

A Structural Analysis of Phrase Patterns and Phonological-Morphophonemic Variation in the Mukomuko Language: A Lens of Structural Linguistic Framework

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Abstract

The Mukomuko language, a regional Malay variety spoken in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province, remains insufficiently documented, particularly regarding the interaction between phrase structure and phonological-morphophonemic patterns in natural language use. Previous studies have examined phonological, morphological, or lexical features separately, leaving limited integrated evidence on their structural relationships. This study investigates phrase categories, structural patterns, phonological variation, and morphophonemic alternation in the Mukomuko language within a structural linguistic framework. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed involving 15 native speakers aged 50–75 years, purposively selected based on native-speaker status, continuous residence, and active daily use of the language. Data were collected through observation, listening, note-taking, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and five digital audio-recording sessions conducted in Mukomuko Regency. The resulting corpus comprised 618 phrase tokens, transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and validated through source and method triangulation as well as inter-speaker verification. The analysis identified 214 verbal, 152 nominal, 103 adjectival, 76 numeral, and 73 prepositional phrases. Nominal and adjectival phrases predominantly exhibit Head-Modifier (D-M) patterns, whereas verbal phrases consistently follow Modifier-Head (M-D) structures. Recurrent phonological variation includes rhotic realization, vowel alternation, final consonant reduction, nasal alternation, and glottal realization, while morphophonemic alternation is primarily reflected in the allomorphic realization of the meN- prefix through regular nasal assimilation. These findings provide an integrated description of phrase structure and sound patterns, contributing to the documentation of regional Malay varieties and comparative studies in Indonesian Malay dialectology.

Keywords: Phrase structure; Phonology; Morphophonemic; Mukomuko language

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INTRODUCTION

Regional languages constitute an essential part of Indonesia's cultural diversity and ethnolinguistic identity. As a multilingual nation, Indonesia possesses hundreds of languages and dialects that have developed across diverse speech communities with distinctive phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic characteristics (Saddhono, 2020). Beyond functioning as everyday means of communication, regional languages preserve cultural knowledge, social identity, and local traditions, making their documentation an important component of linguistic scholarship and language preservation efforts (Eaton & Turin, 2022; Lonardi, 2022; Massuannan & Usman, 2025).

However, increasing language contact, social mobility, and the dominance of the national language have gradually reduced the use of many regional languages, highlighting the need for systematic linguistic documentation (Kasiyarno & Apriyanto, 2025; Watimelu, 2024).

One regional language that continues to be actively spoken is the Mukomuko language in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province. Mukomuko belongs to the Western Malay language group and shares historical and linguistic affinities with other coastal Malay varieties spoken along the western coast of Sumatra (Patriantoro, 2025)(Thenu, 2026). Although it exhibits numerous lexical and grammatical similarities with neighbouring Malay varieties, Mukomuko also demonstrates distinctive linguistic characteristics that differentiate it from Standard Indonesian and other Malay speech varieties. Despite its continued use within the local community, comprehensive linguistic descriptions of Mukomuko remain relatively limited, particularly those examining the interaction among syntactic, phonological, and morphophonemic structures.

Within structural linguistics, phrase structure constitutes an important grammatical unit because phrases function as intermediate constituents linking words and clauses in syntactic organization (Kridalaksana, 2017). Phrase structures also provide an appropriate environment for examining phonological realization and morphophonemic alternation because sound patterns frequently emerge through combinations of lexical items rather than isolated words (Andini et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025). Consequently, investigating phrase structure together with phonological and morphophonemic phenomena provides a more comprehensive understanding of the internal organization of a language than examining each linguistic level independently (Lameli et al., 2025; Sanz-Sánchez & Moyna, 2023).

In structural linguistic research, it is important to distinguish synchronic description from diachronic interpretation. A synchronic analysis aims to describe recurring structural patterns observable in contemporary language use, whereas diachronic analysis explains their historical development through comparative evidence. Therefore, recurring sound correspondences identified in the present study are interpreted as synchronic phonological variation and morphophonemic alternation rather than historical innovations unless supported by comparative historical data (Chaer, 2015; Pfau & Steinbach, 2023). This distinction provides a clearer theoretical basis for analysing the linguistic system of the Mukomuko language.

Previous studies on regional Malay varieties have investigated phonological variation in Bengkulu Malay, morphophonemic processes in Minangkabau, and syntactic characteristics of coastal Malay dialects in Sumatra (Meliana et al., 2026; Tambusai & Nasution, 2024). Other studies have described sound variation and phonological characteristics of regional Malay speech communities (Lubis & Lubis, 2024; Siame et al., 2025). Although these studies have contributed substantially to Malay dialectology, most have focused on individual linguistic levels, particularly phonology, morphology, or vocabulary. Consequently, limited attention has been given to the relationship between phrase structure, phonological variation, and morphophonemic alternation within a unified analytical framework, especially in the Mukomuko language. The limitations of previous studies reveal three important research gaps. First, comprehensive descriptions of Mukomuko phrase structures remain scarce. Second, phonological and morphophonemic phenomena have generally been examined independently from syntactic organization. Third, little attention has been given to how phrase structures provide the structural environment in which phonological variation and morphophonemic alternation occur during natural speech. Addressing these gaps is expected to provide a more integrated understanding of the linguistic system of the Mukomuko language.

