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A Descriptive Study of Nouns in the Helong Language

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a descriptive analysis of nouns in the Helong language, specifically the Helong Semau dialect spoken in Otan Village, South Semau District, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Helong is an endangered Austronesian language with a small and declining number of native speakers, making grammatical documentation crucial for preservation efforts. The research aims to identify the types of nouns in Helong and to describe their syntactic structures and functions within simple sentences. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, narrative elicitation, and translation tasks with native speakers of the Helong Semau dialect, selected using purposive sampling. The collected data were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using morphological and syntactic classification procedures. The findings reveal that Helong nouns can be classified into six types: abstract nouns, concrete nouns, proper nouns, collective nouns, compound nouns, and singular/plural nouns. Abstract nouns are systematically marked by the obligatory prefix in-, which functions as an abstract nominalizer attached to adjectives, verbs, or concrete nouns. Concrete nouns refer to tangible objects and carry no morphological marking for concreteness. Proper nouns are invariant across languages and require no auxiliary verb. Plural nouns are formed by full reduplication of the singular form. The study concludes that Helong possesses a regular and productive noun system with clear morphological marking for abstractness and plurality, contributing to the documentation of an endangered language and to Austronesian morphosyntax research in eastern Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental medium of human communication through which cultural knowledge, social identities, and collective experiences are transmitted across generations. Beyond communication, language represents a complex grammatical system that reflects how speakers conceptualize the world. Nouns constitute an essential lexical category because they identify entities, express relationships, and function as fundamental elements of sentence construction. Their characteristics can be examined through semantic classifications, morphological formations, and syntactic distributions (Aarts, 2020; Haspelmath & Sims, 2010).

Indonesia possesses extensive linguistic diversity, yet the dominance of Indonesian and other widely used languages has contributed to the declining use of several regional languages, particularly among younger generations. Research by Suwarno (2020) highlights challenges in institutional support for regional language maintenance, while Pramuniati et al. (2025) demonstrate how parental language choices influence intergenerational language transmission. These circumstances emphasize the importance of linguistic documentation that encompasses phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic structures to support language maintenance and revitalization.

One of the indigenous languages spoken in East Nusa Tenggara is Helong, an Austronesian language primarily associated with Semau Island and western Timor. It comprises three major dialectal varieties: Helong Semau, Helong Bolok, and Helong Funai, which exhibit lexical and phonological differences. Previous research by Tauk et al. (2022) examined nominal markers in Helong, while Shiohara et al. (2024) documented lexical characteristics of the Helong Bolok dialect. These studies provide important foundations for understanding Helong linguistic structures and highlight the need for further grammatical documentation.

Despite its linguistic significance, Helong faces challenges associated with language maintenance and intergenerational transmission. The increasing use of Indonesian and Kupang Malay in education and everyday communication may reduce the domains of Helong usage. Previous studies indicate that family language practices and institutional support are important factors influencing regional language transmission (Pramuniati et al., 2025; Suwarno, 2020). Therefore, documenting Helong grammatical structures is essential not only for linguistic research but also for preserving the linguistic heritage and cultural knowledge of its speech community.

One important grammatical component requiring further investigation is the noun system. Nouns generally refer to people, objects, places, concepts, and social relationships, with their grammatical properties involving semantic, morphological, and syntactic dimensions. Research by Villani et al. (2021), Banks and Connell (2023), and Diveica et al. (2025) demonstrates that concrete and abstract concepts involve different sensorimotor, experiential, and semantic characteristics. Furthermore, nominalization enables verbs and adjectives to function as nouns, providing an important mechanism for expressing abstract concepts and grammatical relationships.

In Austronesian languages, nominal formation involves various morphological processes, particularly affixation and reduplication. Reduplication may express plurality, intensity, distribution, and lexical modification, depending on language-specific grammatical characteristics. Mustafa (2022) identifies different reduplication patterns in Acehnese, while Fettes (2024) examines the syntactic and interpretive functions of full nominal reduplication in Jakarta Indonesian. Similarly, Pateda et al. (2025) demonstrate the morphological functions

of affixation and reduplication in Gorontalo. These findings provide comparative perspectives for investigating nominal formation in Helong, particularly the use of the prefix in- and full reduplication.

