

WORKING PAPERS

EAST-WEST CENTER WORKING PAPERS



EAST-WEST CENTER

The U.S. Congress established the East-West Center in 1960 to foster mutual understanding and cooperation among the governments and peoples of the Asia Pacific region including the United States. Funding for the Center comes from the U.S. government with additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, corporations, and Asian and Pacific governments.

East-West Center Working Papers are circulated for comment and to inform interested colleagues about work in progress at the Center.

For more information about the Center or to order publications, contact:

Publication Sales Office
East-West Center
1601 East-West Road
Honolulu, Hawaii 96848-1601

Telephone: 808-944-7145

Facsimile: 808-944-7376

Email: ewcbooks@EastWestCenter.org

Website: www.EastWestCenter.org



No. 20, 2005

The Ethnolinguistic Situation in East Timor

**Ryoko Hattori, Matias Gomes, Frances Ajo, and
Nelson Belo**

Ryoko Hattori, Matias Gomes, Frances Ajo, and Nelson Belo
are graduate students at University of Hawaii at Manoa.
They can be reached at frances_ajo@yahoo.com.

This paper was presented at the 4th East-West Center
International Graduate Student Conference, February 17-19,
2005 in Honolulu, Hawaii USA.

*East-West Center Working Papers: International Graduate
Student Conference Series* publishes graduate students'
research in progress. This paper has been peer-reviewed. The
views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily
those of the Center. Please direct orders and requests to the
East-West Center's Publication Sales Office. The price for
Working Papers is \$3.00 each plus shipping and handling.

The Ethnolinguistic Situation in East Timor

--- Current Work at the University of Hawai'i

Ryoko Hattori, Matias Gomes, Frances Ajo, Nelson Belo

University of Hawai'i at Manoa

0. Introduction.

Well-known for its recent independence, the nascent nation of East Timor “is one of those parts of the world that may be described as a linguist's paradise or hell, depending on his appetite for hard work” (Hull, 2000). Even though East Timor may be known for the political atrocities that occurred there between 1975 and 1999, often overlooked is the rich linguistic ecology that survived these atrocities relatively intact. At least sixteen indigenous languages are spoken in this polyglot nation, some rather robust and others stable with less than 1,000 speakers. East Timor's independence on May 20, 2002, allowed Timorese to begin the long process of nation-building, and during that process, language issues have been unavoidable. Within such a multilingual and multiethnic society, discussions about linguistic ecology and language planning are developing. This paper addresses the current work at the University of Hawai'i Manoa (UHM) towards a better understanding of the present-day linguistic ecology of East Timor. We discuss East Timor's linguistic history, current situation, and conclude with remarks about on-going projects for East Timorese languages at UHM.

1.0 East Timor's prehistory and history.

1.1 Ethnic prehistory of East Timorese populations. Historically, Timor's position as an island between Southeast Asia and Oceania lent it to dense linguistic diversity, as different people settled there in distinct historical stages. The density of languages of East Timor can be seen in Figure 1, which shows at least sixteen languages that are currently spoken.