The novelty of this study lies not merely in combining syntactic, phonological, and morphophonemic analyses, but in applying these three levels of linguistic analysis systematically to the same corpus of naturally occurring Mukomuko speech within a structural linguistic framework. Methodologically, the study integrates constituent analysis, phonological analysis based on IPA transcription, and morphophonemic analysis using the same linguistic dataset. Theoretically, it distinguishes synchronic structural description from historical interpretation, thereby providing a more rigorous account of recurring phonological and morphophonemic patterns without making unsupported diachronic claims. The findings of this study are expected to enrich regional linguistic documentation and Malay dialectology by providing a comprehensive description of the relationship between phrase structure, phonological variation, and morphophonemic alternation in the Mukomuko language. Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for regional language documentation, the development of local language teaching materials, and community-based language preservation initiatives.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design within a structural linguistic approach to examine phrase structures and their associated phonological and morphophonemic patterns in the Mukomuko language as used in natural communication. A qualitative approach was adopted to describe linguistic phenomena in their social and communicative context Moleong (2021), while the structural linguistic framework was used to analyse systematic relationships among phonological, morphological, and syntactic elements. The research was conducted in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province, involving 15 native Mukomuko speakers (8 males and 7 females) aged 50–75 years, purposively selected from several villages representing the principal speech community. All participants had acquired Mukomuko as their first language, had lived continuously in the community since birth, used Mukomuko as their primary language in daily communication, and were recognised locally as fluent native speakers. Although bilingual in Mukomuko and Indonesian, Mukomuko remained their dominant language. Their educational backgrounds ranged from elementary to senior high school. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure participants possessed authentic linguistic competence (Mahsun, 2019).

The research focused on nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases. The corpus was derived primarily from naturally occurring speech and supplemented by semi-structured elicitation to clarify specific lexical and grammatical forms. Data were collected through observation, listening, note-taking, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and five digital audio-recording sessions. The recordings totalled 6 hours and 15 minutes, of which 5 hours and 42 minutes met the quality criteria for transcription and analysis. The final corpus comprised approximately 2,350 utterances and 618 phrase tokens representing five phrase categories. All data were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and classified according to phrase type, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations prior to structural analysis.

Data Collection

Data were collected through participant observation, listening, note-taking, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and digital audio recording during fieldwork conducted between January and November 2025 in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province. Prior to data collection, all participants received information about the research objectives and procedures and voluntarily provided informed consent for participation and audio recording. Semi-structured interviews followed a predefined

protocol supported by picture prompts, situational prompts, and targeted word and phrase lists to elicit lexical items, phrase constructions, and naturally occurring utterances. Using a high-resolution portable digital recorder, five recording sessions produced 6 hours and 15 minutes of audio, of which 5 hours and 42 minutes met the quality criteria for transcription and analysis. The resulting corpus comprised approximately 2,350 utterances and 618 phrase tokens representing nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases. The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by interview guidelines, elicitation materials, recording equipment, linguistic classification sheets, and analytical coding forms (Sugiyono, 2022). All recordings were orthographically transcribed and converted into the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Linguistic items were then coded according to phrase category, constituent structure, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations. Data credibility was ensured through member checking and triangulation across speakers, collection techniques, and repeated field observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through four stages: data reduction, classification, structural analysis, and interpretation. First, phrase data relevant to the research objectives were selected from the recorded corpus and classified into nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases. Each item was coded according to phrase category, constituent structure, phonological correspondence, morphophonemic alternation, and lexical form. Structural analysis identified Head–Modifier (D–M), Modifier–Head (M–D), and Connector–Core (P–S) patterns. Phonological analysis was based on International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions obtained through repeated auditory examination and cross-speaker comparison to identify recurrent phonetic and phonological correspondences within comparable linguistic environments. Morphophonemic analysis focused on systematic alternations associated with affixation, particularly the allomorphic realization of the *meN-* prefix through nasal assimilation. Lexical forms were analysed synchronically as elements of the Mukomuko linguistic system and were not interpreted as reduced or derived forms of Standard Indonesian without comparative evidence. The analytical procedures were informed by the structural linguistic, phonological, and morphophonemic frameworks of Chaer (2015), Kridalaksana (2007) and (Katamba & Stonham, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness, source triangulation was conducted through comparisons across multiple native speakers, while theoretical triangulation was applied by comparing the findings with relevant linguistic theories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Corpus Overview

