



Language Typology In Barrier Islands Of Sumatra: A Phonological Comparison Between Enggano And Mentawai Language

Engga Zakaria Sangian ¹; Merry Rullyanti ²; Dhanu Ario Putra ³

^{1,2,3} Department Of English Literature Faculty Of Teacher Training And Education

Dehasen University Bengkulu

e-mail:¹ ezs21072@gmail.com

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Abstract. Enggano and Mentawai are languages of the barrier islands off the western coast of Sumatra, yet the extent of their phonological relationship remains insufficiently defined. This study examines their phonological relationship and associated cultural correspondence, with particular attention to nasal sounds. A qualitative descriptive design was combined with an ethnolinguistic field approach. The linguistic data consist of a 200-item Swadesh list in Enggano and Mentawai and ten supplementary items selected to examine nasal realizations. Recordings and lexical data were organized through ELAN and FLE_x, while representative sound segments were inspected with Praat and the lexical relationship was calculated lexicostatistically. The analysis identifies 36 cognate items from the 200-word comparison, producing a cognate percentage of 18%, which places the relationship in the stock/group range used in the study. Nasal realizations also show systematic differences, with Enggano displaying stronger nasal correspondence with adjacent vowels than Mentawai. Culturally, both communities retain ancestral-spirit traditions and subsistence practices, although their kinship systems differ. The findings indicate relatedness without dialectal identity and underline the distinctiveness of Enggano within the western Sumatran barrier-island linguistic setting.

Keywords: Enggano Language; Mentawai Language; Phonology.

INTRODUCTION

Language functions not only as a system of signs and rules for producing meaningful utterances, but also as a repository of social experience through which communities organize communication and cultural knowledge (Ratnaningsih, 2023; Wiratno & Santosa, 2014). This function becomes especially important in multilingual settings where local languages coexist with a national language and with languages introduced through mobility, trade, education, and tourism. In Indonesia, the continuing shift in the use of regional languages has made documentation and comparative description increasingly urgent. The thesis that forms the basis of this article places this problem within the wider concern over endangered regional languages and emphasizes that language loss should not be viewed only as an eastern Indonesian phenomenon. The barrier islands along the western coast of Sumatra also contain languages whose vitality, historical position, and relationship with neighboring languages require closer examination (Sugiyono, 2022). Enggano is one of the most salient cases in this western Sumatran setting. The language is spoken on Enggano Island, administratively part of North Bengkulu Regency, and its use has declined as Indonesian and other languages become more prominent in daily communication (Rahayu, 2014). The Enggano Project at the University of Oxford likewise characterizes Enggano as threatened and identifies the need for stronger lexical and documentary resources (University of Oxford, 2023). The linguistic importance of Enggano is intensified by uncertainty surrounding its historical position. Earlier descriptions have treated it within the Austronesian sphere, while subsequent studies have continued to discuss how it should be positioned in relation to other Austronesian languages (Edwards, 2015;

Fachruliansyah, 2019). For this reason, examining Enggano in relation to nearby languages is relevant both to language documentation and to historical-comparative linguistics.

Mentawai provides a particularly relevant point of comparison because it is spoken on a neighboring island chain off the west coast of Sumatra. The Mentawai language is used across several localities and dialect areas, including North Siberut, South Siberut, and Sipora-Pagai. Its vitality is stronger than that of Enggano in some respects, yet the thesis also notes a regressive tendency in particular domains of use as mobility, trade, tourism, and Indonesian become more influential (Budiono, 2021; Zachariah, 2017). Geographical proximity does not by itself prove close linguistic kinship, but the distribution of Enggano, Mentawai, Nias, Simeulue, and related western Sumatran island languages has long motivated comparative hypotheses. Nothofer (1986), for example, discussed the barrier-island languages within the Austronesian family and proposed relationships among languages in this zone based on comparative evidence.

