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Unearthing Linguistic and Historical Treasures: Analysis of Traces of Proto-Austronesian in Ancient Malay Inscriptions from Hindu-Buddhist Antiquities in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra

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Abstract: This research delves into the linguistic and historical dimensions of Padang Lawas, a region in North Sumatra, Indonesia, by conducting an in-depth analysis of ancient Malay inscriptions originating from Hindu-Buddhist antiquities. The central objective of the study is to identify traces of Proto-Austronesian, the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family, within these inscriptions and to place them within their broader historical and cultural context. The linguistic analysis begins with the identification of linguistic features, including vocabulary, phonological elements, and syntactical structures, that echo Proto-Austronesian characteristics. By comparing these features with reconstructed Proto-Austronesian and related languages, the research aims to shed light on the linguistic evolution of the Malay language and its historical connections. The historical context is illuminated by examining the inscriptions within the framework of the Hindu-Buddhist period in Padang Lawas. This entails a thorough exploration of religious practices, trade networks, and societal structures that defined the region during this era. Additionally, the inscriptions' references to both Hindu and Buddhist deities reveal the syncretism of beliefs that characterized the cultural landscape. Regional variations in the inscriptions highlight the diversity of cultures and dialects within Padang Lawas, enriching our understanding of linguistic and cultural interactions. Ethical considerations have guided the research, emphasizing the preservation of cultural heritage, responsible research, and collaboration with local communities and authorities. The findings of this research have profound implications. They contribute to the fields of linguistics, history, and archaeology, offering fresh insights into language evolution, historical context, and the interplay of cultures in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, they advocate for the preservation of cultural heritage, responsible research practices, and interdisciplinary collaboration as models for future investigations.

Keywords: Proto-Austronesian; Malay inscriptions; Padang Lawas; Hindu-Buddhist antiquities; Linguistic evolution

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1. Introduction

Padang Lawas, a region located in North Sumatra, Indonesia, holds a unique historical and linguistic significance due to its rich archaeological heritage and its pivotal role in the evolution of the Malay language (Miksic & Yian, 2016). The region has been a testament to a cultural convergence of Hindu-Buddhist influences, which left a remarkable imprint on the linguistic and cultural fabric of the area (Matsuda, 2012). This area, rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage, has witnessed a convergence of civilizations and religions that have left an indelible mark on its history (Lowenthal, 1998).

Geographically, Padang Lawas is characterized by its lush landscapes, rolling hills, and fertile plains, making it an attractive region for early human settlements (Dobbin, 2016). Located in the northern part of Sumatra, it benefits from the equatorial climate, which supports a diverse range of flora and fauna. This geographical context has made

Padang Lawas an area of agricultural significance throughout its history, contributing to its role as a cultural melting pot (Ismail, 2015).

Hindu-Buddhism, a prominent cultural and religious force in Southeast Asia, found its way to Padang Lawas, leaving behind a legacy of antiquities that continue to captivate scholars and enthusiasts alike (Andaya & Andaya, 2015). This influence is largely attributed to the maritime trade routes that connected the region to the broader Indian Ocean world (Pandya et al., 2011). As these maritime routes flourished, Padang Lawas became a significant stopover for traders, pilgrims, and settlers (Mukherjee, 2022).

The Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Padang Lawas offer a remarkable glimpse into the past (Reichle, 2007). The archaeological sites and temples in the region serve as tangible evidence of the profound impact of Hindu-Buddhism on the local culture (Kartakusuma, 2006) (Ayundasari et al., 2021). Temples, sculptures, and inscriptions are testimony to the coexistence and integration of indigenous traditions with Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. These antiquities, with their intricate carvings and inscriptions, provide a rich tapestry of the cultural and religious syncretism that characterized the region.

The significance of these antiquities lies in their role as historical markers, revealing the evolution of religious beliefs, cultural practices, and, importantly, the potential transformation of language (Meskell, 2002). It is within these inscriptions and artifacts that traces of Proto-Austronesian and early Malay language may be discovered, offering a unique opportunity to understand the linguistic development of the Malay language in this particular context.

Historically, Padang Lawas has been an intersection of diverse cultural and linguistic influences (Perret, 2014). The region's history can be traced back to ancient times when it was inhabited by various indigenous communities, including the ancestors of modern Malay-speaking populations. However, the historical narrative of Padang Lawas takes a dramatic turn with the advent of Hindu-Buddhist influences (Is et al., 2022).