The analysed corpus comprised 2,350 utterances collected from 15 native Mukomuko speakers (8 males and 7 females, aged 50–75 years) during five digital audio-recording sessions conducted between January and November 2025. The recordings yielded 6 hours and 15 minutes of speech, of which 5 hours and 42 minutes met the quality criteria for phonetic transcription and structural analysis. Following transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the corpus yielded 618 phrase tokens, which constituted the dataset analysed in this study. The identified phrase tokens were classified into five grammatical categories, namely nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases. These categories represent the productive phrase constructions occurring in contemporary Mukomuko speech and provide the basis for examining constituent structure, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations. Rather than treating lexical forms as direct derivatives of Standard

Indonesian, this study analyses them synchronically as elements of the present-day Mukomuko linguistic system.

Overall, three recurring linguistic patterns emerged from the corpus. First, phrase organization exhibited systematic constituent ordering across the five phrase categories, indicating stable syntactic structures. Second, recurrent phonological correspondences were identified in rhotic realization, vowel alternation, final consonant realization, and nasal assimilation across comparable phonological environments. Third, morphophonemic alternations occurred primarily in verbal constructions involving the meN- prefix, where regular nasal assimilation produced predictable allomorphic variants. These corpus-level observations provide the empirical basis for addressing the four research questions concerning phrase structure, phonological correspondences, morphophonemic alternations, and their interrelationships in the Mukomuko language.

Phrase Categories and Structural Patterns

The first research question examines the phrase categories and constituent structures that characterize the Mukomuko language. Analysis of the 618 phrase tokens identified five productive phrase categories, namely nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases. Across these categories, constituent ordering was highly systematic and reflected stable syntactic organization. Nominal and adjectival phrases predominantly followed the Head–Modifier (D–M) pattern, in which the head preceded its modifier. Verbal phrases consistently exhibited the Modifier–Head (M–D) pattern, with aspectual markers or verbal modifiers preceding the lexical verb. Numeral phrases generally consisted of numerals combined with classifiers or modifiers, whereas prepositional phrases displayed the Connector–Core (P–S) pattern, in which the preposition introduced the following nominal constituent. These findings indicate that phrase formation in Mukomuko follows consistent grammatical principles despite lexical variation across speakers.

Table 1. Phrase Categories and Constituent Structures in the Mukomuko Language

Mukomuko Phrase	English Gloss	Phrase Category	Constituent Structure	Structural Description
<i>oto baghung</i>	new car	Nominal	D–M	Head noun followed by adjective
<i>budak kecil</i>	small child	Nominal	D–M	Head noun followed by adjective
<i>mendah gilo</i>	crazy man	Nominal	D–M	Head noun followed by adjective
<i>tino gilo/ pandi</i>	foolish woman	Nominal	D–M	Head noun followed by adjective
<i>sedang tidu</i>	sleeping	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb
<i>sedang miki</i>	thinking	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb
<i>sedang nyabut ghuput</i>	pulling grass	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase
<i>sedang nebeh kayung</i>	cutting wood	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase
<i>sedang ngait pelepah</i>	hooking palm fronds	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase
<i>sedang maku</i>	hoeing	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb
<i>sedang masak yodah</i>	cooking cakes	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase
<i>sedang ngaling sumu</i>	digging a well	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase
<i>sedang geghek kukung</i>	trimming fingernails	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase
<i>sedang nebih ayam</i>	slaughtering a chicken	Verbal	M–D	Aspect marker + verb phrase

Mukomuko Phrase	English Gloss	Phrase Category	Constituent Structure	Structural Description
<i>elok nian</i>	very good	Adjectival	D–M	Adjective followed by degree modifier
<i>besa' nian</i>	very big	Adjectival	D–M	Adjective followed by degree modifier
<i>kecik nian</i>	very small	Adjectival	D–M	Adjective followed by degree modifier
<i>bughuk nian</i>	very bad	Adjectival	D–M	Adjective followed by degree modifier
<i>geletek jeghek</i>	mischievous	Adjectival	Fixed expression	Idiomatic adjectival phrase
<i>sepuluh iku</i>	ten animals	Numeral	Numeral + Classifier	Numeral phrase
<i>duo bleh buah</i>	twelve fruits	Numeral	Numeral + Classifier	Numeral phrase
<i>limo bleh icek</i>	fifteen items	Numeral	Numeral + Classifier	Numeral phrase
<i>suah laing</i>	one more	Numeral	Numeral + Modifier	Numeral phrase
<i>tigo bleh buah</i>	thirteen fruits	Numeral	Numeral + Classifier	Numeral phrase
<i>pek bleh buah</i>	fourteen fruits	Numeral	Numeral + Classifier	Numeral phrase
<i>nam bleh buah</i>	sixteen fruits	Numeral	Numeral + Classifier	Numeral phrase
<i>kek lepau</i>	at the shop	Prepositional	P–S	Preposition + noun
<i>kek pitung</i>	at the door	Prepositional	P–S	Preposition + noun
<i>daghing pasa</i>	from the market	Prepositional	P–S	Preposition + noun
<i>pagi tading</i>	this morning	Adverbial	Temporal expression	Adverbial phrase
<i>siang kelak</i>	later today	Adverbial	Temporal expression	Adverbial phrase
<i>sta laing</i>	shortly	Adverbial	Temporal expression	Adverbial phrase

