

ETYMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PLACE NAMES IN SOE – TIMOR ISLAND

Marcelinus Yeri Fernandez Akoli

Yanpitherzon Liunokas

Silviana E. Bako

English Education Department

Faculty of Teacher Training and Educational Sciences

Universitas Nusa Cendana

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at describing the etymological meanings of places inside Soe as well as the morphological processes in forming place names in Soe. This research is a part of the writers' concern about the decline of local people's knowledge about their surroundings. There are 21 places' names under investigation although it is also acknowledged that there are some other places' names that we have not covered them yet. Result shows that the places' names are taken from Uab Meto language. Those names are originated either from typical geographical situations of those places or historical events. In particular, the majority of the places' names refer to springs or water sources to represent survivability of the people as shown 8 places' names. Moreover, there are two morphological processes involved in those places' names. They are compounding and affixation. In fact, 19 of the 21 places' names can be morphologically grouped into endocentric compounds and the other two places' names belong to affixation process. Realising that this kind of knowledge is something local people in Soe have paid less attention to, it is strongly suggested that this knowledge should be strengthened by imposing it in Soe local curriculum, i.e, local content.

Keywords : *places' names, Soe, Uab Meto, etymology, word-formation*

INTRODUCTION

Everything in the world has a name. Everything that we can see, touch, smell, hear, taste and even think has a name. Name can be defined as a word or a combination of words by which a person or thing, a body or class, or any object of thought is designated, called or known (Collins 1997). From linguistic viewpoint, name can be considered as a symbol to ease other people in identifying an object or a thing. It is a label we always have in our mind anytime we are dealing an object. Moreover, people nowadays realise that a name becomes so important that it functions like a brand. It determines its owner or referent and the way people think about the referent. In our memory, a Latin adage once said '*nomen est omen*' meaning 'a name is a sign'.

Every place has a name. This is because names are used to mark different geographical areas like cities, villages, hills and seas. Therefore, giving an area a name can help people identify addresses and makes it easier for governments to record and area. The meaning of a name is very broad. It includes not only its physical condition, such as its geographical location, but also its origin, condition and socio-cultural situations, as well as people's religions and the values owned by the community (Kosasih 2010, 34).

The process of naming places is interesting to study and explore. However, based on the reality in today's society, it should be acknowledged that the diversity of place names receive less attention from society since people do not know the origin or history of place names where they live. Many young people and children also have limited attentions and cares toward this issue. In our perspectives, knowing the history behind place names in our local contexts is an important issue because many regents or governors today put tourism as one of leading sectors in their governing agenda. Therefore, there is no other way to support tourism development in this context except knowing the origins of place names in our local areas.

The origins of place names in Soe can still be traced because the communities preserve their original stories of the places and consider the place names as one of cultures that must be preserved. According to the names of places, the majority of place names in Soe are expressed in Uab Meto, depicting how the people of South Central Timor regency are also Uab Meto speakers. Therefore, the writers find it interesting to describe the morphological processes of naming places in Soe, South Central Timor regency as we think that the processes are derived from thinking processes which appear with some considerations. This thinking process is motivated by historical, philosophical and cultural aspects generally derived from Timorese local wisdom on their lives in these places.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to analyse the data from Soe places' names, we occupy two different approaches. The first is that we use etymological approach by working with toponymy as a branch of knowledge examining the history or the origin of place names. Naming is conventional and arbitrary. It is said to be conventional because it is based on the habits of the people who use it. Meanwhile, it is said to be arbitrary since it was created based on the will of the people (Sudaryat 2009).

The second theoretical treatment is derived from morphological theory provided by Aikhenvald (2008, 1 – 65). Slightly looking, most of places' names in Soe are morphologically classified as compounds. Aikhenvald (2008, 24-35) divides compounding process into several criteria, that is, (I) nominal compounds, (II) verbal compounds, (III) compounding in other word classes. In particular, there is a traditional division of compounds using two parameters, that is, (a) whether a compound indicates a part of the whole elements explained by one of its element or not (*endocentric vs exocentric*) and whether it is a coordinate structure ; and (b) whether it possesses a verbal root or not (*root compounds vs synthetic compound*). The places' names in Soe are framed based on the classification of compounds above.

