

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Language is not merely a tool of communication but also a fundamental expression of culture, identity, and social organization (Crystal, 2020). One of the essential components of any language is its numeral system, which serves not only quantitative functions but also reveals deep structural and typological patterns. The study of numeral systems provides important insights into how different languages conceptualize quantity, order, and mathematical abstraction (Comrie, 2021). Numerals interact with grammatical categories such as classifiers, noun phrases, and syntactic structures, making them an important domain in linguistic research.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, languages consist of various speech varieties that reflect geographical, social, and cultural distinctions among their speakers. A dialect represents a regional speech variety characterized by systematic differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar while still belonging to the same language system. The study of dialectal variation is therefore essential for understanding linguistic diversity and for documenting lesser-studied varieties, particularly those spoken in geographically isolated communities.

The Rote language, spoken on Rote Island in East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, belongs to the Austronesian language family. Linguistic descriptions indicate that Rote consists of approximately nine major dialects, namely Termanu, Korbafo, Bokai, Bilba, Landu, Dela, Dengka, Oenale, and Rikou. These dialects display distinctive phonological, morphological, and lexical characteristics shaped by geographical distribution and historical development. Among these varieties, the Rikou dialect is spoken primarily in Rikou Village and surrounding areas and represents one of the regional speech varieties of the Rote language.

Given the dialectal diversity of the Rote language, it is essential to situate the Rikou dialect within its geographical context. Geographic distribution plays a significant role in shaping linguistic variation, as physical separation among communities often results in phonological, lexical, and grammatical differentiation. On Rote Island, dialect boundaries generally correspond to regional settlements and traditional territories. Understanding the spatial distribution of these dialects is therefore important for interpreting linguistic patterns found in the Rikou dialect. The geographical distribution of the Rote dialects, including Rikou, is presented in Figure 1 below.

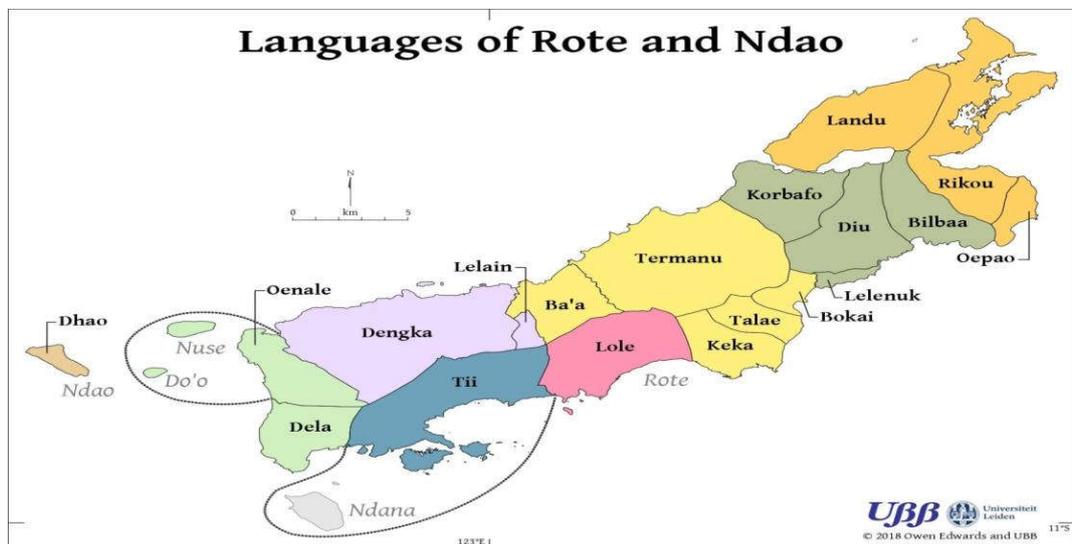


Figure 1. Geographical Distribution of Rote Dialects Including Rikou

Source: Unit Bahasa Dan Budaya

The map highlights the position of the Rikou dialect within the broader linguistic landscape of Rote Island. The geographical concentration of Rikou speakers contributes to distinctive linguistic developments, including patterns observed in its numeral system. Despite the linguistic richness of the Rote language and its dialectal diversity, scholarly attention to the Rikou dialect remains limited, particularly in relation to its numeral system from a descriptive linguistic perspective. Consequently, many structural aspects of Rikou numerals remain insufficiently documented (Grimes & Edwards, 2022).

The numeral system of the Rikou dialect is particularly noteworthy due to its distinctive morphological processes. Native speakers use numerals in everyday communication to express both quantity (cardinal numerals) and sequence (ordinal numerals). For example, the numeral *esa* means “one” and functions as a basic cardinal form. In the sentence “*Au asa buku*” (“I buy one book”), *esa* indicates quantity. In contrast, ordinal forms are derived through morphological strategies, such as in *la’i esa* (“first”), where a functional element combines with the base numeral to indicate sequence. These patterns demonstrate how numeral formation in Rikou reflects structural organization as well as cultural conceptualization of order and counting (Comrie, 2021; Evans, 2022; Himmelmann, 2007).

Documenting numeral systems is particularly important in the context of endangered languages and dialects. UNESCO (2023) categorizes many regional dialects in Eastern Indonesia as vulnerable due to declining numbers of native speakers and the growing influence of dominant languages such as Indonesian. The Rikou dialect faces similar sociolinguistic pressures, especially among younger generations who increasingly shift to more widely used languages. Therefore, a descriptive study of the numeral system of the Rikou dialect is not only linguistically significant but also urgent from a language preservation perspective. By systematically analyzing its numeral structure and usage, this study contributes to Austronesian linguistic typology and supports efforts to preserve local linguistic heritage.

1.2 Research Problems

1. What are the forms and linguistic characteristics of cardinal and ordinal numerals used in the Rikou dialect of the Rote language?
2. How are classifiers used in relation to numerals in the Rikou dialect, particularly in distinguishing count and non-count nouns?

1.3 Aims of Study

1. Describe the forms and linguistic characteristics of cardinal numerals used in the Rikou dialect of the Rote language.
2. Identify and analyze the use of numeral classifiers associated with cardinal numerals in distinguishing between count and non-count nouns in the Rikou dialect.

1.4 Significance of Study

In this study, the researcher only focusses on numeral systems (cardinal numeral) and cardinal numeral classifiers (count noun and noncount noun) used in Rikou dialect

1.4.1 Implication

This study holds several implications for linguistic theory and typological research, particularly in the analysis of numeral systems. Based on the main theoretical framework proposed by Tamelan (2021), numeral systems are understood as an integral part of grammatical structure that reflect how languages encode quantity, order, and semantic categorization. Cardinal numerals, in particular, play a crucial role in revealing morphosyntactic patterns and the interaction between numerals and classifiers in Austronesian languages.

By examining the numeral system of the Rikou dialect, this study contributes to the broader typological description of Rote languages and supports Tamelan's argument that Rote dialects employ highly analytic numeral constructions with systematic classifier usage. The findings demonstrate how cardinal numerals in Rikou encode number, plurality, and measurement through lexical composition rather than inflection, thereby enriching comparative studies within the Austronesian language family and strengthening descriptive linguistic theory grounded in empirical field data.

1.4.2 Application

1. The result of this study will use as the basic information to Rikou people in understanding numeral systems (cardinal numeral) and numeral classifiers (count and non count noun) in Rikou dialect.

2. The result of study is hopefully will help other researcher who wants to conduct any further research dealing with numeral systems (cardinal numeral) and numeral classifiers (count and non count noun) especially in Rikou dialect.