The distribution of phrase categories demonstrates that Mukomuko employs a stable constituent-ordering system comparable to that of other Malay varieties while maintaining its own lexical inventory. Nominal and adjectival phrases consistently exhibit Head–Modifier (D–M) constructions, whereas verbal phrases favour the Modifier–Head (M–D) pattern through the placement of aspectual markers before lexical verbs. Numeral phrases productively combine numerals with classifiers or modifiers, and prepositional phrases uniformly display Connector–Core (P–S) structures. These structural regularities provide the syntactic framework within which phonological correspondences and morphophonemic alternations operate. Importantly, lexical items such as *kek*, *miki*, *maku*, *suah*, and *pek* are treated in this study as synchronic lexical forms of the contemporary Mukomuko language. Although some exhibit semantic correspondences with Standard Indonesian or neighbouring Malay varieties, the present analysis does **not** assume historical derivation or lexical reduction in the absence of comparative historical evidence. Such questions fall beyond the scope of this synchronic structural description and are therefore not addressed in the present analysis.

Phonological Correspondences

The second research question examines the phonological correspondences observed in Mukomuko phrase realization. Analysis of the corpus revealed that the identified sound patterns occurred consistently across multiple speakers and comparable phonological environments, indicating systematic phonological correspondences rather than isolated pronunciation differences. The most recurrent patterns involved rhotic realization, vowel alternation, final consonant realization, and nasal segment realization. These correspondences occurred across all phrase categories but were especially frequent in nominal, verbal, adjectival, and prepositional phrases.

Table 2. Phonological Correspondences in Mukomuko Phrase Realization

Mukomuko Phrase	IPA Transcription*	Phonological Correspondence	Phonological Environment	Representative Examples
<i>oto baghung</i>	/oto baʁuŋ/	Rhotic realization and final nasal segment	Word-final position	<i>baghung</i> , <i>bughuk</i> , <i>daghing</i>
<i>sedang nyabut ghuput</i>	/sədaŋ ɲabut ɣuput/	Rhotic realization	Word-initial onset	<i>ghuput</i> , <i>ghing</i> , <i>ghumah</i>
<i>bughuk nian</i>	/buʁuʔ nian/	Rhotic realization	Intervocalic position	Recurrent across speakers
<i>daghing pasa</i>	/daŋiŋ pasa/	Rhotic realization with final nasal segment	Word-final position	Multiple speakers
<i>sedang tidu</i>	/sədaŋ tidu/	Final consonant omission	Word-final position	Recurrent in verbal phrases
<i>duo bleh buah</i>	/duo bləh buah/	Vowel reduction	Medial syllable	Numeral phrases
<i>pek bleh buah</i>	/peʔ bləh buah/	Segmental shortening	Numeral phrases	Multiple speakers
<i>nam bleh buah</i>	/nam bləh buah/	Vowel reduction	Numeral phrases	Multiple speakers
<i>pagi tading</i>	/paŋi taɲiŋ/	Final nasal realization	Temporal expressions	Recurrent pattern

The most frequent correspondence involved the realization of the historical rhotic as the voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/, particularly in lexical items such as *baghung*, *bughuk*, *ghuput*, and *daghing*. Because this study adopts a synchronic perspective, these realizations are described as recurrent phonological correspondences within the contemporary Mukomuko sound system rather than as evidence of historical sound change. Similarly, final consonant realization and vowel alternation occurred repeatedly in comparable phonological environments, particularly in numeral and verbal phrases, indicating regular patterns of speech production shared by multiple speakers.

The observed phonological correspondences demonstrate that Mukomuko maintains a relatively stable segmental system while exhibiting distinctive realizations that differentiate it from neighbouring Malay varieties. However, the present study does not interpret these correspondences as historical developments from Standard Indonesian or other Malay varieties because such claims require comparative historical evidence beyond the scope of this research. The third research question examines the morphophonemic alternations associated with phrase formation in the Mukomuko language. Analysis of the verbal phrase corpus revealed that morphophonemic variation occurs predominantly in verbs formed with the *meN-* prefix. Rather than representing irregular forms, these alternations exhibit systematic patterns of nasal assimilation and allomorphic variation conditioned by the initial segment of the lexical base. The

observed patterns are consistent across multiple speakers, indicating that they constitute productive morphophonemic processes within the contemporary Mukomuko linguistic system.

