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Traces of language contact: The Flores-Lembata languages in eastern Indonesia

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English summary

The overall aim of this dissertation is to reconstruct the history of the Flores-Lembata languages including traces of contact-induced change. The Flores-Lembata languages are a lower-level subgroup within the Austronesian language family spoken in eastern Indonesia.

Part I of this dissertation fills a gap in the documentation of the Flores-Lembata languages by providing a descriptive grammar of the language Central Lembata. This description is the first extensive description of a language belonging to the Central Lamaholot subgroup of Flores-Lembata. Part II concerns the history of the phonology and the lexicon of the Flores-Lembata languages with the aim of providing evidence, on the one hand, for inherited Austronesian vocabulary in the Flores-Lembata languages, and on the other hand, for the presence of a non-Austronesian lexical substrate. Part III examines morpho-syntactic features and their history of contact. Eight features of the Flores-Lembata languages which are atypical for Austronesian languages are described and evaluated on their potential of being the result of contact with non-Austronesian languages of the area.

This dissertation shows that the Flores-Lembata languages are, genealogically, closely related to the Austronesian languages located to the west of Flores-Lembata. The Flores-Lembata languages form an innovation-defined subgroup together with their western neighbours on Flores, as well as further Austronesian languages on the islands of Sumba and of Bima (based on lenition of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) *b > w). The lexicon of individual Flores-Lembata subgroups contains a considerable component of vocabulary that cannot be reconstructed to an Austronesian ancestor (up

to 50% in individual languages). This vocabulary most likely entered the languages due to contact with now extinct non-Austronesian languages. Typologically, especially concerning morpho-syntax, the Flores-Lembata languages are mixed. In addition to inherited Austronesian features, these languages also share features with their eastern neighbours of the non-Austronesian Timor-Alor-Pantar family. In the morpho-syntax of the Flores-Lembata languages, a number of contact-induced innovations are found. The nominal domain appears to be affected in particular. On the one hand, the word order in the noun phrase, concerning the position of the nominal possessor, the numeral and the locative noun, differs from typical Austronesian languages. On the other hand, new semantic distinctions, such as an alienability distinction in possessive constructions or the plural number marking on nouns, become grammaticalized in a subset of the Flores-Lembata languages. Also the clausal syntax underwent changes. In contrast to the inherited pre-predicate negation and the SVO word order, some of the Flores-Lembata languages have innovated clause-final negation and all Flores-Lembata languages have innovated a set of clause-final deictic motion verbs. The word order features of the noun phrase and two of the deictic motion verbs can be reconstructed to Proto-Flores-Lembata. All other innovated features appear to have entered the languages after the break-up of Flores-Lembata into subgroups. All these innovated features in the Flores-Lembata languages are also attested in the non-Austronesian Alor-Pantar languages, which are spoken on two adjacent islands to the east, and these features can be reconstructed to Proto-Alor-Pantar.

Combining lexical and typological evidence, I propose that the Flores-Lembata languages have been in contact with languages typologically similar to the Alor-Pantar languages since the time of Proto-Flores-Lembata until after the break-up of the family into subgroups. Some subgroups have gained more non-Austronesian features than others. This suggests that there was variation in length and intensity of contact among the subgroups.