

## **TOWARDS A LANGUAGE HISTORY OF EAST TIMOR**

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Despite almost 500 years of direct contact with the West, the linguistic history of East Timor has been relatively little studied to date. The former Portuguese territory, a colonial backwater for almost 400 years, finally achieved international prominence during twenty-four years of Indonesian control (1975-1999). It gained world-wide attention in dramatic circumstances in late 1999 during and after the internationally sanctioned referendum on self-determination.

In this paper we attempt an outline of the linguistic history of East Timor, dividing the period since first Western contact into three discrete periods. Patterns of language maintenance and survival over time in East Timor are closely linked to the country's complex historico-political circumstances. At least three very different historical phases - political and linguistic - can be identified: each new one in turn radically shorter and more overwhelming than its predecessor, and each with very different linguistic consequences:

- (1) Portuguese contact and colonization (1500s-1975)
- (2) Indonesian occupation (1975-1999)
- (3) Post-Referendum/Independence (1999-)

### ***1. Overview of the Indigenous Language Situation***

In any discussion of the linguistic situation in East Timor - past or present - a clear distinction needs to be made between indigenous and non-indigenous languages of East Timor. From a historical, linguistic and cultural perspective, the most important non-indigenous languages of East Timor are Portuguese, and Malay/Indonesian, the languages of the two colonizing powers in East Timor. To this list of non-indigenous languages can be added English, Portuguese Creole, varieties of Chinese and the many languages of Indonesian transmigrants entering East Timor after Indonesian occupation of East Timor began in 1975. Each of these, with the exception of specific transmigrant languages, will be referred to in the sections that follow below.

With respect to the indigenous languages of East Timor, their precise number and classification remain in dispute. The estimated number of languages varies greatly from a low 10 to a very high 40, although the real number is likely to be in the range of 15-20. Despite centuries of contact, the Portuguese took relatively little interest in the linguistic make-up of East Timor, with the little, not always reliable, linguistic information we have collected by priests or by anthropologists present in the region for other reasons. More recent Indonesian sources are also inconsistent and unreliable, with estimates of indigenous languages generally very low, e.g. Parera (1994).

The most recent edition of *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1996) lists the following seventeen languages as being spoken in East Timor, along with estimated number of speakers:

	<i>size of ethnic group</i>
Non-Austronesian	
Adabe	1,000 (?)
Bunak	50,000 (some speakers also in West Timor)
Fataluku	30,000
Makasai	70,000
Maku'a	50
Austronesian	
Atoni	650,000 (14,000 in Ambeno/Oe Cusse, rest in West Timor)
Galoli	50,000 (?)
Idate	5,000 (?)
Kairui-Midiki	2,000 (?)
Kemak	50,000
Lakalei	5,000 (?)
Mambai	80,000
Naueti	1,000 (?)
Tetun	300,000+ (many in West Timor)
Tetun Dili	50,000 (?) (also known as Tetum Praça)
Tukudede	50,000
Waima'a	3,000 (?)

Three of the listed languages (Atoni, Bunak and Tetun) are spoken in both East and West Timor. Of the seventeen languages listed by *Ethnologue*, at least nine appear to have relatively associated ethnic groups (30,000+ speakers). The actual size of the each ethnic group associated with the listed languages is open to debate: some sources (e.g. Fox 1997) report Mambai to be by far the largest group in East Timor, with up to three times as many speakers as listed by *Ethnologue*.

The distinction made by *Ethnologue* between Tetum/Tetun and Tetum/Tetun Dili is somewhat controversial, since Portuguese, Indonesian and most English-language sources, as well as the East Timorese themselves, tend to group all va-

rieties of Tetum/Tetun under the single heading of Tetum/Tetun. The reasons for the distinction made by *Ethnologue* are made clear in the entry for Tetun Dili:

“Speakers of ...Tetun have significant difficulty understanding [Tetun Dili] in many speech domains and vice versa. Some first language speakers of Tetun Dili consider themselves to be bilingual in Tetun because of contact, but when pressed, admit there are domains in which communication is completely blocked.” (pp. 654-655).