Table 3. Morphophonemic Alternations in Mukomuko Verbal Phrases

Mukomuko Phrase	IPA Transcription*	Morphophonemic Pattern		Morphological Process	Distribution
<i>sedang nyabut ghuput</i>	/sədaŋ ɲabut kʊput/	meN- → ny-		Nasal assimilation before palatal onset	Productive
<i>sedang ngait pelepah</i>	/sədaŋ ŋait pələpah/	meN- → ng-		Nasal assimilation before velar onset	Productive
<i>sedang ngaling sumu</i>	/sədaŋ ŋalin sumu/	meN- → ng-		Nasal assimilation before velar onset	Productive
<i>sedang nebeh kayung</i>	/sədaŋ nəbəh kajun/	meN- → n-		Nasal assimilation before alveolar onset	Productive
<i>sedang nebih ayam</i>	/sədaŋ nəbih ajam/	meN- → n-		Nasal assimilation before alveolar onset	Productive
<i>sedang miki</i>	/sədaŋ miki/	Lexicalized form	verbal	No productive alternation identified	Limited
<i>sedang maku</i>	/sədaŋ maku/	Lexicalized form	verbal	No productive alternation identified	Limited

The corpus indicates that the most productive morphophonemic process involves the allomorphic realization of the meN- prefix, particularly through the alternants ny-, ng-, and n-. These alternations are conditioned by the phonological properties of the following segment and occur consistently across comparable verbal constructions. Such regularity suggests that the alternations represent systematic morphophonemic rules rather than isolated lexical variation. By contrast, forms such as miki and maku do not provide sufficient evidence to be analysed as products of productive morphophonemic alternation. In the present study, these items are therefore treated as synchronically established lexical verbs within the Mukomuko language. Although they correspond semantically to verbs found in Standard Indonesian and neighbouring Malay varieties, the available corpus does not support interpreting them as reduced or derived forms. Their historical origin requires comparative diachronic investigation beyond the scope of this study. Overall, the findings demonstrate that morphophonemic alternation in Mukomuko is primarily associated with productive nasal-prefix allomorphy, whereas several frequently used verbal forms function as independent lexical items. This distinction clarifies the relationship between productive morphological processes and lexical representation in the contemporary Mukomuko linguistic system.

Relationship among Phrase Structure, Phonological Correspondences, and Morphophonemic Alternations

The fourth research question examines the relationship among phrase structure, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations in the Mukomuko language. The analysis demonstrates that these three linguistic domains are systematically interconnected rather than functioning as independent components. Constituent structure provides the grammatical framework for phrase formation, while phonological correspondences and morphophonemic alternations contribute to the phonetic realization of lexical items within that framework. Together, these processes shape the characteristic linguistic profile of contemporary Mukomuko speech. Across the analysed corpus, Head–Modifier (D–M) constructions were consistently associated with stable nominal and adjectival phrase organization, whereas Modifier–Head (M–D)

constructions predominated in verbal phrases containing aspectual markers or verbal modifiers. These constituent patterns remained stable regardless of the occurrence of phonological correspondences or morphophonemic alternations, indicating that changes in sound realization do not alter the underlying syntactic organization of the phrase.

Similarly, recurrent phonological correspondences—including rhotic realization, vowel alternation, final consonant realization, and nasal segment realization—were observed across different phrase categories without affecting constituent order. These patterns therefore represent regular phonological characteristics of Mukomuko speech rather than syntactic variation. Morphophonemic alternations exhibited an equally systematic distribution, occurring primarily in verbal constructions involving the *meN-* prefix, where nasal assimilation generated predictable allomorphic variants while preserving the grammatical function of the verb phrase. The interaction among these linguistic domains demonstrates that Mukomuko phrase formation is governed by complementary structural principles. Phrase structure determines constituent organization, phonological correspondences account for recurrent segmental realizations, and morphophonemic alternations regulate the realization of productive morphological processes. Consequently, the distinctive characteristics of Mukomuko arise from the interaction of these linguistic levels rather than from isolated phonological or lexical phenomena.

The findings also indicate that lexical items such as *kek*, *miki*, *maku*, *suah*, and *pek* should be interpreted within the synchronic grammatical system of Mukomuko. Their distribution across phrase categories shows that they function as productive lexical elements irrespective of their possible historical relationship with other Malay varieties. Accordingly, the present analysis describes these forms based on their structural and functional behaviour in the contemporary language without proposing historical derivation in the absence of comparative evidence.

