

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Language is a very important element in human life for socializing and self expression. Through language, people can express their opinions, ideas, cultural values, and thoughts. Language is also a source and means within human civilization for conveying identity and cultural values. Therefore, it can easily be said that language is a bridge between people. According to Sapir (1921), language is a purely human and non-instinctive method for communicating ideas, emotions, and desires through voluntarily produced symbols. This definition emphasizes that language is a uniquely human system that enables individuals to create meaning and forge relationships within society. Furthermore, language plays a vital role in preserving culture and transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. Every language contains cultural values, traditional knowledge, and social practices that are deeply intertwined with the communities that use them. As stated by Halliday (1978), language is not merely a tool for communication but also a social semiotic system that shapes human experience and social interaction. This means that language reflects how people understand the world around them and how they maintain social relationships within their communities. From a linguistic perspective, language is a highly structured system consisting of several interconnected components, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Each component contributes to how meaning is constructed and interpreted. Among these linguistic branches, morphology becomes particularly important because it studies the internal structure of words and the processes through which words are formed. Morphology helps explain how languages create vocabulary, modify meanings, and express grammatical relationships. Therefore, the study of morphology is essential in understanding how language functions systematically.

Language is never truly finished. It bends and shifts with the people who speak it shaped by new technologies, cross-cultural encounters, migration, and the quiet pressures of daily life. When a community needs a word for something new, language finds a way to provide it. This is why linguists have long understood language not as a fixed structure but as a living system that grows alongside society. Studying how that growth happens particularly at the level of individual words opens a window into how human communities make meaning and pass it on.

Indonesia offers perhaps one of the richest windows of all. With more than 700 living languages spread across its islands, the country is a remarkable case of linguistic diversity, one that has no easy parallel anywhere in the world. These languages are not simply alternative ways of saying the same things. Each one carries its own logic, its own way of categorizing experience, its own store of cultural memory. Fishman (1991) argued that language and ethnic identity are deeply intertwined. When a community loses its language, it loses something that cannot simply be translated into another tongue. Crystal (2000) makes a similar point that local languages hold knowledge systems and expressive traditions that resist full representation in national or global languages. Among Indonesia's many regional languages sit Uab Meto, spoken by the Dawan people of Timor Island, particularly across parts of East Nusa Tenggara including South and North Central Timor and Kupang Regency. Classified within the Austronesian family, more specifically the Central Malayo-Polynesian subgroup, Uab Meto serves as the primary language of daily life for its community.

Morphology occupies a central place in linguistic theory precisely because words are where grammar and meaning meet. To study morphology is to examine how languages build their vocabulary from smaller meaningful unit morphemes and how those units combine to produce lexical and grammatical complexity. Scholars such as Katamba (1993) and Lieber (2009) define morphology as the study of internal word structure and the processes through which words are formed. What makes morphology particularly interesting, however, is not just its structural dimension but its

responsiveness to change. Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) note that morphological processes are highly productive and evolve continuously alongside social, cultural, and technological developments. In this sense, studying word formation is not simply a matter of cataloguing linguistic forms it is a way of tracing how a language community responds to a changing world.

Documenting the morphological and structural features of such regional languages is highly essential, as local dialects often carry deep linguistic reflections and structural heritage directly inherited from Proto-Austronesian (Utamayana et al., 2024). But it is more than a communication tool. The language carries the Timorese worldview within it: ritual expressions, kinship terms, and cultural concepts whose meanings are woven into local belief systems and customary laws in ways that are difficult to disentangle. The intricate relationship between regional languages and cultural practices has been widely recognized in local linguistic research; for instance, Geofany (2023) demonstrated how specific lexicons are deeply embedded and preserved within traditional rituals, such as the Wura Bongi Monca dance in Bima. Boas (1940) argued that language and culture cannot be separated, and Uab Meto illustrates exactly why. Yet this language, like many others across Indonesia, is under pressure. The growing dominance of Indonesian as the national language and English as the language of global opportunity has gradually pushed regional languages to the margins especially among younger generations who associate these dominant languages with education and economic mobility. As observed by Ramendra (2013) in his sociolinguistic studies on local Indonesian dialects, there is a significant phenomenon of language shift among the youth, where the usage of regional languages in daily communication is steadily declining.