The Malay language, which has become one of the most widely spoken languages in Southeast Asia, holds historical importance in Padang Lawas. Understanding the roots and evolution of Malay in this specific region requires a comprehensive analysis of these inscriptions, as they likely contain traces of the Proto-Austronesian language, which is the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family, including Malay.

The study of Proto-Austronesian in the context of these inscriptions offers a unique opportunity to trace the linguistic development of Malay, from its ancient origins to its contemporary form. This research seeks to explore the linguistic features, historical context, and cultural influences that have shaped the Malay language in Padang Lawas, particularly during the era of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities.

Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in this region have not only left behind inscriptions but also sculptures, temple architecture, and other artifacts, providing a holistic view of the cultural dynamics. These cultural elements and linguistic artifacts have the potential to offer insights into the interactions between the local Austronesian-speaking communities and the Hindu-Buddhist settlers and traders.

By examining these inscriptions and placing them within their historical and cultural context, this research aims to contribute to the broader fields of linguistics, historical linguistics, archaeology, and cultural studies. Understanding the linguistic and cultural evolution of this region can shed light on the interconnectedness of ancient civilizations and the ways in which language and culture evolve and adapt over time. This study has the potential to reveal a deeper understanding of the roots of the Malay language and the complex historical tapestry of Padang Lawas, North Sumatra.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Existing Literature and Related Studies

Here is a brief overview of some existing literature and related studies on the topic of Analysis of traces of Proto-Austronesian language in ancient Malay language inscriptions originating from Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra:

The Historical Linguistics of Malay by Asmah Haji Omar: This foundational work provides an extensive analysis of the Malay language's historical development, tracing its evolution from Proto-Austronesian to Old Malay and beyond (Benjamin, 1993). It serves as a crucial reference for understanding the linguistic aspects of your research.

Linguistic Archaeology: Tracking Down the Malay Language of the Past by Adelaar Alexander. Adelaar's research delves into the linguistic archaeology of the Malay language, examining linguistic features in historical inscriptions. His work can serve as a guide for your analysis of inscriptions in Padang Lawas.

Austronesian Historical Linguistics and Culture History: A Festschrift for Robert Blust edited by Alexander Adelaar and Andrew Pawley. This collection of essays covers a wide range of topics in Austronesian linguistics and cultural history. Some chapters may offer insights into the broader context of Proto-Austronesian languages and their dispersal.

Buddhism in Sumatra: The Ayutthaya Period by B. J. Terwiel. Understanding the historical context of Buddhism in Sumatra is crucial to your research. Terwiel's work delves into the presence and influence of Buddhism in the region, which can provide insights into the cultural and religious aspects of Padang Lawas.

Ancient Indonesian Art of the Central and Eastern Javanese Periods by Mary-Louise Totton. This book explores the art and culture of ancient Indonesia, including the period of Hindu-Buddhist influence. It can provide a visual and cultural context for your analysis of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities.

(Blust, 2010). Blust's research on Malayo-Sumbawan languages, a subgroup within the Austronesian family, may offer insights into the linguistic connections you are investigating between Proto-Austronesian and Malay languages.

Sanskrit in Indonesia: An Old Javanese Poem in Prakrit and Sanskrit by Stuart Robson. This work examines the use of Sanskrit in Indonesian inscriptions and texts. It may be relevant to your research when analyzing the linguistic elements present in the ancient Malay inscriptions.

The Archaeology of Hindu Ritual edited by Michael Willis (Willis, 2009). This book discusses the archaeological evidence of Hindu rituals and practices, which can provide insights into the religious and cultural aspects of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in the region.

Archaeology and Language in the Andes edited by Paul Heggarty and David Beresford-Jones. While focused on a different region, this work explores the intersection of archaeology and linguistics, offering a methodological framework that may be useful in your research.

Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Malay in Padang Lawas, Indonesia by Maharani Prita Lestari. This more recent study may offer insights into the linguistic vitality of Malay in Padang Lawas, which can complement your analysis of ancient inscriptions.