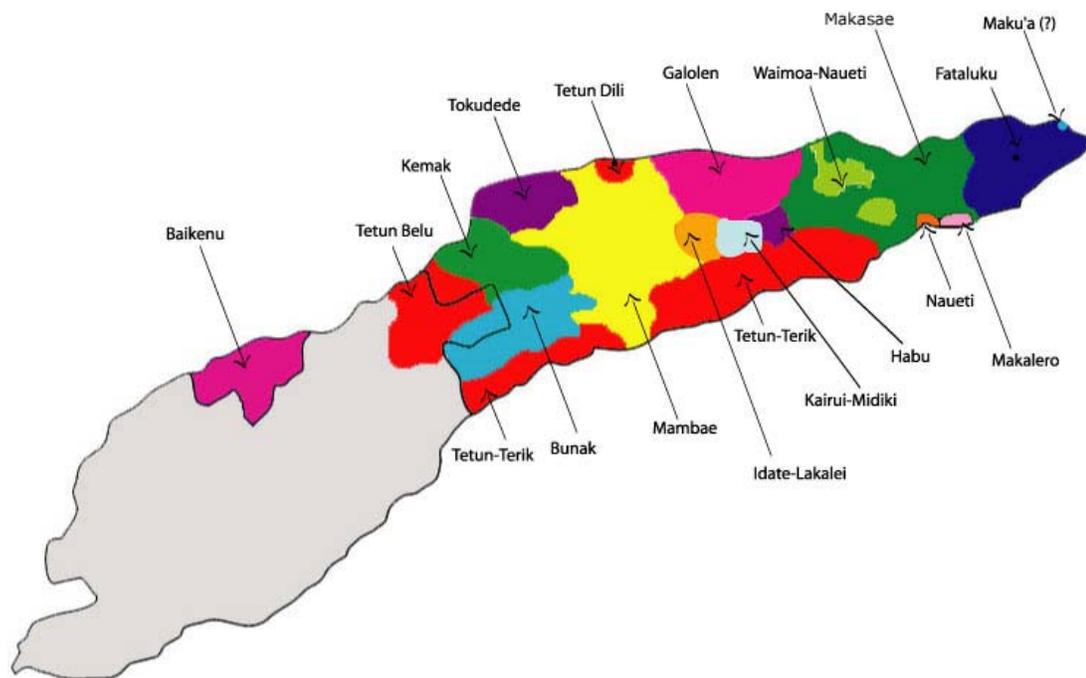


Figure 1. Linguistic diversity in East Timor adapted from Fox (2003). (Note that Tetun Belu and Tetun-Terik extends further into West Timor.)

According to Bellwood (1997), around 2000 BC, Austronesian people migrated from the Asian continent to the island of Timor. Some of these people migrated further east as far as Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Hawai'i. Consequently, Timor was one of the gateways between Asia to Oceania. After the settlement of Austronesian speakers in

Timor, Papuan peoples back-migrated from what is current-day Eastern Papua New Guinea to Timor. As the result of these migration patterns, both Austronesian and Papuan people settled East Timor, where they continue to live together today.

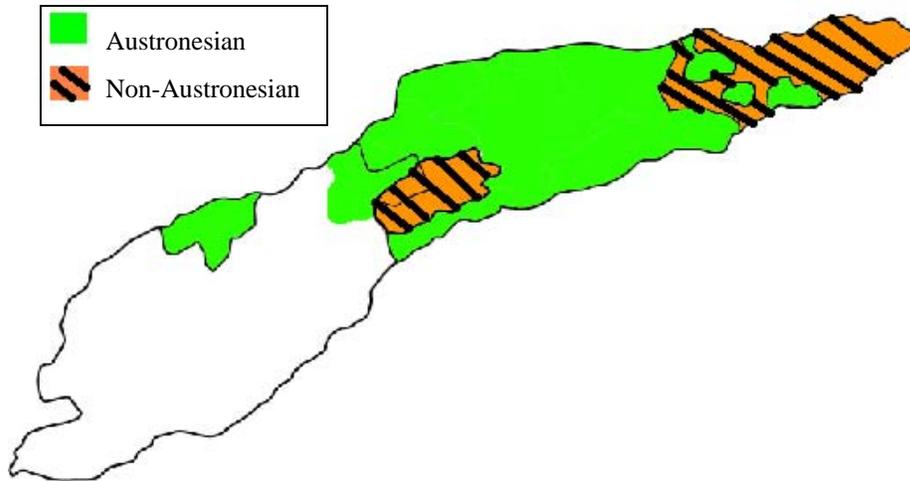


Figure 2. Austronesian and non-Austronesian language distribution in East Timor adapted from Fox (2003).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages in East Timor. In general, there are more Austronesian languages in the western part of East Timor and more non-Austronesian languages in the eastern part. Historically, there were various indigenous kingdoms from both groups, who often warred with one another.

