

Emic and etic classifications of languages in the North Maluku region.

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A famous joke often repeated in introductory linguistics classes is the idea that 'a language is a dialect with an army and a navy'. Although the origins of the saying remain obscure, the idea behind the notion that a language is only differentiated as such from other dialects seems to be borne out by practice in parts of Europe. For example, Spanish and Italian, while usually designated as distinct languages are often mutually intelligible to native speakers. The same often applies to 'languages' such as Danish and Norwegian.

While the existence of armies and navies may have nothing to do with the emic classification of languages in North Halmahera, the idea that languages might be dialects with a sultan has long been recognized in the region. While Ternate and Tidore are generally thought of as being distinct languages (and are listed as such by Ethnologue), this separation seems to be based on the fact that each variety has its own sultan. In fact, Ternate and Tidore are mutually intelligible varieties rather than truly distinct languages.

In other parts of the Halmahera area other factors seem to be at play in determining whether speakers of a particular lect see their lects as separate languages or not. On the west coast of Halmahera in the region north of Jailolo are spoken a number of closely related dialects, labelled variously as separate languages or dialects of the same language by different authors. Visser and Voorhoeve (1987) for example, describe the Sahu language spoken in this area and assert that Waioli, Gamkonora and other varieties are dialects of the Sahu language. The most recent version of Ethnologue (Lewis, et al, eds. 2013) lists Waioli and Gamkonora as separate languages distinct from Sahu, but also claims that Waioli and Gamkonora share 81% vocabulary (which would normally make them dialects of a single language). In reality, the relevant stretch of west Halmahera coast contains a number of villages where inhabitants say they speak either Waioli or Gamkonora, but where linguistic features play little or no role in determining which of the two 'languages' they speak. The most salient difference between Waioli villages and Gamkonora villages is that the former have churches and the latter have mosques. Gamkonora speakers are Muslims and Waioli speakers are Christians, whatever the linguistic differences between particular villages might be.

In this paper I canvas a variety of factors that lead to the emic classification of languages in the North Halmahera language area.

#### REFERENCES

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