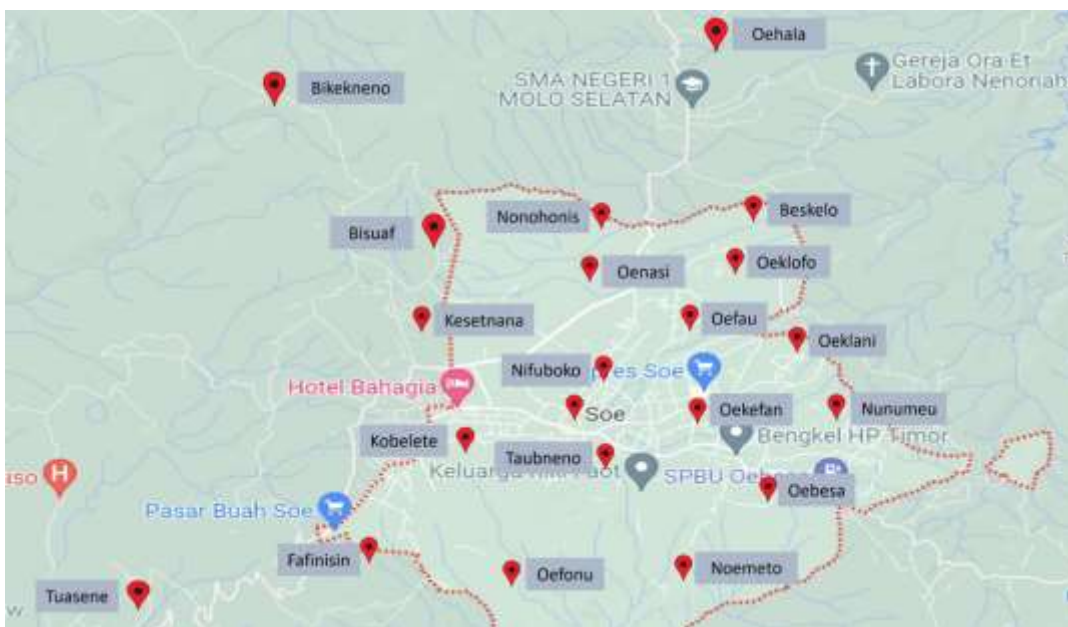
METHOD

This is a qualitative research method. Data were taken in Soe, Timor during August 2022. There were 6 informants involved in this research. They were chosen due to their capability and availability toward the issues being investigated.

In collecting data, the writers mainly employed interview method which was also accompanied by audio recording and note-taking techniques (Moelong 2010). Data were analysed by conducting several steps : first, transcribing the audio data into texts ; second, sorting all written data gained from note-taking process ; third, classifying the data to separate the relevant data from the irrelevant ones. Then, the relevant data were then described and presented by using Aikhenvald's theory of word-formation (Aikhenvald 2008).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our research comes up with 21 names of location around Soe. These places were the villages in the past having grown up into modern settlements during several decades. Today, the settlements have become a chain of neighbourhood where Soe communities are structured into (See Map 01 below).



Map 01. Locations of the 21 investigated places in Soe city

The etymological discussion of the 21 place names in Soe, Timor island can be stated as follows. The place names are alphabetically-ordered.

BESKELO

In Uab Meto spoken by people living in Soe, beskele is divided into *bes* meaning ‘Pilang tree’ and *kelo* meaning ‘monkey’. In the past, there was a huge Pilang tree where many

monkeys hanging on it. At that time, the place around was sparsely populated and full of forest.

Beskelo can be divided into *bes* as the head and *kelo* as the modifier. It is a nominal compound, that is, particularly an endocentric compound.

BIKEKNENO

Bikekneno in Uab Meto literally means a dense and forbidden forest, therefore there was not any sunshine passing through when people visited the place during the day.