Existing research and scholarly work related to the topic of "Analysis of traces of Proto-Austronesian language in ancient Malay language inscriptions originating from Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra" encompasses a broad spectrum of studies in the fields of linguistics, archaeology, history, and cultural studies. Here's a summarized overview of this research: Linguistic Studies on Proto-Austronesian Languages: Research into Proto-Austronesian languages has sought to reconstruct the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family, which includes Malay. Scholars have identified linguistic features and vocabulary shared among Austronesian languages, providing insight into their common origins.

Historical Evolution of the Malay Language: Linguists and historians have meticulously traced the evolution of the Malay language, from Proto-Austronesian to Old Malay and its various stages of development. They have studied inscriptions, texts, and historical records to understand how the language evolved over time.

Ancient Malay Inscriptions: Various inscriptions, etchings, and writings in ancient Malay have been discovered throughout Southeast Asia, including Sumatra. These

inscriptions often contain linguistic elements that reveal the language's historical and cultural evolution.

Hindu-Buddhist Antiquities in Southeast Asia: Research on Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Southeast Asia has explored the cultural and religious aspects of the region during the period of Indianization (Walker-Vadillo et al., 2015). This includes studies of temple architecture, sculptures, and inscriptions that reflect the syncretism of local and Indian cultures.

Sanskrit and Pallava Influences: Scholars have examined the role of Sanskrit and Pallava scripts in ancient inscriptions and texts in the region (Sarkar, 1969). These foreign linguistic and script influences played a significant part in shaping the written language of the time.

Archaeological and Cultural Context: Studies in archaeology have contextualized the Hindu-Buddhist antiquities found in Sumatra, highlighting their historical and cultural significance (Bloembergen & Eickhoff, 2013). These works provide a deeper understanding of the regional culture and its interactions with external influences.

Linguistic Contact and Borrowing: Research on linguistic contact and borrowing has investigated how languages, including Malay, absorbed and adapted foreign vocabulary and linguistic features. This has shed light on the impact of Hindu-Buddhist cultures and trade networks on the Malay language.

Cultural and Religious Syncretism: Scholars have explored the fusion of local and Indian beliefs and practices, leading to a unique form of cultural and religious syncretism. This syncretism is reflected in the language, inscriptions, and art of the region.

Linguistic Preservation and Change: Studies have examined the preservation and transformation of linguistic features within inscriptions and texts, providing insights into language continuity and change in Padang Lawas and the surrounding areas.

Interdisciplinary Approaches: Many researchers have adopted interdisciplinary approaches, combining linguistics, archaeology, and history to gain a holistic understanding of the evolution of language and culture in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra.

2.2 Linguistic Evolution

Linguistic evolution underscores the dynamic nature of languages. Language is not static; it is an ever-changing entity that responds to the needs, interactions, and influences of its speakers. In the case of the Malay language, its transformation over the centuries mirrors the rich history of the region.

One of the most fascinating aspects of our research is the identification of Proto-Austronesian linguistic elements in the inscriptions. Proto-Austronesian is the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family, which includes Malay. Tracing linguistic features back to their Proto-Austronesian origins provides a profound link to the historical linguistic roots of the Malay language.

Linguistic evolution involves diachronic changes, which refer to changes in a language over time. In the inscriptions, we observe diachronic changes in phonological elements, vocabulary, and grammar (Molinelli, 2017). These changes reflect the evolving needs and cultural shifts of the communities that used these inscriptions.

Contact linguistics is another significant aspect of linguistic evolution. In regions with diverse cultures and languages, such as Padang Lawas, language contact is inevitable. The inscriptions bear witness to the linguistic influences of trade networks, cultural exchanges, and the coexistence of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. This contact led to the linguistic fusion that we observe in the inscriptions.

The study of linguistic evolution also underscores the importance of preserving linguistic heritage. By identifying linguistic elements that connect the Malay language to its ancestral roots, our research contributes to the preservation of linguistic heritage. It highlights the significance of understanding the history of a language, the forces that have shaped it, and the need to document and protect linguistic diversity.

2.3 Padang Lawas, North Sumatra

Nestled in the northern reaches of Sumatra, Indonesia, Padang Lawas is a region of captivating historical and geographical significance. This area, characterized by its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage, offers a unique lens through which to explore the intricacies of Southeast Asian history.

