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Fataluku Language and Literacy Uses and Attitudes in Timor-Leste

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Introduction

In this contribution we present some preliminary outcomes of an investigation on Fataluku, one of the sixteen “national languages” of Timor-Leste. The project is part of a larger research programme which also includes a study on adult literacy acquisition and use in Tetun and a historical study of adult literacy campaigns in the recent past of Timor-Leste (see Corte-Real and Kroon, this volume).² The main research questions that our project set out to answer related to the development of Fataluku from an endangered oral language into a language of literacy, the linguistic landscape in Lautém and the uses and opinions with respect to language and literacy of Fataluku speakers in rural Tutuala and urban Lospalos, and the position and use of Fataluku within existing adult literacy programs in the Fataluku speaking area of Lautém.³

In the following we will limit ourselves to presenting some of the outcomes of a questionnaire that we conducted with Fataluku speakers in Lospalos on their uses and opinions regarding Fataluku (as compared to other languages in Timor-Leste). We will first briefly sketch a theoretical framework for our research. After that we will explain our methodology and present the main findings of our study. In a final section we will draw some conclusions and present some points for further discussion.

Language policy and literacy

According to the 2002 Constitution of Timor-Leste, the country’s two official languages are Portuguese and Tetun (article 13). Fifteen other national languages are “to be developed by the state” (article 13) and English and Bahasa Indonesia are accepted as working languages (article 159). Fataluku is one of the fifteen other national languages. It has five dialects and is a Papuan language (Van Engelenhoven 2006). It is the vernacular spoken by the people of the easternmost part of the island who inhabit the district of Lautém, more specifically the Lautém, Lospalos, Lorehe and Tutuala sub-districts (Hull 2004). Its name, *Fataluku* (lit. “to speak correctly”), epitomizes how after centuries of warfare, ethno-linguistically diverse clans united under one “correct language” (*Fatalukunu*). Although Fataluku is related to Makasai and Makalero (Huber 2011) from an anthropological-linguistic point of view, its speech community diverges clearly from the anthropological patterns found elsewhere in Timor-Leste and conforms rather to those in Southwest-Maluku in Indonesia (McWilliam 2007). The linguistic isolation of Fataluku is attributed to its remoteness from the nation’s centres of activity, such as, for example, Baucau and Dili.

Fataluku is a mainly oral language, that is more and more becoming endangered among generations up to forty years old. It is currently in the process of becoming a written language and its use as a language of literacy is under discussion. Apart from the fact that the inclusion of Fataluku in the Constitution as a national language clearly represents an act of status planning, i.e. an effort of allocating a specific function to the language, the wording “to be developed by the state” also includes the endeavour of corpus planning,

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³ It soon turned out that adult literacy programs in Fataluku did not (yet) exist in Lautém. We therefore changed our research focus to investigating the use of Fataluku as an (additional) language of instruction in adult literacy programs in Tetun by conducting a number of case studies across the district (August-October 2011).

i.e. the efforts related to the adequacy of the form or structure of the language (Hornberger 2006). The latter aspect was among other things dealt with within the *Endangered Languages Programme* of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.⁴ One of the main efforts in this context has been the (ongoing) development of a Fataluku orthography based on Timor-Leste's national orthography implemented by the National Institute of Linguistics (Van Engelenhoven, in press).

As has been indicated Fataluku has not been introduced as a school subject or a language of instruction in regular or non-formal education. This implies that the third type of language planning, i.e. acquisition planning (Cooper 1989), referring to efforts to influence the number of users of a language by creating or improving opportunities or incentives to learn it, is still missing in the case of Fataluku. There are, however, as we were told, grassroots initiatives to pay attention to Fataluku in primary education.

From research in the East African multilingual state of Eritrea with its language policy of unity through diversity and its mother tongue approach in primary education, we know that in order to establish successful literacy initiatives it is of utmost importance to have a thorough understanding of the uses and attitudes of the different ethno-linguistic groups with respect to the languages that together constitute the linguistic landscape of the country as well as their uses and attitudes with respect to literacy in these languages (Hailemariam 2002; Asfaha 2009). Whatever language policy a government in multilingual contexts might formulate, implement and police (Blommaert 2009), its success is always closely related to the language users' perceptions of the usefulness of using one or the other language or acquiring and using literacy in one or the other language.

