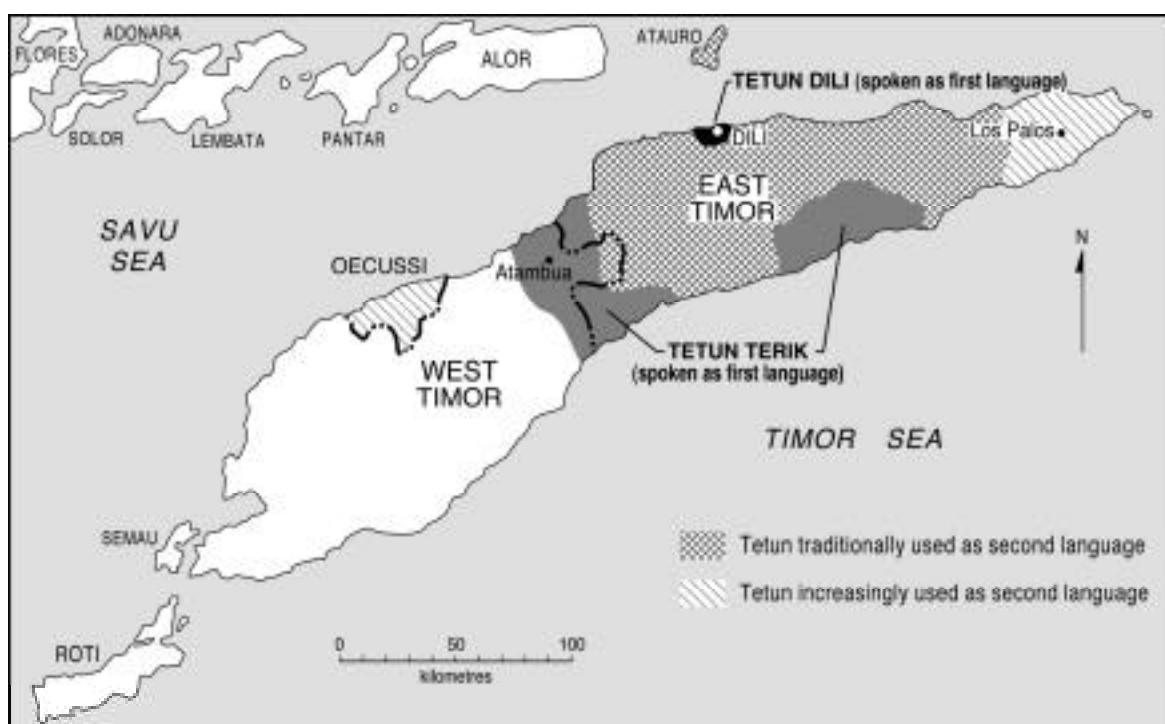


High Registers of Tetun Dili: Portuguese Press and Purist Priests

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1. Introduction

Tetun, the main lingua franca of East Timor, has undergone a rapid expansion in role over the last two decades, becoming the language of the Catholic mass in 1981, and taking on a much increased role in media and public life since East Timor's separation from Indonesian rule in 1999. Such expansion can be expected to continue, as Tetun has, along with Portuguese (the colonial language up to 1975), been selected as an official language for the nation when it achieves full independence in May 2002.



Map 1: The distribution of Tetun in Timor (from Williams-van Klinken, Hajek and Nordlinger (forthcoming), based on Thomaz 1981:56)

Tetun comprises two very different varieties, whose speakers have, at best, considerable difficulty understanding one another.¹ As shown in the map above, Tetun Terik (described in Van Klinken 1999) is a vernacular Austronesian language spoken as various dialects on parts of the south coast of East Timor, and in a north–south strip along the border between East and West Timor. It is primarily associated with traditional culture, and has relatively few loan words. Tetun Dili (described in Williams-van Klinken, Hajek and Nordlinger forthcoming) is spoken as a first language in Dili, the capital located on the north coast. It is also spoken as a lingua franca throughout much of East Timor. This variety has been influenced extensively by Portuguese, the language of Timor's colonisers from the 16th century until 1975.

¹ A major difference between the two Tetun varieties is the large number of Portuguese loan words that have been adopted by Tetun Dili but not Tetun Terik. However there are also numerous other differences between the two, in areas such as subject marking (used in Tetun Terik but not Tetun Dili), morphological derivation, and pronunciation.