Discussion

Phrase Structure within the Malay Syntactic Tradition

The present study demonstrates that phrase formation in the Mukomuko language is governed by systematic constituent-ordering principles characteristic of Malay languages. Nominal and adjectival phrases predominantly follow the Head–Modifier (D–M) construction, whereas verbal phrases consistently exhibit the Modifier–Head (M–D) pattern through the placement of aspectual markers before lexical verbs. Prepositional phrases uniformly display the Connector–Core (P–S) pattern. These findings indicate that Mukomuko preserves the fundamental syntactic organization widely described for Malay languages while maintaining lexical forms that distinguish it from neighbouring varieties. The predominance of the D–M construction corresponds closely with structural descriptions proposed by Kridalaksana (2017), who argues that constituent order in Indonesian and Malay noun phrases is primarily determined by the relationship between the head and its modifier. Similar constituent organization has also been reported for several coastal Malay varieties in Sumatra, suggesting that Mukomuko shares a common syntactic foundation within the Western Malay subgroup (Meliana et al., 2024; Tambusai & Nasution, 2024). Nevertheless, the corpus analysed in this study indicates that Mukomuko retains distinctive lexical combinations, such as *oto baghung*, *budak kecil*, and *kek lepau*, which function productively within these shared syntactic frameworks.

Verbal phrases exhibit a different constituent organization. The consistent occurrence of aspectual markers before lexical verbs supports the predominance of the Modifier–Head (M–D) pattern, a feature commonly observed in Malay languages. Comparable constructions have been documented in Bengkulu Malay, Jambi Malay,

and Minangkabau, where temporal or aspectual markers precede verbal predicates while preserving relatively stable constituent order (Lubis & Lubis, 2024; Meliana et al., 2026). These similarities reinforce the classification of Mukomuko as a Malay variety while simultaneously highlighting its local lexical identity. An important contribution of the present study lies in integrating phrase-level structural analysis across five productive phrase categories. Previous studies of regional Malay varieties have generally concentrated on phonological variation or lexical documentation independently. By analysing nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases within a unified structural framework, this study demonstrates that syntactic regularity remains stable despite lexical diversity. Consequently, the findings extend previous descriptions of Mukomuko beyond vocabulary documentation toward a more comprehensive account of phrase organization.

Unlike several earlier descriptions, the present study adopts a synchronic structural perspective. Lexical items such as *kek*, *miki*, *maku*, *suah*, and *pek* are analysed according to their grammatical functions in contemporary Mukomuko speech rather than being interpreted as reduced forms of Standard Indonesian. This approach is consistent with modern descriptive linguistics, which prioritizes the internal organization of the language under investigation before proposing historical explanations. Questions concerning historical derivation require comparative evidence from multiple Malay varieties and therefore remain outside the scope of the present research.

Phonological Correspondences in the Context of Malay Dialectology

The phonological correspondences identified in the Mukomuko corpus demonstrate that the language preserves a coherent segmental system while exhibiting realizations that distinguish it from neighbouring Malay varieties. Rather than representing isolated pronunciation differences, the recurrent realization of rhotic segments, vowel alternations, final consonant realizations, and nasal segments reflects regular phonological behaviour shared by multiple speakers and occurring in comparable phonological environments. These findings suggest that phonological variation in Mukomuko is governed by systematic linguistic constraints and therefore constitutes part of the synchronic sound system of the language.

Among the most salient correspondences is the realization of the rhotic segment as the voiced uvular fricative /ʁ/ in lexical items such as *baghung*, *bughuk*, *ghuput*, and *daghing*. Similar rhotic variation has been reported in several coastal Malay varieties of Sumatra, although the phonetic realization and distribution differ across speech communities (Lubis & Lubis, 2024; Siame et al., 2025). The present findings indicate that this correspondence is not sporadic but recurs across lexical items and speakers, suggesting that it functions as a stable phonological characteristic of contemporary Mukomuko speech rather than an individual articulatory preference. The corpus also revealed recurrent vowel alternation and final consonant realization, particularly in numeral expressions and frequently occurring verbal phrases. These patterns are consistent with articulatory economy, whereby speakers simplify or stabilize segmental sequences without altering lexical identity. Chaer (2015) argues that phonological variation in Indonesian regional languages frequently reflects articulatory efficiency while remaining constrained by the phonological system of the language. The Mukomuko data support this observation by showing that segmental variation occurs in predictable phonological environments and does not affect constituent structure or grammatical interpretation.

From a dialectological perspective, the Mukomuko findings are compatible with descriptions of Malay varieties spoken along the western coast of Sumatra, where phonological innovation coexists with relatively conservative syntactic organization

(Meliana et al., 2026; Tambusai & Nasution, 2024). Nevertheless, the present study does not interpret these correspondences as direct historical developments from Standard Indonesian or neighbouring Malay varieties. Instead, the observed patterns are described as synchronic properties of the Mukomuko sound system because the available corpus was designed for structural description rather than comparative historical reconstruction. Establishing historical relationships would require systematic comparison with cognate sets across multiple Malay varieties and evidence from historical linguistics, which falls beyond the scope of this research.

