INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES
e-ISSN: 2829-8675 | p-ISSN: 2830-4578
Volume.4, Issue.1, May (2025) : 70-82
DOI: https://doi.org/10.56314/ijoleh.v4i1.295

Numerals Variation of Gebe Language in Central Halmahera Regency: Morphosyntactic Study

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Received : 14 May 2025
Accepted : 22 May 2025
Published : 23 May 2025

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Abstract

This research investigates the variation of numerals in the Gebe language, spoken in the Central Halmahera Regency, with a focus on its morphosyntactic structure. The study aims to describe how numeral forms vary and function within the grammatical framework of the language, particularly regarding noun phrases, classifiers, and verb agreement. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through interviews, observation. and direct elicitation from native speakers across several Gebe-speaking communities. The analysis reveals that almost any type of noun, numeral, or described thing can exhibit this variety, although ordinal numerals offer fewer choices. These findings contribute to the documentation of the Gebe language and offer insights into the typological diversity of numeral systems in Eastern Indonesian languages. This study concludes that the numeral system of the Gebe language exhibits unique morphosyntactic characteristics, including variation in form, structure, and function, which not only differ based on semantic domains, such as human, non-human, and object counting, but also undergo specific morphological processes like affixation depending on the syntactic environment.

Keywords: *Gebe Language, Numerals, Morphosyntactic Approach, Variation, Central Halmahera*

INTRODUCTION

The local knowledge of the speaking community and the usage of regional languages as a reflection of culture must be preserved (Jalaludin et al., 2024), protected, and cared for, particularly in the modern era when most facets of life are undergoing major change (Duwila et al., 2022). Remote locations are also affected. Changes that take place include the arrival of businesses in a community, which are gradually followed by the arrival of immigrants, who subsequently influence the sociocultural life of the area (Mastura et al., 2024). With the existence of other ethnic groups in the area, the community's culture, which was once one ethnicity and spoke the local language (Rajab et al., 2022; Rosmayanti, 2024), started to undergo cultural changes (Nurahmad et al., 2020).

Although it has been completed since 2004, mining continues on Gebe Island, where a nickel mining company first entered in 1978. The Gebe community is therefore receptive to change and the arrival of new ethnic groups in their region. They coexist with people who speak other languages. In (Nugraha & Fauziya, 2018), Society is heterogeneous, both in terms of ethnicity and language." Within the confines of society, members can live and interact with one another. The sustainability of linguistic speech is impacted by the state of distinct ethnic groups' existence. Derived from earlier research on the language's usage, the Gebe language has become less common in several places (Maulud & Ternate, 2023.).

The condition that motivates the study is the gradual extinction of the language itself (Ismail et al., 2024). This means that even minor aspects of the Gebe language, like the numerical system, require documentation. The numerical system used in the Gebe language is distinct in that it uses different sorts of numerals to explain quantity. In the Gebe language, for instance, there are variations in the shape of numerals used for counting, calculating, and expressing amounts. Among the several Gebe language numerals, the early examples include number 1 (one) is referred to as *Piso*, 1 Book is *Buk Iso*, and 1 time is *Nenco* in the Gebe language.

Syntax is a subfield of linguistics that examines the nuances of discourse, sentences, clauses, and phrases (Matende & Hlungwani, 2025). Tarigan, (2021) defines syntax as the study of word combinations to form sentences, which are further quoted by him. Accordingly, syntax is the study of the patterns required to join words into sentences (Kalyan & Donohue, 2023). Muliono, whom Supriyadi also cited, highlighted that syntax is the study of the rules for joining words into phrases, clauses, and sentences (Castilla-Earls et al., 2023). This restriction shows that phrases, clauses, and sentences with words as the fundamental unit are the units contained in syntax. the syntax field. The study of syntax examines the connections among all word groupings or phrases within these syntactic units.