This paper compares three high registers of Tetun that are used in formal public settings. The main focus is on two registers used in modern society. One, which exhibits features of both Tetun Terik and Tetun Dili, is used by the church, while the other, which is clearly a register of Tetun Dili, is used by the press. For purposes of comparison, the traditional ritual register of Tetun Terik is first presented briefly.

We will see that the newer church and press registers are very different to the traditional ritual register, in terms of vocabulary and style, as well as in terms of who controls the registers. The constants appear to be that in each case only an elite are able to speak or write in the register, and that the majority of the population understand relatively little unless they are already familiar with the subject matter.

The characteristics of these three registers may be summarised as follows: Ritual Tetun Terik is an oral register which is controlled by traditional ritual specialists. It uses poetic parallelism, specialist vocabulary and pervasive metaphor. The church register is used primarily by the Catholic clergy. It has a strong bias towards using Tetun Terik forms rather than those of Tetun Dili. The press register is controlled by the modern educated elite. Its primary characteristic is even greater Portuguese influence than is customary in everyday Tetun Dili.

2. The ritual register of Tetun Terik

The Tetun Terik ritual register is, in its highest form, used by ritual specialists in formal ritual contexts. In West Timor it is also used in prayers and sermons in some Tetun-speaking churches, as illustrated by the text below. Many (particularly older) speakers also incorporate aspects of the register when telling folktales, and can recite a large repertoire of traditional poetry.

The essence of the ritual register is pairs of poetically parallel lines (or parts of lines), in which the second is an echo of the first, except for the replacement of one or more words or expressions by related ones. The pairs come from a largely standard repertoire of hundreds of parallelisms. Many of the terms are never used in daily speech, and are poorly understood by the bulk of the population.

Ritual speech also incorporates special vocabulary (mainly in place of common verbs and nouns) for honouring the hereditary nobility while humbling oneself.

For more information on this register see Therik's (1995) anthropological description of the Tetun-speaking community in Wehali, West Timor. Corte-Real (1998) describes a similar register in the East Timorese language Mambae, while the articles in Fox (1988) describe the same phenomenon throughout eastern Indonesia.

The following text is an introduction to a Christian prayer.² The pairs are separated by slashes.³

- (1) *Ama na'i maromak, ama iha leten bá / ás bá,*
 father lord God father LOC above DISTAL high DISTAL
 Father Lord God, father up above, in the heights,

² This standard opening was recorded by the author near Betun in West Timor, and is in the Fehan sub-dialect of the South dialect of Tetun Terik.

³ Abbreviations used: 1PI = first person plural inclusive, 1PE=first person plural exclusive, GEN = genitive, LOC = location ('in, at, on...'), 3P = third person plural, PL = plural definite marker, POS = possessive, RECIP = reciprocal, REL = relative clause marker, S = singular.

- (2) *iha fatin di'ak / no kmanek;*
 LOC place good and good
 in the place which is good;
- (3) *ba tuku ne'e nia-kan laran o-kan ata-n ami feto / no mane,*
 at hour this 3S-POS interior 2S-POS servant-GEN 1PE female and male
 in this hour your servants, we—female and male,
- (4) *ferik / no katuas, oan ki'ik / no kawa'ik,*
 mature.woman and mature.man child small and older
 old women and old men, children small and big,
- (5) *ami sudi ti'an malu, / libur ti'an malu iha fatik ne'e.*
 1PE collect already RECIP assemble already RECIP LOC place this
 we have collected together, have gathered together in this place.

3. The church register

The church register is used throughout East Timor in the translated liturgy and Scriptures, as well as being spoken in sermons and prayers. Outside of the immediate church context, some use it as a model when making speeches on formal occasions, such as funerals.

This register appears to have been begun during the last century by Catholic clergy. In 1898 the Catholic church established a secondary college at Soibada, in a Tetun Terik speaking area on the south coast of East Timor. This was the only secondary college in East Timor, and its graduates constituted the sole educated class of Timorese until about World War II. The college trained teachers, church workers and civil servants for the whole of East Timor (Thomaz 1981). The location of this college has heavily influenced the Tetun used in the church throughout East Timor.

Although the Catholic church has used Tetun for over a century in various functions, it was not used as the language of the mass until 1980–81 (Hajek 2000), when the Indonesian government banned the use of Portuguese.