Although previous studies have documented Helong lexical characteristics and nominal markers (Shiohara et al., 2024; Tauk et al., 2022), a comprehensive description of noun classifications and their morphological and syntactic behavior in the Helong Semau dialect remains limited. In particular, the formation of abstract nouns, plural marking, and the distribution of different nominal categories in simple sentences require further investigation. This study addresses this gap by examining nouns in the Helong Semau dialect spoken in Otan Village, South Semau District, East Nusa Tenggara.

Specifically, the study investigates six nominal categories: abstract nouns, concrete nouns, proper nouns, collective nouns, compound nouns, and singular/plural nouns. Particular attention is given to the formation of abstract nouns through the prefix in- and plurality through full reduplication, as well as their syntactic functions in simple sentences. Accordingly, this research addresses two questions: (1) What types of nouns are identified in the Helong Semau dialect? and (2) How are these nouns morphologically formed and syntactically used in simple sentences? The findings are expected to contribute to Helong grammatical documentation and provide additional empirical evidence for understanding nominal morphology and syntax in Austronesian languages of eastern Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

Nouns constitute a fundamental lexical category that typically functions as the head of noun phrases and may occupy syntactic positions such as subjects, objects, and complements. Their classification requires consideration of semantic properties, morphological characteristics, and syntactic distributions (Aarts, 2020; Haspelmath & Sims, 2010). In Austronesian languages, word-class distinctions may involve overlapping characteristics, making morphological and syntactic analysis essential (Oxford Handbook of Word Classes, 2026).

Semantically, nouns can be classified into abstract and concrete categories. Abstract nouns refer to concepts, emotions, qualities, and relationships, whereas concrete nouns denote entities that can generally be perceived through the senses. However, these categories involve complex cognitive and experiential dimensions. Villani et al. (2021), Banks and Connell (2023), and Diveica et al. (2025) demonstrate that abstract and concrete concepts differ in their sensorimotor, perceptual, emotional, and social representations. Nominalization also enables verbs and adjectives to acquire nominal functions through morphological processes such as affixation and conversion (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2021). Pateda et al. (2025) further demonstrate the role of affixation and reduplication in the formation of lexical categories in Gorontalo, providing a comparative perspective for examining the prefix in- in Helong.

Other nominal categories include proper nouns and collective nouns. Proper nouns identify specific individuals, geographical locations, and cultural entities, with their grammatical characteristics varying across languages (Sloat, 2026). Collective nouns, meanwhile, refer to groups conceptualized as single entities, although their grammatical agreement may vary according to linguistic conventions (Alexander & Lakaw, 2024; Nicolas & Payton, 2025). These perspectives are relevant to examining personal names, geographical names, and collective expressions such as hutmamo (‘crowd’) and ngala (‘family’) in Helong.

Compound nouns are formed through the combination of two or more lexical elements that function as a nominal expression. Their meanings may be transparent or lexicalized,

depending on the semantic relationship between their components. Downing (2026) emphasizes the importance of contextual relationships in interpreting noun–noun compounds. In Helong, expressions such as kipa ai (‘ant’), sen bon (‘cranium’), and buku tene (‘big book’) provide examples for examining nominal combinations. However, possessive constructions should be distinguished from lexical compounds because they may function as syntactic noun phrases.

Grammatical number distinguishes singular and plural referents and can be expressed through affixation, reduplication, and other grammatical strategies. While English commonly employs suffixation, several Austronesian languages use reduplication to express plurality and other semantic functions. Mattes and Schwaiger (2024) demonstrate the diversity of full and partial reduplication across Malayo-Polynesian languages, while Klamer and Saad (2020) examine structural developments in reduplication through language contact. These studies provide a comparative foundation for analyzing full reduplication in Helong, as illustrated by uma–uma (‘houses’), mija–mija (‘tables’), and behata–behata (‘girls’).

Beyond morphological formation, nouns must also be examined in relation to their syntactic functions. They may function as subjects, objects, complements, possessive heads, and elements of prepositional constructions. Halliday and Matthiessen (2021) emphasize the role of nominal groups in organizing participants and representing experiences within clauses. Accordingly, examining nominal expressions in simple Helong sentences is essential for identifying their grammatical distribution and relationships with other sentence constituents.