The central empirical issue is therefore not whether Enggano and Mentawai occupy a similar geographical corridor, but how far their linguistic systems actually correspond. Existing work has generated substantial descriptions of individual languages. Kähler (1940) provided an early grammatical account of Enggano, Yoder (2011) examined the phonological and phonetic properties of Enggano vowels, and Edwards (2015) addressed the position of Enggano within Austronesian. Research on Mentawai has included phonological interference and vitality studies, while comparative studies elsewhere have demonstrated how phonological comparison can distinguish a dialect relationship from a looser historical relationship (Fitrianti, 2018; Shin et al., 2019; Hamid et al., 2016). However, the thesis identifies a narrower unresolved gap: direct phonological comparison between Enggano and Mentawai, especially one that combines basic-vocabulary comparison with closer attention to nasal sounds and field-based cultural observations, remains limited. This gap is important because a superficial resemblance between isolated words can overstate linguistic closeness, while an exclusively lexical comparison may overlook phonological behavior that differentiates two languages. Enggano is especially notable for its nasal vowel system and for the interaction between nasal consonants and neighboring vowels (Yoder, 2011). Mentawai, by contrast, is described in the thesis as having a different vowel inventory and less prominent nasal realization in comparable forms. A systematic comparison of shared basic vocabulary, supported by acoustic inspection of selected nasal forms, can therefore provide a more disciplined basis for evaluating the relationship between the two languages than geographic proximity alone. The study also treats language and culture as connected dimensions of the barrier-island context. Communities along the western coast of Sumatra have developed cultural practices shaped by maritime and terrestrial environments, including hunting, gathering, fishing, customary institutions, and ritual traditions (Kaprisma & Yuwono, 2014; Nainggolan et al., 2023). Enggano and Mentawai share several broad cultural features but also differ in important social structures, especially kinship organization. Bringing these observations into the linguistic discussion does not establish language genealogy by itself, but it provides contextual evidence for understanding long-term contact, parallel adaptation, and cultural continuity.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in integrating three forms of evidence contained in the thesis: a 200-item Swadesh comparison, a focused comparison of ten nasal-related lexical forms supported by acoustic inspection, and field observations of selected cultural correspondences. The study does not attempt to resolve every question concerning the classification of Enggano. Instead, it provides a bounded phonological and cultural comparison between the two nearest barrier-island contexts addressed in the thesis. The objectives are to describe the phonological relationship between Enggano and Mentawai through their basic vocabulary and nasal realizations, to determine the level of lexical relatedness through lexicostatistical calculation, and to identify cultural similarities and differences that contextualize the linguistic findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Barrier-Island Languages and the Position of Enggano

The term barrier-island languages is used in the thesis for languages distributed on islands and adjacent areas along the western side of Sumatra. Nothofer (1986) discussed Gayo, Batak, Simeulue, Nias-Sikule, Mentawai, and Enggano within this wider Austronesian context. The value of this geographical concept is comparative rather than deterministic: islands that share a maritime corridor may preserve traces of common inheritance, contact, or parallel development, but geographic closeness does not guarantee that they constitute a single language or dialect continuum. This distinction is essential for the Enggano-Mentawai comparison because both languages occupy the same broad western Sumatran zone while displaying considerable lexical and phonological differentiation.

Enggano has been described from several complementary perspectives. Kähler's (1940) grammatical sketch represents an early descriptive foundation, while Yoder (2011) focuses specifically on the phonological and phonetic characteristics of vowels. The thesis summarizes the Enggano system as containing 12 consonants and 14 vowels, consisting of seven oral and seven nasal vowels, together with four principal syllable types and a stress pattern reported as consistently final in monomorphemic and polymorphemic words. Yoder's treatment of nasality is particularly relevant because it distinguishes oral vowels that remain non-nasal, underlying nasal vowels that preserve nasality, and vowels that become nasalized when adjacent to nasal consonants. This makes nasality a structurally informative domain for comparison rather than a merely impressionistic phonetic feature.

The historical classification of Enggano remains a central issue in the literature used by the thesis. Edwards (2015) re-examined the position of Enggano within Austronesian, while Fachruliansyah (2019) discusses Enggano within debates concerning Austronesian peoples and language. These works support the thesis's decision to treat Enggano as a language whose broader affiliation is relevant but whose distinctive structure warrants direct comparison with neighboring languages. The present article therefore follows the thesis in avoiding an overly broad classification claim and concentrates on the measurable correspondence between Enggano and Mentawai data.

Mentawai Phonology and Comparative Evidence

Mentawai is the principal local language of the Mentawai Islands and is represented by several dialect areas. The thesis describes five core vowels, /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/, and emphasizes that phonological interpretation must account for consonants, vowels, syllable structure, stress, intonation, and contextual phonetic variation. In the examples used in the thesis, Mentawai forms frequently contain consonant-vowel patterns that are superficially comparable to Enggano forms, yet the realization of nasal segments and the morphological contribution of final consonants differ. Fitrianti (2018), although concerned with interference from Mentawai into Indonesian rather than with Enggano-Mentawai comparison, further demonstrates that Mentawai phonology has identifiable features capable of influencing other linguistic systems.

