A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORD FORMATION PROCESSES IN ENGLISH & TIMOR LANGUAGE *(UAB METO)*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and identify the morphological processes involved in word formation within the Timor language, and then compare them with word formation processes in English. This comparative analysis addresses the core issue of preserving regional languages from temporal erosion, a critical challenge given that the active use of regional language morphology is increasingly limited to specific rural populations. English serves as an ideal comparative baseline due to its comprehensive linguistic documentation and status as an international language with established structural rules. This study employs a qualitative research design with a comparative approach. Data on the Timor language, specifically vocabulary and their meanings, were collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews with selected informants who met the criteria as reliable native sources. Conversely, English terminology was sourced from credible lexical databases, namely the Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries. The results of this study resulted in a total of 60 words in the Timor language that successfully covered 9 word-formation elements, including (22) affixation, (14) compounding, (10) reduplication, (7) borrowing, (3) clipping, (2) blending, (2) conversion, (2) acronyms, and (1) back-formation. The comparative analysis clearly shows these nine processes in English, with 10 tokens for each type of word formation. Although the structural mechanisms differ, this study makes a significant contribution to enriching the linguistic documentation and preservation of the Timorese language.

Keywords : *Word Formation, Morphology, English Language, Timor Language, Comparative Study.*

INTRODUCTION

Beyond its basic function as a tool for communication, language also holds cultural identity and traditional knowledge within it. Regional language morphology, however, is a field currently under considerable strain. Many indigenous languages, the Timor language (Uab Meto) among them, are now actively spoken by an ever-narrowing segment of rural communities. This phenomenon is not isolated; as observed by Budasi et al. (2021) in the context of Balinese traditional lexicons, regional language elements are often severely threatened due to limited intergenerational transmission. At the heart of the matter is the question of how these regional languages can be transmitted and sustained so that neither time nor the pressures of globalization erode them further, since the loss of a language often carries with it the loss of the cultural memory, oral tradition, and indigenous knowledge embedded in it (Crystal, 2000; Fishman, 1991). For this reason, documenting the morphological structure of languages such as Uab Meto becomes an essential step toward protecting their linguistic legacy.

Word formation itself constitutes one of the fundamental morphological processes through which new words emerge from existing roots or bases, a mechanism that allows a speech community to keep pace with its changing communicative needs (Yule,2010). Understanding how the Timor language behaves morphologically becomes considerably clearer when placed alongside a language whose structure has already been extensively mapped. English serves this comparative purpose well, given how thoroughly it has been documented linguistically and how productive its word-formation processes have become under the influence of globalization and mass media (Plag, 2003). Functioning as a global lingua franca, English offers firmly established grammatical rules and morphological patterns, which in turn provide a solid theoretical and practical benchmark against which a regional language can be examined.

Considerable scholarly attention has already been devoted to mapping derivational and inflectional patterns in major world languages (Ali, Gul, & Azim, 2023; Avalova, 2025), as well as in digital and regional dialects (Faradisa, Aziz, & Yasin, 2019; Nasution, 2024). Comparative work specifically addressing the morphology of the Timor language, by contrast, remains conspicuously limited. Little has been done to document how Timor speakers form new words, whether through affixation, compounding, or other more intricate processes, in a way that is systematically set against the well-established structures of English. This gap in the literature leaves much of the Timor language's structural character still unexamined.

The present study therefore sets out to identify the morphological processes underlying word formation in the Timor language and to compare these processes with their English counterparts. Attention is given to affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, clipping, blending, conversion, acronym formation, and back-formation in both languages, with the aim of revealing where the two systems converge and where they diverge (Katamba, 1993; Yule, 2010). It is hoped that the findings will contribute meaningfully to the documentation of Timorese linguistics and support broader efforts toward language preservation.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design built around a comparative approach. A qualitative framework was considered appropriate given its capacity to explore and interpret meaning holistically, treating words and language as they naturally occur within context rather than reducing them to numerical measurement (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017). The comparative dimension of the study was employed specifically to place the morphological structures of the Timor language and English side by side, so that their similarities, differences, and language-specific traits in word formation could be systematically identified (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010).