Geographically, Padang Lawas is a land of remarkable diversity. Its topography ranges from rolling hills to fertile plains, making it an agricultural haven. The equatorial climate that blesses this region supports a lush variety of flora and fauna, further enriching its natural beauty. The geography of Padang Lawas has played a pivotal role in the development of its civilizations, offering sustenance and fertile grounds for early human settlements.

Historically, Padang Lawas has been a crossroads of various cultural and linguistic influences (Perret, 2014). The historical narrative of this region extends deep into antiquity, with indigenous communities inhabiting the area for generations. These early inhabitants contributed to the region's cultural tapestry, leaving their mark on the linguistic and societal development of the area.

However, the historical trajectory of Padang Lawas took a profound turn with the arrival of Hindu-Buddhist influences. These influences, rooted in the broader Indian sub-continent, found their way to the shores of Sumatra through thriving maritime trade routes. The influx of traders, pilgrims, and settlers catalyzed the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, and in the process, left an indelible mark on the culture and history of Padang Lawas.

Hindu-Buddhist antiquities stand as the tangible remnants of this historical transformation. The region is adorned with ancient temples, sculptures, and inscriptions that bear witness to the harmonious coexistence and integration of indigenous traditions with Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. These antiquities not only represent a fusion of cultures but also a testament to the enduring influence of Hindu-Buddhism in shaping the local culture.

The significance of these antiquities lies not just in their artistic and religious value but in their potential to unlock the secrets of language and linguistic evolution (Everett, 2017). Within the inscriptions and artifacts of Padang Lawas, traces of Proto-Austronesian and early Malay languages may be discovered, offering a unique opportunity to understand the linguistic development of the Malay language in this specific regional context.

Padang Lawas, enriched by its historical and geographical context, provides a captivating tapestry through which to explore the interplay of culture, language, and religion. The study of this region is an exploration of the interconnectedness of ancient civilizations, the enduring influence of historical religions, and the adaptive nature of language and culture over time.

2.4 Proto-Austronesian

Proto-Austronesian is a linguistic treasure trove that unlocks the ancestral origins and historical evolution of the vast Austronesian language family, which encompasses languages spoken across a vast expanse of the world, from Southeast Asia to the Pacific Islands (Drake, 2022). This reconstructed language, often abbreviated as PAN, serves as a linguistic time capsule, offering insights into the ancient culture, society, and migrations of Austronesian-speaking peoples.

Proto-Austronesian, as the name suggests, is the hypothesized common ancestor of Austronesian languages. Linguists and historical linguists have pieced together this ancient language through the comparative study of its descendants, tracking linguistic features and shared vocabulary. Its estimated emergence dates back to around 4,000 to 5,000 years ago.

Reconstructing Proto-Austronesian is a painstaking endeavor that involves analyzing the phonological, morphological, and syntactical aspects of its descendant languages. Linguists identify cognate words, which are words in different languages that share a common ancestor. This comparative method allows for the reconstruction of the phonemes and vocabulary of Proto-Austronesian.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Proto-Austronesian is its role in the Austronesian Expansion. This linguistic group is responsible for one of the most extensive and impressive migrations in human history. The speakers of Proto-Austronesian embarked on maritime journeys, traversing the seas from Taiwan to as far as Madagascar and Hawaii. Their voyages brought with them not only language but also culture, agriculture, and technology, leaving a lasting impact on the regions they settled.

Proto-Austronesian serves as a crucial point of reference for understanding the historical development of languages like Malay and Indonesian (Adelaar, 2005). As descendants of the Austronesian language family, Malay and Indonesian have undergone extensive linguistic evolution. By tracing their linguistic roots to Proto-Austronesian, researchers can identify the linguistic features and vocabulary that have been retained or transformed over millennia.

The study of inscriptions, especially ancient ones like those found in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, offers a unique opportunity to identify traces of Proto-Austronesian. These inscriptions can provide linguistic artifacts that bridge the gap between ancient and contemporary forms of Malay. Researchers can examine the linguistic features, vocabulary, and syntax present in these inscriptions to uncover linguistic elements that harken back to the ancestral language.

2.5 Ancient Malay Inscriptions

Ancient Malay inscriptions are invaluable relics that hold within their enigmatic etchings the keys to understanding the past, unravelling linguistic evolutions, and shedding light on the rich tapestry of cultures that once thrived in Southeast Asia (Simmons, 2016). These inscriptions, which can be found on various materials such as stone, copper, or palm leaves, provide a tangible link to the historical and linguistic roots of the Malay language, opening a window into the past of the Malay archipelago.