According to Hull (2000) and Wallace (1869), Timor is more closely associated with Oceania rather than Southeast Asia because of its anthropologic, zoologic, and geographic characteristics. Hull (2000) also reports that the Portuguese colonizers considered East Timor as an overseas territory of Oceania rather than Asia. As a colonial power, Portugal imposed a lasting linguistic legacy on Timor.

1.2 Linguistic colonialism in East Timor. Within the past five centuries, two major¹ colonizers, Portugal and Indonesia, have colored East Timor’s linguistic ecology, arguably encroaching on local languages (vernaculars). We examine linguistic colonialism in East Timor through the lens of shifting language usage. Moreover, we identify the dissemination of colonial languages through the Church, education, and government administration. Whereas Portuguese colonialism in East Timor (circa 1519–1975) lasted nearly nineteen times longer than Indonesian occupation (1975–1999), the characteristics of these colonizers contrast starkly, as do their linguistic legacies. Portuguese colonialism in East Timor was based on the exploitation of natural resources, particularly sandalwood (Fox, 2003). Portugal ruled East Timor, its most distant colony, relatively loosely until the 1960’s, when Portugal intensified a policy of social assimilation, and in conjunction, linguistic assimilation. In contrast, the Indonesia occupation was fierce, beginning by invasion in December 1975 and ending with the well-documented violence of September 1999. Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor is commonly characterized as brutal and oppressive, defined by a threatening military presence. According to Hajek (2000), even though the Portuguese language policy of the 1960’s may have adversely affected Timorese vernaculars, the Indonesian language policy that followed disrupted these vernaculars to a far greater extent.

1.3 Linguistic effects of Portuguese colonialism. To understand the linguistic ecology of present-day East Timor, it is necessary to reflect on Portuguese and Indonesian linguistic legacies. John Hajek (2002) provides some of the most recent and lucid review of these legacies, claiming “[t]here is no evidence of any indigenous language being put

¹ The Japanese occupied East Timor as well, from 1942–1945.

in direct peril by the Portuguese language” and contends that East Timor’s definitive tradition of stable vernacular multilingualism continued throughout Portuguese rule. However, aspects of Portuguese rule permeate much of modern East Timorese culture, and, as a result, contemporary Tetun is sprinkled with Portuguese loanwords (Hull, 1999).

Retrospectively, we find that most direct Portuguese language policy did not occur until around the 1960’s, and up until this time, the Portuguese language did not enjoy widespread use. According to Fox (2003), in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Portuguese rule did not reach beyond the capital of Dili, and hence Portuguese was not spoken outside Dili. The Fataluku language community, on the far east end of the island of Timor, constituted the sole exception, as Fox contends Portuguese was used as a lingua franca there. In the late 1800’s, Portuguese rule strengthened outside of Dili, and Portugal sought to eradicate the use of Malay. Yet, Portuguese language did not necessarily kill off local vernaculars, but rather, according to Hajek (2002), its usage was usually alongside East Timorese people’s vernaculars. This trend shifted in the 1960’s, as Portuguese was used as the sole language in central institutions in East Timor.

According to the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) East Timor, in December 1960, a United Nations resolution declared East Timor a non-self governing territory under Portuguese administration_ and by 1970, Portuguese peoples made up only 0.2 percent of the population of East Timor, but Portuguese was enforced as the official language of the Church, administration, and schools. Fox (2003) quotes a 1973 internal document that encourages the use of Portuguese in school.

The second 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!

Table 1 outlines the language usage at these institutions.

Institution	Language Usage
Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Portuguese used by clergy as liturgical language
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instruction solely in Portuguese ○ Children caught speaking Tetun or vernacular allegedly beat with bat ○ Government mandated school attendance; 1953-1974 attendance up from 8,000 to 95,000 students ○ Quality of education poor, evidenced by 90-95% illiteracy ○ Instruction provided elementary understanding of Portuguese
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governing apparatus in Dili used Portuguese solely, and began promoting Portuguese through military

Table 1. Portuguese language usage in East Timorese institutions adapted from Hajek (2000) and Fox (2003).