According to Martin-Jones, Kroon and Kurvers (2011) in Timor-Leste language policies have been ushered in by major political and social changes at different points in history, i.e. in the Portuguese era with its clear focus on Portuguese in coexistence with indigenous languages (1500s-1975), the abolition of Portuguese during the Indonesian occupation (1975-1999), the language-policy-wise (add hyphen) inconclusive post-referendum period (1999-2002) leading to independence in 2002 with its explicit choice for a multilingual language policy (Hajek 2000; Cabral and Martin-Jones 2008; Boon 2011). The case studies on multilingual literacies and language policies in the global south as collected in Martin-Jones, Kroon and Kurvers (2011) show that remnants of such long entrenched language policies all contribute to shaping the language and literacy uses, values and attitudes of those involved.

So far not much is known about the language and literacy uses and attitudes of Fataluku speakers. We therefore decided to conduct a survey in Lospalos and (at a later stage) Tutuala in order to be able to draw their sociolinguistic profiles as a basis for better understanding regional adult literacy teaching practices.

Method and participants

In order to collect our data we designed a written questionnaire that apart from the participants' background characteristics such as age, sex, occupation and education mainly dealt with the participants' self reported oral and written proficiency in different languages, their uses of spoken and written languages in different domains, and their opinions and attitudes with respect to literacy in different languages. For illiterate speakers of Fataluku questions were also included dealing with the practice of asking literates for help in reading and writing. The partially pre-coded questionnaire was conducted orally by Edgar da Conceição Savio during a field visit from June to August 2010. The questionnaire was available in Fataluku, Tetun, Indonesian (and English) and participants could choose the language they preferred to use with the interviewer.

The questionnaire was conducted with 212 Fataluku speaking participants. Their mean age was 39.8 years (ranging from 16 to 83); 59% were men and 41% women; 99% were Roman Catholics. Their mean number of years of education was 7.4 (ranging from 0 to 18 years; standard deviation 5.35); 38% were working in the agricultural sector, 29% in private business, 16% were office workers, 12% had other jobs and 5% were jobless.

⁴ NWO File number 256-70-560.

In the following we will only present a limited selection of questions from our survey. In doing so we will in most cases compare two groups of participants, i.e. those 40 or younger (N=124) and those older than 40 (N=88). This distinction relates to the main change in the language in formal education policy that was implemented in 1975. Roughly speaking, the participants older than 40 years of age went to school during Portuguese rule, whereas those younger than 41 went to school during Indonesian occupation. Furthermore, we will only focus on the main languages that were reported, i.e. Fataluku, Tetun, Indonesian and Portuguese.

Results

The first question we will deal with relates to the participants' self-reported oral language proficiency, i.e. the central question in all language surveys in multilingual contexts: What languages can you speak and understand? (e.g. Extra and Yagmur 2011). The answers to this question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Oral proficiency in Fataluku, Tetun, Indonesian and Portuguese (percentages)

	Fataluku	Tetun	Indonesian	Portuguese
Age 40 or below (N=124)	83.1	66.1	58.9	10.5
Over age 40 (N=88)	87.5	47.7	31.8	19.3
Total (N=212)	84.9	58.5	47.6	14.2
Chi-square	ns	7.18** (p=.007)	15.10** (p=.000)	3.31 (p=.069)

The general, and in view of the fact that the survey was conducted among Fataluku speakers, not very surprising finding is that Fataluku, the participants' native language, comes first, followed by Tetun, one of the country's official languages and at the same time its *lingua franca*. After that comes Indonesian, one of the country's working languages and Portuguese, the other official language of Timor-Leste. The third position of Indonesian can be explained by the fact that especially in Lautém Indonesian kept a very strong position, even after the end of the Indonesian occupation of the country.

When we look at the influence of age it is clear that the older and younger generations do not differ as far as speaking and understanding Fataluku is concerned. More than 80% of all participants, irrespective of age group, self-reported as proficient in Fataluku. More or less the same is true for Portuguese. On average only 14% of the participants reported to be proficient in Portuguese and although more older than younger people speak Portuguese, the statistical difference between the two age groups does not reach significance. Significant differences are found between the older and the younger generations with respect to their proficiency in Tetun and Indonesian. Many more younger people, especially in more urban environments, reported that they can speak and understand Tetun and Indonesian. Their proficiency in Indonesian is clearly related to the fact that they went to school during Indonesian occupation and the present-day impact of the Indonesian media (television, radio, newspapers and the like). After that they came to live in a "new" country in which Tetun as the new official language (next to Portuguese that was explicitly kept as an official language) was perceived as the language of independence (see however Hajek 2000).

