Dialects and Varieties in a Situation of Language Endangerment

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Abstract

This paper examines the relation between some language varieties in the northern part of Ambon Island in the Maluku province of East Indonesia. According to Collins 1982:90:

> the language spoken along the north coast [of Ambon Island – SM] from Seit to Tial and in Laha on Ambon Bay is called Hitu after its most prestigious village. There are three main dialects: Hitu-Tulehu, Seit-Kaitetu, and Laha.

In another publication, Collins 1983:100 treats the languages of Seit, Kaitetu, Laha, Hitu and Tulehu as distinct. All of these languages are assigned to the Proto-Ambon group, but there is sub-grouping within that group. In this paper I examine data from the varieties which Collins 1983 assigns to the N.E. Ambon group, Tulehu and Hitu. I compare the varieties spoken in Tulehu and its two adjoining villages (Tial and Tengah-tengah) with the variety spoken in the village of Hitu, and also the varieties spoken in two intervening villages, Liang and Mamala. On the basis of wordlists and of translations of a standard elicitation text, I will show that there are differences between the language of Hitu and that of Tulehu, and that the Liang variety is clearly a dialect of the Tulehu language, and that the Mamala variety is closely related to that of Hitu.. However, these conclusions must be taken to be very tentative, in view of the type of problems which arise in attempting a dialect survey when a language is losing vitality. Reliable data can be very hard to find with older speakers often already having begun to forget their language, and younger speakers having never learned the language fully. Also, many scholars have claimed that higher than usual levels of variation are common in speech communities which are losing vitality (Wolfram, 2002). It is therefore difficult to know how much variation within and between varieties should be discounted as an epiphenomenon of the process of language loss**.**

Keywords:
Austronesian Languages, Maluku, Dialects, Language Shift, Language Variation

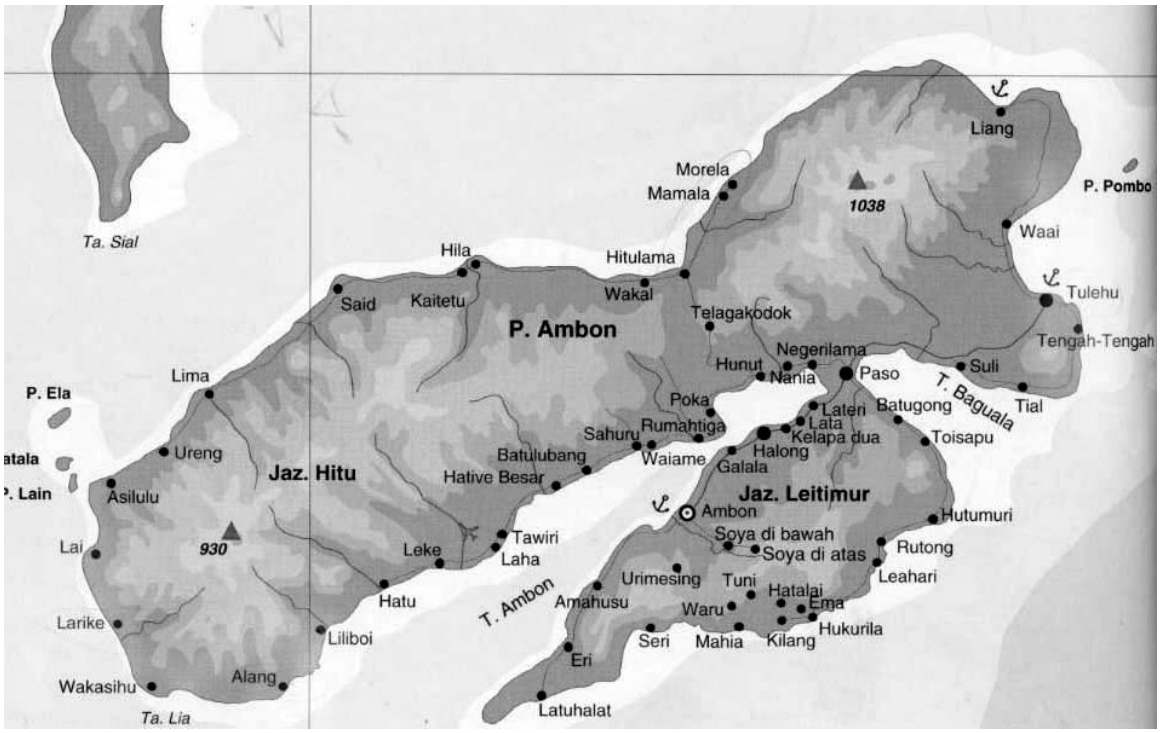
1. Introduction[1]