This kind of language shift is not unique to Indonesia, but it is particularly consequential here, where so many languages carry cultural knowledge that exists nowhere else. Fishman (1991) warned, when a language disappears, the oral traditions and indigenous knowledge it carries can disappear with it. This is why linguistic

research on languages like Uab Meto matters not just academically, but practically. Documentation efforts, morphological studies, and comparative analyses all contribute to keeping these languages visible in the scholarly record. O'Grady (1997) notes that morphological research is especially valuable because it reveals how a language organizes meaning through word structure. Comparative work between Uab Meto and a language like English can shed light on both the unique features of Austronesian grammar and the broader principles that cut across language families. This specific cross-linguistic approach has proven highly effective in local linguistic research; for instance, Yani et al. (2017) successfully contrasted American and Balinese linguistic elements to reveal how distinct cultural backgrounds shape language use. In this sense, studying Uab Meto is both an act of linguistic scholarship and, in a quiet way, an act of cultural preservation.

Word formation itself encompasses a range of processes. Yule (2010) identifies affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, conversion, clipping, blending, acronyms, and back-formation as primary word formation processes. English, in particular, has long been recognized as a language with exceptional morphological productivity. Plag (2003) attributes this productivity partly to the influence of globalization, science, and digital media on the language, all of which generate constant demand for new lexical items. The impact of digital media on morphological productivity is particularly evident in contemporary local studies; for instance, Paramarta (2022) highlights how English department students actively employ diverse word-formation processes to adapt their communication within social media platforms. Yule (2010) points out that conversion is one of the most productive word formation processes in flexibility of English, conversion the process by which words shift grammatical category without any change in form as another mark of the language's adaptability. Words like *email*, *text*, and *Google* now function freely as both nouns and verbs. Meanwhile, Crystal (2003) traces the breadth of English vocabulary to centuries of contact with other languages, a history of borrowing that has made English one of the most lexically diverse languages in the world. All of this makes

English a particularly well documented reference point for comparative morphological research.

Timor Language (Uab Meto) presents a very different morphological picture. As an Austronesian language within the Central Malayo-Polynesian subgroup (Blust, 2013), its word formation patterns are shaped by a distinct grammatical tradition and a deeply oral communicative culture. Unlike English, which belongs to the Indo-European family, Austronesian languages are widely recognized for their highly productive morphological processes. O'Grady (1997) observes that many Austronesian languages are characterized by complex systems of affixation and reduplication, both of which carry semantic and grammatical weight. In Uab Meto, these processes are not merely technical mechanisms they are tied to cultural practice, appearing in ritual speech, traditional oral forms, and the everyday language of community life. Symbolic constructions, repetitive forms, and culturally embedded meanings exist in Uab Meto that have no direct equivalents in English. Sapir (1921) argued that every language reflects the worldview of its speakers through its structural choices, and this is clearly true of Uab Meto, where linguistic form and cultural meaning are difficult to separate. Fishman (1991) makes a related point that local languages preserve ethnic identity through their structural features, which carry indigenous ways of organizing experience and social relationships. It is this contrast between the globally dominant, historically documented morphology of English and the culturally specific, relatively understudied morphology of Uab Meto that makes comparative analysis between the two languages academically productive. Comparative morphology, as Comrie (1989) explains, is concerned with identifying both universal tendencies and language specific features that distinguish one system from another. Katamba (1993) and Lieber (2009) emphasize that comparing morphological systems across languages helps reveal structural variation and linguistic patterns. O'Grady (1997) adds that such comparisons help identify typological similarities and differences across languages. In the case of English and Uab Meto, the gap between their linguistic families and sociocultural origins makes

the comparison especially revealing. It is precisely where the two systems diverge most sharply that the most interesting typological questions arise.