Three years later, in 1975, civil war erupted and East Timor underwent political transition. FRETILIN (Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente), an East Timorese independence party, rose to power on November 28 and held it for ten short days until December 7, when the Indonesian military invaded (UNDP, 2005).

1.4 Linguistic effects of Indonesian colonialism. Interestingly, during the ten days that FRETILIN held power, their plans to promote Tetun through parish school surfaced.

According to Hajek (2000), instructional materials had been prepared by the time the party ascended to power. However, these materials may or may not have been used, because after its invasion, Indonesia repressed the use of vernaculars, such as Tetun. Over the following 24 years (1975-1999), Indonesia forcefully implemented a systematic social, economic, and linguistic assimilation often dubbed “Indonesianization”.

Hajek (2000) asserts that Indonesia had “no interest in maintaining the local linguistic ecology” and “authorities closely monitored the spread of Indonesian languages through East Timor.” According to Hajek, Indonesia sought to supplant local languages with Indonesian. Table 2 identifies the institutions that promoted the use of Indonesian/Malay.

Institutions	Language Usage
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brutal military presence punished use of Portuguese, Tetun, and local languages; populace spoke Indonesian/Malay publicly out of fear, resulting in loss of intergenerational transmission ○ Indonesian authorities resettle East Timorese populations, disrupting speech communities of indigenous languages ○ Government-directed transmigration from Java and Bali further disrupts speech communities and necessitates Indonesian/Malay used as lingua franca
Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1980-1981 use of Portuguese in church services was banned by Indonesian authorities ○ Church replaced Portuguese with Tetun for liturgical purposes in 1981
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indonesian/Malay used as sole language of education; children fear for their safety if they speak any other language

Table 2. Indonesian language policies in East Timor.

Violence in East Timor during the Indonesian occupation has been documented, and some estimates suggest that nearly one-third of East Timorese died. Given the freshness of the occupation, in particular the widespread violence of September 1999, it is still uncertain to what extent East Timorese speech communities were disrupted. As a result, when examining the current language situation in East Timor, one finds many resilient speech communities that thrive today, and some that teeter near extinction.

2.0 Present-day language policy in East Timor.

2.1 Languages of independence. By popular consultation, a United Nations referendum was held in August 1999. As a result, the East Timorese people chose independence from Indonesia. Following the withdrawal of the Indonesian military in the fall of 1999, the East Timorese began to rebuild and strengthen their new nation. The fledgling government of East Timor faced the task of choosing an official language. By May 2002, the government finalized the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, and Section 13 stated that Tetun and Portuguese would be as official languages. During Indonesian rule, Tetun was elevated as a symbolic resistance to the occupation, and following independence, it remained a strong identifier among many Timorese.

2.2 Current language usage. East Timorese are typically multilingual and often speak a local vernacular, Tetun (that serves as the lingua franca of East Timor), and either Indonesian (youth) or Portuguese (elders), depending on their language of education. Notably, Portuguese is spoken by less than 2% of the population, even though it is one of the country's official languages. Portuguese fluency is concentrated among elder

speakers, who were educated under Portuguese rule. These speakers have varying degrees of proficiency and Portuguese is largely a language of the post-independence ruling class. Undoubtedly, more information is needed about the current linguistic situation in East Timor. From the information currently available, Figure 3 shows the percentage of first language vernaculars.