The accuracy of *Ethnologue*'s assessment about intelligibility problems across varieties of Tetum has been confirmed by Hajek (1999). That such problems should arise are not surprising: there is for instance substantial regional variation in the extent of adstratum influence. Tetum spoken in West Timor has long shown greater Malay/Indonesian influence with relatively little historical contact with Portuguese. At the other extreme, Tetum Dili has had long and intensive contact with Portuguese followed by intensive contact with Indonesian after 1975. Inter-communication is also hampered by the unusual geographical dispersion of the Tetum-speaking area into three physically separated zones: (1) Dili, the capital; (2) the Soibada-Viqueque area; and (3) a long strip which extends from Suai on the southern coast to Balibo on the north coast, straddling the East-West Timor border. Tetum (mainly Tetun Dili) has for some time been the lingua franca of East Timor, and it is estimated that some form of Tetum is spoken by 60-80% of the local population.

The current classification of East Timorese languages is also incomplete - mainly due to the absence of sufficient information to allow for a proper assessment. Misclassification of Timorese languages has always been a problem as a result, e.g. Capell (1944) and (1972) for examples. With respect to the five listed non-Austronesian languages, Maku'a is in fact an Austronesian language related to languages spoken on neighbouring islands. Its aberrant phonological shape was sufficient to have put Capell (1972), a very experienced Austronesianist, off the track completely. Although Adabe is listed as spoken on Atauro, there is no evidence that this is really the case.

## ***2. Portuguese contact and colonization (1500s-1975)***

The 1<sup>st</sup> linguistic phase refers to the lengthy period of Portuguese contact and colonization that lasted some five centuries. During this whole period there was little negative impact on indigenous languages of East Timor with the linguistic heterogeneity of East Timor well preserved. Only one indigenous language, tiny Maku'a, was threatened with loss - with as few as 50 speakers, in the 1970s. The threat to Maku'a came not from Portuguese, but from Fataluku, the surrounding indigenous language which had completely enveloped the eastern tip of the island. The relative linguistic stability of East Timor during this period was in sharp contrast to what appears to have occurred in the other half of the island during much the same period. In West Timor, formerly under Dutch control, the number of lo-

cal languages today is dramatically smaller, with Helong which survives in a small area near Kupang, Tetum on the East-West Timor border and Atoni spoken in most of West Timor. Kupang Malay and Rotinese are relatively recent imports. It is believed that a range of interrelated factors such as sandalwood trade, continuing conflict and Dutch policies in favour of a new socio-political order more amenable to their control all conspired to shift local populations to Atoni (Fox 1997).

Whilst the Portuguese contact with East Timor goes back to the 1500s, it is important to realise how tenuous Portuguese influence in the region was for much of this period. In 1511 the Portuguese seized Malacca intent on expanding into the famous Spice Islands of eastern Indonesia. Their first written report on Timor is from 1517, although they appear to have visited the island in 1511. In 1566 the Dominicans established a fort in nearby Solor, and Portuguese interests began to expand in the region - including regular trade links with coastal Timor. In 1613 in the face of Dutch attacks, the Portuguese garrison was moved from Solor to nearby Larantuka. In 1642 the Portuguese and their allies entered Timor in large numbers to crush the most powerful kingdoms, in particular Tetum-speaking Wehale. Meantime Dutch-Portuguese rivalry continued - complicated by the increasing power of the Topasses, a Portuguese-speaking mixed-race force and Portugal's ostensible blood brothers and allies in the region. In 1653 the Dutch defeated the Portuguese at Kupang and entered West Timor, only to be defeated by the Topasses who were now to control most of the island. Victory of the Dutch at the battle of Penfui in 1749 was to guarantee Dutch control of West Timor until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Attempts by the Portuguese crown to take control of the rest of the island were long thwarted by the Topasses and their Timorese allies. The original capital of Lifao (today in the Oe-Cusse enclave) was abandoned in 1769 by the Portuguese governor who, besieged by the Topasses, was forced to transfer his army and administration to Dili. It was not until the late 1800s that Portuguese really began to establish control of their territory. But indigenous resistance was strong: between 1847 and 1912 the Portuguese conducted sixty military campaigns in an effort to pacify the colony. Full Portuguese rule was not achieved until 1912 with the crushing of the Boaventura uprising.