Interest in comparative word formation research has, in fact, grown steadily in recent years, though the resulting body of work remains fragmented rather than cumulative. For instance, Sutrisna et al. (2013) demonstrated the value of comparative morphology by analyzing the morphological processes of local Austronesian dialects, specifically Tambakan and Pelaga, to uncover structural variations within a single language family. Ali, Gul, and Azim (2023) compared English and Pashto, but confined their analysis to two processes only, compounding and derivation, leaving reduplication, conversion, borrowing, and several other productive mechanisms outside their scope. Working across a different typological pairing, Avalova (2025) examined seven word formation processes in English against four in Uzbek and found conversion to be markedly more productive in English while reduplication carried far greater weight in Uzbek; yet her study, like Ali et al.'s (2023), did not extend to any Austronesian or Indonesian regional language, nor did it treat acronyms and back-formation in comparative depth. Closer to the present context, Nasution (2024) compared word formation in two dialectal varieties of Batak Angkola using WhatsApp chat data, identifying blending, back-formation, and derivation as active processes. Because the two varieties compared belong to the same language cluster, however, the study could not capture the kind of typological contrast that emerges when a regional Austronesian language is set directly against an analytic language such as English, and its analytical scope was limited to three processes. Faradisa, Aziz, and Yasin (2019), for their part, identified six word formation processes operating in Indonesian Instagram captions, but their analysis remained confined to a single language environment, without any comparative dimension at all.

Taken together, these four studies confirm two things: that comparative and descriptive word formation research is an active area of inquiry, and that none of the existing work combines a comprehensive, multi-process framework with a direct

comparison between English and an Austronesian regional language of Indonesia. Where Indonesian regional languages have been studied at all, as Fishman (1991) and Crystal (2003) have separately observed, the emphasis has tended to fall on sociolinguistic or ethnographic questions rather than systematic morphological description. However, there is a growing recognition of the need for structural documentation; for example, Tawurutubun et al. (2017) conducted a dedicated morphological analysis of the Kei dialect, illustrating how regional Austronesian languages utilize unique word-formation mechanisms. Uab Meto sits squarely within this gap: a language whose grammatical structure is documented mainly through anthropological rather than linguistic scholarship, and one that has yet to be examined against English using the kind of comprehensive nine-process framework applied in recent comparative studies elsewhere. It is this specific, demonstrable absence, rather than a general assumption of neglect, that motivates the present study. The urgency of this work is also connected to the broader problem of language endangerment. Across Indonesia, regional languages are under sustained pressure from the dominance of Indonesian and English in formal, educational, and economic domains. Younger speakers increasingly shift towards these more prestigious languages, which gradually erodes the intergenerational transmission that keeps a language alive. Crystal (2003) has warned that when a language disappears, it takes with it unique systems of meaning, oral traditions, and cultural knowledge that cannot simply be recovered or reconstructed. Linguistic documentation, including morphological analysis is one concrete way to preserve what exists before it is lost. In this sense, this research is not only a contribution to comparative linguistics; it is also part of a wider effort to ensure that Uab Meto remains visible in academic discourse.

Taken together, these considerations theoretical, pedagogical, and preservationist, form the basis for this study. English and Uab Meto differ in their linguistic origins, morphological systems, and social positions, but it is exactly this difference that makes comparing them worthwhile. This research aims to analyze and compare word formation processes in both languages, identifying similarities,

differences, and dominant morphological patterns. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to the development of comparative linguistics, support the documentation of a regional language, and offer insights that may be useful for English language teaching in multilingual, culturally diverse contexts.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the research background, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What types of word formation processes are found in the Timorese language (Uab Meto)?
2. What are the similarities and differences between word formation processes in English and the Timorese language (Uab Meto)?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and describe the types of word formation processes found in the Timorese language (Uab Meto).
2. To analyze the similarities and differences between word formation processes in English and the Timorese language (Uab Meto).

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research is expected to contribute to the field of linguistics in two interconnected ways theoretically, by advancing comparative morphological scholarship.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

On the theoretical side, the study adds to the growing body of morphological research by providing a systematic comparison of word formation processes in English

and Uab Meto. While English morphology has been extensively documented, Uab Meto remains underrepresented in linguistic scholarship. By examining both languages side by side, this research contributes to the documentation of a minority language and enriches discussions on how morphological systems vary across typologically distinct languages. In doing so, it also supports broader efforts to preserve regional languages at a time when many are facing gradual decline.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study provide directly relevant insights into word formation processes in English and the Timorese language, which can support the development of teaching materials, curriculum design, and bilingual learning resources. Furthermore, this study supports English vocabulary learning for Timorese (Uab Meto) speakers by helping students understand the similarities and differences between the word-formation systems of the two languages. In addition, this study serves as a reference for future linguistic research, particularly in the fields of morphology, comparative linguistics, and regional language studies

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on the study of morphology, particularly on the comparison of word formation processes in the English language and the Timorese language (Uab Meto). The analysis emphasizes how words are formed in both languages through various morphological processes. In the Timorese language, the data are derived from authentic language use, especially from traditional utterances and daily communication of the Dawan community on Timor Island, East Nusa Tenggara. Traditional utterances, such as those used in ritual ceremonies including harvest thanksgiving, birth, marriage, and funeral, are considered part of oral cultural practices that reflect rich morphological structures. These are complemented by examples from everyday conversations to represent the natural use of the language.