Morphologically, it can be broken into *bi-kek-neno*. *bi* is a prefix referring to person, location or animal. For example, there are some Uab Meto words like *bi-fel* meaning ‘woman’, *bi-jael* meaning ‘cow’, *bi-ume* meaning ‘at home’. However, it is unclear why only some animals like *bijael* ‘cow’ and *bibi* ‘goat’ are attached by the prefix while other animal names do not. Moreover, *kek* is a noun meaning ‘a dense forest’ and *neno* meaning ‘midday’. Bikekneno is an example of affixation process where *bi* as a prefix is attached to a compound *kek-neno*.

BISUAF

Bisuaaf can literally be conceived as ‘sets of wood to build a house’. Etymologically, bisuaaf can be divided into *bi* referring to person, location or animal and *suaf* ‘wood to build a house’. In the days when Mollo and Amanuban tribes were engaged in war, this place became a truce location. For that purpose, both sides collected their weapons and bound it into one. The object looked similar to a traditional house of the Timorese symbolising peace between Mollo and Amanuban.

Morphologically, bisuaaf undertakes an affixation process where *suaf* as a noun is attached by *bi* as a prefix.

FAFINISIN

Fafinisin in Uab Meto can literally be understood as ‘pig’s teeth’. In the past, this place was popularly recognised as the doorway for invaders. The ceremony was then held in this place by slaughtering a pig, taking its jaw as the symbol of this entrance and pin the jaw into a high tree. An Uab Meto sentence like ‘*ue mnanu fafinisin*’ can be translated as ‘a pig’s jaw is hooked into a high tree’. Like many other communities, Timorese people believe that high place is a sign to see the enemy coming to the place. That is why this place is called *fafinisin*.

Fafinisin can be divided into *fafi* as the head and *nisin* as the modifier. As a nominal compound, *fafinisin* is an endocentric compound.

KESETNANA

In Uab Meto, kesetnana is divided into two words, that is, *kese* ‘a kind of irritating tree’ and *tnana* ‘middle’. In ancient time, there were a lot of irritating trees in the area. Those touched or exposed to these trees used to suffer from intense itches on their skin. Because of the existences of these trees, until today people call the area Kesetnana.

Kesetnana can morphologically be broken into *kese* as the head and *tnana* as the modifier. It is an endocentric compound since *kese* ‘irritating tree’ determines the whole meaning of the compound.

KOBELETE

Kobelete in Uab Meto spoken by people around Soe town can be divided into *kobe* meaning ‘small cut’ and *lete* referring to the name of a Banyan tree ever lived in that place. Kobelete literally means a small cut made on a Banyan tree, functioned as a stepping point for people where they were detecting, spying or warning their own people on the coming of enemies.

Kobelete is morphologically considered as an endocentric compound since *kobe* is the head and *lete* is the modifier. The morphological meaning of the compound in this case is obtained when *kobe* ‘small cut’ is viewed to have possessive relationship with *lete* ‘Banyan tree’ (Aikhenvald 2008,30).

NIFUBOKO

Nifuboko in Uab Meto is etymologically taken from *nifu* ‘lake’ and *boko* ‘pumpkin’. However, *boko* is used here as a metaphor of human skull. In ancient time, there was a lake in that area where human skulls were strewn along it. The actual name of the place is *nifunakan* where *nakan* means ‘human head’. However, as the name was too harsh, the ancestors preferred to use the metaphorical expression of *nakan* ‘human head’ itself, that is, *boko* ‘pumpkin’.

Like other places’ names, Nifuboko can be divided into *nifu* as the head and *nakan* as the modifier. Nifuboko is a nominal compound. As a nominal compound, it can be considered as an endocentric compound.

8. NOEMETO

In Uab Meto spoken by people in Soe, noemeto can be separated into *noe* meaning ‘river’ and *meto* meaning ‘dry’. There was a river in the area. However, it has been dry since that time. In the rainy season, the river is filled with rainwater. However, after the dry season comes, it becomes dry again. That is why the area is called ‘noemeto’.