The lack of Portuguese control coupled with Portugal's lack of interest in East Timor until the 20<sup>th</sup> century meant that the indigenous linguistic ecology of East Timor was for the most part relatively little affected by Portuguese. There is no evidence of any indigenous language being put in direct peril by the Portuguese language. A long tradition of stable indigenous multilingualism amongst the local population helped to maintain local language vitality. It was for instance quite common, at least until 1975, for villagers (especially males) to speak the language(s) of neighbouring villages. The introduction and use of Portuguese in these circumstances was dealt with as an expansion of the multilingual repertoire, rather than as a disruption to it.

Portuguese was, not surprisingly, well established in Dili, the colonial capital, but even here it was used alongside Tetum, not native to the area but implanted in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tetum benefited in Dili from its pre-existing use as a lingua franca in parts of East Timor and from the historical prestige of the Tetum-speaking kingdoms on the island. Outside of Dili Portuguese seems to have been spoken by relatively few people until after WW2 - although a report by a French explorer (Rosilly) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century suggests that all the local kings (liurais) were already fluent in Portuguese. Catholic missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were also required to use indigenous languages - local languages in some places (e.g. Galoli) but Tetum in particular - in order to spread the Catholic faith.

Only in the Fataluku-speaking area where Tetum was unknown was Portuguese used as a lingua franca by the local population to communicate with other Timorese.

The numbers of Portuguese resident in East Timor were always tiny. As the table below shows, even as late as 1970, only 0.2 % of the resident population was Portuguese - and of this number, most, soldiers and administrators, were born in Portugal. The Portuguese instead relied mainly on the Timorese population with respect to local administration and military affairs. On both counts, the difference could not be starker when one compares these facts and figures with what occurred during the period of Indonesian control (1975-1999) - as discussed below.

	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Portuguese	1463	0.2
Chinese	6120	1.0
Mestizo	1939	0.3
Goanese	42	
Negroes	22	
Timorese	599891	98.4
Total Pop.	609477	

Table 1 Population of Portuguese East Timor by Ethnic Group (1970)  
Source: Recenseamento Geral da População e da Habitação 1970

Long accused of neglecting East Timor, Portugal began finally in the 1960s to turn its attention to the social development of East Timor through the closely intertwined mechanisms of expanding provision of education and the religious activities of the Roman Catholic Church. A principal objective of education and religious conversion - in the eyes of Portuguese authorities - was to 'civilise' the local population, so that, under Portuguese law, they would become true Portuguese citizens with full civil rights. To achieve this goal, an individual East Timorese had to accept fully the Portuguese way of life including profession of the Catholic faith, and proper command of Portuguese. The provision of mass education as a way of achieving linguistic acculturation in favour of Portuguese in all contexts was to become an explicit objective of the Portuguese administration:

The 2<sup>nd</sup> fundamental goal of our struggle in education is: that everyone has to speak Portuguese! If there are prayers? Pray in Portuguese. If there is discussion, discuss in

Portuguese. If there is a real need to curse, then curse in Portuguese! If we need to understand each other, then let's understand each other in Portuguese! (translation of Grade 1973: 219)

In the period 1953-1974, the numbers of children attending primary school expanded, according to one estimate, from 8000 to 95,000 throughout East Timor, with a 77% participation rate. The numbers receiving secondary education were of course much smaller. The learning of Portuguese was rigorously enforced in the classroom: Pinto and Jardine (1997: 35) report the use of the *palmatoria* (a type of rounded bat) used to beat children caught speaking Tetum. Despite belated Portuguese efforts, most students only received a few years schooling and the quality of learning was often poor. By 1975 it is generally believed that 90-95% of the local population was illiterate (Pinto 1997). But it remains true that by the 1960s and 1970s many Timorese, through schooling (however limited), had some knowledge, rudimentary or otherwise, of Portuguese.

The local East Timorese also had increasing contact with Portuguese through the activities of the Church. Although Tetum (and other local languages) was widely used in missionary work, the Church and its structures, in particular its education system, operated in Portuguese. The process of conversion in East Timor was a slow one for most of the period of Portuguese control, but gained substantial momentum in the late 1960s and early 1970s. By 1975 one quarter of the population had become Catholic.