Comparative phonology offers a model for distinguishing resemblance from genealogically meaningful correspondence. Ferdyani et al. (2023) show that two languages may share certain phonological patterns while retaining substantial structural differences. Shin et al. (2019) similarly demonstrate that a high degree of lexical cognacy does not automatically justify treating one language as a dialect of another; their comparison of Remun and Iban combines lexical and phonological evidence to establish distinct status despite strong cognate similarity. Hamid et al. (2016) likewise use phonological parallelism to examine relationships among Malay varieties. These studies are relevant to the present analysis because they reinforce the need to interpret lexical percentages together with the behavior of sound systems.

Within the thesis, lexicostatistics is used as the principal quantitative indicator of basic-vocabulary relatedness. The approach compares cognate items in a standardized Swadesh list and calculates a percentage based on the number of cognates relative to the total number of items compared. The classification applied in the thesis follows percentage ranges also discussed in lexicostatistical research such as Erni et al. (2022): 81-100% is treated as the same language, 36-80% as a family, 12-36% as a stock/group, 4-12% as a microphylum, 1-4% as a mesophyll, and less than 1% as a macro-phylum. The value of this framework in the present study lies in providing a transparent numerical interpretation of the 200-item comparison, while its limitations are recognized in the final section of the article.

Language, Culture, and the Western Sumatran Coastal Context

The cultural dimension of the thesis is grounded in the view that language practices are embedded in community life. Kaprisma and Yuwono (2014) describe language and rites on the west coast of Sumatra as components of coastal cultural expression, while Nainggolan et al. (2023) emphasize the maritime culture of coastal communities and their dependence on natural resources. For Enggano and Mentawai, this context includes hunting and gathering traditions, customary institutions, local ritual practices, and forms of social organization that have developed in relatively remote island settings.

At the same time, cultural similarity is not uniform. The thesis highlights a fundamental difference in descent organization: Enggano follows a matrilineal system in which clan identity is traced through the mother, whereas Mentawai follows a patrilineal system in which descent is traced through the father. Traditional architectural forms also differ, although both communities retain practices associated with Austronesian cultural histories (Loeb, 1972; Fachruliansyah, 2019). A more direct parallel appears in beliefs concerning ancestral spirits. Simanjuntak (2015) is used in the thesis to contextualize Austronesian traditions, while field observations identify the Enggano pahpe ceremony and the Mentawai punen tradition as ritual practices associated with major events and ancestral permission. These similarities provide contextual evidence of comparable cultural orientations without being treated as proof of close linguistic identity.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to describe linguistic phenomena identified in the Enggano and Mentawai data. The design is combined with an ethnolinguistic approach because the data were collected through direct engagement with speech communities and interpreted in relation to the cultural contexts in which the languages are used. The field orientation follows the thesis's emphasis on speaker-based documentation: linguistic forms were elicited from native speakers, while cultural information was obtained through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and participation in community settings. This documentary orientation is consistent with systematic recording, transcription, translation, and analysis of language practices in their social context (Austin & McGill, 2003). The methodology chapter of the thesis does not state a fixed number of informants or a formal sampling frame; consequently, this article does not introduce a respondent count that is absent from the source manuscript. The primary linguistic instrument was a 200-item Swadesh vocabulary list. The list contains basic lexical items across semantic categories and was used to obtain corresponding forms in Enggano and Mentawai. For the focused phonological analysis, ten supplementary lexical forms were selected because they contain nasal sounds or kinship-related forms in which nasal segments can be compared directly. These items include forms glossed as mother, my mother, your mother, our mother, my father, your father, our father, their father, bird, and cat. The cultural data cover customary belief, hunting and gathering practices, kinship systems, traditional ritual, and aspects of community life described during fieldwork and in the literature cited by the thesis. Data collection combined elicitation, recording, and in-depth interviewing.