Methodologically, this distinction is important because it **separates** phonological correspondence **from** historical sound change. The former describes regular relationships among speech forms within the contemporary language, whereas the latter requires evidence of diachronic development. By adopting a synchronic analytical framework, the present study provides a more robust account of Mukomuko phonology while avoiding historical interpretations that are not supported by the available data. This approach also strengthens the contribution of the study to Malay dialectology by providing empirically documented phonological patterns based on a systematically transcribed spoken corpus rather than on isolated lexical comparisons.

Morphophonemic Alternations and Verbal Formation

The morphophonemic alternations identified in the Mukomuko corpus demonstrate that verbal formation is governed by productive allomorphic patterns rather than by random phonetic variation. The alternants *n-*, *ny-*, and *ng-* associated with the *meN-* prefix occur systematically according to the phonological characteristics of the following lexical base. Their recurrent distribution across speakers indicates that these alternations constitute regular morphological processes within the contemporary Mukomuko language. Consequently, the observed variation should be interpreted as evidence of productive verbal morphology rather than as irregular lexical modification.

These findings are consistent with the morphophonemic principles described for Indonesian and Malay languages. According to Kridalaksana (2007), allomorphic variation in the *meN-* prefix is conditioned by the phonological properties of the base-initial segment and represents one of the most productive morphological processes in the Malay language family. Similarly, Katamba & Stonham (2018) argues that morphophonemic alternation reflects the interaction between morphological structure and phonological realization, enabling affixes to maintain grammatical function while adapting to phonological context. The Mukomuko data support these theoretical perspectives by demonstrating that nasal-prefix alternation follows predictable structural patterns across verbal constructions.

Comparable morphophonemic behaviour has also been reported for Minangkabau, Bengkulu Malay, and several coastal Malay varieties of Sumatra, where nasal-prefix allomorphy functions as a productive mechanism of verb formation despite differences in lexical inventories (Lubis & Lubis, 2024; Meliana et al., 2026). The present findings therefore strengthen the view that productive nasal assimilation represents a shared characteristic of Malay morphology while simultaneously revealing local realizations specific to Mukomuko. This balance between shared grammatical principles and local linguistic identity contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of variation within the Western Malay linguistic continuum.

An important implication of the present study concerns the interpretation of lexical items such as *miki*, *maku*, *nebeh*, and *nebih*. Previous descriptive accounts of regional Malay languages have sometimes interpreted comparable forms as reductions or abbreviated equivalents of Standard Indonesian verbs. However, the present corpus does not provide sufficient synchronic evidence to support such an analysis. Instead, these

forms function as established lexical verbs within the contemporary Mukomuko speech community and are used consistently by speakers regardless of age or educational background. Their synchronic distribution therefore justifies treating them as lexical units unless future comparative historical evidence demonstrates otherwise.

The distinction between productive morphophonemic alternation and lexicalized verbal forms constitutes one of the methodological contributions of this study. Productive alternations, such as those involving the *meN-* prefix, can be explained through regular morphological rules, whereas lexicalized forms should be analysed according to their grammatical function within the contemporary language rather than their presumed historical origin. By separating these two categories, the analysis avoids overgeneralisation and provides a more accurate description of Mukomuko verbal morphology. This distinction also responds to recent recommendations in descriptive linguistics that synchronic grammatical analysis should precede diachronic interpretation, particularly when dealing with under-documented regional languages. From a broader linguistic perspective, the Mukomuko data demonstrate that verbal formation emerges from the interaction of morphology and phonology without disrupting the underlying syntactic organisation of phrases. Morphophonemic alternation therefore complements, rather than replaces, constituent structure and phonological correspondence. This interaction illustrates how multiple linguistic levels operate simultaneously to produce systematic verbal constructions, reinforcing the integrative analytical framework adopted in the present study.

Implications for Malay Dialectology and Language Documentation

The findings of this study have important implications for both Malay dialectology and the documentation of regional languages in Indonesia. From a dialectological perspective, the analysis demonstrates that the Mukomuko language shares fundamental structural characteristics with other Western Malay varieties while preserving distinctive lexical, phonological, and morphophonemic features. The coexistence of shared grammatical organization and local linguistic innovations supports the view that Malay varieties constitute a dialect continuum in which structural stability is maintained despite regional variation (Meliana et al., 2026; Tambusai & Nasution, 2024). The present findings therefore contribute additional empirical evidence for understanding the internal diversity of the Malay language family in western Indonesia.

One significant contribution of this study is its integrative analytical framework, which examines phrase structure, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations within a single corpus. Previous studies of Mukomuko and related Malay varieties have generally concentrated on individual linguistic components, such as phonology, vocabulary, or morphophonemics, without examining the interaction among these linguistic domains. By analysing the relationships among syntax, phonology, and morphology simultaneously, the present study provides a more comprehensive description of the Mukomuko linguistic system and demonstrates how these components collectively shape phrase formation. This methodological integration represents an advancement over earlier descriptive studies that treated each linguistic level independently.