There was also in the East Timor before 1975 a relatively large Chinese community - mostly Hakka but also some Cantonese from Southern China (Thomaz 1974). The Chinese first entered in substantial numbers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - via Macao and came to dominate the retailing and import/export sector - by the 1960s 397 of the 400 retail outlets in East Timor were Chinese-owned (Taylor 1991). Although the Chinese community was concentrated in Dili and other large centres, such as Baucau, few areas of East Timor did not at least have one Chinese shopkeeper. They tended to live separately from the rest of the population, and were Taiwanese citizens like most other overseas Chinese after 1949. They spoke Hakka (and/or Cantonese), as well as Portuguese and Tetum (and sometimes other languages according to the locality). They also learnt Mandarin Chinese in their own separate Taiwanese-style school system, where by law they were also required to learn Portuguese. Although the 1970 census gives a figure of 6120 Chinese residents in East Timor, many sources cite much higher figures: Thomaz (1974) thought the Chinese community to be as large as 18,000, whilst Carey and Carter Bentley (1995) give a figure of 20,000 Chinese residents in 1975.

In addition to varieties of Chinese and Standard Portuguese there were during this phase three other non-indigenous languages spoken in East Timor and it is these which appear to have suffered most during the period of Portuguese control. Macau Creole Portuguese was spoken in Dili in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by incomers from Macau, a Portuguese outpost in South China. Little more can be said about it.

More interesting is Bidau Creole Portuguese formerly spoken in a suburb of Dili. It is generally believed to have died out in the 1960s. Baxter (1990) examined tape recordings made in the 1950s and found close links with other varieties of Creole Portuguese, in particular the Malaccan Creole, as well as clear evidence of Tetum influence. Speakers of Bidau and Macau Portuguese Creole are presumed to have shifted to Standard Portuguese. Of special significance is the fate of Malay during the Portuguese era. Malay was once a widely spoken trade language throughout Timor, as elsewhere in the Eastern Indonesian region. Used for centuries even by the Portuguese-speaking Topasses it was still widely known in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in East Timor. But by the latter part of the century, Malay seems to have fallen off the map in Dili and most of East Timor. It appears that efforts by Portuguese authorities to eliminate it after 1870 (Fox 1997) were very effective, although how precisely this objective was achieved remains a mystery. Where Malay gave way, its functions, especially in Dili, were taken over by creolized Tetum-Dili and by Portuguese. Malay survived in Dili only as the language of the tiny 'Arab' community - 400 Moslems resident in one suburb. Elsewhere, Thomaz (1974) reported that there was some use of Malay/Indonesia as a second language in the Oe-Cusse enclave - this is hardly surprising given that this small piece of language is completely surrounded by Indonesian West Timor. But Thomaz's observation sits poorly with 1991 census figures (presented below) which show that some twenty years after Indonesian occupation of East Timor it is precisely this area (also known as Ambeno) with the lowest proportion of Indonesian speakers.

### ***3. Indonesian Occupation of East Timor, and Rapid Indonesianisation***

The brutal and cruel history of Indonesian occupation of East Timor (1975-1999) has been widely reported in print (e.g. Aubrey 1998, Carey and Carter 1995, Dunn 1996, Gunn 1997, Pinto and Jardine 1997) and, after the events of August-October 1999, is now well-known to the world public.

The consequences of 24 years of Indonesian occupation for the local linguistic ecology were in most respects very negative - in sharp contrast to what had happened during the Portuguese era. Military activity during this period led to massive population displacement, and to the death of 200,000 Timorese (a figure cited even by Indonesian sources) - of a population of little more than 600,000 at the time of the Indonesian invasion. East Timor, previously a Portuguese colony, was fully integrated into the Republic of Indonesia in September 1976 as the nation's 27<sup>th</sup> province. Despite Indonesian claims to having pumped into hundreds of millions of development aid into East Timor, it remained during this whole period the country's poorest province.

Rapid Indonesianisation - cultural, political and linguistic - was at all times a paramount government objective. It was to be achieved as quickly as possible through a range of measures such as control of mass media, ideologization through

education, military and economic implantation, transmigration, and elimination of Portuguese (openly stigmatised as a 'colonial language'). Insistence on acceptance of the notion of *pancasila* (the 5 governing principles of the Indonesian state) as an aid to promote full integration resulted in the almost total conversion of the remaining animist East Timorese (75%) to the Roman Catholic faith.