A second question pertains to our participants' use of the different languages or combinations of languages they know in different public and private domains (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Uses of languages in different domains (percentages)

	Fataluku	Fa+Te	Tetun	Fa+Te+In	Te+Po	Te+In	Po
Home	49	21		7			
Friends	28	30	7	14			
Shops	24	33	22	6		8	
Market	37	34	9	9			
Administration	36	23	18	6			

offices						
Work	14	11	15		7	
School (N=122)		5			17	21
Church	11	14	57		6	
Traditional events	80	6				

(Fa=Fataluku only; Te=Tetun; In=Indonesian; Po=Portuguese; percentages below 5% are not represented; N=212 except for the school domain where only participants who went to school (N=122) are included)

Table 2 shows that most of the domains of language use in Lospalos can be characterized as essentially multilingual. There is not a single domain in which only one single language is used. In the domains Home, Friends, Shops, Market, Administration, Church and Work people reported they used Fataluku and Tetun (only, together, or together with Indonesian). The only clear tendency towards monolingual language use can be observed in the domain of Traditional events which is almost exclusively a Fataluku domain (80% reported Fataluku only). Also the domains of Church and Home, although multilingual, clearly show a dominant language, i.e. Tetun and Fataluku respectively. The only domain where Portuguese plays a role is School. Although the country's official languages and languages of education are Tetun and Portuguese, here too the participants, next to these languages, reported a limited use of Fataluku and a more extensive use of Indonesian (both in combination with Tetun). The limited use of Portuguese (except for the School domain) and the rather broad use of Indonesian in schools are especially remarkable here. It might indicate that the participants' proficiency in Indonesian exceeds their Portuguese proficiency and that teachers therefore opt for using Indonesian as an additional language of instruction in schools.

A comparison of the above language use figures in different domains by generation shows remarkable differences. This can be illustrated by the results for the domain Work. Here Fataluku is used by 48% of the younger generation vs. 65% of the older generation whereas Tetun is used by 88% of the younger generation vs. 57% of the older generation and Indonesian by 37% of the younger generation vs. 6% of the older generation. Generally speaking the younger generation reported more use of Tetun and Indonesian whereas the older generation reported more use of Fataluku and Portuguese, the latter especially in the domains of School and Administration.⁵

Let us now turn from language use figures to the domain of literacy. Here we first asked the question what languages the participants were able to read. The findings are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 – Reading proficiency (literate only; percentages)

	Fataluku	Tetun	Indonesian	Portuguese
Age 40 or below (N=112)	30.4	88.4	78.6	36.6
Over age 40 (N=44)	38.6	90.9	72.7	61.4
Total (N=156)	32.7	89.1	76.9	43.6
Chi-square	ns	ns	ns	7.87**(p=.005)

Table 3 shows that a vast majority of almost 90% of the literate participants in our survey reported being able to read Tetun and that also a majority of almost 77% reported being able to read Indonesian. The fact that nearly one third of our participants reported to be able to read Fataluku is remarkable since Fataluku is still in the process of being orthographically standardized and is not yet an official language of literacy in schools. Whereas we did not find any statistical differences between reported literacy figures of the older and younger generations in Fataluku, Tetun and Indonesian, differences were found in Portuguese reading. The average percentage of people that self-reported as able to read Portuguese is clearly below the percentage of those who can read Tetun and Indonesian and above the percentage of those who can read

⁵ Significant for the domains of work and friends; due to limitation of space statistical analyses for the two generations for each of the languages and domains are not presented here.

Fataluku. If we look at the generations, however, it turns out that significantly more older people self-reported as able to read Portuguese (61.4% vs. 36.6%).