Noemeto is an endocentric compound consisting of *noe* as the head and *meto* as the modifier. Nonohonis

It is taken from Uab Meto words, that is, *nono* meaning ‘small river’ and *honis* meaning ‘endlessly flowing water’. Literally, *nonohonis* is conceived as ‘a small river that flowed endlessly’.

Like previous discussed terms, *nonohonis* is morphologically an endocentric compound. In this case, *nono* is the head and *honis* is the modifier so that the meaning of *honis* modifies *nono*. However, *nono* is the most important element of the compound.

NUNUMEU

nunumeu is derived from two Uab Meto words, that is, *nunu* meaning ‘Banyan tree’ and *meu* meaning ‘light/midday’. In ancient times, a large Banyan tree grew somewhere in the place and local people there used to gather or conduct meetings under its shadows.

Nunumeu can be considered as an endocentric compound where *nunu* is the head and *meu* is the modifier. Literally, *nunumeu* can be understood as a Banyan tree under which people used to gather together on midday.

11. OEBESA

Oebesa is made of two Uab Meto words, that is, *oe* meaning water and *besa/kabesak* meaning Pilang tree. This area is named so since there was a spring coming out of the tree.

Oebesa can be divided into *oe* as the head and *besa* as the modifier. It is an endocentric compound in which *besa* ‘Pilang tree’ belongs to *oe* ‘spring’.

OEF AU

‘Oefau’ is derived from two Uab Meto words, that is, ‘*oe*’ meaning *water* and ‘*fau* or *faun*’ meaning *a lot*. In the past, there were many springs in the place. Thus, it can be assumed that people named the place that way in order to remind them on the most striking characteristics the place ever had.

Oefau morphologically refers to a compounding process where *oe* sits as the head and *fau* as the modifier. Consequently, this is particularly labelled as an endocentric compound since there is an obviously possessive relationship between *oe* and *fau* where *fau* belongs to *oe* (Aikhenvald 2008,30).

OEFONU

In Uab Meto, *oefonu* can be divided into *oe* meaning ‘water’ and *fonu* meaning ‘leaf of betel nut’. In the past, there was a spring and people planted a lot of betel nut in this location. That is why this place is called ‘Oefonu’.

Oefonu is an endocentric compound in which *oe* is the head and *fonu* is the modifier.

OEHALA

Oehala in Uab Meto is literally understood as ‘the place where we can take a rest and enjoy the natural panorama’. In this place, there is an awesome waterfall where people built a resting area to enjoy the waterfall. This location is currently a popular tourist destination in Soe.

Oehala is a nominal compound morphologically. *Oe* can be considered as the head and *hala* as the modifier. In this case, *oehala* is an endocentric compound.

15. OEKEFAN

Oekefan in Uab Meto language can be divided into *oe* meaning ‘water’ and *kefan* meaning ‘cliff’. In the past, there was a spring flowing out of the cliff located in the area.

As a nominal compound, Oekefan can be grouped as an endocentric compound consisting of *oe* as the head and *kefan* as the modifier.

OEKLANI

In Uab Meto, *Oeklani* consists of *oe* meaning ‘water’ and *klani* meaning ‘wooden grill’. This area in ancient time was rarely populated and full of forest. Therefore, thieves and criminals used to occupy the forest as a hiding and resting place. When people arrived in this place, they used to find traces of wooden grills left by the thieves after having roasted chickens. That is why they call the place *Oeklani*.

Oeklani is an endocentric compound in which *oe* is the head and *klani* is the modifier. Although there is a little connection with *oe* ‘water’, *oe* like many similar expressions in Indonesia has become an idiomatic expression referring to place. In our personal communication with informants, they said that when associating a place with water, they also hope that people living in the area can grow and live comfortably despite no spring in the area.

OEKLOFO

Oeklofo in Uab Meto can be broken into *oe* ‘water’ and *klofo* ‘mud’. The soil in this location is moist and muddy since water leaks from below. People dig a hole to find clean water and when the spring was found out, it fit the hole. The location is called Oeklofo which means ‘water that makes ground muddy’.