The primary characteristic of the church register is its tendency to use Tetun Terik forms. Tetun Terik words are consistently preferred to Portuguese ones, even when it is the latter that are now in everyday use in Dili. These loans then take on restricted ‘church’ meanings from the point of view of Tetun Dili speakers. For instance, while *tulun* is the normal Tetun Terik verb for ‘help’, to Tetun Dili speakers it primarily suggests ‘help from God or the saints’, since it is used mainly in church, with Portuguese *ajuda* being used in daily interactions.

Other areas of conservatism include the retention of Tetun Terik /w/ (which in Dili has merged into /b/), the retention of the glottal stop (lost in Dili), and a greater use of the causative prefix *ha-* than is now customary in Dili (where it has largely been replaced with the verb *halo* ‘do, make’). Grammar at least partially follows Tetun Terik, for instance in not requiring a possessive linker *nia* within possessive noun phrases.

Nevertheless, church Tetun follows Tetun Dili in not using the subject marking that is characteristic of Tetun Terik.⁴

⁴ There are numerous other ways in which the church register follows Tetun Dili rather than the Fehan dialect of Tetun Terik with which I am familiar. These include the tense–aspect system, speech act verbs, and complementisers. However at this stage I do not know whether (or to what extent) these reflect a difference between the Fehan and Soibada dialects, or a difference between Tetun Terik and Tetun Dili.

It also follows Tetun Dili in not using the ritual terms and poetic parallelism which are characteristic of the high ritual register in Tetun Terik. Noble terms, too, are not used in church Tetun, with the exception that *futar* (literally ‘adorned’) is sometimes placed before body-part nouns when reference is to God (e.g. *iha Maromak nia futar oin* ‘LOC God POS honourable face’, meaning ‘before God’s face’). In avoiding the features of ritual and noble speech, the church in East Timor thus differs from that in West Timor, where (as pointed out in section 2) poetic parallelism *is* used in Tetun-speaking churches.

It seems likely that there are at least two reasons why the church in East Timor does not (normally, at least) use the traditional ritual register. The first is that the church register was developed by Catholic clergy, who were not ritual specialists. In fact in most cases they were not native Timorese, although the priests at the Soibada college in the early twentieth century reportedly had a good knowledge of Tetun Terik (Thomaz 1981:65). Secondly, the register is likely to have been influenced by translation from Portuguese, since most writing in church Tetun has been translation, with much of it done by non-Timorese translators.

From testing church materials with adult native speakers of Tetun Dili, it seems that the narrative parts of the translated gospels are readily understood, presumably aided by repeated hearing. However material that is heard or read for the first time, such as a sermon or an article on the Lord’s Prayer, is not at all well understood. Indeed, there does not seem to be much expectation, at least on the part of younger people, of understanding it well.

The following translation of Mark 10:13–14 (from *Liafuan diak ba imi: Evangelho Sao Marcos nian* ‘Good news for you: Saint Mark’s Gospel’, released by the Catholic church in 1990) illustrates various characteristics of church Tetun. Note that, like the subsequent texts, it is presented in its original spelling, illustrating the diversity of spelling systems currently in use. The only Portuguese loans are *escolante* ‘disciple’ (meaning ‘student’ in Tetun Dili) and *reino* ‘kingdom’ (interpreted as ‘citizens, the people’ in Tetun Dili). Verb phrases tend to be coordinated by *hodi* (line 8) rather than *ho* or the Portuguese loan *i* ‘and’ as in Tetun Dili. The causative prefix *ha-* derives two terms in line 9 which are not usually used in Tetun Dili, where the prefix is much less productive.

- (6) *Ema lori labarik sira ba Nia atu kona sira.*
 person carry child PL to 3S IRREALIS touch 3P
 People brought children to Him (i.e. Jesus) to touch them.
- (7) *Maibe escolante sira haksiak sira nebe lori labarik sira nee.*
 but disciple PL rebuke 3P REL carry child PL this
 But the disciples rebuked those who brought the children.
- (8) *Wainhira Nia hare sira, Nia hirus hodi dehan ba sira,*
 when 3S see 3P 3S angry and say to 3P
 When He saw them, He was angry and said to them,
- (9) *“Husik labarik sira ha-kbesik Hau; keta ha-dook sira.*
 let child PL make-near 1S don’t make-far 3P
 “Let the children approach Me; don’t send them away.
- (10) *Lolos, reino lalehan mak ba sira nebe hanesan sira nee...”*
 truly kingdom heaven/sky FOCUS for 3P REL be.like 3P this
 Indeed, the kingdom of heaven is for those are like them...”