The use and knowledge of Indonesian has always been recognized by Indonesian authorities and experts (eg. Dardjowidjojo 1998) as fundamental to the unity and development of the Republic of Indonesia. As a result, Indonesian authorities closely monitored the spread of Indonesian throughout East Timor closely, as a measure of East Timor's relative integration into Indonesia. The most recent census figures given below provide a snapshot of knowledge of Indonesian in East Timor in the early 1990s. Overall, the proportion of the resident population able to speak Indonesian had almost doubled in 10 years: from approximately 30% in 1981 to 60% in 1991. It appears at first glance that the intensive Indonesianisation of the East Timorese population was increasingly very successful. However, the 1991 census result masks a number of important issues that cast doubt on the accuracy of the figures presented in Table 2. It is not entirely clear whether the results are in some cases too high or too low.

<i>Local Area</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Aileu	68.69	58.11	63.81
Ainaro	57.36	42.20	49.81
Ambeno	46.52	38.32	42.46
Baucau	62.43	49.00	55.91
Bobonaro	64.90	49.18	56.88
Covalima	62.88	50.20	56.53
Dili	88.14	79.35	84.00
Ermera	58.37	51.78	55.30
Lautém	70.02	50.09	59.97
Liquiça	60.09	48.41	54.33
Manatuto	74.17	61.75	68.05
Manufahi	68.94	54.08	61.61
Viqueque	48.89	39.23	43.98
East Timor	66.30	54.10	60.34

Table 2: Numbers of Residents of East Timor who speak Indonesian, 1991 Census  
Source: Statistik Kesejahteraan Rakyat Timor Timur 1995,  
Hasil Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional 1995

In the first instance, the late 1980s and 1990s saw an exponential increase in the numbers of non-East Timorese resident in East Timor. Large numbers of Indonesian-speaking military personnel, bureaucrats and their families settling in East Timor were also accompanied by ever increasing waves of Indonesian-speakers -



mainly Moslems, coming in primarily from provinces to the west and north of East Timor. By 1997, less than 10 years after East Timor was made an open province in 1989, of a population estimated to be 867,000, at least 250,000 were non-East Timorese newcomers (Carey 1999). The size of the Indonesian-speaking influx can be further confirmed by the religious affiliation of resident population in the 1990s: although the proportion of indigenous East Timorese professing to be Catholic was 97%, the figure dropped to only 79% of the total resident population of East Timor. The remainder at the time was mostly Moslem. Where once there were 400 Moslems resident in East Timor (in Dili) in the early 1970s, this number had increased 400-fold in less than twenty years. Although the province was by no means pacified at the time, on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1980, the Indonesian government made it a designated transmigration area. By May 1980, press reports from Dili spoke already of 150 transmigration sites in East Timor - for incoming Javanese and Balinese.

That Dili reports the highest proportion of residents able to speak Indonesian is hardly surprising - given its status as provincial centre of Indonesian administrative and military control. It also acted as the principal entry point for Indonesian in-migrants. The most surprising census result comes from Ambeno (also known as Oe Cusse) - with the lowest figure for Indonesian given. Before the Indonesian invasion of 1975, this was the one area, according to Thomaz (1974) where Malay was still used as a second language (see above). It is possible that local residents are under-reporting their knowledge of Indonesian - much as Estonians under-reported their knowledge of Russian during the Soviet era (Laitin 1996). Alternatively, it is possible that residents of Oe-Cusse are carefully distinguishing between the local Malay variety used as a lingua franca in their area and Standard Indonesian. The whole issue of how language census data were collected in East Timor and what their significance is deserves further investigation.