1.1 Background

My current research focuses on the language spoken at the eastern end of Ambon Island. The villages of Tulehu, Tengah-tengah and Tial form the core speech community, and the people there have decided (in response to my work) to refer to the language as *Sou Amana Teru* 'language of the three villages'. Related varieties are spoken in villages to the north and west along the north coast: Waai (now only a few elderly rememberers), Liang, Morela, Mamala, Hitu, Hila, Kaitetu and Seit. Map 1 illustrates the location of all the villages on Ambon Island discussed in this paper.

Ethnologue (Gordon, 2005) suggests a speaker population of 18,843 for the language spoken in Tulehu, Tengah-tengah, Tial and Liang, on the basis of data from 1987. More recent census data, from 2000, gives the total population of Tulehu, Tengah-tengah and Tial as 18,790. Census data from Liang are not currently available, but certainly several thousand people live in that village. Of the total population in the three southern villages, I estimate that around 10,000 people are fluent speakers of Sou Amana Teru, and another 6,000 have some knowledge of the language. *Ethnologue* gives the population of Hitu, Wakal, Mamala, Morela and Hila as 15,965, again on the basis of data from 1987. I have no more recent population data for those villages, nor can I make any estimate of the proportion of fluent speakers of indigenous languages in those communities.

[1] I am deeply grateful to the many people in Ambon who assisted me in gathering the data reported here, especially Drs Hasan Umarella, who drove the motorbike. Thanks to Margaret Florey for data from Haruku, Rutah and Alune, and to her and Michael Ewing for discussion which has assisted me enormously. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. This research is funded by a Major Documentation Project grant (MDP0009) from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Programnme, SOAS, UK (*Documentation of four moribund Moluccan languages: Eastern Indonesia and the Dutch diaspora*) and by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project grant (DP0343379) (*Cross-linguistic study of endangered Maluku languages: Eastern Indonesia and the Dutch diaspora*).



Map 1 – Ambon Island (adapted from Straver and Boelens 1998)

According to Collins 1982:90:

> the language spoken along the north coast [of Ambon Island – SM] from Seit to Tial and in Laha on Ambon Bay is called Hitu after its most prestigious village. There are three main dialects: Hitu-Tulehu, Seit-Kaitetu, and Laha.

In another publication, Collins 1983:100 treats the languages of Seit, Kaitetu, Laha, Hitu and Tulehu as distinct. All of these languages are assigned to the Proto-Ambon group, but there is sub-grouping within that group, as seen in Figure 1.

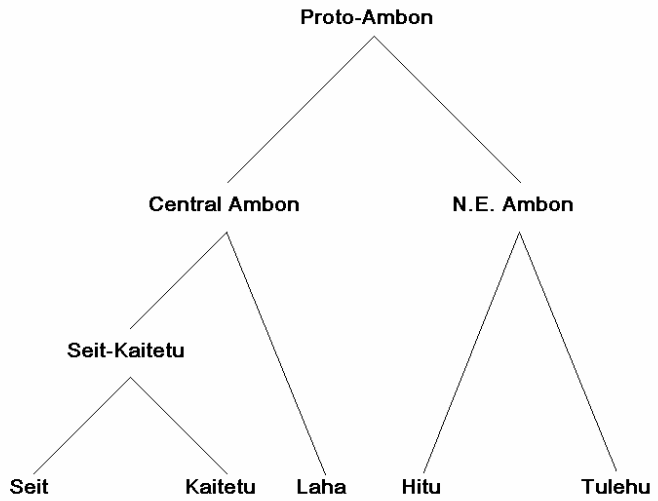


Fig. 1 — Sub-grouping of Proto-East Piru Bay (after Collins, 1983:100)

In this paper, I present some current data concerning the relation ships between the varieties spoken in the three southern villages, Liang, Mamala and Hitu, that is, the villages which fall within Collins' 1983 N.E.Ambon group. I will reassess Collins' conclusions about the varieties spoken in these villages, finding that the evidence currently available favours his 1983 analysis, that there are two distinct languages. This conclusion is based on evidence from sound changes (section 2), lexical variation (section 3), and variation in morphology and syntax (section 4). I also discuss the problems encountered in attempting a dialect survey in communities where language shift (to Ambonese Malay and to standard Indonesian) is happening rapidly (section 6).