The Swadesh items were asked directly in the two speech communities and the resulting forms were recorded for subsequent organization and analysis. ELAN was used to align and annotate recorded speech, allowing textual annotations, translations, and descriptive notes to be associated with time-aligned audio or video data. FLEx was used to manage lexical entries and related language documentation, including lexicon organization and semantic information. The thesis further reports the use of Praat in the analysis chapter to inspect representative sound spectra, pitch, intensity, duration, and the temporal distribution of phonetic segments. In this article, Praat-based observations are presented qualitatively because the thesis provides visual spectra and interpretive descriptions rather than a complete statistical table of acoustic measurements.

Lexical relatedness was calculated with the lexicostatistical procedure used in the thesis. Cognate items identified in the 200-word comparison were counted, and the percentage of relatedness was obtained by dividing the number of cognates (ΣK) by the number of vocabulary items compared (ΣKB) and multiplying the result by 100. With 36 cognate items and 200 items compared, the calculation is $36/200 \times 100 = 18\%$. This percentage is interpreted through the kinship ranges adopted in the thesis and is placed in the stock/group category (12-36%). The focused nasal comparison was then interpreted descriptively by examining the segmental composition and acoustic patterns of the ten supplementary forms. Cultural data were analyzed qualitatively by identifying recurrent similarities and contrasts between Enggano and Mentawai practices. The analytical procedure was deliberately bounded. It does not reconstruct proto-forms, calculate phonological correspondence sets across multiple barrier-island languages, or claim that cultural similarity establishes genealogical linguistic relationship. Instead, it answers the thesis objectives at the level supported by its data: basic-vocabulary relatedness, selected nasal behavior, and contextual cultural correspondence. This scope is consistent with the study's aim to provide an initial direct comparison between Enggano and Mentawai while preserving the need for broader historical-comparative research.

RESULTS

Basic-Vocabulary Relatedness

The Swadesh comparison shows that Enggano and Mentawai contain a limited but identifiable set of corresponding basic lexical forms. The thesis records 36 items as cognates in the 200-word comparison. Examples include first- and second-person pronouns, selected numerals, deictic expressions, temporal items, kinship terms, animal names, and several basic verbs or adjectives. At the same time, a much larger part of the list is marked as non-cognate or contains unavailable data for one of the languages. The operative lexicostatistical result is therefore based on the 36 cognates against the 200-item comparison list.

Representative cognates illustrate that similarity is not necessarily identity of surface form. For example, 'mother' is represented as [naj] in Enggano and [na] in Mentawai; 'father' as [e.ām] in Enggano and [ma.e] in Mentawai; 'name' as [ni:] and [oni]; 'bird' includes an Enggano form [kɛʔ.ep]/uma and Mentawai [umaʔ]; and 'cat' is [me.ja] in Enggano and [ma.oʔ] in Mentawai. Other examples such as 'yellow', 'sweet', 'now', 'horse', 'egg', and 'sew' also show partial segmental resemblance. These forms support the presence of relationship while simultaneously showing changes in vowel quality, consonant sequence, syllable structure, and glottal realization.

Table 1. Representative Cognate Items in the Enggano-Mentawai Swadesh Comparison

English gloss	Indonesian gloss	Enggano	Mentawai
I	Aku	[u]	k:u
You	Engkau/kamu	[əʔ]	eʔ.ku
Like this	Begini	ki.nə.əiʔ	ke.ke.nieʔ

One	Satu	[ka.haʔ]	saraʔ
Now	Sekarang	[nə.ən]	ne.ne.get
Mother	Ibu	[nai]	na
Father	Bapak	[e.ãm]	ma.e
Name	Nama	[ni:]	oni
Bird	Burung	[kɛʔ.ɛp]/uma	umaʔ
Cat	Kucing	[me.ja]	ma.oʔ
Horse	Kuda	[ku:d]	kuda
Sew	Menjahit	[jaʔ.jiʔ]	jaiʔ

Source: Processed from field and Swadesh-list data in the thesis, 2024.

The lexicostatistical calculation gives a relatedness value of 18%. In the classification used by the thesis, this falls within the stock/group range of 12-36% (Erni et al., 2022). The result is far below the 81-100% range that would be interpreted as the same language and below the 36-80% range treated as a family-level percentage in the framework adopted by the study. On this basis, the Enggano and Mentawai data do not support a dialectal interpretation. Instead, the percentage indicates a more distant relationship within the broader historical context addressed by the thesis.