The study also contributes to the documentation of an under-described regional language. The spoken corpus analysed in this research consisting of recordings from 15 native speakers, 2,350 utterances, and 618 phrase tokens provides systematically documented linguistic evidence that can support future descriptive, comparative, and computational research. Unlike lexical inventories or isolated examples, the corpus captures naturally occurring phrase usage across multiple speakers and communicative contexts, thereby offering a more reliable representation of contemporary Mukomuko

language use. Such documentation is particularly valuable for regional languages that have received limited scholarly attention and remain underrepresented in linguistic databases.

Beyond descriptive linguistics, the findings have broader implications for language maintenance and revitalisation. Regional languages throughout Indonesia increasingly face pressures from national language dominance, urbanisation, and intergenerational language shift (Kasiyarno & Apriyanto, 2025; Watimelu, 2024). Comprehensive linguistic documentation provides an essential foundation for developing educational materials, community-based language programmes, and digital language resources. The phrase corpus and structural descriptions presented in this study therefore offer practical resources that may support future initiatives in local-language education and cultural preservation.

Finally, the present study highlights several directions for future research. Because the analysis adopts a synchronic structural perspective, it does not attempt to reconstruct the historical development of Mukomuko or determine the origins of specific lexical forms. Future investigations should incorporate comparative historical linguistics, dialectometric analysis, and acoustic phonetic methods to examine relationships between Mukomuko and neighbouring Malay varieties in greater detail. Expanding the corpus to include younger speakers and additional dialect areas would also provide valuable evidence regarding ongoing language variation and change. Such studies would complement the present findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic diversity of the Malay language family.

CONCLUSION

This study examined phrase structure, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations in the Mukomuko language using a spoken corpus comprising 2,350 utterances, 618 phrase tokens, and recordings from 15 native speakers. The findings directly address the four research questions by demonstrating that the analysed corpus contains five productive phrase categories—nominal, verbal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional phrases—with consistent constituent organization. Nominal and adjectival phrases predominantly exhibit the Head–Modifier (D–M) pattern, verbal phrases consistently display the Modifier–Head (M–D) pattern, and prepositional phrases follow the Connector–Core (P–S) pattern. These recurrent structural patterns indicate that phrase formation in the analysed corpus is governed by systematic syntactic organization.

The study also identified recurring phonological correspondences, including rhotic realization, vowel alternation, final consonant realization, and nasal segment realization, which occurred across multiple speakers and comparable phonological environments. In addition, productive morphophonemic alternations involving the *meN*-prefix were observed in verbal constructions through regular allomorphic variation conditioned by the phonological characteristics of lexical bases. These findings describe recurrent structural and segmental patterns in the analysed Mukomuko corpus without making claims concerning their historical development or wider typological distribution.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its integrated analysis of phrase structure, phonological correspondences, and morphophonemic alternations within a single spoken-language corpus. By combining these three linguistic domains, the study provides a more comprehensive synchronic description of Mukomuko phrase formation than previous studies that examined these components separately. The documented corpus and its structural analysis also contribute to the linguistic documentation of the Mukomuko language and provide empirical data for future descriptive and comparative research. Several limitations should be acknowledged. The findings are based on speech

produced by 15 native speakers from the investigated research sites and therefore should be interpreted within the scope of the analysed corpus.

RECOMMENDATION

This study contributes to regional linguistic research, particularly Malay dialectology, regional phonology, and Austronesian morphophonemics. The findings show that Mukomuko preserves traditional syntactic structures while exhibiting systematic phonological innovations, including uvularization, final nasalization, syncope, and morphophonemic reduction. These results highlight that phonological change can occur independently of syntactic change and reinforce the phonological diversity of Sumatran Malay varieties despite their shared syntactic patterns. The study also provides a basis for documenting regional languages, preserving Mukomuko linguistic and cultural identity, and developing local-content teaching materials in Bengkulu Province. This study is limited to phrase structure, phonology, and morphophonemics, with limited coverage of semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic aspects. The data were collected from a relatively small speech community and analysed qualitatively without acoustic phonetic measurements. Future research should employ acoustic phonetic methods to examine sound patterns more precisely, compare Mukomuko with other Sumatran Malay varieties, and investigate sociolinguistic issues such as language attitudes, intergenerational language shift, and the influence of Indonesian. Such studies would deepen understanding of linguistic change and support the preservation of regional languages in Indonesia.

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Declaration of Using AI Tools

This article acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools during the writing process. AI-assisted tools were utilized to support literature organization, improve language clarity, enhance grammatical accuracy, and assist in refining the structure and presentation of the manuscript. The use of AI was limited to supporting the authors' writing process and did not replace the authors' intellectual contributions, critical analysis, interpretation of findings, or decision-making throughout the research process. The authors remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, validity, and ethical integrity of the content presented in this article.

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