1.2 Data

This research uses two types of data:

1) Word list: A word list of 230+ items was used for lexical comparison. This list was created by me and it overlaps considerably with Swadesh 200. However, there is an emphasis on local food items, and directional and locational terms which tend to be a richly differentiated semantic domain in Central Malukan languages. The actual number of items collected at each site is variable as not all items were collected at all sites.

2) Elicited narrative: An elicitation story (referred to below as "Garden Story") has been developed to obtain comparable cross-linguistic data for a range of morpho-syntactic structures which occur in Central Malukan languages. The story was written in Ambonese Malay and developed around the culturally relevant theme of a family spending a day working in their farmlet. This simple 450 word story (70+ clauses) elicits a lexicon of approximately 130 morphemes, making the recall of lexemes less onerous for elderly speakers.

Details of the number of speakers from whom data was collected are given in the following table[2]:

	Tulehu	**Tengah[2]**	**Tial**	**Liang**	**Mamala**	**Hitu**
Word list	2	2	1	3	1	(many)
Story	1	0	0	1	1	(many)

Table 1 – Number of speakers from whom data was collected

In Hitu, a single version of each instrument was collected, but several speakers collaborated to provide the data.

[2] In table headings, I use the abbreviation Tengah[2] for Tengah-tengah, for reasons of space. This style of writing reduplications has been discouraged in Indonesia since the spelling reform of 1972.

2. Sound Change

One significant isogloss separates the language of the three southern villages and Liang from that of Hitu and Mamala. Comparison with other languages in the region suggests that the presence of [r] (in some environments) in the southern villages corresponding to [l] further north can be taken to be an innovation. Within each of the two groupings of villages defined by this isogloss, there is further phonological differentiation with palatalized variants of /s/ occurring at Liang and at Mamala. However, this variation is occurring in different environments in the two villages, and no isogloss can be drawn separating those two villages on this basis.

2.1 The shift from [l] to [r]

In Tulehu, Tengah-tengah, Tial and Liang, [r] occurs before /i/, /u/ and /e/ where cognates in neighbouring languages have [l]. For example, the name of the village of Liang in the local variety is *Riane* (the velar nasal is not part of the native phonemic inventory). In the northern villages, [l] occurs in all environments, but in the Lease Islands to the east, the change to [r] has occurred before high vowels only. Table 2 gives cognate sets, including the closely related variety from Rutah in South Seram (named Amahai in Figure 1 above), and from the more conservative Seram language Alune:

	Tulehu	**Liang**	**Mamala**	**Hitu**	**Haruku**	**Nusalaut**	**Rutah**	**Alune**
2sg	yare	yare	ale	ale	ale	ale	ale	ale
water	waer	waer	wail	wail	waele	wael	aelo	'wele
delicious	matere	matere	ngatere	matele	matele	mu'ele	emmele	ntele
house	ruma	ruma	luma	luma	ruma	ruma	rumalo	luma
two	rua	rua	lua	lua	rua	rua	rua	lua
five/arm	rima	rima	lima	lima	rima	rima	rima	lima
eight	waru	waru	walu	walu	waru	walo	waru	'walu

Table 2 – Cognate sets showing the distribution of /r/ and /l/

The evidence shows that [r] and [l] are nevertheless two distinct phonemes in the southern villages, with the distinction remaining clear at least where the following vowel is /a/ or /o/: for example, *loun* ' clump' v. *rou'e* 'again'.

2.2 Palatalisation of /s/

The three speakers from Liang from whom I collected data all palatalized /s/ before /i/ at least some of the time. The degree of palatalisation extended from a slight movement of the articulation towards the palate, to the realisation of /s/ as an alveo-palatal affricate:

(2a) *sia* ‘nine’ → [sʸija] (one speaker)

(2b) *usi’a* ‘already’ → [usʸiʔa] (one speaker)

(2c) *si’a* ‘cat’ → [ʧiʔa] (all three speakers)

(2d) *sinana* ‘fry’ → [ʧinana] (two speakers)

This type of palatalization is of course common cross-linguistically, and the phonetic motivation is easily understood.