Types of Numerals

Based on their subcategorization, numerals are separated into two categories: defined numerals, which indicate a specific amount, like two, one quarter, five, and thousands, and indefinite numerals, which indicate an ambiguous amount, like several, each, and all (Kosogorova, 2023). Moreover, definitive numbers are separated into: Cardinal numerals, which are basic numerals used for counting and indicating the quantity of a certain object under discussion (SIL).; this answers the question of how many; for example, half, one seventh, Multiplicative numerals, which are numerals that indicate the number of layers or times (SIL): the frequency of an action, such as once, twice, etc. Numbers that represent a place in a specific sequence or order (SIL) or that respond to the question "how many" are known as ordinal or iterative numerals (Nurahmad et al., 2020).

Fractional or partial numerals are those that represent a fraction or part, such as half, one-third. Distributive numerals, also known as collective numerals, are those that represent a group of specific amounts, such as a dozen, pair (Everaert et al., 2023). KBBI explains more about numerals as -- multiplicative Ling numerals, which state how many times an action occurs, for example, once, twice, and so on; -- partitive Ling numerals, which state fractions, for example, half, one seventh, and so on.

Overall, research on the Gebe language is still very limited, especially in terms of its grammar and structure. Most previous studies have focused only on vocabulary or oral traditions, without exploring how numerals are formed and used in sentences. While some research exists on numeral systems in other Austronesian languages, there has been little to no focus on the morphosyntactic aspects of numerals in Gebe. As a result, we still do not fully understand how numerals in Gebe vary in form or how they function in different sentence structures. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the variations and grammatical roles of numerals in the Gebe language.

METHOD

The study's method is a qualitative descriptive approach. This relates to the objective of this study, which is to explain the form and function of numerals in Gebe language. Qualitative descriptive research is a type of research with a setting as it is." By using this method, the study allows the collection of qualitative data, which will thereafter be methodically explained by referencing the facts or symptoms that emerge in the field (Creswell, 2021; Taylor et al., 2016).

The data collection involves direct elicitation using translation tasks and picture-based prompts, and participant observation to capture natural use of numerals in daily interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Audio recordings of both spontaneous and elicited speech are made to ensure the accuracy of

phonological and morphological analysis. Participants are selected purposively to reflect a range of ages and dialectal variations within the Gebe-speaking community. Observation and recording of residents' speech are used to gather numerical data, and structured interview techniques are used to validate the data. To get a comprehensive picture of how the speech community uses or designates numerals, the data is gathered from sources and the field and then examined using morphosyntactic approaches.

The analysis process involves transcribing and classifying the numerical data based on form as well as by semantic domains (Elliott, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016; Richards & Hemphill, 2018). Morphological analysis is conducted to identify root forms and affixation, while syntactic analysis examines the positioning of numerals in noun phrases and their interactions with classifiers, quantifiers, and verb agreement. In addition, the study explores variations in numeral usage across different speakers and contexts, aiming to reveal any patterns or inconsistencies. The results are interpreted through a morphosyntactic framework, providing insights into how numerals function structurally within the Gebe language and how these features compare with those in other Austronesian languages.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Gebe language has various numeral categories. There are five types of definitive numerals in Gebe language: cardinal, distributive, multiplicative, partitive, and ordinal. Each category has unique syntactic distributions and characteristics that lead to distinct semantic meanings.

The discussion will first go over the fundamental PTN numerals as shown below before going into greater detail about the five numeral categories mentioned above:

Tabel 1. *Basic Numerals of Gebe Language*

No.	Basic Numerals	Number	Basic Numerals
1	*sa*	*Dozens*	*Afa*
2	*lu*	*20*	*Afalu*
3	*tol*	*21*	*Afalu re sa*
4	*fat*	*Hundreds*	*Calansa*
5	*lim*	*101*	*Calansa re sa*
6	*wonom*	*Thousands*	*Utinsa*
7	*fit*		
8	*wal*		
9	*siw*		
10	*wotsa*		
11	*Wotsa re sa*		
12	*Wotsa re lu*		

These basic numerals, as shown in the example table below, cannot be used directly as modifiers in Gebe language, nor can they be used to mention or explain a specific number of objects.