Previous research provides an important foundation for investigating Helong nominal structures. Tauk et al. (2022) examine nominal markers and their morphological and phonological characteristics, while Shiohara et al. (2024) document lexical materials from the Helong Bolok dialect. However, a systematic description of nominal classifications and their morphological and syntactic behavior in the Helong Semau dialect remains limited. Therefore, the present study extends previous documentation by examining six nominal categories: abstract, concrete, proper, collective, compound, and singular/plural nouns. Particular attention is given to the nominalizing function of the prefix in- and full reduplication as a plural-marking strategy. By integrating semantic, morphological, and syntactic perspectives, this study contributes to the documentation of Helong grammar and the broader understanding of underdocumented Austronesian languages in eastern Indonesia.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at documenting and analyzing the noun system of the Helong language, particularly the Semau dialect. Qualitative methods are appropriate for linguistic fieldwork as they allow for in-depth, contextualized analysis of naturally occurring language use (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The descriptive approach facilitates the systematic presentation of grammatical patterns without imposing external theoretical presuppositions. Data were collected through field-based methods to ensure ecological validity and to capture authentic linguistic practices within the speech community.

Primary data consisted of spoken Helong collected directly from native speakers on Semau Island, including natural conversations, narratives, and elicited utterances containing nominal constructions. Secondary data sources included existing linguistic descriptions, dictionaries, and textual materials on Helong, which provided lexical and phonological

context for the analysis. A purposive sampling technique was used to select six native speakers of the Helong Semau dialect from Otan Village, South Semau District. Informants were selected based on the following criteria: born and raised on Semau Island, daily use of Helong as their primary home and community language, age variation to capture potential generational differences (ranging from 25 to 80 years), and willingness and ability to articulate metalinguistic insights. Of the six informants, four were male and two were female, with occupations including farmers, community elders, and a local educator; all were Helong-dominant and bilingual in Indonesian. Fieldwork was conducted in Otan Village, South Semau District, Kupang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, ensuring naturalistic interaction and cultural relevance during data collection.

Data were collected in two phases. The first phase involved a review of existing literature on Helong and Austronesian morphology and syntax, as well as the compilation of lexical and textual materials for preliminary analysis. The second phase involved field data collection through semi-structured interviews focusing on noun forms and uses, narrative elicitation in which informants told personal stories or described daily activities and local traditions, and translation tasks from Indonesian to Helong for specific noun constructions. All spoken data were audio-recorded using a digital recorder and later transcribed orthographically and translated into Indonesian and English.

The instruments used in this study included a digital voice recorder for capturing high-quality audio data, and an interview and elicitation guideline containing noun-focused questions, picture descriptions, storytelling prompts, and translation exercises. Data analysis followed a qualitative procedure consisting of three stages: (1) transcription and translation, in which audio data were transcribed in Helong orthography and translated into Indonesian and English for cross-linguistic comparison; (2) identification of noun forms, in which utterances were segmented into clauses and phrases and candidate nouns were identified based on morphological markers and syntactic distribution; and (3) classification and categorization, in which the identified nouns were grouped into types based on their morphological features (e.g., presence or absence of the prefix in-, reduplication) and their syntactic functions within simple sentences.

4. Results

Based on the data obtained from interviews with informants in Otan Village, South Semau District, the analysis shows that nouns in the Helong language can be classified into six types: abstract nouns, concrete nouns, proper nouns, collective nouns, compound nouns, and singular/plural nouns. Each type is discussed below, along with relevant examples and analyses.

4.1 Abstract Nouns

Abstract nouns in Helong are systematically marked by the prefix in-, which functions as a nominalizing morpheme that derives abstract concepts from adjectives, verbs, or concrete nouns. The prefix in-, as shown in Table 1, can attach to adjectives (e.g., namnau ‘lovely’ → innamnau ‘lovely/beloved’), verbs (e.g., parsai ‘to believe’ → inparsai ‘belief’; kehe ‘to be patient’ → inkehe ‘patience’), and concrete nouns (e.g., olet ‘sibling’ → inolet ‘brotherhood’). All abstract nouns identified in the data include the prefix in-, suggesting that this prefix is an obligatory marker for abstraction in Helong. Cross-linguistically, this system parallels the English suffixes -ness, -hood, and -tion, or the Indonesian circumfix ke-...-an. Table 1 presents examples of this formation pattern.

