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Variation and change in Abui : the impact of Alor Malay on an indigenous language of Indonesia

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Variation and change in Abui

The impact of Alor Malay on an indigenous language of Indonesia

This dissertation investigates on-going language variation and change in Abui, a Timor-Alor-Pantar (Papuan) language spoken on the island of Alor, eastern Indonesia. Like many indigenous languages spoken on Alor, Abui has been in intensive contact with Alor Malay, the regional lingua franca, for around 50-60 years. This has had the greatest impact on younger speakers, who are now being raised in Alor Malay and only learn Abui during or after adolescence. Drawing on methods from descriptive linguistics, bilingualism research, and variationist sociolinguistics, the Abui of four different age-groups was found to vary significantly, suggesting that this shift to Alor Malay is having an impact on Abui.

This was illustrated using three case-studies of language variation and change, examining reflexive possessive marking, verb usage, and reduplication. Broadly speaking, it was found that the 50-60 years of intense contact between Alor Malay and Abui has led to the simplification of Abui grammar. In particular, the reflexivity distinction in possession is becoming neutralized, certain verbs are taking over others and becoming more generic, while reduplication is becoming more productive and more Malay-like in function and form. These outcomes are argued to be a case of both incomplete acquisition and transfer.

This dissertation may prove of relevance to anyone interested in the study of language contact and change, bilingualism, sociolinguistics, descriptive linguistics, endangered languages, Papuan and Austronesian languages, and language variation in minority languages.

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