Let us return for a moment to reading and writing in Fataluku. We found a few examples of Fataluku writing and print in the linguistic landscape pictures that we collected, but they do not give the impression of an elaborate use of the language in writing; rather, they contain some characteristics that can be considered grassroots literacy (see the contributions in Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Blommaert 2008). One example that we want to discuss here is an information poster that we found at a medical post in Mehara in Tutuala. The poster contains a picture of a mother and a baby and a text in Fataluku (top) and Tetun (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Medical information in Fataluku and Tetun in Mehara (picture with permission of Médicos do Mundo Portugal (Lospalos))



The intention of the poster is to alert parents to the importance of adding iodine to the food of their children. This message is clearly formulated in the Tetun text at the bottom of the poster which in an English translation reads as follows: “Do not forget to add a little salt that contains a bit of iodine to the food of the children”. The Fataluku text at the top, however, reads “If you prepare the child’s food do not forget salt and make a lot if the child wants to eat”, and leaves out the crucial iodine information, just focusing on adding salt to the food and preparing a lot.

In addition to Fataluku in the public sphere, we also came across examples of Fataluku being used in text messaging on mobile phones and in social media on the Internet such as Facebook. Also in our questionnaire, irrespective of the language used, mobile text messaging showed up among the top five reading objects in the domains Home (place 2), Work (place 4) and School (place 5). It might be that the digital era is contributing to literacy development in Fataluku as well as other languages.

Apart from the question of what languages our participants were able to read, we also asked them to give an indication of their frequency, proficiency and preference of reading these languages. The outcomes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 – Frequency, proficiency and preference of reading languages (percentages)

		Fataluku	Tetun	Indonesian	Portuguese	Combinations
Most	Age 40 or below	0.9	39.3	41.1	4.5	14.4
	Over age 40	2.3	61.4	9.1	18.2	9.1
Best	Age 40 or below	3.6	41.4	42.3	0.9	11.7
	Over age 40	11.4	40.9	18.2	25.0	4.5
Preferred	Age 40 or below	2.7	45.5	36.6	6.3	7.2
	Over age 40	4.5	50.0	18.2	20.5	6.8

The overall picture that emerges from Table 4 is that Tetun is the language read most, read best and most preferred to read in most of the groups. Only the younger generation reported that Indonesian is the language they read most often and read the best. With respect to Portuguese it is clear that the language is mainly mentioned by about 20% of the older generation as their best and favourite language of literacy. Except for some older people who reported that Fataluku is the language they read best – most probably people who do not read very much at all – Fataluku is clearly not the language that people do, can and prefer to read.

Conclusion and discussion

As far as language use is concerned, the main conclusion that we can draw from our survey of Fataluku speakers in Lospalos is that indeed they nearly all speak and understand Fataluku and that many of them at the same time also know Tetun and Indonesian. Portuguese turns out to be the least used language among Fataluku speakers. The conclusion that multilingualism is a central feature of our participants is corroborated by the finding that, except for the domains of Traditional events (Fataluku) and Church (Tetun), all domains of language use referred to in the questionnaire are multilingual. In this multilingual fabric of society, however, age turns out to be an important factor. The younger generations who grew up during Indonesian occupation, went to Indonesian schools and learned Indonesian use more Indonesian and Tetun than the older generations who went to school before 1975. The older generations on the other hand, who grew up in Portuguese times, use slightly more Portuguese than the younger generations do. The latter, however, especially those born after 1999 seem to catch up in Portuguese at school.

As far as literacy use is concerned our conclusion has to be that Tetun and Indonesian (in that order) are the best and most often read languages and that the younger generations read Tetun and Indonesian more often, whereas the older generations read more Portuguese. Fataluku can be used as a language of literacy in certain Traditional events and more recently also appears in modern media such as mobile text messaging. As far as literacy attitudes are concerned our findings show a clear preference for Tetun and Indonesian as languages of literacy, the latter especially by the younger generations.

Our findings show that the actual language and literacy uses and attitudes of our participants are influenced by the historical phases of language policy making that they themselves witnessed or that became entrenched in society in general in earlier phases of development. As such they will provide us with indispensable background information when conducting ethnographic case studies of Tetun adult literacy classes in Lautém where, apart from Tetun, Indonesian, Fataluku and even Portuguese might also be used as auxiliary languages of instruction and communication. It goes without saying that a deep understanding of these case study outcomes is impossible without taking into consideration the backgrounds and genesis of our participants' actual language and literacy behaviour and attitudes.

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