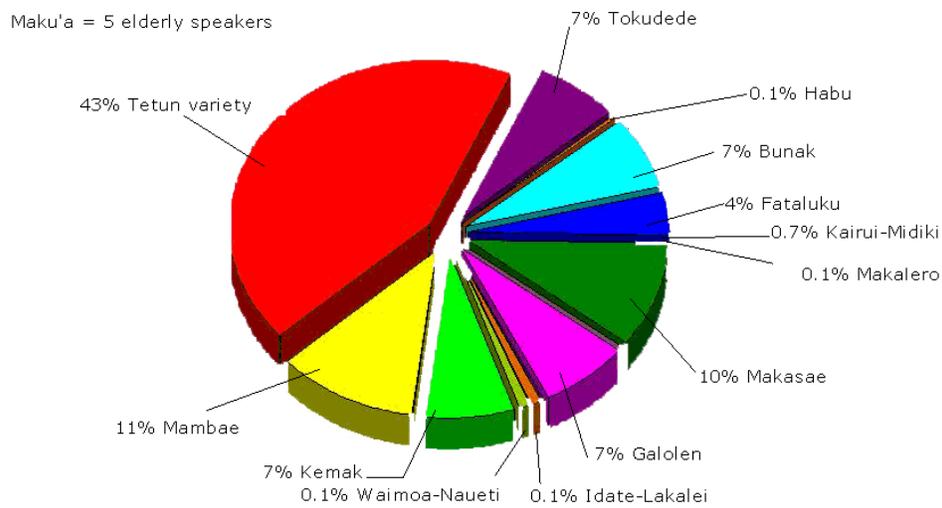


Figure 3. First language vernaculars by percent of population adapted from Grimes (1996). Note: Maku'a (Lovaia) probably extinct now as the five speakers were elderly.

By comparing the current language usage in the three aforementioned institutions (see Table 3), we can explore the language policy shifts that have occurred since independence.

Institution	Language Usage
Church	○ Tetun and local languages used as liturgical

	<p>language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Portuguese maintained in some spheres; baptismal names and official church documents
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instruction in Indonesian/Malay and Tetun and often local language; although Portuguese is official language, majority of teachers do not speak Portuguese
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governing apparatus in Dili uses Portuguese, because it is the language of leaders (in exile during occupation) who came to power after independence

Table 3. Current language policies and usage in East Timor.

Apparently, whereas Tetun has a strong position in the Church (and has had since 1981), Portuguese is used as the language of government. However, this creates difficulties for many East Timorese. Those who are not proficient speakers of Portuguese need official documents, such as passport applications, to be translated into Tetun. However, Portuguese speakers in East Timor contend that the popular transition to Portuguese proficiency will simply take time, and in the meanwhile, translation is necessary. Portuguese proficiency is expected to rise because the government chose Portuguese as the language of instruction in elementary schools.

2.3 Language of education. The language of instruction in education remains controversial in current-day East Timor. The government dictates that the language of instruction should be Portuguese, but teachers are often of the younger generation that has little Portuguese proficiency, having been taught under the Indonesian occupation.

Thus, in reality, school instruction occurs in a mixture of Indonesian/Malay and Tetun, often supplemented by the local vernacular.² Table 4 provides a matrix of possible languages of instruction (columns) and the instructional necessity (rows) that this language could be used in instruction. The matrix is scaled from *yes* to *maybe* to *no*, suggesting the probability that this language fulfills instructional necessities.

	Local languages	Tetun	Portuguese	Indonesian	English
Materials	no	maybe	yes	yes	yes
Instructors	yes	yes	maybe	yes	maybe
Student Background	yes	yes	maybe	yes	no
Student Motivation	yes	yes	no	yes	no

Table 4. Matrix of possible languages of education and necessities.

Likely languages of instruction include local languages, Tetun, Portuguese, Indonesian, and English. Whereas Portuguese materials are available, students have little to no background in Portuguese and little motivation to learn it. In contrast, Tetun materials are not widely available, but students are often fluent in the language and motivated to use it. Notably, local languages maintain all the desirable aspects of a language of instruction, and yet they have few pedagogical materials—furthermore, these local vernaculars are not official languages, but constitutionally recognized as “national languages”. Table 4 illustrates that maintaining a single language of education in East

² According to Fox 2003, “Malay is still used as the medium of instruction at all levels... local languages Fataluku and Makalero are also used quite prominently in the schools.”

Timor seems problematic unless new materials are developed (local languages, Tetun) or instructors trained (Portuguese).

2.4 Education using local vernaculars. Other models for the language of instruction may inform East Timor's decision to continue using Portuguese or choose bilingual or monolingual education in another language. In 1953, UNESCO proposed that the best medium for educational instruction is the mother tongue of the pupil. Since this classic statement, UNESCO has been working to promote instruction in vernaculars.

