

## Sound correspondences in three East Timorese languages

In Pawley (1995, 2005) and Ross (2005) it is hypothesized that on the basis of correspondences in pronoun forms, the non-Austronesian languages spoken on East-Timor belong to the Trans New Guinea family, and form a separate subgroup with the languages of Alor. Hull (2004) recognizes a neo-Bomberaic subgroup of languages in East Timor.

In this talk, I study the mutual relationship between three non-Austronesian languages of East Timor: Oirata, Fataluku and Makasai, on the basis of word lists of 400 items. Then I reconstruct the proto-phoneme inventory of the three languages. The aim is to find linguistic evidence for the history of the speakers of these languages: which language was there first? Can the observed sound changes help us to reconstruct the history of these languages?

My reconstruction suggests that of the three languages, Makasai represents the older stage, followed by Oirata and then Fataluku. In the past, it has been suggested that the inhabitants of the island of Kisar moved there from the Fataluku speaking area of East Timor, and that Oirata is a variety of Fataluku, rather than a distinct language. However, my data suggest that Oirata should be classified as a separate language, although originally it is very probably a dialect from (an archaic form of) Fataluku. Since the 18th century many innovations took place in mainland Fataluku which did not occur in Oirata, so that the languages diverged.

The classification of Oirata as a separate language obviously has consequences for the historic path of the Non-Austronesian languages of East Timor. I will consider this historic pathway by going over my reconstructions (which, incidentally, largely correspond to the reconstructions in Hull 2004). The reconstructions help us to understand how the NAN languages reached East Timor, and how they developed there.

### References

- Pawley, A. (1995). 'C.L. Voorhoeve and the Trans New Guinea Phylum hypothesis', in C. Baak et.al. (eds.), *Tales from a concave world*. Leiden, 83-123.
- (2005). 'The chequered career of the Trans New Guinea hypothesis: recent research and its implications', in A. Pawley (ed.), *Papuan pasts: cultural, linguistic and biological histories of Papuan-speaking peoples*, Canberra, 67-107.
- Ross, M. (2005). 'Pronouns as a preliminary diagnostic for grouping Papuan languages', in A. Pawley (ed.), *Papuan pasts: cultural, linguistic and biological histories of Papuan-speaking peoples*, Canberra, 15-66.
- Hull, G. (2004). 'The Papuan languages of East Timor', *Studies in languages and cultures of East Timor* 6: 23-99.