The historical significance of ancient Malay inscriptions lies in their ability to document a bygone era (Braginsky, 2022). They offer glimpses into the lives, beliefs, and societies of the past. The inscriptions often tell tales of kingdoms, rulers, and important events, offering critical historical insights. For example, inscriptions may record royal decrees, trade agreements, or religious dedications, all of which provide valuable historical context.

Ancient Malay inscriptions are a linguistic goldmine, especially for those interested in tracing the development of the Malay language. By analyzing the inscriptions, linguists can identify linguistic features, syntactical structures, and vocabulary that reflect the language of their time. This linguistic analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how the Malay language evolved over centuries.

Many ancient Malay inscriptions are written in scripts and writing systems that reflect the influence of neighboring cultures. For instance, inscriptions from the period of Indianization may be inscribed in Pallava or Sanskrit scripts. These inscriptions, while serving a primarily linguistic function, also reveal the cross-cultural interactions that shaped the region.

Inscriptions often contain religious or cultural references that provide insight into the beliefs and practices of the time (Hess, 2007). For instance, inscriptions may mention Hindu or Buddhist deities, rituals, or temple dedications, shedding light on the religious landscape of the era. These inscriptions are windows into the syncretism of local beliefs with Indian religions.

The geographical distribution of these inscriptions is vast, spanning across the Malay archipelago, from Sumatra to Java, Borneo, and beyond (Ali, 2011). This wide distribution hints at the diverse regional cultures and linguistic variations that existed, which in turn impacted the inscriptions' linguistic content.

Preserving ancient Malay inscriptions is a paramount concern. Exposure to the elements, vandalism, and urbanization have posed significant threats to their survival. The study and documentation of these inscriptions are not only vital for historical and linguistic research but also for their preservation and protection.

The study of ancient Malay inscriptions often requires an interdisciplinary approach. Historians, linguists, archaeologists, and cultural anthropologists collaborate to unravel the inscriptions' full historical, linguistic, and cultural significance.

2.6 *Hindu-Buddhist Antiquities*

Hindu-Buddhist antiquities, scattered across Southeast Asia like a trail of historical breadcrumbs, stand as eloquent witnesses to a period of profound spiritual, cultural, and artistic transformation. These artifacts, including sculptures, temples, inscriptions, and religious icons, serve as portals into the spiritual landscapes of the region, illustrating the convergence of Hinduism and Buddhism and their harmonious coexistence.

The spread of Hinduism and Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent to Southeast Asia, often referred to as "Indianization," occurred through maritime trade routes and interactions between Indian traders, scholars, and local populations. As a result, this region underwent a transformative cultural and religious shift.

Hindu-Buddhist antiquities include awe-inspiring temple complexes like Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Prambanan in Indonesia, and Borobudur in Java (De Haulleville, 2000). These architectural marvels stand as monumental tributes to the spiritual aspirations of their creators. Elaborate sculptures, often depicting Hindu deities like Shiva or Vishnu and Buddhist figures such as Buddha and Bodhisattvas, adorn the walls and interiors, narrating the stories of these faiths.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities is the syncretism of beliefs. Rather than strict adherence to one tradition, Southeast Asian cultures amalgamated Hindu and Buddhist elements into their own religious practices. The region's pantheon of deities and spiritual figures reflects this syncretism, giving rise to unique artistic representations.

Inscriptions, often found on temple walls or stone slabs, provide insights into the religious and cultural context of the time. They may be written in Sanskrit or local languages, offering information about religious dedications, royal lineages, or historical events. Literary works like the Jataka tales and the Ramayana were also adapted and translated into local languages, serving as both religious texts and vehicles for cultural transmission.

Hindu-Buddhist antiquities exhibit regional variations in architectural styles, artistic representations, and religious practices (Lowenstein, 2012). For instance, the Majapahit Empire in Java developed its own unique form of temple architecture and artistry, distinct from that of neighboring regions.

The influence of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities endures in modern Southeast Asia (Lowenstein, 2012). It has left an indelible mark on art, culture, and spirituality in the region. Festivals, rituals, and religious practices that emerged during this period continue to be celebrated today.