4. The press register of Tetun Dili

The press register of Tetun Dili is used primarily in the more formal segments of the written press, television and radio. It has developed rapidly over the last 2–3 years,

illustrating Ure's (1982:6) comment that "The register range of a language is one of the most immediate ways in which it responds to social change."

Until 1999, the press, like education and government, was a domain of colonial languages. Portuguese was used for these functions until 1975, when Indonesia invaded and subsequently installed its own national language instead. All educated East Timorese have thus had their schooling in Portuguese and/or Indonesian. Tetun was not written much outside of church contexts, with the result that few had experience in writing it, and the main experience of reading it was of church Tetun.

This changed in 1999, when the United Nations conducted the popular consultation that led to independence. It published materials in English (its working language) along with translations in Tetun, Indonesian, and Portuguese. The publications ranged from pamphlets and posters to the full legal document detailing the autonomy proposal. When East Timor subsequently started on the road to independence, Tetun continued to be used in newspapers, radio and television, alongside the other three languages. Much of this continues to be translations, but original material is produced as well.

The primary characteristic of press Tetun is extensive Portuguese influence. Portuguese loans can represent as much as 50% of the total word count, and a much higher percentage of the nouns and verbs. While many of these loans are well-known, many others are new to those Timorese who do not speak Portuguese.

While the majority of loans in press Tetun are from Portuguese, some are from Tetun Terik, apparently being incorporated via the church register. Indonesian loans are used as well, reflecting their common occurrence—particularly amongst younger Indonesian-educated people—in informal discussions of 'high-level' matters. However there appears to be a strong tendency to avoid Indonesian loans in writing or when speakers are self-conscious about their speech.

Pronunciation on radio and television is sometimes strongly Portuguese-influenced. This is particularly evident in the retracting of sibilants word-finally and before voiceless stops, even in native Tetun words such as *moras* 'sick'.

In the press there is an increased use of Portuguese plurals, instead of using a Portuguese singular form with the Tetun definite plural marker *sira*, as is usual in spoken Tetun (e.g. *livru-s* instead of *livru sira* '(the) books'). There is also an increase in the use of noun phrases which consist solely of Portuguese loans, and follow the Portuguese order, with number and gender agreement (e.g. *primeira vise-sekretária* 'first.FEM vice-secretary.FEM'). A feature carried over from press styles in other languages is a tendency for final quote margins, something which never occurs in spoken Tetun (e.g. "*Diak,*" *Sebo hateten* (lit. "Good" Sebo say) "Good," said Sebo').

The development of this register appears to have been influenced by the following factors. Firstly, since all journalists are educated in Portuguese and/or Indonesian (or, for some expatriate East Timorese, English), they are accustomed to using abstract nouns and technical vocabulary, both of which are in short supply in Tetun except through loans. The use of loans allows them to continue writing in this style.

Secondly, the use of Portuguese loans allows the avoidance of Indonesian ones. The latter are at this stage better understood by most of the community, since education has been in Indonesian rather than Portuguese for the last quarter-century. However many people (not surprisingly in light of the events over this period) have a strong aversion to mixing Indonesian with Tetun, at least in formal public contexts.

Thirdly, Portuguese has a number of positive associations. Prior to 1975 Portuguese was the language of the educated elite. During Indonesian rule, it was strongly associated with the resistance movement, and used by the Falintil guerrillas. It has now been decided that

Portuguese and Tetun will become the official languages of East Timor once it becomes fully independent in May 2002, and therefore Portuguese will be a language of the next elite as well. Extensive use of Portuguese loans and grammatical features therefore suggests affiliation with the elite as well as an anti-Indonesian pro-independence (or potentially pro-Portugal) stance.

Finally, there was (and still is) a serious shortage of qualified translators to handle the large amount of translation to be done into Tetun from other languages (particularly English, as the language of the United Nations body overseeing the transition to independence). This has no doubt contributed to the significant amount of ‘translationese’ found in the press. Particularly when a translator has poor control of English (or Tetun, in some cases), it is easier to find the closest Portuguese word than to fully understand the source text and rephrase it into idiomatic Tetun without using little-known loans.

When testing the intelligibility of newspaper articles with tertiary-educated native speakers of Tetun Dili, it was not uncommon to find several words in a single paragraph for which they could not even hazard a guess at the meaning. If tertiary-educated native speakers of Tetun Dili have low comprehension of the written press, it can be expected that the rural population have very little chance indeed. While many East Timorese speak Tetun Dili as a ‘second’ language, only about 10% are native speakers. The low literacy rates in the rural areas can be expected to further exacerbate the gap between the elite who control the press, and the rural population.