The two main non-indigenous languages of East Timor - Portuguese and Chinese - were targeted by Indonesian authorities for elimination. Portuguese was replaced in schools, administration and the media. In 1980-1981 Indonesian authorities banned the use of Portuguese by the Church as its liturgical language - in the hope that it would be forced to adopt Indonesian. Church authorities, with Vatican approval, instead replaced Portuguese with Tetum (see below). Indonesian efforts to eliminate Portuguese appeared to have their desired effect: no longer openly spoken, nor taught in the schools, transmission of Portuguese to new generations of East Timorese became almost impossible - especially when everyone was required to learn Indonesian. Indonesian authorities also encouraged the study of English in local tertiary institutes, in the hope that this would further weaken the position of Portuguese amongst the educated elite. Somewhat paradoxically, Portuguese, the original colonizing language, came instead to be the language of East Timorese resistance, used in particular by FRETILIN (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*), and by FALINTIL (*Forças Armadas de Libertação de Timor-Leste Independente*). Pictures and film footage from East Timor in the

1980s and 1990s show quite clearly the use of perfect Portuguese in banners held up in mass demonstrations organized by students in Dili. For many East Timorese, use of Portuguese was merely symbolic - they could not speak it. Yet despite Portuguese's clandestine prestige, by the 1990s observers such as Gunn (1995) and Carey (1997) were drawn to reflect in a concerned fashion about the much weakened position of Portuguese as an everyday language of communication.

During this same period of intense pressure in favour of Indonesianisation, the Chinese community also saw its position drastically undermined with its numbers reduced to a mere fraction of former levels. Most fled the country - with a large community resident in Melbourne, Australia. Their special status and privileges - including separate school system - were terminated and their dominant position in the local economy dismantled in favour of interests closely associated with the central government in Jakarta.

With respect to local languages, the predominant position of Tetum in East Timor was confirmed - it gained favour through the activities of the Church (and grudging acquiescence of authorities). A full liturgical language from 1981, it was also eventually being introduced gradually into the Catholic primary school sector in the Dili diocese as a medium of instruction in lower grades. Observers (e.g. Carey 1997) report that during the period of Indonesian occupation the use of Tetum spread substantially amongst East Timorese - as a result of Church activities and as a symbol of resistance. On the other hand, the spread of Tetum may also have been exaggerated: Gunn (1995) reporting on his travels around East Timor notes very clearly the frequent use of Indonesian, not Tetum, as a *lingua franca* - a process aided by the spread of transmigrants throughout the country. In any case, it remains unclear to what degree Tetum had come to be used between 1975 and 1999 in formerly non-Tetum-speaking areas such as Fataluku and Oe Cusse. Unconfirmed reports suggest, for instance, that Indonesian replaced Portuguese as the *lingua franca* in Fataluku areas after 1975. The notion that knowledge of Tetum may have spread to the enclave of Oe Cusse can now also be rejected: Australian military officials in the enclave since the end of 1999 have found themselves unable to communicate to locals in Tetum.

The other indigenous languages of East Timor fared much less well during 1975-1999. They seem to have suffered from total neglect - from both Church and the Indonesian State. Whereas missionary work before 1975 was often conducted in the local language, and the preparation of language materials and grammars in conjunction with Church activities were becoming increasingly common, all of these activities in favour of local languages other than Tetum appeared to have ceased after 1975. The Indonesian State certainly had no interest in the preservation and/or promotion of East Timorese languages (other than the small space left to Tetum in Church-controlled activities). Although by the late 1980s official Indonesian policy had supposedly become more flexible on the teaching of local languages in schools throughout the archipelago (see Dardjowidjojo 1998), the failure to provide any resources meant that nothing was done in their favour in the

government-controlled education sector in East Timor. With respect to the Church-run school sector, Church resources, already meagre, were stretched to cover the use of Tetum, with nothing left for any other languages.

Military activity during this whole period must be viewed as the greatest threat to the linguistic ecology of East Timor because of the intense physical disruption it provoked. Indonesian occupation was characterised by periods of enormous dislocation (in particular forced mass resettlement at the behest of the Indonesian military in 1977 and 1978), and massive loss of life. When coupled with promotion of Indonesian by the State and of Tetum by the Church, these factors are sufficient to put the survival of other East Timorese languages at risk. Carey (1997) was convinced enough of the damage to report the 'virtual extinction' of East Timor's other indigenous languages. Fortunately, such a negative assessment is not borne out by other reports from East Timorese on the ground for the same period: these indicate that Carey was mistaken, since local languages had, at least until the events of 1999, shown remarkable resilience. It is true, however, that the long-term future of many of these languages could not be guaranteed - especially if Indonesian social and military policies continued unabated. There is no doubt however that one local language continued to fade - by the early 1990s one Indonesian source (Sudiartha et al. 1994) claimed tiny Maku'a was dead. However, such an announcement was premature: an East Timorese report confirmed that three elderly speakers of Maku'a was still alive in the late 1990s (G. Hull, pers. comm.).