Examples:

1.

Cukal	***katale***	***tol***
OPT+buy	chicken	Num-three
I buy	three	chickens
	(portions)	

2.

wotsa	***re***	***tol***
Num+ten	and	Num+three
	Thirteen	

Sentences (1) and (2) are grammatically incorrect because numerals (modifiers) and the objects being described are closely related in Gebe. The same is true for example statement (2), which counts as the items to be tallied must be understood or even present before they can be counted.

1. Cardinal Numerals

Cardinal numerals are number words used to inquire about an object's number. The inquiry "How many?" is answered with this kind of numeral.

The preliminary findings of this study generally indicate that there are two ways to mention cardinal numerals when they are used as modifiers of nouns (objects). The Gebe language distinguishes between the mention of numerals on objects with and without souls, so there are two types of prefixes attached to the Gebe language's basic numerals: for objects (nouns) with a soul, the prefix *si-* is added to the basic numeral for the object (noun) that is described, and for objects without a soul, the prefix pi- is added to the numeral for the object (noun) that is described.

Table 2. Cardinal Numerals with *Si*+Basic Numeral Pattern

sa	*isa*
lu	*silu*
tol	*sitol*
fat	*sifat*
lim	*silim*
wonom	*siwonom*
fit	*sifit*
wal	*siwal*
siw	*sisiw*
wotsa	*wotsa*

The usage of the number ten (wotsa) does not alter or add to the basic si-numeral ten (*wotsa*); the basic *si*+numeral pattern only extends to the number nine (*sisiw*). The fundamental *si*+numeral prefix comes after the object (noun) that has an atma in its unit number when numbers exceeding ten (*wotsa*) are allocated, such as eleven.

For Instance:

Cukal katale sitol
Opt+buy chicken (noun) *si*+basic numeral three
'I bought three (portions) chickens'

Yut in wotsa re isa
Opt+ bring fish ten and one
'I brought eleven (portions) fish'

The number one, which denotes a heavy object, should follow the *si-* prefix pattern in the basic *si*+numeral prefix. However, in everyday Gebe language, the number one (*sa*) is accepted as *isa* for (one) rather than becoming a remnant as in the *si*-prefix pattern.

For Instance: *Ntuk isa*
'I have one child'

Since *katale* (chicken) *in* (fish) and *tuk* (kid) are nouns with atma, nouns with the prefix pattern *si*+ basic numerals are the appropriate numerals to explain these terms. Generally speaking, objects that have atma, like the one in the previous example, are described by numerals with the prefix *si-* or are modified by them. There is an exception though, where in Gebe, the noun *Buk* (book) has a condition where an object without an atma receives a numeralia modifier with the form *si*+basic numerals.

For instance: *nik buk sifit*
'I have seven books'
Numeral *si*+numeral fit which is a numeral has an atma.

For objects that do not have a soul, there is the prefix *pi-* on the basic numeral for the object (noun) being described.

Table 3. Cardinal Numerals with *Pi*+Basic Numeral Pattern

sa	*pisa*
lu	*pilu*
tol	*pitol*
fat	*pifat*
lim	*pilim*
wonom	*piwonom*

fit	*pifit*
wal	*piwal*
siw	*pisiw*
wotsa	*wotsa*

Based on the table above, can be seen the basic pi+numralia prefix pattern that generally describes objects (nouns) that do not have atma.

Fo Instance : *ya niw gulo pilu*
Opt+ eat two young coconut two
'I ate two young coconuts'

As previously mentioned, the number ten (*wotsa*) is unaffected by alterations or new prefixes like *pi-* or *si-*. Additionally, in Gebe language, the number of dozen is a mixture of the unit number, the word *re* (and), and the number ten (*wotsa*). Therefore, the prefix *pi*-basic numbers on the unit number will be used to identify objects (nouns) that lack an atma.