The lexicons and word-formation rules of both languages formed the primary focus of the research. Because the two languages differ considerably in how accessible their linguistic data are, data collection procedures were tailored separately for each. Vocabulary items from the Timor language, together with their contextual meanings, were gathered directly from the field through observation and semi-structured interviews. Informants for these interviews were selected on the basis of specific criteria to ensure the reliability of the data obtained, namely adult native speakers with a firm grasp of the language's everyday use, capable of supplying authentic linguistic data grounded in actual usage (Samarin, 1967).

Data on English morphology, meanwhile, were obtained through library and documentary research. Terms and structural definitions relevant to English word formation were drawn from established lexicographical sources, specifically the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2020) and the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2013), supplemented by morphological references from Yule (2010), Katamba (1993), and Plag (2003).

Analysis of the collected data followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Sixty Timorese vocabulary items were examined, selected to represent nine key word-formation processes: affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, clipping, blending, conversion, acronym formation, and back-formation. Each of these items was then structurally compared with corresponding examples from English in order to draw conclusions about the parallels and distinctions between the two morphological systems. To strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, both data source triangulation and methodological triangulation were applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the data is structured to answer the two main research questions: identifying the types of word formation processes in the Timor language (Uab Meto) and examining the morphological similarities and differences between Uab Meto and English.

1. Types of Word Formation Processes in the Timor Language (Uab Meto)

During the data collection process, the researcher successfully identified 60 Timorese (Uab Meto) words through observation and in-depth interviews. The analysis revealed that the language actively utilizes nine distinct word-formation processes. Table 1 presents a synthesis of these processes along with representative corpus examples.

Table 1. Comprehensive Word Formation Data in the Timor Language (Uab Meto)

Word Formation Process	***Morphological Sub-Type & Structure***	***Original / Base Form***	***Uab Meto Word***	***Grammatical Function & Meaning***
1. Affixation	**Prefixation (Agentive):** Adds *a-*, *at-*, *m′-* to verbs.	*Sulat* (write)	***Asulat***	Agentive Noun (writer).
		Fua (see)	***Atfua***	Agentive Noun (seer).
		Kius (see)	***M'kius***	Agentive Noun (seer).
	Prefixation (Verbalizer): Adds *ta-*, *n-*, *na-*, *mu-*.	*Noina* (educate)	***Tanoina***	Active Verb (educating).
		Menu (bitter)	***Mumenu***	Active Verb (embitter).
	Suffixation (Nominalizer): Adds *-enu*, *-kun*, *-nan*.	*Tui* (write)	***Tuisenu***	Abstract Noun (writing).
		Naen (run)	***Naenkun***	Abstract Noun (running).
	Suffixation (Verbal/Causative): Adds *-enu*, *-ta*, *-kit*, *-at*, *-man*.	*Nao* (go)	***Naota***	Directed Verb (going/send away).
		Mafauban (thick)	***Mafaubanman***	Causative Verb (thicken).
2. Compounding	**Exocentric (Toponymy):** Combines nouns to form	*Kuan + fatu*	***Kuanfatu***	Village name (village of stone).
		Oe + puah	***Oepuah***	