The text below, from an editorial in the newspaper *Lalenok* (‘Mirror’, 9 April 2000), illustrates some of the characteristics of press Tetun. 25% of its word tokens are Portuguese loans, including a significant number of abstract nouns (e.g. *esperansa* ‘hope’). These loans are here underlined. Coordination is done both with the Tetun Dili coordinator *ho* (line 11) and with *no* (line 13), which is used in the church and in Tetun Terik. Line 15 (*difinisaun akademika*) illustrates gender agreement, something which is rare in spoken Tetun Dili except in fixed borrowed phrases.

- (11) *Esperansa ho seguransa.*
 hope and security
 Hope and security.
- (12) *Koalia kona problema rua ne'e, la-os buat foun ba ita Timor oan.*
 speak about problem two this not thing new for 1PI Timor child
 Talking about these two problems is not a new thing for us Timorese.
- (13) *Ita houtu hatene saida mak esperansa, no saida mak seguransa.*
 1PI all know what FOCUS hope and what FOCUS security
 We all know what hope is, and what security is.
- (14) *Karik haluha, leno-an ba historia funu tinan 24 nian liu ba.*
 perhaps forget illuminate-self to story war year 24 POS pass go.
 If (you/we) should forget, reflect on the story of the 24-year war that is past.
- (15) *La bele hanoin atu halo difinisaun akademika de'it,*
 not can think IRREALIS make definition.FEM academic.FEM just
 Don't just determine to make an academic definition
- (16) *maibe mos tenki bazeia ba buat*
 but also must base to thing
 but also base (your understanding) on the things
- (17) *ne'ebe uluk ita houtu uza: condiçã objectiva.*
 REL formerly 1PI all use condition.FEM objective.FEM
 which in the past we all used: objective conditions.

A more extensive use of Portuguese loans is illustrated by the following brief extract from the newspaper *A Voz de/Suara Timor Lorosae* ('Voice of East Timor', 4 July 2001). This is taken from a long sentence in which Portuguese loans (here underlined) constitute 50% of the overall word tokens and 90% of the verb and noun tokens.

- (18) ... membro gabinete sira nebe activo politicamente
 member cabinet PL REL active politically
 ...those cabinet members who are active politically
- (19) sei atu suspende sira nia funksaun governamental ...
 FUTURE IRREALIS suspend 3P POS function governmental
 would have to suspend their government functions,...

5. Conclusion

Tetun Dili is a language in rapid transition. The style of Tetun used by the press, and its intelligibility, can be expected to continue changing in the longer term, as Portuguese becomes an official language and becomes more widely known, and also as efforts to develop Tetun (by the recently founded National Linguistics Institute at the National University of East Timor) start to bear fruit. If schools include Tetun in the curriculum, this will also have an impact.

In the short term, there are several possibilities for helping more people to understand the press. One is of course to use Indonesian, the language of education over the last quarter-century or so. This strategy is common at present, with Indonesian-language articles in the newspapers still outnumbering Tetun-language ones. The Indonesian language understandably carries negative emotional baggage for many people, and few want it to have an official role in the new country. There are also a significant number of (mainly older) people who do not speak it well. Nevertheless, it is widely recognised that Indonesian must continue to play various roles within East Timor, and some are seeking to minimise its negative connotations by relabelling it 'Malay'.

A second possibility is for the press to regularly explain the lesser-known Portuguese loans. In the written press, which is aimed at the literate public (virtually all of whom know Indonesian), this can be easily done by adding Indonesian glosses after little-known words (as was frequently done in the Tetun-language Email discussion list 'Timor-oan' when it first started), or by including Portuguese-Indonesian glossaries. Larger-scale education projects on Tetun (including recent Portuguese loans) would also be useful, since many people are keen to develop Tetun, and are acutely aware of their difficulty in writing it.

A final possibility that can be implemented immediately is to use 'plain' Tetun Dili, that is, such a subset of Tetun as will be intelligible to the majority of speakers, regardless of their educational level or exposure to Portuguese. This strategy was apparently used by Fretilin in the 1970s, but is very uncommon now. Successful writing in plain Tetun requires creative rephrasing, and, at least initially, intelligibility testing with the target audience, since Timorese are often surprised at what other Tetun Dili speakers do not understand—or understand very differently to what was intended. A significant advantage of this strategy is that it facilitates communication with those who have little education, as well as with those for whom Tetun Dili is not their native language.

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