For instance : *Nik wag wotsa re pilu*
Pss1 boat ten and two
'I have twelve boats'

Um pifat te nomor
Noun pi+basic numeral four with adjective
'That house four is better'

The nouns *wag* (boat) and *um* (house) are objects that do not have a soul so they explicitly receive a numeral modifier with the pattern *pi*+basic numeral.

1Even if it is previously known which numerals have souls and which do not, Gebe language's cardinal numerals nevertheless have exceptions. when food or beverages are mentioned without specifically referring to the container.

For instance: *wa isa*
'Single water'
Wa galas pisa
'One cup of water'

Apart from the cardinal numerals with the prefixes *si-* and *pi-*, Gebe language also has the prefix *sa-* to indicate the number of boats sailing in the ocean and seen from land.

Table 4. Cardinal numerals with the prefix pattern *Sa*+Basic numeral

sa	*Sasa*
lu	*Salu*

tol	*Satol*
fat	*Safat*
lim	*Salim*
wonom	*sawonom*
fit	*Safit*
wal	*Sawal*
siw	*Sasiw*
wotsa	*Wotsa*

For instance: *Wag salu*

Boat prefix *sa*+basic numeral two

'Two boats'

2. Distributive Numerals

In Gebe language, there are two groups of distributive numerals, namely numerals that express a certain number of numbers. The two groups are *sel-* and *floton-* which are added to the basic numerals. The pattern (*sel* + basic numeral) is usually used to count the number of objects in the form of pairs. While the pattern (*floton* + basic numeral) is used to mention the number or count the number of objects in the form of tens (multiplication of ten).

Table 5. Cell-Patterned Distributive Numerals, *Floton* + Basic Numerals

sa	*selpisa*	*flotonsa*
lu	*Sellu*	*flotonlu*
tol	*Setol*	*flotontol*
fat	*Selfat*	*flotonfat*
lim	*Sellim*	*flotonlim*
wonom	*selwonom*	*flotonwonom*
fit	*Selfit*	*flotonfit*
wal	*selwal*	*flotonwal*
siw	*Selsiw*	*flotonsiw*
wotsa	*selwotsa*	*flotonwotsa*

The basic *sel*-numeral pattern is usually used for numbers of objects in pairs or bound together.

For instance: *Niu selpisa*

'One coconut in a bunch'

Coconuts tied in two pieces are often carried by coconut farming communities.

Lyeut kai selpisa 'I carry a bundle of wood'

The basic *floton*+numeral pattern in Gebe language to mention or explain the number of objects (nouns) in the form of tens (multiplication of ten)

For instance: 1. *yof flotonsa na oto truk a lo*

'Ten sago *tumang* in a truck'.

Yof flotonsa in the sense of sago *tumang* collected in one container with a total of 10 *tumang*.

2. *Niu yao flotonwal*

'There are 80 coconut trees' (in a row of trees)

3. Multiplicative Numerals

It is a numeral that indicates the number of folds or times (frequency). In Gebe language, this kind of numeral is identified by adding the prefix non- to the base numeral. *Nenfis?* "How many times?" is a popular question to ask in this situation.

Table 6. Multiplicative Numerals Patterned *Nen*+ Basic Numerals

sa	*nensa*
lu	*nenlu*
tol	*nentol*
fat	*nenfat*
lim	*nenlim*
wonom	*nenwonom*
fit	*nenfit*
wal	*nenwal*
siw	*nensiw*
wotsa	*nenwotsa*

For instance: *manan nenfis*

'How many times do you eat?'

Yanan nenlu

'I ate twice'

4. Partitive Numerals

This partitive numeral is used to express the number of divisions of an object. In Gebe language, the expressions commonly used are *kapalo, kanyongo* and *kapoto*. *Kapalo*, divide something equally or divide in two, half (1/2). *Kanyongo*, divide an object into four parts, this expression is specifically used in dividing fish. *Kanyongosa* is the same as a quarter (1/4). *kanyongosa re kapalo* means three quarters (3/4).