Table 1. Formation of Abstract Nouns with Prefix in-

Word Class	Root (Helong)	Root Meaning	Abstract Form	Meaning
Adjective	*namnau*	lovely	*innamnau*	lovely / beloved
Verb	*parsai*	to believe	*inparsai*	belief
Verb	*kehe*	to be patient	*inkehe*	patience
Concrete Noun	*olet*	sibling	*inolet*	brotherhood
Verb	*toma*	to be right	*intoma*	rightness

Source: Field data (2026)

In simple sentences, abstract nouns occupy different syntactic positions depending on context. For example, in the sentence Auk anang innamnau ('My lovely child'), the abstract noun innamnau functions as a modifier following the possessive pronoun auk 'my' and the head noun anang 'child', following the pattern [Possessive] + [Noun] + [Abstract Noun Modifier]. In contrast, in Un inparsai ka Kristen ('His/her belief is Christian'), the abstract noun inparsai functions as the subject of the sentence, occurring at the beginning after the possessive pronoun un 'his/her', followed by the linking particle ka and the predicate nominative kristen. In Ni bel auk inkehe ('This taxes my patience'), the abstract noun inkehe occupies the object position at the end of the sentence, following the pattern [Subject] + [Verb] + [Possessive] + [Object].

A further example is the proverbial expression Inkehe ka muik boablingin ('Patience brings peace to life/the world'), in which two abstract nouns, inkehe 'patience' and muik 'peace', are linked by the causative particle ka, while boablingin 'world/life' functions as a contextually abstract noun denoting an existential domain. This expression reflects an important cultural value in Helong society: patience is regarded as a primary virtue, and peace is considered its natural outcome — a philosophy embedded directly in the structure of the language. Similarly, the phrase Inolet banan ('Brotherhood in harmony') combines inolet 'brotherhood', an abstract noun denoting a social relationship, with banan 'harmony/goodness', an abstract noun of quality, together expressing a core cultural value of kinship-based solidarity that is essential for social cohesion in traditional Timorese communities.

4.2 Concrete Nouns

Concrete nouns in Helong refer to physical objects that can be seen and touched, such as items of furniture and household objects. Unlike abstract nouns, concrete nouns carry no prefix and are therefore the unmarked noun category in Helong. Table 2 presents examples of concrete nouns identified in the data.

Table 2. Examples of Concrete Nouns

Helong	English	Indonesian
Dela	chair	kursi
Mija	table	meja
Uma	house	rumah
Kakapi	bag	tas
Hadut	lamp	lampu

Source: Field data (2026)

In simple sentences, concrete nouns can occupy either the middle or the end position of a clause. For example, in Au dar ne dela ('I am sitting on the chair') and Auk buku ne mija ('My book is on the table'), the concrete nouns dela and mija occur at the end of the sentence following the preposition ne 'on/at'. In Auk uma tene ('My house is big'), the concrete noun uma occurs in the middle position immediately after the possessive pronoun auk. In Nia baes un kakapi ('Nia washes her bag') and Rony hoet hadut ('Rony turns on the lamp'), the concrete nouns kakapi and hadut occur in the end position following the verb. These examples indicate that, unlike abstract nouns which require the obligatory prefix in-, concrete nouns are unmarked morphologically and exhibit greater syntactic flexibility, occurring with verbs, prepositions such as ne, and possessive pronouns such as auk.

4.3 Proper Nouns

Proper nouns in Helong begin with a capital letter and include names of persons, places, nationalities, religions, and time units. A key characteristic of proper nouns in Helong is that they remain unchanged when translated into English or Indonesian, and they require no auxiliary verb in sentences.