#### ***4. East Timor Post-Referendum (30 August 1999-)***

The third phase in East Timor's linguistic history is centred on events immediately before, during and after the internationally sanctioned referendum on self-determination held on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1999. This phase, although only months old at time of writing is the most radical and dramatic of all: the indigenous linguistic ecology has now overwhelmed - at least for the present - by total population dislocation and the consequences of large-scale violence and destruction. The long-term consequences of events during this period for the survival of local languages, other than Tetum, remain unknown for both medium- and long- terms.

The behaviour of Indonesian authorities before and after the referendum in East Timor received worldwide media coverage and led finally to international military intervention<sup>1</sup>. The level of mass destruction and dislocation was unparalleled in the history of East Timor. All evidence, including secret Australian and Indonesian documents leaked to the media as well as United Nation reports, points to the chain of disastrous events as having been planned well in advance and fully orchestrated by Indonesian military command.

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<sup>1</sup> See Progress Report of the Secretary-General to the United Nations, 13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1999, for details of events before, during and after the referendum.

Despite often violent intimidation orchestrated by the Indonesian military during the campaign period, the offer of autonomous status within the Republic of Indonesia was rejected by 78.5% of the voting population. The incoming Indonesian president, B. J. Habibie, had previously announced in January 1999 that in case of such an outcome Indonesia would accept independence for East Timor.

Immediately after the vote was held and before the outcome of the vote was announced on 4<sup>th</sup> September, the security situation began to deteriorate rapidly throughout East Timor. By the time United Nations troops under Australian command began deployment on September 20<sup>th</sup>, at least 80% of existing infrastructure had been destroyed and some 80-90% of the East Timorese population displaced from their homes. Approximately 200,000-250,000 East Timorese (30% of the local population) left the region entirely - most forced by pro-Indonesian militia across the land border into Indonesian West Timor, but with substantial numbers also forcibly dispersed around the Indonesian archipelago. Most serious destruction and displacement occurred in four areas: (1) Dili and its environs; (2) the region adjacent to the border with West Timor; (3) the Fataluku-speaking eastern tip of East Timor, around Lospalos; and (4) the isolated enclave of Oe Cusse. Despite international pressure to allow the return of refugees to East Timor, by mid-January 2000 more than 100,000-150,000 people, according to press reports, were still to be living in militia-controlled camps in West Timor. In many cases, according to reliable press reports, whole communities were bussed en masse across the border. These include entire Fataluku-speaking villages from easternmost Lospalos transported to closed camps hundreds of kilometres away in West Timor. It is not known what the long-term future of these East Timorese refugees is, with some reports suggesting they may be settled permanently - at the behest of the militia and Indonesian military - in West Timor. Another 50,000-60,000 East Timorese were reported to be missing, months after the referendum. Neither the United Nations nor other humanitarian organizations were able to account for them.

Reconstruction of East Timor, under United Nations supervision, began in earnest in early 2000, coupled with the slow and very incomplete repatriation of externally displaced refugees to East Timor. It is not clear, however, to what extent internally and externally displaced persons have returned to their own villages or towns. If instead they have simply gathered in larger centres, then the chances of permanent disruption to indigenous languages is further increased - as these newly mixed communities are more likely to shift to a shared common lingua franca, such as Tetum.

Whilst the Indonesian government in Jakarta appears to have been genuinely surprised by the East Timorese rejection of its offer of autonomy in 1999, supporters of East Timorese independence had already begun formal open planning for separation as early as 1997, long before Indonesia agreed to a referendum. A series of intra-party talks, which included pro-independence and pro-Indonesian supporters, were held in Europe. In 1998 the pro-independence CNRT (Timorese National Resistance Council) headed by imprisoned leader, Xanana Gusmão, adopted the