A less common type of palatalization can be observed at Mamala, where the speaker who was interviewed, and her daughter who was present throughout the interview, displayed audible palatalization of /s/ before the vowel /a/:

(3a) *sayi* ‘paddle (a canoe)’ → [sʸayi]

(3b) *sa’a* ‘climb’ → [sʸaʔa]

These speakers showed no trace of palatalization where /s/ occurred before /i/. Speakers from Liang occasionally had slight palatalization before /a/. For example, one speaker gave a palatalized /s/ in the word *sa’a* ‘climb’ when using the word as part of a phrase, but not when giving the word in isolation.

3. Lexical Variation

Cognate percentages calculated from the wordlist data are shown in Table 3 (next page). These data show that Tulehu, Tengah-tengah and Tial group together closely, with Liang separated somewhat, and Hitu and Mamala a little more separated. The last two, however, show a high degree of similarity. Interestingly, Mamala and Hitu are closer to the three southern villages in respect to lexical variation than they are to Liang, although Liang is geographically closer to them. This may reflect the fact that there has not always been a road around the north-eastern tip of Ambon Island (the road is closed at the time of writing due to landslips), and that the shorter distance between Liang and Mamala does not mean greater ease of contact. The results in Table 3 are broadly consistent with those obtained by Travis in 1989, who did not collect data at Hitu, but did in Morela and Wakal. Travis’s results are reproduced in Table 4 (next page). Travis’s data do not show the larger difference between Liang and the northern villages which was apparent in my data. I am not aware of any reason for this difference.

	Tulehu	Tengah[2]	Tial	Liang	Mamala
Tengah2	94.3				
Tial	92.6	92.1			
Liang	77.1	77.7	77.8		
Mamala	72.6	74.3	74.6	69.3	
Hitu	73.1	75.9	76.0	69.2	85.7

Table 3 – Cognate percentages calculated from my wordlist data

	Tulehu	Tengah2	Tial	Liang	Mamala	Morela
Tengah2	89					
Tial	88	90				
Liang	84	85	90			
Mamala	76	78	80	78		
Morela	74	74	78	77	90	
Wakal	82	82	79	72	88	86

Table 4 – Cognate percentages from Travis, 1989

Many items in comparison pairs are not only cognate, but are in fact identical, and Table 5 shows the percentages of identical items:

	Tulehu	Tengah	Tial	Liang	Mamala
Tengah	85.1				
Tial	84.8	85.6			
Liang	70.4	65.9	68.8		
Mamala	40.7	40.5	41.5	35.8	
Hitu	41.0	39.7	41.8	38.9	69.2

Table 5 – Percentages of identical items in my wordlist data

These data suggest a greater distance between Hitu and Mamala and the other villages. However, this increase is almost entirely due to the effect of the [l] to [r] correspondence.

4. Morphology and Syntax

Two morpho-syntactic features distinguish the language used in Hitu and Mamala from that of the southern villages. One relic of previous morphology survives in the two northern villages, and speakers there use an inalienable possession construction with Malay kin terms as the possessed item, which is not possible in the southern villages. One additional morphological feature is specific to Mamala.

4.1 Verb Conjugation

Central Maluku languages historically had a system of verb conjugation involving changes to the initial segments of a verb form changed depending on the person and number of the subject Collins, 1983:24-26. In Hitu and Mamala, traces of this system can still be seen in variation between different forms of a verb[3]:

(4) Hitu, Garden Story

Ite	*kolo*	*wa'ale*	*kula*	*ite*	*tolo*	*ahasame*
1PL.E	sit	LOC-PROX	and	1PL.E	sit	rest

'We sat down here and we rested.'

(5) Mamala, Garden Story

Au	***kakak***	*mahina'a*	*kolo*	*wa'a*	*luma'a*
1SG	older.sibling	female-CV	sit	LOC	house-CV

'My big sister stayed at home.'

(6) Mamala, Garden Story

Am	*tolo*	***istirihat***	*wa'ale*
1PL.I	sit	rest	LOC-PROX

'We sat here and rested'

Example 4 is particularly revealing, in that two verb forms occur in the two clauses, but each has the same subject, *ite* '1st person plural exclusive'. The different forms no longer have any function in the language today. In the word list data, the variation can be seen between some citation forms given at Hitu and those given at Mamala:

[3] Abbreviations used in glossing: 1,3 – first person, third person; SG – singular; PL – plural; I – inclusive; E – exclusive; LOC – locative; PROX – proximal; CV – consonant + vowel suffix. Malay loans are **bolded** in examples.