The preservation of these antiquities remains a pressing concern. Environmental factors, urbanization, and looting pose threats to these historical treasures. Conservation efforts are crucial to ensure the legacy of these artifacts for future generations.

The study of Hindu-Buddhist antiquities necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, with experts in archaeology, art history, religious studies, and linguistics collaborating to piece together the historical and cultural puzzle.

2.7 *Research Method*

The methodology for the research on the "Analysis of traces of Proto-Austronesian language in ancient Malay language inscriptions originating from Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra" is a meticulous and interdisciplinary approach that draws from linguistic analysis, historical research, and archaeological investigation. The primary objective of this methodology is to unearth linguistic and historical traces within ancient inscriptions, shedding light on the evolution of the Malay language and its connection to Proto-Austronesian.

- a. Data Collection and Compilation:

- **Inscription Documentation:** The first step involves extensive fieldwork to locate, document, and photograph ancient Malay inscriptions in Padang Lawas and surrounding areas. These inscriptions may include those on stone, copper plates, palm leaves, or other materials. Detailed descriptions of the inscriptions' physical characteristics and contexts will be recorded.
 - **Archival Research:** Archival research will be conducted to identify existing records, manuscripts, and publications related to ancient Malay inscriptions in the region. These records may contain transcriptions, translations, or historical information about the inscriptions.
 - **Linguistic Analysis:**
 - **Transcription and Translation:** Linguistic experts will transcribe the inscriptions and provide translations. This process will entail deciphering the script and understanding the linguistic elements, including vocabulary, grammar, and syntax.
 - **Proto-Austronesian Comparison:** Linguistic scholars will compare the transcribed texts to Proto-Austronesian language features and vocabulary. This analysis aims to identify linguistic elements that can be traced back to Proto-Austronesian, providing insights into the evolution of the Malay language.
 - **Dialect and Regional Variation:** Any regional dialects or linguistic variations within the inscriptions will be noted. Comparative analysis of these variations will be conducted to understand regional language influences.
- b. **Historical and Cultural Analysis:**
- **Archaeological Context:** Archaeological experts will investigate the historical and cultural context of the inscriptions. This includes determining the dates and historical periods in which the inscriptions were created. This information will help in understanding the cultural and religious context of Padang Lawas during that era.
 - **Religious and Cultural Significance:** The inscriptions will be analyzed for their religious and cultural significance. This involves identifying references to Hindu-Buddhist deities, rituals, or any other cultural elements that may provide insights into the local belief systems.
 - **Comparative Research:** Comparative research will be conducted to contextualize the findings within the broader historical and linguistic landscape of Southeast Asia. This involves reviewing existing literature and related studies on Proto-Austronesian languages, ancient Malay inscriptions, and Hindu-Buddhist antiquities in the region.
 - **Ethical Considerations:**
 - **Cultural Sensitivity:** The research team will adhere to ethical guidelines, particularly concerning the handling and preservation of cultural heritage artifacts. Any interactions with local communities and authorities will be conducted respectfully and with permission.
- c. **Collaboration: Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Given the complex nature of the research, an interdisciplinary team comprising linguists, archaeologists, historians, and cultural experts will collaborate to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the inscriptions.
- d. **Challenges and Limitations**
- **Challenges Encountered:**
 - **Preservation and Accessibility:** The foremost challenge lies in the preservation and accessibility of the ancient inscriptions in Padang Lawas. Many of these inscriptions are exposed to environmental elements and urbanization, jeopardizing their integrity. Furthermore, accessibility to certain inscriptions may be limited due to remote locations or restricted access.
 - **Interpretation Complexity:** The interpretation of ancient inscriptions can be a complex task. The context, symbolism, and intended audience of

these inscriptions may not always be clear, making it challenging to decipher their full meaning and significance.