Like other places’ names, oeklofo is morphologically also a part of nominal compound, i.e, an endocentric compound. It can be broken into *oe* as the head and *klofo* as the modifier.

OENASI

Oenasi is an Uab Meto word consisting of *oe* meaning ‘water’ and *nasi* meaning ‘forest’. In ancient time, there was a spring flowing out in the middle of many trees in that place. *Oenasi* today is close to the location where the vanished spring ever existed.

Morphologically, *oenasi* is an endocentric compound where *oe* is the head and *nasi* is the modifier. The meaning of *oenasi* can be understood in which *nasi* ‘forest’ is possessed by *oe* ‘water’.

SOE

‘soe’ is an Uab Meto word meaning ‘to draw or to take’. According to a local version, this name came into existence due to the meeting of a Dutch soldier and a local woman in the past. When the soldier visited the place, he asked a woman taking some water from a river over there on the name of the place he visited. The woman did not understand the soldier’s question, but she assumed that the man was asking about things she was doing at that time. She replied in Uab Meto ‘au soe oe’ meaning ‘I am taking some water’. The soldier only remembered ‘soe’ in his memory and did not pay attention to the whole sentence. Since then, the word ‘Soe’ has started to be used to name the place particularly among colonial soldiers and administrative figures. The place got its official name as ‘Soe’ in 1920.

TAUBNENO

Taubneno is an Uab Meto word which can be broken into two words, that is, *taub* ‘time marker’ and *nen* ‘day’. It is told by the informants there that in the past people living there used to schedule an activity for a specific time each day and known as a daily schedule.

Taubneno is morphologically interesting. It can be divided into two distinct words, that is, *taub* as the head and *nen* as the modifier. *Taub* itself is a metathesis of *tabu* with the same meaning. Taubneno is an endocentric compound.

TUASENE

Tuasene is etymologically taken from Uab Meto words, i.e, *tua* ‘palm tree’ and *sene* ‘bell’. In the past, there were a lot of palm trees in that place. Those trees then produced a constant sound which is similar to a bell by striking the trees with their dry branches or dry trunk. As a result, this sound was considered as a bell.

In morphological viewpoint, tuasene is an endocentric compound since there is a possessive relationship between *tua* and *sene* in its actual meaning.

CONCLUSION

There are 21 location names found in Soe. We acknowledge that these names are not the whole names existing in Soe but we have collected the majority of them. These names are totally derived from Uab Meto, the language mainly spoken in west Timor. From etymological viewpoint, those names are taken either from typical geographical situations of those places or historical events. In many cases, ancient people chose places’ names starting

with *oe* since there were springs in each of the places which ensured their survivability. In fact, of the 21 places' names, about one third of the places started with *oe* meaning water.

Morphologically, those places names mainly consist of two words. The morphological processes where those names are made of can be divided into two. The first process is compounding and the second is affixation. Compounding is the most dominant morphological process of those names where more than 90 percent of the total investigated names can be grouped into compounding process. The compounds found are mainly nominal compounds where both the head and the modifier are nouns. As nominal compounds, they can be classified as endocentric compounds. Next, the affixation process can be found in two places' names. They are indicated by the appearance of *bi-* prefix. However, a further research should be conducted to give a clear explanation on the meaning of *bi-* prefix.

REFERENCES

- Aikhenvald, A.Y.2007. Typological Distinctions in Word Formation. In Language Typology and Syntactic Description; Volume III: Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon (Timothy Shopen,ed). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Collins, William Sons. 1997. Collins English Dictionary. Complete & Digital Editions.
- Kosasih, Dede. 2010. 'Kosmologi Sistem Nama Diri (Antoponim) Masyarakat Sunda'. *Seminar Internasional Hari Ibu*, hlm.33-38.
- Moleong, Lexy.J. 2010. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung : Remaja Rosda Karya.
- Sudaryat, Yayat. 2009. *Toponimi Jawa Barat (Berdasarkan Cerita Rakyat)*. Bandung : Dinas Pariwisata dan Kebudayaan Propinsi Jawa Barat.