Table 2. Lexicostatistical Result

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
Swadesh items compared	200	Basic-vocabulary comparison
Cognate items	36	Items identified as cognate in the thesis
Cognate percentage	18%	$36/200 \times 100$
Kinship range used	12-36%	Stock/group category

Source: Lexicostatistical calculation reported in the thesis, 2024.

Focused Comparison of Nasal Forms

The ten-item focused comparison demonstrates that nasality is a particularly useful differentiating feature. In the kinship forms for 'mother', Enggano and Mentawai share an initial /n/ and /a/ sequence, but Enggano [nai] contains an additional final vowel and is described in the thesis as having clearer nasal and vowel correspondence. The corresponding Mentawai [na] has a shorter [n] segment and a longer [a] realization in the Praat display described by the thesis. This pattern illustrates how apparent lexical similarity can coexist with different phonetic organization.

Possessive or person-marked forms further reveal structural differences. Enggano 'my mother' is represented as [na u], while Mentawai is [nang ku]. Both retain the [na] base associated with 'mother', but the Mentawai form adds [ŋ] and [ku]. For 'your mother', Enggano [naim] and Mentawai [inam] both contain final [m], yet the position of [i] differs: Enggano places [i] in the second syllabic portion before [m], whereas Mentawai begins with [i] and continues with [nam]. The thesis interprets final [m] in both languages as contributing to the meaning associated with the second person in these forms. In 'our mother', Enggano [naik] uses final [k], whereas Mentawai [inan ra] expresses the comparable meaning with a separate [ra] element.

The father terms show a related pattern of resemblance and divergence. Enggano [am u] and Mentawai [mae ku] both contain a nasal /m/ in the lexical base, but the sequence and vowel structure differ. Enggano begins with [a] followed by a strongly realized [m], while Mentawai begins with [m] and continues with [ae]. In 'your father', Enggano [amam] contains repeated [am] material, whereas Mentawai [maem] adds final [m] to the [mae] base. For 'our

father', Enggano [amik] and Mentawai [mae ra] contrast final [k] with the separate [ra] marker, and 'their father' contrasts Enggano [amek] with Mentawai [mae ta]. These forms show that comparable grammatical meanings are organized through different segmental patterns.

The animal terms provide additional evidence. The thesis's focused table gives Enggano [uma] and Mentawai [umaʔ] for a bird form, noting a strong nasal quality around [m] in Enggano and a final glottal stop in Mentawai. For 'cat', Enggano [mea] and Mentawai [maoʔ] differ in vowel sequence and again show the Mentawai final glottal stop. Across the ten comparisons, the thesis consistently characterizes Enggano nasal sounds as more prominent in their interaction with vowels, whereas Mentawai nasal sounds are less strongly realized in the corresponding acoustic displays.

Table 3. Ten Supplementary Forms Used for Nasal-Sound Comparison

Gloss	Enggano	Mentawai
Mother	na / nai	na
My mother	naiʔ / na u	nang ku
Your mother	naim	inam
Our mother	naik	inan ra
My father	am u	mae ku
Your father	amam	maem
Our father	amik	mae ra
Their father	amek	mae ta
Bird	uma (also kēʔēp in the thesis data)	umaʔ
Cat	mea	maoʔ

Source: Supplementary nasal-comparison table and analysis in the thesis, 2024.

Cultural Correspondence

Field observations and literature-based descriptions identify several cultural parallels between Enggano and Mentawai. Both island communities historically depend strongly on natural resources and preserve hunting and gathering practices. The thesis notes hunting implements in Enggano, including spears, and describes Mentawai hunting with spears, arrows, and blowpipes. These practices reflect adaptation to island environments rather than serving as direct evidence of linguistic genealogy, but they form part of the comparable cultural setting in which the two languages developed.

The strongest ritual parallel concerns belief in ancestral spirits. Enggano communities retain the pahpe ceremony, conducted in connection with important events and understood as a ritual directed toward or seeking permission from ancestors. The thesis identifies a comparable Mentawai tradition, punen, as part of a belief system in which ancestral and spiritual relations remain culturally significant. These observations are consistent with the broader Austronesian cultural discussions cited in the thesis (Simanjuntak, 2015).