Names of persons in Helong follow the pattern Auk + [kinship term] + ngala + [name], as shown in examples such as Auk batang ngala Vania ('My sister's name is Vania') and Auk blaneng ngala Dani ('My brother's name is Dani'), where auk means 'my', batang and blaneng are kinship terms for 'sister' and 'brother', and ngala functions as 'named/is called'.

Names of places appear directly after the verb without a preposition, unlike English 'to' or Indonesian 'ke'. For instance, Au lakong Surabaya means 'I go to Surabaya', where the place name Surabaya is placed immediately after the verb lakong. The verb 'to go' changes form according to the subject: lakong for first person (au 'I', kaim 'we'), lako for second/third person singular (ku 'you', un 'he/she'), and lakos for third person plural (en 'they'), while the place name itself receives no morphological marking.

Names of nationalities in Helong, such as laun 'Timorese', lote 'Rotenese', and sapu 'Sabunese', differ from their English and Indonesian forms, while names of religions such as Protestan 'Protestant' and Islam 'Islam' show similarities across languages. In sentences such as Au Laun ('I'm Timorese') and En Protestan ('They are Protestant'), Helong follows the pattern [Subject] + [Nationality/Religion] without any copula equivalent to the English verb 'to be'.

Names of units, particularly days, follow the pattern [Time word] + leol + [Day], where leol functions as a copula-like word meaning 'day/is the day'. Examples include Ola leol Minggu ('Tomorrow is Sunday') and Lahin leol Eneng ('Yesterday was Saturday'), where ola means 'tomorrow' and lahin means 'yesterday'. As with nationalities and religions, no auxiliary verb is required in these constructions.

4.4 Collective Nouns

Collective nouns in Helong refer to a group of people, animals, or objects considered as a single unit. Examples identified in the data include hutmamo 'crowd' and ngala 'family'. In the sentence Un deng ngala ('He/she is from a good family'), deng 'good' modifies the collective noun ngala 'family'. In Ana beklobe na ilang ne hutmamo ('The little boy got lost in the crowd'), the collective noun hutmamo occurs in the end position following the preposition ne 'in/at', similar to the syntactic behavior of concrete nouns described above.

4.5 Compound Nouns

Compound nouns in Helong are formed from two or more different words and may carry meanings that cannot always be predicted from their individual parts. The data reveal four patterns of compound noun formation: noun + noun, noun + adjective, noun + verb, and possessive + noun.

In the noun + noun pattern, examples include kipa ai 'ant' and sen bon 'cranium'. The meanings of such compounds are often lexicalized, meaning the meaning has become fixed and cannot easily be derived from the individual components. In the noun + adjective pattern, the adjective follows the noun, as in buku tene ('big book', literally 'book + big') and luis mitang ('black cat', literally 'cat + black'), as illustrated in sentences such as Au muik buku tene ('I have a big book') and Nita muik luis mitang ('Nita has a black cat'), where muik means 'have/has'.

In the noun + verb pattern, examples include ana lilu ('baby cries', literally 'baby + cry') and tilu ahan ('bird warbles', literally 'bird + to warble'), as in Ana lilu nee kamar ('The baby cries in the bedroom') and Tilu ahan okhaong ('The bird warbles every morning'), where nee is a variant of the preposition ne 'in/at' and okhaong means 'every morning'. In the possessive + noun pattern, examples include auk uma ('my house'), auk kado ('my T-shirt'), and ku fhae ('your umbrella'), where auk means 'my' and ku means 'your (singular)', as illustrated in Auk uma tene ('My house is big'), Auk kado ngoe ('My T-shirt is wet'), and Ku fhae kunis ('Your umbrella is yellow').

4.6 Singular and Plural Nouns

Unlike English, which generally forms plurals by adding the suffix -s or -es to the singular form (e.g., dog → dogs, house → houses), with various irregular patterns for words ending in -y, -f/-fe, -o, or with irregular forms such as child → children (Azar, 2000), Helong forms the plural of nouns through full reduplication of the singular form. Table 3 presents examples of this pattern.