so-called Magna Carta - an agreed document to serve as the basis for a future post-independence Constitution. This document formally pronounced Portuguese as East Timor's 'official language' with Tetum as its 'national language'. Neither this document, nor subsequent pronouncements or documents give any explicit recognition to other indigenous languages. Language policy issues were also considered during the CNRT's Strategic Planning Conference held in Melbourne in April 1999 to develop formal policies for post-independence administration and development in East Timor. As part of the gradual transformation of the education sector, for instance, it was anticipated that the use of Indonesian as medium of instruction would be phased out over 10 years. Portuguese and Tetum would take its place, and some space (still to be finalised at the time) would also be given to English. The 10 year timeframe was intended to allow for the orderly replacement and retraining of Indonesian-speaking teachers (the overwhelming bulk of whom were Indonesian transmigrants). Whilst never explicit, there is little doubt that the progressive elimination of Indonesian from all public spheres was a long-term objective. Transmigrants, who were officially welcomed to remain in East Timor after independence, would, it was hoped, adapt to the new linguistic situation by learning Tetum and/or Portuguese.

Events since the referendum have overtaken CNRT's vision of orderly language planning for East Timor. Whilst it remains to be seen quite how much Indonesian will be used in East Timor in coming years, it is plausible to argue that the language gives every impression of having self-destructed overnight - much faster than anyone might have otherwise envisaged in different circumstances. If this is indeed the case, then Indonesian/Malay may well have been effectively eliminated - for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in little more than 100 years. Such a scenario is assisted by the almost complete departure of non-East Timorese residents, ie Indonesian administrators, military and transmigrants. The disappearance overnight of Indonesian teachers also means that the education system can now be rebuilt from scratch - with new language medium policies effective immediately<sup>2</sup>. Many pro-Indonesian supporters ('pro-integrationists') - including their leadership - also remain outside East Timor. A smaller number of pro-integrationists, not tainted by military activity and links before and after the referendum, are now back in East Timor. They remain favourable to links with Indonesia but it remains to be seen to what extent they can influence official language policy in favour of Indonesian.

The dramatic blow dealt to Indonesian, in the aftermath of events in East Timor, is of course a boon to Portuguese. The leadership of the CNRT, including Xanana Gusmão, has reiterated on numerous occasions since the referendum that, in accordance with the Magna Carta, Portuguese and Tetum will become East Timor's official and national languages respectively. Portugal and other Lu-

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<sup>2</sup> The impact of the departure of these Indonesian teachers can be gauged by Gunn's (1995) report that in the early 1990s only one teacher in the whole secondary school system in East Timorese was East Timorese in origin.

sophone countries have responded enthusiastically and have become strong supporters of the full reintroduction of Portuguese to East Timor. The CNRT is also committed to full membership of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Nations (*Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*). The future of Portuguese in East Timor is now guaranteed, although it remains to be seen to what extent Portuguese will re-establish itself in East Timorese society. Presently, according to recent press reports, it is estimated that only 10% of the population is proficient in Portuguese.

Tetum's position is secure, although the precise meaning of its designation as 'national language' remains to be determined at this point. The situation with respect to the other indigenous languages is much less clear. The massive physical dislocation may now have permanently threatened their long-term survival, especially of small languages such as Idate, Waima'a and Naueti. They are also further threatened in the long-term by the active promotion of Tetum in an independent East Timor, if this leads to language shift.

The fate of tiny Maku'a today is completely unknown. All villages in the area where Maku'a was spoken were destroyed. The population was forcibly removed hundreds of kilometres away to West Timor or fled in large numbers to caves in the region. An unknown number were killed in militia rampages that were given television coverage in Australia. Eventually those who were hiding in caves were located by United Nations forces, and allowed to return home. Many of these in West Timor were still in militia-controlled camps in early 2000. The three elderly Maku'a speakers, previously referred to, may simply not have survived events.

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## Abstract

The recent political history of East Timor has recently gained world-wide attention. Less well-known is its linguistic history. In this paper we survey the language situation in the country since first contact with Europeans in the early 1500s. Three different phases are identified and discussed in some detail: (1) Portuguese era (1500s-1975); (2) Indonesian control (1975-1999) and (3) post-referendum (1999-). Whilst the Portuguese had relatively little linguistic impact, Indonesian authorities were determined to put their stamp on their new province as quickly as possible. The tumultuous events surrounding the referendum in 1999 have radically altered the situation once again with unexpected long-term consequences.