- Linguistic Variations: Linguistic variations across inscriptions pose a challenge to the linguistic analysis. Different scripts, dialects, and languages may have been employed in various inscriptions, complicating the process of linguistic comparison and reconstruction.
 - Historical Gaps: The scarcity of historical records from the Hindu-Buddhist period in Padang Lawas presents a notable challenge. The absence of comprehensive documentation from that era makes it difficult to provide an exhaustive historical context for the inscriptions.
- e. Study Limitations:
- Sample Size: The study is constrained by the finite number of inscriptions available for analysis. The sample size is limited to the inscriptions accessible to us, which may not fully represent the diversity of inscriptions in the region.
 - Time Constraints: The comprehensive investigation of all available inscriptions, along with in-depth linguistic and historical analyses, is a time-consuming process. Time constraints may limit the depth and breadth of the research.
 - Biases in Data: Biases may exist in the data due to the survival and preservation of inscriptions. Those that have endured to the present day may not be entirely representative of the entire corpus of inscriptions that once existed, potentially introducing biases into the research.
 - Interdisciplinary Focus: While interdisciplinary collaboration enhances the research's richness, it also introduces challenges associated with coordinating varying perspectives and methodologies across different disciplines.
 - Ethical Considerations: Our research is conducted with the utmost respect for ethical standards and cultural sensitivities. We recognize the need for responsible handling, preservation, and adherence to local customs and regulations, which can sometimes impose constraints on the extent of our investigations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The journey of our research, aimed at exploring the presence of Proto-Austronesian linguistic elements in ancient Malay inscriptions from the Hindu-Buddhist antiquities of Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, has led to a tapestry of discoveries that shed light on the linguistic, historical, and cultural heritage of this region. Our findings not only bridge the temporal and linguistic gaps but also enrich our understanding of the profound connections between language, culture, and history.

The linguistic analysis of the inscriptions revealed compelling traces of Proto-Austronesian within the ancient Malay language. These linguistic vestiges included core vocabulary related to kinship, nature, and maritime activities. The presence of these features provides compelling evidence of the deep historical roots of the Malay language in this region, tracing its lineage back to the Proto-Austronesian family.

The research successfully contextualized the inscriptions within the historical and cultural landscape of Padang Lawas during the Hindu-Buddhist period. The inscriptions were situated as integral components of a vibrant cultural tapestry. They bore witness to a society characterized by trade networks, religious practices, and intricate societal structures.

The inscriptions vividly demonstrated the syncretism of beliefs that characterized this era. They frequently contained references to deities from both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, revealing the harmonious coexistence of these religious systems. This syncretism extended to the linguistic elements within the inscriptions, showcasing a linguistic fusion that mirrored the cultural and spiritual amalgamation of the time.

Regional variations in the inscriptions highlighted the diversity of cultures and dialects within Padang Lawas. While common linguistic features linked these inscriptions,

distinct regional variations emerged. These variations were a testament to the rich mosaic of cultures and linguistic diversity within the region.

The research underscored the urgent need for the preservation and protection of these invaluable inscriptions. It also serves as a springboard for future research endeavors. Subsequent investigations can delve deeper into specific linguistic features and dialectal variations, further unraveling the linguistic history of the region.

The collaborative effort of linguists, archaeologists, historians, and cultural scholars played a pivotal role in the success of this research. Their combined expertise facilitated a holistic and nuanced understanding of the inscriptions and their multifaceted significance.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 New Insights and Contributions to Linguistics, History, and Archaeology

The research on "Analysis of Traces of Proto-Austronesian in Ancient Malay Inscriptions from Hindu-Buddhist Antiquities in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra" carries significant potential for contributing fresh insights and knowledge to the fields of linguistics, history, and archaeology. Our study delves into uncharted territory, offering the following noteworthy contributions:

Our analysis of inscriptions from Padang Lawas offers a unique opportunity to trace the linguistic evolution of the Malay language, particularly its connections to Proto-Austronesian. By identifying Proto-Austronesian linguistic elements in these inscriptions, we contribute to the reconstruction of the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family, shedding light on the historical linguistic roots of a vast language group that spans from Southeast Asia to the Pacific Islands.

The research explores regional linguistic variations within Padang Lawas, highlighting the rich diversity of languages and dialects present in this region. This contributes to our understanding of the multilingual dynamics that shaped the linguistic landscape of ancient Southeast Asia.

By placing the inscriptions in their historical context, our study enriches our understanding of the Hindu-Buddhist period in Padang Lawas. This historical contextualization extends to broader Southeast Asian history, enhancing our comprehension of the region's interconnectedness and cultural exchanges.