	geographical names.	*Fatu* + *ulan*	***Fatuulan***	Village name (water + areca nut).
	Endocentric (Noun + Noun): Describes cultural items.	*Ume* + *kbubu*	***Umekbubu***	Tourist spot (wet rock).
		Feto + *tnana*	***Fetotnana***	Traditional round house.
	Noun + Adjective: Describes abstract states or habits.	*Lais* + *noina*	***Lais noina***	Girl in a family.
		Mena + *kbail*	***Mena kbail***	Education/teachings.
	Modifier + Adjective: Forms superlative degrees.	*Susal* + *naek*	***Susalnaek***	Disease-prone/sickly.
		Ao min + *leko*	***Aominleko***	Deep sorrow/grief.
				Healthiest condition.
3. Reduplication	**Full Reduplication:** Exact repetition of a base morpheme.	*Neno* (day)	***Neno-neno***	Adverb of frequency (every day).
		Leok (good)	***Leok-leok***	Adverb of caution (careful).
		Mese (one)	***Mes-mese***	
	Partial Reduplication: Repetition of a segment.	*Atono* (deaf person)	***Atono-tono***	Distributive adverb (one by one).
		Mepu (work)	***Mep-meup***	Inflectional Plurality (deaf people).

	Partial Reduplication with Alteration: Repetition accompanied by internal vowel shifts.	*Biso* (tear)	***Bis-bios***	Verbal Intensity (continuous work). Verbal Intensity (destructive action).
4. Borrowing	**Direct Borrowing:** Adopted with minimal to no phonetic shifts.	*Obrigadu/Obrigado* (Portuguese) *Oto* (Indonesian)	***Obrigado*** ***Oto***	Interjection (Thank you). Noun (Car).
	Assimilated Borrowing (Phonological Adaptation): Undergoes consonant shifts, vowel elision, or diphthong reduction.	*Cunhado* (Portuguese) *Kopi/Koffie* (Indo/Dutch) *Sekolah* (Indo) *Pegawai* (Indo)	***Kunyadu*** ***Kofi*** ***Skol*** ***Pegawi***	Noun (Brother-in-law). Noun (Coffee) via consonant shift. Noun (School) via vowel elision. Noun (Employee) via diphthong reduction.
5. Clipping	**Back Clipping:** Removal of the final syllable.	*Beta* (I) *Pergi* (go)	***Be*** ***Pi***	1st person singular pronoun. Verb of motion.
	Complex Clipping (Syncope): Dropping medial consonants/syllables.	*"Beta mau pergi ke pasar"*	***"Be mau pi pasar"***	Casual spoken efficiency without changing word class or meaning.

	Syntactic/Phrasal Clipping: Multiple clipped words in one sentence.			
6. Blending	**Partial Blend:** Back-clipping the first word (dropping *-ah*) and fusing it with the second word.	*An(ah) + mone* (male)	***Anmone***	Sociolinguistic gender marker (son/boy).
		An(ah) + feto (female)	***Anfeto***	Sociolinguistic gender marker (daughter/girl).
7. Conversion	**Zero-Derivation (Adjective → Verb):** Shifting from a state to an action based on syntactic position (direct object).	*Toan* (angry in *"In toan"*)	***Toan***	Transitive verb (to hate, as in *"In toan au"*).
		Heknan (the catch in *"Heknan nee nakfena"*)	***Heknan***	Action verb (to catch, as in *"Polisi heknan asiruk"*).
	Zero-Derivation (Noun → Verb): Shifting from subject to predicate.			
8. Acronym	**Syllabic Acronym:** Extracting specific syllables to form a proper noun.	*Biboki - Insana - Miomafo*	***Biinmafo***	Administrative/Geopolitical identity.
		Tanoba Lais Manekat	***TLM***	Institutional naming (Pronounced: *"Talem"*).
	Initial-Letter Acronym: Using the first letters but pronouncing them as a unified word.			

9. Back-formation	**Prefix Deletion (Reverse Derivation):** Stripping away a perceived agentive prefix to create a verbal base.	*a-* + *bako* (*abako* = smoker)	***Bako***	Verb (to smoke, as in *"Au bako nbi kuan"*).