A major contrast appears in kinship organization. Enggano follows a matrilineal system, so clan descent is traced through the mother. Mentawai follows a patrilineal system, tracing descent through the father. The thesis also notes architectural differences: Enggano round-house traditions are compared with forms outside Sumatra, whereas traditional Mentawai houses are rectangular (Fachruliansyah, 2019). Thus, the cultural evidence reveals neither complete similarity nor complete separation; instead, it shows shared ritual and subsistence orientations combined with distinct social organization.

Table 4. Cultural Similarities and Contrasts Reported in the Thesis

Aspect	Enggano	Mentawai
Ancestral-spirit tradition	Pahpe ritual	Punen tradition
Descent system	Matrilineal	Patrilineal
Subsistence tradition	Hunting and gathering; spear use	Hunting and gathering; spears, arrows, and blowpipes
Traditional house description	Round-house tradition noted in the thesis	Rectangular traditional house
Broad setting	Barrier island off western Sumatra	Barrier-island chain off western Sumatra

Source: Field findings and literature synthesized in the thesis, 2024.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the study was to determine how closely Enggano and Mentawai are related at the phonological level and to place that comparison within their cultural setting. The 18% cognate value is the clearest quantitative finding. Within the lexicostatistical categories adopted by the thesis, this percentage places the two languages in the stock/group range rather than the same-language or family range. The result supports the thesis conclusion that Enggano and Mentawai should not be treated as dialects of one language. This is important because geographic adjacency across the western Sumatran barrier-island chain can create an intuitive expectation of close linguistic similarity. The data show that such an expectation must be tested against systematic lexical and phonological evidence. The finding also fits the broader logic of comparative studies cited in the thesis. Shin et al. (2019) found that Remun and Iban could remain distinct despite a much higher degree of lexical similarity than that observed here. This comparison is methodologically instructive: if even very high cognacy does not automatically establish dialect status, an 18% cognate rate between Enggano and Mentawai provides even stronger grounds for rejecting a simple dialectal interpretation. Likewise, Hamid et al. (2016) demonstrate that phonological parallelism must be evaluated in relation to systematic differences rather than isolated similar forms. The Enggano-Mentawai comparison follows the same principle by examining the structure of corresponding forms instead of relying only on shared meanings.

The nasal comparison sharpens this interpretation. Enggano's nasal system is not merely a set of consonants that happen to occur in some words; the literature summarized in the thesis indicates that nasality is deeply integrated into its vowel system. Yoder (2011) distinguishes oral, nasal, and contextually nasalized vowels, and the thesis describes seven oral and seven nasal vowels. The focused data are therefore consistent with a phonological system in which nasal features can spread or interact perceptibly with adjacent vowels. In contrast, Mentawai is described with a five-vowel system and, in the selected acoustic comparisons, does not show the same strength of nasal-vowel correspondence. The difference helps explain why seemingly comparable lexical bases such as [na], [am]/[mae], and [uma] are realized differently across the two languages. The person-marked kinship expressions also suggest that phonological difference interacts with morphological organization. Enggano forms such as [naim], [naik], [amam], [amik], and [amek] package person-related distinctions through segmental additions or alternations within a compact word form. The Mentawai data more often show separate material such as [ku], [ra], and [ta], or different placements of final nasal consonants. The thesis does not provide a full morphological analysis, so these forms should not be overinterpreted as a complete paradigm. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that the comparison concerns more than pronunciation alone: segmental patterns are tied to the way lexical and grammatical meanings are expressed.

Several individual cognates also reveal plausible pathways of divergence without providing enough evidence for formal reconstruction. The correspondence between Enggano [naj] and Mentawai [na] for 'mother' preserves a recognizable [na] sequence but differs in the Enggano final vowel. The bird forms [uma] and [umaʔ] share the same core sequence but differ in the Mentawai glottal stop. The cat forms [mea] and [maoʔ] show a comparable initial nasal and vowel structure but diverge in the vowel sequence and final glottal realization. These patterns show why the article's conclusion must be carefully framed: the languages exhibit correspondences, but the available data do not establish regular sound laws across the entire lexicon. A deeper historical-comparative analysis would require systematic correspondence sets and reconstruction across a larger dataset.

The 18% value also has implications for the longstanding discussion of Enggano's position in Austronesian. Edwards (2015) and Fachruliansyah (2019) show that Enggano's classification has been debated, while Nothofer (1986) places the barrier-island languages within a broader Austronesian comparative framework. The present evidence does not independently settle that classification question. What it does show is that direct comparison with Mentawai does not yield a level of basic-vocabulary similarity that would make Mentawai a near proxy for Enggano. In practical terms, Enggano should therefore be documented and analyzed as a structurally distinctive language rather than approached primarily through assumptions drawn from its nearest island neighbor.