Also, looking at the language policies of other small Pacific nations, similar to East Timor, one finds '[v]arious small nations of the region have had to solve, each in its own way, the question of an official or national language—a language of administration, education and identity' (Eccles 2000). In the case of Papua New Guinea, a characteristically multilingual country in the South Pacific, over 800 languages are spoken, both Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages (Siegel, 1996). At this point, the situation in Papua New Guinea is similar to that of East Timor. The official languages are English, Tok Pisin, and Hiri Motu; the latter two are Creole languages. English is used in government schools.

Vernacular education has a long tradition in Papua New Guinea. Before World War II, nearly all schools were run by different churches and used the local vernaculars for instruction. After the war, the Australian administration emphasized unity by using English. However, this Australian policy was not successful. Only 1 % of children who entered school were able to continue to Grade 11. It was widely felt that the education system should do more to help village people live full and productive lives and to develop their own communities.

As a result, a community-based non-formal education movement started to teach initial literacy and numbers using the local vernacular in preschools. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a Christian linguistic organization, started documenting local vernaculars in Papua New Guinea in 1957. By 1975 they had developed vernacular literacy programs for adults in nearly 100 local vernaculars. SIL has been supporting non-formal local vernacular preschools ever since 1957, by helping the community to develop materials and curriculum and to train teachers.

Communities retain ownership of their local preschool; they build school buildings, develop materials, curricula, and select and train teachers. The funds are from non-government organizations, often foreign-based. Today, 80 % of the population has access to preschool education in their mother tongue.

Moreover, these preschools are very successful. The dropout rate of children has significantly decreased, and children from these preschools do better in later schooling and also contribute more in their communities. Clearly, the Papua New Guinea case could serve as a model for future East Timor language planning.

3. Projects for Timorese languages at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa (UHM).

3.1 Commitment to East Timorese students and their languages.

There are ongoing efforts to elevate the languages and cultures of East Timor at UHM. These efforts are being made by both East Timorese students and linguistics students who are interested in the region.

	Non-Degree	Degree Fellow
--	-------------------	----------------------

Year		Bachelor	Master	Doctor	Total
2000	2				2
2001			4		4
2002			8		8
2003		5	8		13
2004		15	2		17
2005		15	2	1	18

Table 5. East-Timorese students at the East-West Center (in the United States—East Timor Scholarship Program) from the East-West Center annual report (2000-2003) and personal communication with Mendl Djunaidy, Associate Dean of the Education Program at the East-West Center.

Table 5 shows the increasing number of East Timorese students at the East-West Center and UHM. These students are supported by the United States-East Timor Scholarship Program, funded through the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and attend UHM for their studies. The Linguistics Department of UHM has a special focus on the languages of Asia-Pacific and a commitment to documentation, conservation and planning of underdocumented languages. Thus, the languages of East Timor are within our focus.

3.2 Language Documentation Center. Since Spring 2004, graduate students of linguistics have been organizing the Language Documentation Center. This project trains speakers of underdocumented languages to work on documenting their own language. Matias Gomes, an East Timorese student, joined this project in Spring 2004. Impressed by his passion, Ryoko Hattori started the linguistic documentation and development of

orthography and literacy project for languages of East Timor. Preparing Timorese participants to be involved in or to lead the project for their language is at the heart of this project. The project has been awarded the Jacob Peace Memorial Award from Matsunaga Institute for Peace and also received a grant by the United States Agency for International Development. In the Fall 2004, another East Timorese student, Nelson Belo, and a graduate student of linguistics, Frances Ajo, joined the project. Languages both from Austronesian and non-Austronesian language groups are represented in this project (see Table 6).

	Participant's Name	Project Language	Other Timorese languages he/she speaks
Spring 2004-	Matias Gomes	Kemak (AN)	Mambai (AN), Tetun Dili (AN)
Fall 2004-	Nelson Belo	Waima'a (AN) Makasae (Non-AN)	Tetun Dili (AN)
Spring 2005-	Alvaro Ribeiro	Makasae (Non-AN)	Tetun Dili, Naueti (AN)
Spring 2005-	Rosalyn	Fataluku (Non-AN)	
Spring 2005-	Joao Sarmento	Makasae (Non-AN)	Tetun Dili (AN)

Table 6. Number of East Timorese Participants in Spring 2005.