Kapoto is typically used to break up hard materials into tiny pieces, such as sugar cane, young mango, *kedondong*, and so forth. For example, a *kedondong* can be separated into multiple *kapoto,* such as *kapotosa, kapotolu, kapototol, kapotofat*, and so forth.

For instance: Ia npo nak in kanyongosa

'He gave me a quarter (one gaki) of fish.'

Nak kapoto

'Mine is half (explanation of an object that is divided/split in two)'

5. Ordinal Numerals

Ordinal numerals are those that represent a level or place within a specific set of sequences or orders. The question, "Which one?" is answered with ordinal numerals.'

There are just two levels in Gebe language: *kabo*, which means "the first," and *misimul*, which means "the last." A particular word is used to express the number level for the second, third, or neither first nor last.

For instance: *Pibdipya syei ten pot kabo ?*

'Who came first yesterday?'

Ina npot kabo

The explanation above demonstrates the numerical variants in the Gebe language, where cardinal numerals have different names depending on the context of the reference. This variety can be seen in practically any sort of noun, numeral, or described item, but ordinal numbers have fewer options (Klamer & Kratochvíl, 2014).

Five separate forms of numerical systems— cardinal, distributive, multiplicative, partitive, and ordinal numerals—show up in the Gebe language, complex and deeply ingrained numerals. Depending on the kind of noun it alters, each kind has particular syntactic distributions and semantic responsibilities. One noticeable difference is the way various prefixes—si- for animate objects and pi- for inanimate ones—distinguish animate from inanimate nouns. For chickens, for instance, sitol ("three") is used; for coconuts, pilu ("two"). Counting particular objects like boats seen from the shore using unique numeral forms like sa- shows how closely the numerical system is linked to the speakers' surroundings and way of life.

Two patterns define Gebe's distributive numerals: floton-, used for multiples of ten (e.g., flotonwal for eighty); sel-, used to signify pairs or groupings of objects (e.g., selpisa for a pair of coconuts). With the prefix nen-, multiplicative numerals—that is, those expressing the frequency of actions—such as nenlu ("twice"). Partitive numerals, which divide objects, include kapalo ("half"), kanyongo or kanyongosa ("a quarter"), and kapoto—used for hard object division—fruit. These forms imply that the language not only defines but also codes for culturally relevant measuring and division.

Gebe's ordinal numerals are more constrained; there are just two basic forms: kabo for "first," and misimul for "last." Though indicated through context or lexical

means, intermediate ordinal numbers are not marked morphologically. Gebe's numeral system shows generally that counting and quantity are language reflections of cultural practices, cognitive categorisation, and ecological awareness rather than only mathematical ones.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has revealed that the numeral system of the Gebe language exhibits unique morphosyntactic characteristics, including variation in form, structure, and function. Numerals in Gebe not only differ based on semantic domains—such as human, non-human, and object counting—but also undergo specific morphological processes like affixation depending on the syntactic environment. The placement of numerals within noun phrases, their interaction with classifiers, and their influence on agreement patterns highlight the language's complex internal grammar. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the linguistic diversity in Central Halmahera and emphasize the importance of documenting lesser-studied Austronesian languages.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that further research be conducted to explore numeral systems in closely related languages or dialects in the region to better understand historical and typological relationships. Additionally, since the Gebe language faces the risk of reduced transmission to younger generations, language documentation efforts—including the development of educational materials and community-based linguistic projects—should be prioritized. These steps are vital not only for preserving the Gebe language but also for enriching the broader field of Austronesian morphosyntax.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors express gratitude to Allah SWT for His kindness and guidance to finish this study entitled "Numerals Variation of Gebe Language in Central Halmahera Regency: Morphosyntactic Study." The Faculty of Cultural Sciences at LPPM Khairun University and the author herself would like to thank them for reviewing and budgeting the research. The authors acknowledge that this is only the first of many in-depth analyses of this subject. As a result, after reading the study's findings, readers' comments and ideas will be gratefully received by the author.

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