This conclusion strengthens the language-documentation rationale of the study. Enggano is described as threatened, and the reduction of intergenerational use noted by Rahayu (2014) and the University of Oxford (2023) raises the risk that precisely those phonological distinctions that make the language distinctive may become difficult to document. Nasalized vowels, fine phonetic contrasts, and speaker intuitions about glottal or glide-initial forms require high-quality recordings and careful annotation. The use of ELAN, FLEEx, and Praat in the thesis therefore has methodological value beyond this single comparison: it creates a workflow through which speech data can be preserved, annotated, lexically organized, and acoustically inspected.

The Mentawai context is different but still relevant to language maintenance. Budiono (2021) reports a regressive vitality pattern for the Sipora-Pagai dialect in particular domains, and the thesis relates this condition to external linguistic influence, migration, trade, and tourism. The comparison therefore involves two languages experiencing different degrees and forms of pressure. This shared sociolinguistic environment suggests that comparative research can contribute not only to historical classification but also to documentation priorities. Basic vocabulary and culturally salient kinship terms are especially useful because they combine structural evidence with domains of everyday community knowledge.

The cultural findings require a separate but complementary interpretation. Similarities in hunting and gathering, island-based subsistence, and ancestral-spirit traditions demonstrate that Enggano and Mentawai communities developed within comparable ecological and ritual environments. Kaprisma and Yuwono (2014) and Nainggolan et al. (2023) provide a broader context for such coastal and maritime patterns. The Enggano pahpe and Mentawai punen traditions are particularly notable because both are associated with relationships to ancestors during important communal events. Yet the difference between Enggano matrilineal descent and Mentawai patrilineal descent is equally significant. It prevents the cultural discussion from being reduced to a narrative of simple sameness and shows that geographically adjacent communities can share broad orientations while maintaining distinct social institutions.

These cultural contrasts also help clarify what counts as novelty in the study. The novelty is not a claim that cultural similarity proves linguistic kinship. Rather, it lies in presenting the phonological result alongside cultural evidence that explains why comparison between the two communities is historically and regionally meaningful. The linguistic evidence remains

primary: 36 cognates in the 200-item list and the distinctive nasal patterns provide the basis for the relationship assessment. The cultural evidence then shows that the two communities inhabit a connected western Sumatran island world in which interaction, parallel adaptation, and shared Austronesian cultural features are plausible, even though their language systems and kinship structures remain clearly differentiated.

From an applied perspective, the findings support continued documentation of both languages, particularly Enggano. Documentation should prioritize natural speech, culturally embedded vocabulary, and phonetic phenomena that cannot be represented adequately through ordinary orthography. The thesis's workflow with ELAN and FLE_x offers a foundation for a reusable digital corpus, while Praat analysis can preserve evidence of nasalization, duration, and segmental timing. Such documentation can also support future comparative work involving Nias, Simeulue, Nasal, and other western Sumatran languages mentioned in the thesis. A multi-language comparison would make it possible to determine whether the correspondences observed between Enggano and Mentawai reflect shared inheritance, historical contact, or more general areal patterns. A further implication concerns the interpretation of low-percentage cognacy in a small regional comparison. The 18% result should not be read as evidence that Enggano and Mentawai are unrelated in every historical sense, because the classification framework used in the thesis explicitly places percentages from 12% to 36% in a stock/group category. At the same time, the result is too low to support a close family or dialect relationship under that same framework. This middle position is analytically useful. It explains why a number of basic forms remain recognizable across the two datasets while most forms are substantially different, and it provides a reason to investigate whether the shared items represent inheritance from a more remote source, contact within the western Sumatran maritime corridor, or similarities that become clearer only when additional barrier-island languages are included. The present dataset cannot distinguish among those historical mechanisms, but it identifies the precise comparative question that a larger study should test.