1.5.1 Scope of the Study

This study focuses specifically on the morphological dimension of language, examining word formation processes in both English and the Timorese language (Uab

Meto). The analysis covers nine processes: affixation both derivational and inflectional compounding, reduplication, conversion, borrowing, clipping, blending, acronyms, and back-formation. Each process is identified, described, and classified based on established morphological theories, then compared across both languages to reveal similarities, differences, and dominant patterns.

The Uab Meto data are drawn from authentic language use within the Dawan community primarily traditional utterances from ritual ceremonies such as harvest thanksgiving, marriage, birth, and funeral practices, complemented by examples from everyday conversation. These sources are chosen because they represent both the formal and informal registers of the language, offering a fuller picture of its morphological range. The English data, by contrast, are drawn from authoritative dictionaries and morphology references, reflecting the well-documented nature of English word formation.

The overall approach is descriptive and comparative rather than statistical. The goal is not to generalize numerically but to understand, in depth, how words are formed in each language and what those formations reveal about the linguistic and cultural systems behind them.

1.5.2 Limitations of the Study

Several boundaries define the scope of what this research can and cannot claim. The analysis is strictly morphological, and questions of syntax, phonology, semantics in a broader sense, and pragmatics fall outside its scope, not because they are unimportant, but because maintaining a clear analytical focus is essential for a study of this kind.

The Uab Meto data are also limited by practical constraints. Collection depends on the availability of willing and knowledgeable native speakers within a defined time frame, which means the findings cannot claim to represent every dialectal variation or the full range of the language's lexical possibilities. Similarly, not all theoretically recognized word formation processes are expected to appear in both languages the analysis is confined to what actually emerges from the data, meaning some processes may be present in one language but absent in the other.

Finally, while the study has clear relevance for English language teaching, it does not set out to develop instructional materials or classroom models directly. Its contribution to education is foundational rather than applied providing a linguistic basis from which future pedagogical work can draw.

1.6 Preliminary Findings / Expected Findings

Based on the theoretical framework and existing literature, this study anticipates several patterns in the comparative morphological data, though these remain provisional until the full analysis is complete.

Both languages are expected to share affixation and compounding as productive word formation processes, given that these are among the most universal mechanisms through which languages expand their vocabularies. However, the forms these processes take and the grammatical and cultural functions they serve are likely to differ considerably between the two systems. Affixation in English operates within a relatively standardized derivational framework, while in Uab Meto it appears more closely tied to grammatical marking and culturally embedded meanings.

Reduplication is expected to emerge as one of the most distinctive features of Uab Meto morphology. As an Austronesian language with strong oral traditions, Uab Meto likely employs reduplication far more productively than English not merely as a stylistic device but as a grammatically and semantically significant process indicating plurality, intensity, or repetition. English reduplication, by contrast, tends to appear in informal or expressive contexts and carries limited grammatical weight.

On the other side of the comparison, processes such as conversion, clipping, blending, acronyms, and back-formation are expected to be considerably more productive in English than in Uab Meto. These processes are strongly associated with the pressures of modern communication the need for efficiency, adaptability, and rapid vocabulary expansion in response to technological and social change. Uab Meto, whose

morphological development has been shaped more by oral tradition and cultural continuity than by modernization, is less likely to demonstrate the same degree of productivity in these areas.

Some asymmetry in the findings is therefore anticipated from the outset. Certain processes documented in English may not appear at all in the Uab Meto data, and conversely, some culturally specific morphological patterns in Uab Meto may have no clear equivalent in English. Rather than treating this asymmetry as a limitation, however, the study regards it as one of the more analytically interesting aspects of cross-linguistic comparison a reminder that morphological systems are not simply parallel structures waiting to be mapped onto one another, but reflections of the distinct histories, cultures, and communicative needs of the communities that use them.