Table 3. Plural Formation through Reduplication

Singular	Plural	English Meaning
Uma (house)	*Uma-uma*	houses
Kai'ina (tree)	*Kai'ina-kai'ina*	trees
Atuli (people)	*Atuli-atuli*	peoples
Mija (table)	*Mija-mija*	tables
Behata (girl)	*Behata-behata*	girls

Source: Field data (2026)

As shown in Table 3, plural forms in Helong are produced by repeating the entire singular word, without any change in spelling or the addition of an affix. This pattern, [Singular] + [Singular], is similar to reduplication in Indonesian (e.g., rumah → rumah-rumah 'houses') but contrasts with English, which relies on suffixation (e.g., house → houses).

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Helong Semau dialect possesses distinctive morphological strategies for expressing abstractness and plurality. One of the most significant findings is the use of the prefix in- to form abstract nouns from adjectives, verbs, and concrete nouns, as illustrated by innamnau ('loveliness/beloved'), inparsai ('belief'), inkehe ('patience'), and inolet ('brotherhood'). The consistent occurrence of this prefix in all identified

abstract nouns suggests that it functions as a regular nominalizing marker in the collected data. This finding supports Halliday and Matthiessen's (2021) explanation that nominalization enables speakers to transform qualities, processes, and other experiences into abstract grammatical entities. It also complements research on Austronesian morphology, which demonstrates that affixation plays an important role in lexical formation and grammatical organization (Pateda et al., 2025). However, further investigation involving a larger lexical dataset is necessary to establish the productivity and obligatory status of in- across different lexical categories and dialectal varieties of Helong.

The formation of abstract nouns in Helong also provides an interesting perspective on the relationship between morphology and conceptual representation. Research by Banks and Connell (2023) demonstrates that abstract and concrete concepts are grounded in different combinations of sensorimotor experiences, while Diveica et al. (2025) identify distinct patterns in the organization of their semantic properties. In this context, the use of in- illustrates how Helong morphologically encodes abstract concepts such as belief, patience, and social relationships. Unlike Indonesian, which commonly employs the circumfix ke-...-an to derive abstract nouns, Helong uses a prefixation strategy in the examples identified in this study. Nevertheless, establishing whether this pattern represents an independent morphological development or a historically inherited Austronesian feature requires further comparative and historical investigation.

Another important finding concerns plural formation through full reduplication, as illustrated by uma–uma ('houses'), kai'ina–kai'ina ('trees'), atuli–atuli ('people'), mija–mija ('tables'), and behata–behata ('girls'). This pattern demonstrates that Helong employs morphological repetition rather than English-type suffixation to express plurality. Similar processes have been documented in other Austronesian languages. Dalrymple and Mofu (2012) demonstrate that reduplication in Indonesian interacts with plurality and nominal interpretation, although plural marking is not obligatory in all contexts. Arka and Dalrymple (2017) also show that reduplicated nouns in Balinese may express plural meanings, although reduplication does not invariably encode grammatical plurality. Furthermore, Mattiola and Barotto (2022) identify a range of semantic functions of nominal reduplication across languages, including plurality and changes in referential specificity. Fettes (2024) similarly demonstrates that full nominal reduplication in Jakarta Indonesian may express plurality, variation in kind, and contrastive focus. Compared with these findings, the Helong data suggest a relatively transparent relationship between full reduplication and plural reference. However, additional contextual and discourse-based analysis is needed to determine whether this process has other semantic or pragmatic functions.

The findings also contribute to understanding the grammatical characteristics of Helong in relation to previous linguistic documentation. Tauk et al. (2022) identify basic, combined, and phonologically conditioned forms associated with nominal expressions in Helong, while Shiohara et al. (2024) provide lexical documentation of the Bolok dialect. The present study extends these investigations by examining nominal categories and identifying specific morphological patterns associated with abstractness and plurality in the Semau dialect. These findings indicate that Helong possesses grammatical resources that deserve further investigation, particularly in relation to nominal derivation, reduplication, and syntactic distribution. Nevertheless, similarities between Helong and other Austronesian languages should be interpreted cautiously because shared morphological patterns do not necessarily establish common historical origins.