The data collected reveal affixation as among the most productive word-formation strategies in Uab Meto, marked by a heavy reliance on derivational prefixes (*a-, ta-, at-, n'-, am-, m'-, na-, mu-*) that mark the doer of an action or indicate whether a verb is active or stative. Reduplication and compounding likewise appear frequently throughout the corpus. Reduplication carries out both inflectional and derivational functions, as seen for instance in the shift from nouns to adverbs of frequency, whereas compounding functions almost as a repository through which the community encodes its relationship with the surrounding environment and its traditions.

2. Similarities and Differences Between Word Formation in English and Uab Meto

While both languages expand their lexicons utilizing the same nine fundamental mechanisms, their structural realization and functional distribution diverge significantly. Table 2 maps the comparative convergence and divergence between the two languages.

Table 2. Comparative Matrix of English and Uab Meto Word Formation

Process	***Structural Convergence (Similarities)***	***Structural Divergence (Differences)***
Affixation	Both languages use prefixes and suffixes to alter meanings or grammatical categories.	English: Relies on suffixes for category shifts (*e.g., teach → teacher*) and prefixes for meaning (*unhappy*). Uab Meto: Relies heavily on prefixes for category shifts (e.g., agentive *asulat*).
Compounding	Both merge two free lexical elements to create a more specific concept, heavily utilizing Noun + Noun patterns.	English: Predominantly right-headed (e.g., *classroom*) and names everyday objects. Uab Meto: Frequently left-headed (e.g., *Fatuulan*) and features exocentric toponymy and cultural naming.
Reduplication	Both use repetition (full or partial) to add communicative meaning.	English: Limited to expressive, informal, rhyming forms (e.g., *bye-bye*, *chit-chat*) with no grammatical shift.

		Uab Meto: An active grammatical tool marking plurality, frequency, or word-class shifts.
Borrowing	Both adopt external vocabulary to name newly introduced concepts.	English: Borrows from a vast global array, often retaining original forms (e.g., *kindergarten*, *tsunami*). Uab Meto: Shows localized historical borrowing (Portuguese, Dutch), strictly assimilated to native phonology (e.g., *kopi* → *kofi*).
Conversion	Both allow zero-derivation, changing word class via syntax rather than overt marking.	English: Multidirectional (Noun ↔ Verb ↔ Adjective; e.g., *email* → *to email*, *run* → *a run*). Uab Meto: Morphologically restricted, primarily shifting Nouns/Adjectives into Verbs.
Back-formation	Both forge new base words by removing perceived affixes, retaining a semantic bond.	English: Typically removes word-final suffixes (e.g., *editor* → *edit*). Uab Meto: Removes initial prefixes (e.g., *abako* → *bako*).

The comparative data reveal that English morphological shifts frequently occur at the end of words (suffixation, back-formation of suffixes), whereas Uab Meto exerts its grammatical gravity at the front of words through prefixation. Additionally, while processes like clipping, blending, and acronyms in English are utilized broadly across technology, science, and casual media (e.g., *sitcom*, *NATO*, *motel*), their counterparts in Uab Meto are much more localized. Blending in Uab Meto is confined strictly to gender/kinship markers (*Anmone*), and acronyms predominantly serve geographical or local philosophical identities (*Biinmafo*, *TLM*).

Discussions

1. Morphological Behavior of the Timor Language (Uab Meto)

These findings lend support to the theoretical positions advanced by Yule (2010) and Katamba (1993), both of whom argue that morphology does more than reshape word forms; it actively reflects the communicative needs and environmental realities of its speakers. In Uab Meto, morphological behavior is closely tied to sociocultural context. Compounding, for example, seems to serve a purpose beyond ordinary lexical expansion, functioning instead as an exocentric means of encoding local topography, settlement history, and cultural artifacts, as seen in the term *Umekbubu.*

Reduplication in Uab Meto likewise plays a role that extends well beyond sound patterning; it operates as a genuine mechanism of syntactic modification. Where many modern analytic languages tend to relegate reduplication to informal or peripheral vocabulary, Uab Meto draws on it extensively to mark inflectional plurality or to intensify continuous verbal action, as in

mep-meup. A comparable pattern appears in the language's use of blending, which consistently truncates the final syllable of *Anah (child)* before attaching gender markers, producing forms such as *Anmone* and *Anfeto*. This suggests that lexical innovation in Uab Meto follows a highly structured logic, one oriented largely toward reinforcing social identity and kinship roles within the Dawan community.