3.3 Progress on Kemak. We have completed a basic analysis of Kemak sounds and developed a linguistically accurate and user-friendly alphabet for the language. Using the alphabet, the first alphabet picture book of Kemak (Figure 3) was developed. An Alphabet Picture Book is significant, since it will have an expected wide range of readers, including young children as well as their adult caregivers. This will be especially

essential for the spread of the standardized orthography. We also expect that reader feedback concerning the writing system used in this alphabet book will lead to important modifications and improvements. These data will serve as the basis for the future development of a Kemak dictionary and other literacy materials. Gomes will bring this book back to his home this summer and ask for feedback from the community.



Figure 3. The First Alphabet Book for Kemak (Ema in local name).

Furthermore, Gomes successfully approached the Department of Linguistics at UH to offer a field methods class to document his language, Kemak. The product of this class will be a sketch grammar of Kemak. Working relationships with graduate students and professors built through this experience will be useful for Gomes' future linguistic projects.

4. Concluding Remarks.

Obviously, more research for East Timorese linguistics is needed. Also, cultivating East Timorese linguists is paramount. Current work being carried out by students while

studying in Hawai'i is an example of emerging indigenous efforts. Through studying indigenous Timorese languages, Timorese can celebrate their linguistic heritage. Ultimately, such study can lead to better understanding among the diverse ethnic groups of East Timor, a key to nation-building.

References

- Bellwood, Peter. 1997. *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago*. Honolulu : University of Hawai'i Press.
- Cox, Murray P. 2003. Genetic Patterning at Austronesian Contact Zones. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Biochemistry, Otago University, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- East Timor *Action* Network. 2005. <http://www.etan.org/etan/>
- Eccles, Lance. 2000. East Timorese language policy and the language policies of other small Pacific nations". *Studies in the Languages and Cultures of East Timor* 3, 1-30
- Fox, James J. 2003. *Deconstruction and reconstruction of East Timor*. Australian National University E Press.1-27.
- Glover, I. C. 1971. Prehistoric research in Timor. *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia*, ed. by D. J. Mulvaney and J. Golson, 158-181. Canberra: The Australian National University.
- Grimes, Barbara F. (ed.) 1996. *Ethnologue*, 13th edition. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Hajek, John. 2000. Language Planning and Sociolinguistic Environment in East Timor: Colonial Practice and Changing Language Ecologies. *Current Issues in Language Planning* 1.400-415.

- Hajek, John. 2002. Language maintenance and survival in East Timor: all change now? *Winners and losers*, ed. by David Bradley and Maya Bradley, 183-185. New York, NY: Routledge Curzon.
- Hull, Geoffrey. 1998. The languages of Timor 1772-1997: a literature review. *Studies in languages and cultures of East Timor* 1.1 -38.
- Hull, Geoffrey. 1999. Tetum: Language Manual for East Timor. Academy of East Timor Studies, University of Western Sydney Macarthur.
- Hull, Geoffrey. 2000. Current Language Issues in East Timor. Text from a public lecture given at the University of Adelaide, 29 March 2000.
<http://www.ocs.mq.edu.au/~leccles/speech1.html>
- Robin E. Stobbs. 2005. Austronesian migration routes.
<http://www.ramtops.co.uk/migrate.html>
- Siegel, Jeff. 1996. *Vernacular education in the south pacific: regional development*. Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development.
- UNESCO. 1953. *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*. Monograph on Fundamental Education VIII. Paris, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- UNDP Timor-Leste. 2005. *About Timor-Leste: A Brief History*. <http://www.undp.east-timor.org/>
- Wallace, Alfred Russel. 1869. *The Malay Archipelago*. [Washington, D.C. : Central Intelligence Agency, 1982]