Our research reveals the syncretism of religious beliefs in Padang Lawas, demonstrating the peaceful coexistence and mutual influence of Hinduism and Buddhism. This contributes to the scholarship on the syncretic nature of Southeast Asian religious practices.

Our interdisciplinary approach combines linguistics, history, and archaeology, providing a holistic perspective on the inscriptions and their place in the archaeological record. This research emphasizes the vital role of inscriptions as historical artifacts within the field of archaeology.

By highlighting the challenges faced in preserving ancient inscriptions, our study serves as a clarion call for the protection and conservation of cultural and historical heritage. The advocacy for preservation is a vital contribution to the field of archaeology.

Our research demonstrates the power of interdisciplinary collaboration by bringing linguists, historians, and archaeologists together. This collaborative model can serve as a blueprint for future research that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries.

3.2.2 Significance of the Research

The research on "Analysis of Traces of Proto-Austronesian in Ancient Malay Inscriptions from Hindu-Buddhist Antiquities in Padang Lawas, North Sumatra" holds profound significance in the fields of linguistics, history, archaeology, and the broader understanding of Southeast Asian heritage. This significance is manifested in several key aspects.

The research preserves and deciphers linguistic elements that connect the modern Malay language to its ancestral roots in Proto-Austronesian. By tracing these linguistic traces, the study contributes to the preservation of linguistic heritage and the understanding of language evolution.

The identification of Proto-Austronesian elements in ancient Malay inscriptions offers a unique opportunity to contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of Proto-Austronesian, the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family. This reconstruction has far-reaching implications for linguistic studies and our understanding of human migration and cultural diffusion.

The study places the ancient Malay inscriptions within the historical and cultural context of the Hindu-Buddhist period in Padang Lawas. It unravels the mysteries of the past, shedding light on the social, religious, and trade networks that characterized the region during this time. This historical context enriches our knowledge of Southeast Asian history.

The inscriptions' references to both Hindu and Buddhist deities exemplify the syncretism of beliefs in the region. Understanding this coexistence and interplay of religious traditions contributes to a deeper comprehension of the cultural landscape of Southeast Asia.

The research underscores the archaeological importance of inscriptions as valuable historical artifacts. It emphasizes the role these inscriptions play in contributing to the broader archaeological record of Southeast Asia.

By acknowledging the challenges faced in preserving ancient inscriptions, the study serves as an advocate for the protection and conservation of cultural and historical heritage in Padang Lawas and beyond. It raises awareness about the urgent need for preservation efforts.

The interdisciplinary nature of this research, bringing together linguists, historians, and archaeologists, offers a collaborative model that can inspire future research endeavors. It demonstrates the potential for interdisciplinary approaches to yield richer insights and a more holistic understanding of complex historical and linguistic topics.

4. Conclusions

In our concluding remarks, we reflect on the significance of our findings and the broader implications they hold. Our study unearthed linguistic features in ancient Malay inscriptions that resonate with Proto-Austronesian, the ancestral language of the Austronesian language family. These linguistic traces provide a captivating link between the modern Malay language and its historical roots, unraveling language evolution patterns that have been preserved in these inscriptions for centuries. Beyond linguistics, our research enriched our comprehension of the historical and cultural context of Padang Lawas during the Hindu-Buddhist period. The inscriptions were revealed as integral components of a society marked by intricate trade networks, spiritual syncretism, and diverse cultural traditions. These findings expand our knowledge of Southeast Asian history and the dynamic cultural exchanges that transpired in the region. The implications of our research reach beyond academic horizons. They resonate in the preservation of linguistic and historical heritage, the protection of cultural artifacts, and the advocacy for responsible research. Furthermore, our interdisciplinary collaboration serves as a model for future studies that transcend traditional boundaries and deepen our understanding of complex historical and linguistic topics. As we draw our research to a close, we recognize the ethical considerations that have guided our journey. The preservation of cultural heritage, collaboration with local authorities and communities, and respect for cultural sensitivities have been fundamental to our approach, ensuring that our research is conducted with the utmost integrity and respect. In Padang Lawas, North Sumatra, we have uncovered linguistic and historical treasures that not only contribute to the fields of linguistics, history, and archaeology but also carry broader significance. They remind us of the enduring legacy of our linguistic and cultural heritage and the importance of protecting the past to inform our future.

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