	Hitu	**Mamala**	**Tulehu**
sit	*kolo*	*tolo*	*upa*
sleep	*kele*	*tele*	*na'e*
enter	*kuri*	*suri*	*nusu*
climb	*ka'a*	*sa'a*	*sa'a*
descend	*kulu*	*tulu*	*turu*

Table 6 – Citation forms of verbs from Hitu, Mamala and Tulehu

It is interesting to note that in some cases the form used consistently at Tulehu is one of the conjugated forms, but in other cases an unrelated from is used. Variation can also be seen in the presence and absence of initial [p] in some verb forms:

	Hitu	**Mamala**	**Liang**
cook	*unau*	*unau*	*punau*
listen	*ahanene*	*panene*	*pahanene*
do	*una*	*puna*	*puna*
fish	*ahanu*	*anahu*	*panahu*

Table 7 – Citation forms of verbs from Hitu, Mamala and Liang

In these forms, other variation is also evident. In the set of forms for 'listen', a syllable (*-ha-*) is missing in the form given at Mamala. The forms given for the verb 'fish' also show variation involving the same syllable, which is metathesized in the form at Hitu relative to the other two forms. This data suggest the possibility that, in addition to the remnants of the verb conjugation system, there may be other examples of frozen morphology in the data.

4.2 Loan Words and Possession

In all the villages where data was collected, language shift to Ambonese Malay (see Grimes, 1991 and Minde, 1997) is progressing rapidly. Some shift to Bahasa Indonesia, a standardized Malay, is also seen. Malay loans are therefore very commonly used in spontaneous language use, and kin terms are one semantic domain where this is especially true. For example, the Malay *baba* 'father' is often used for the native *ama*, *kaka(k)* 'older sibling' for the native (cognate) *a'a*. Central Malukan languages have (or in some cases had, see Ewing, 2005) special marking of inalienable possession. Kin terms for parents, grand-parents, siblings and in-laws fall within the domain of inalienable possession.

At Tulehu, Malay kin terms are never used in inalienable possession constructions Musgrave, 2005. At Hitu and at Mamala, inalienable possession, marked by a suffix on the possessed noun, is possible with Malay loans.

(7) Mamala, Garden Story

Au	***papa**'u*	*i*	*oi*	*pa'anane*
1SG	father-1SG	3SG	go	pound.sago

'Father went to pound sago.'

(8) Hitu, Garden Story

Yau	*oi*	*kula*	*au*	*ina'u*	*kula*	***papa**'u*
1SG	go	with	1SG	mother-1SG	with	father-1SG

'I went with my mother and my father.'

(9) Hitu, Garden Story

Au	***tete**'u*	*kula*	*au*	***nene**'u*	*tolo*	*sua*	*pahawana*
1SG	grandfather-1SG	with	1Sg	grandmother-1SG	sit	at	right.side

'My grandfather and grandmother sat on the right.'

Example 10 is typical of usage at Tulehu. Where a Malay kin term is used, the inalienable possession suffix never occurs:

(10) Tulehu, Garden Story

Au	***baba***	*apa*	*isi*	*ipei*	*hasama*
1SG	father	ask	3PL	2PL-do	what

"Father asked them: "What are you doing?""

4.3 –CV suffixes

Suffixes of the form –(C)V which attach to nouns are common across the languages of Central Maluku. The consonants tend to be restricted to alveolar segments, and the vowels are distinctive for villages. For example, in the current sample, the southern villages use /e/, Liang uses /a/. However, for at least some words, Mamala has a different pattern, with glottal stop as consonant, and a copy of the last vowel of the noun:

Tulehu	**Mamala**	**Gloss**
marinue	*marinu'u*	'garden'
lopue	*lopu'u*	'machete'
atatorue	*atolu'u*	'evening'
rumae	*luma'a*	'house'
mahinae	*mahina'a*	'woman'
malonae	*malono'o*	'man'
kakie	*kaki'i*	'k.o. sweet potato'