Beyond its grammatical contribution, this study highlights the importance of documenting underdescribed languages. Detailed descriptions of morphological and syntactic structures provide foundational resources for subsequent comparative research, grammatical analysis, and language maintenance initiatives. Moeller et al. (2026) emphasize that contemporary language documentation can benefit from systematic data collection, annotation, and computational approaches, particularly for languages with limited digital resources. In this regard, documenting Helong nominal structures provides valuable baseline information that may support the development of dictionaries, grammatical descriptions, educational materials, and digital language resources. However, the present study has limitations, particularly its small sample of six informants from a single village. Consequently, the findings cannot yet be generalized to all Helong-speaking communities or dialectal varieties, including Helong Bolok and Helong Funai. Future research should involve more speakers from different villages and generations, supported by a larger naturalistic language corpus, to examine the productivity of the prefix in-, the functions of reduplication, and possible dialectal variations. Comparative investigations involving other Austronesian languages, particularly Rote, Sabu, and Tetun, would also provide further insights into the morphological characteristics and historical relationships of Helong.

6. Conclusion

This study has described the noun system of the Helong language as spoken in Otan Village, South Semau District, East Nusa Tenggara, focusing on noun classification, morphological formation, and syntactic use. The findings identify six categories of nouns in the collected data: abstract nouns, concrete nouns, proper nouns, collective nouns, compound nouns, and nouns distinguished by number (singular and plural). Abstract nouns are characterized by the prefix in-, which combines with different lexical bases to express abstract meanings, as illustrated by inparsai ‘belief’, inkehe ‘patience’, and inolet ‘brotherhood’. Concrete nouns refer to tangible entities and generally occur without additional morphological marking. Proper nouns identify specific persons, places, nationalities, religions, and time units, while collective nouns refer to groups understood as unified entities, as in hutmamo ‘crowd’ and ngala ‘family’. Compound nouns exhibit four structural patterns: noun + noun, noun + adjective, noun + verb, and possessive + noun. In addition, plural forms are expressed through full reduplication of singular nouns, as in uma–uma ‘houses’ and mija–mija ‘tables’.

These findings provide an initial description of the morphological and syntactic characteristics of Helong nouns and contribute to the documentation of an underdocumented Austronesian language in eastern Indonesia. In particular, the use of in- in the abstract nouns identified and full reduplication in plural formation represent important patterns for further investigation. However, these patterns should be examined using broader linguistic data before conclusions can be drawn about their productivity and distribution across the Helong language. The study is limited by its small sample of six informants from a single village; consequently, the findings may not represent all Helong-speaking communities or dialectal variations.

Future research should involve speakers from multiple villages across South Semau and other Helong-speaking areas to establish whether the identified noun patterns are consistent across dialects. Further investigation of the prefix in- is also necessary to examine its grammatical distribution, derivational functions, and possible exceptions. Similarly, reduplication should be studied across different word classes to establish its grammatical and

semantic functions. Research on verbs, adjectives, pronouns, and other grammatical categories would also contribute to a more comprehensive description of Helong grammar. Moreover, comparative studies involving other languages of eastern Indonesia, including Rote, Sabu, Tetun, and Kupang Malay, may provide insights into linguistic similarities, areal features, and possible language-contact influences.

From a language documentation and preservation perspective, the findings can serve as a preliminary resource for developing Helong dictionaries, grammar books, literacy materials, and children's storybooks. Collaboration among local communities, linguists, educators, and language activists is essential to ensure that such materials reflect local linguistic knowledge and support intergenerational language transmission. Future initiatives may also explore the integration of Helong language materials into local educational activities. Finally, developing a digital corpus containing traditional narratives, oral histories, and everyday conversations would facilitate more extensive research on noun frequency, distribution, and morphological patterns. Further semantic analysis could also classify abstract nouns into categories such as emotions, personal qualities, social relationships, and virtues. Such efforts would strengthen the linguistic documentation of Helong and support its continued use and transmission among future generations.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions
Heni Juwita Papa: Investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing – original draft.
Yanrini Martha Anabokay: Supervision, conceptualization, methodology, and writing – review and editing.
Ni Putu Juliani Lestari Dewi: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.

Statement of the Use of AI
The authors used AI-assisted tools solely for language editing and improving the linguistic clarity of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and verified the edited text and take full responsibility for the content of the article.

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