2. Structural Divergence and Convergence: English vs. Uab Meto

Comparing English and Uab Meto reveals how typological differences shape the way seemingly universal morphological principles are actually put into practice. Avalova (2025) and Ali, Gul, and Azim (2023) make a similar observation, noting that languages with different typological profiles tend to distribute their grammatical load in different ways. Nowhere is this clearer than in how the two languages handle affixation and back-formation. English depends heavily on suffixation to move words across grammatical categories, as in the shift from teach to teacher, and it just as routinely reverses this process through back-formation, stripping suffixes to yield forms like *babysit* from *babysitter*. Uab Meto, however, places nearly the entire weight of this grammatical work on prefixes, using a- to mark agentive nouns (as in *asulat)* and trimming prefixes in much the same reversible fashion to derive new forms (as in bako from *abako)*. This contrast suggests that while the impulse to deconstruct vocabulary may be universal, where that deconstruction actually takes place depends on which side of the word carries the language's affixational weight.

Conversion offers a further illustration of this divergence. As a highly analytic language, English shows considerable structural flexibility, allowing words to move freely and in multiple directions across grammatical boundaries without any change in form, so that a noun like *email* can become a verb just as easily as a verb like run can become a noun. Uab Meto exhibits a comparable capacity for zero-derivation, yet its grammar constrains this movement far more tightly, permitting the shift mainly in one direction, from noun or adjective bases toward newly formed verbs, as seen in toan and heknan. Even so, both languages converge on the same underlying need to expand their lexical resources through borrowing, clipping, and compounding. The difference lies in execution: English behaves as a highly standardized global borrower, absorbing and adapting external material with relative ease, whereas Uab Meto continually reshapes and filters its morphology to safeguard local phonetic patterns and communal identity.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to examine how the Timor language (Uab Meto) forms new words and to compare these processes systematically with those found in English. The results show that Uab Meto draws on nine distinct word-formation strategies to build its vocabulary: affixation, compounding, reduplication, borrowing, clipping, blending, conversion, acronyms, and back-formation. Within the language itself, both affixation and back-formation rely heavily on prefixation to mark verbal and agentive functions. Reduplication, meanwhile, takes on an important grammatical role in signaling plurality and verbal intensity, while compounding tends to follow a left-headed pattern that reflects local place names and traditional cultural concepts.

The comparison further shows that although English and Uab Meto draw on the same basic mechanisms for expanding their lexicons, the way these mechanisms actually play out, both structurally and functionally, differs considerably as a result of typological and sociocultural factors. English leans strongly on suffixation to shift words between grammatical categories, favors right-headed compounding when naming everyday objects, and allows conversion to move quite freely in multiple directions. Borrowing, blending, clipping, and acronym formation in English also span a much wider semantic range, one closely tied to globalization, science, and modern technological life. The same processes in Uab Meto, by contrast, remain far more localized in scope, serving mainly to streamline casual spoken interaction, mark gender and kinship identity, or preserve geographical names tied to the land.

Taken together, these findings suggest that even though word-formation processes appear to be universal, they do not necessarily produce identical linguistic outcomes across languages. Each language shapes these morphological tools according to its own grammatical system, its history of contact with other languages, and the cultural needs of its speakers. Documenting the morphology of Uab Meto in this way represents a meaningful contribution to preserving regional linguistic diversity, while also offering comparative insights that may prove useful for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Future research would benefit from working with a larger corpus, involving speakers from more varied demographic backgrounds, and extending this kind of comparative approach to other regional languages, all of which would further strengthen the documentation of Indonesia's indigenous linguistic heritage.

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