The quality of future conclusions will depend heavily on data control. The thesis demonstrates the usefulness of the Swadesh list as a common elicitation frame, but it also shows why missing values, uncertain cognate coding, and phonetic detail must be documented transparently. In a stronger comparative design, each lexical item should be linked to the original recording, speaker metadata, phonemic transcription, phonetic transcription where necessary, and an explicit decision rule for cognacy. Items that are unavailable in one language should be separated from items judged non-cognate, because absence of data is not evidence of lexical difference. Replication across several speakers would also allow researchers to distinguish stable language patterns from idiolectal pronunciation. These improvements follow directly from the documentary orientation of the thesis: the value of ELAN and FLE_x is not simply technical convenience, but the possibility of preserving an auditable chain from recording to lexical entry and comparative judgment. The preservation implications are equally significant. The thesis frames Enggano as a threatened language whose younger speakers increasingly rely on Indonesian, while Mentawai also faces pressure in particular domains. A comparative article can contribute to preservation only if it does not reduce these languages to lists of isolated words. The most informative evidence in the thesis appears where lexical forms are connected to pronunciation, kinship meaning, ritual terminology, and community practices. This suggests that future documentation should combine controlled word-list elicitation with narratives, conversations, ritual descriptions, and other naturally occurring speech. Such a corpus would allow the nasal patterns identified here to be tested in broader phonological environments and would also preserve the cultural meanings that make individual forms socially significant. In that sense, the study's contribution is both comparative and documentary: it identifies a linguistic difference while demonstrating why that difference should be recorded before continuing language shift reduces access to fluent speaker knowledge.

Overall, the results reaffirm the importance of separating three levels of inference. First, lexical resemblance demonstrates that some items are cognate or similar. Second, phonological behavior demonstrates that the languages organize sound differently, especially with respect to nasality and selected final consonants. Third, cultural correspondence demonstrates regional and social parallels but does not establish linguistic descent. When these levels are kept analytically distinct, the conclusion becomes more robust: Enggano and Mentawai are related within the broad Austronesian/barrier-island context used by the thesis, but the available phonological and lexical evidence does not support treating them as the same language or as dialects of a single language.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Enggano and Mentawai show a measurable but relatively distant relationship in the data analyzed. The 200-item Swadesh comparison identifies 36 cognate items, yielding an 18% cognate percentage and placing the relationship in the stock/group category under the lexicostatistical ranges adopted in the thesis. The focused comparison of nasal forms reinforces the distinction between the languages: Enggano displays stronger nasal interaction with vowels, whereas the corresponding Mentawai forms show different vowel sequences, segment placement, and frequent use of forms such as [ku], [ra], [ta], or final glottal stops. These patterns support the conclusion that Enggano and Mentawai are not dialects of one language even though they occupy the same western Sumatran barrier-island region and are discussed within the broader Austronesian context. Cultural evidence further shows a combination of parallel and divergent features. Both communities retain ancestral-spirit traditions and hunting-gathering orientations, but Enggano is matrilineal while Mentawai is patrilineal. The findings therefore answer the study objectives by establishing limited lexical relatedness, identifying salient phonological differences, and situating those differences within a connected but culturally non-identical island environment. Future research should extend the comparison to larger corpora and additional barrier-island languages, with systematic phonological correspondence analysis and stronger language-documentation coverage.

LIMITATION

The study is intentionally limited to a phonological and lexicostatistical comparison of Enggano and Mentawai, with cultural observations used as contextual rather than genealogical evidence. It does not provide a full historical reconstruction, a systematic set of sound correspondences across all lexical items, or a comparative analysis involving the other barrier-island languages discussed in the background. The acoustic analysis is also descriptive: the thesis contains Praat spectra and qualitative interpretations of selected forms but does not provide a complete statistical dataset of duration, formants, intensity, or fundamental frequency for all speakers and items. Consequently, the acoustic observations should be read as supporting evidence for the phonological description rather than as an inferential phonetic experiment. A further limitation concerns data reporting. The thesis calculates relatedness from 36 cognates out of 200 Swadesh items and obtains 18%, but its appendix summary also reports 162 non-cognates and 38 entries marked as unavailable; those summary counts are not mutually compatible if treated as exclusive categories within a 200-item list. This article therefore preserves the thesis's reported 36/200 calculation without silently recalculating the underlying dataset. In addition, the methodology does not specify a fixed number of informants, speaker demographic profile, or formal sampling criteria. Future research should document speaker metadata explicitly, verify the Swadesh coding item by item, distinguish missing data from non-cognacy, and test regular phonological correspondences across multiple speakers and neighboring western Sumatran languages.

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