villages share the same ethnicity, religion, and often have close kinship ties.

The landscape of youth gangs in Palu City is currently undergoing significant changes due to evolving times, which, in turn, influence shifts in thought patterns. Some gangs have seen a decline in followers or group members, while others continue to exist albeit with altered missions and visions. Additionally, new youth gangs have emerged, yet they may lack widespread sympathy and support.

Understanding the factors that drive individuals to join specific gangs is crucial. Several causative factors include: Firstly, disharmonious family conditions stemming from divorce, conflicts, or authoritarian parenting, leading children to seek solace outside the home with peers. Secondly, the need for socialization, driven by high curiosity and the desire for companionship to exchange information and creative ideas for expanding knowledge. Unfortunately, a significant number of youths find themselves ensnared in misguided communities, such as motorcycle gangs. Thirdly, the desire for recognition from their environment, which is perceived to enhance self-confidence, garner respect, admiration, and pride from peers or the group.

In light of these circumstances, comprehensive support is essential from all quarters, especially the government, community leaders, and parents. Guiding and directing young individuals toward positive pursuits, such as sports, arts, or community involvement, can contribute significantly to talent development and achievements.

4. Conclusion

Drawing from the insights gathered in this study, it can be deduced that the nomenclature of youth gangs in Palu City exhibits a remarkable diversity, uniqueness, and intriguing quality. The array of gang names is intricately linked to the multifaceted socio-cultural milieu within Palu City, particularly considering its status as the capital of Central Sulawesi Province, characterized by a mosaic of tribes and religions. The adoption of gang names by the youth in Palu City serves not only as a means of identification but also as a manifestation of linguistic phenomena intertwined with communities, social groups, ethnicities, and professions. These linguistic phenomena encompass (1) the utilization of acronyms, (2) incorporation of the Kaili language, (3) integration of English, (4) instances of language resistance, (5) reference to figures or legends, and (6) incorporation of names related to musical genres and groups.

In the course of time, some gang names have become inactive due to evolving social and cultural dynamics within the society. Others persist but undergo shifts in their vision and mission. This study underscores several key messages, including the notion that the use of gang names should not inherently convey a negative image or impression to society. Although the term “gang” still carries a negative connotation, youth gangs should strive to contribute positive values or benefits to their members and the broader community. Additionally, it is imperative that gang members or followers avoid exhibiting excessive fanaticism, as it could potentially escalate into conflicts.

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