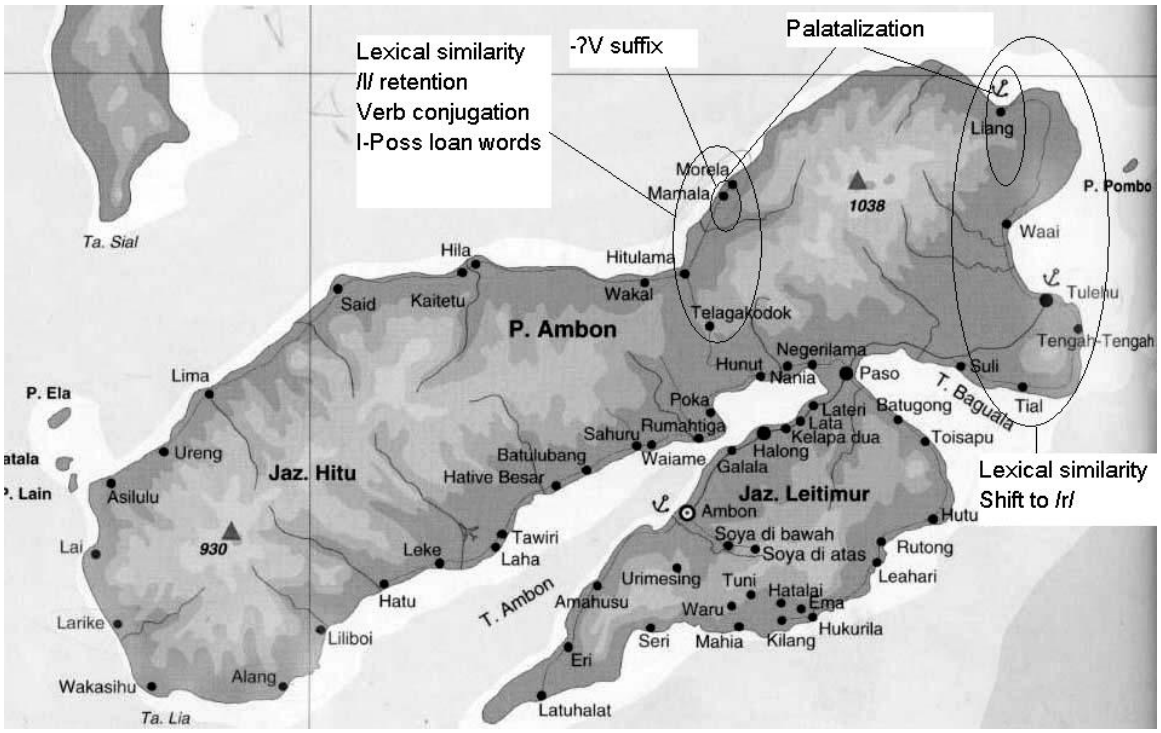
Table 8 – Suffixed forms from Tulehu and Mamala

Usage at Hitu is very similar to that at Tulehu and the other southern villages, with alveolar consonants and /e/ as the vowel. This morphological feature therefore separates the variety spoken at Mamala from those of all the other villages considered here.

5. Tentative Conclusions

The data examined here do nothing to contradict the opinion of the speakers at Tulehu, Tengah-tengah and Tial that the three villages form a homogeneous speech community reflected in the language name *Sou Amana Teru*. There is a very high percentage of cognates in the wordlist data for these three sites, and the percentage of identical items is only very slightly lower. This is to be expected when there is no phonological variation across the three villages. Speakers report that there are differences of intonation between the villages, but this does not show up in the data examined here. The variety spoken at Liang is a dialect of *Sou Amana Teru*, marked by some lexical differences and one phonological difference, the palatalization of /s/ before /i/. There are no difference of morphology or syntax between Liang and the three southern villages which are evident in the data examined here.

The varieties spoken at Hitu and Mamala are distinct from Sou Amana Teru but cluster together. Most significantly, the isogloss separating languages which retain /l/ in all environments and those in which /l/ becomes [r] in some environments divides the villages in this way. In addition, Hitu and Mamala share lexical differences, and have one morphological feature (remnants of verb conjugation) and one syntactic feature (inalienable possession of Malay kin terms) not seen in the other villages. One feature might appear to link Liang with the two northern villages, palatalization of /s/, but, as shown in section 2.2, this phonological variant appears in different environments in Liang and in Hitu and Mamala. No isogloss based on this feature unites Liang and the northern villages. One additional morphological feature is found only at Mamala, but this does not constitute evidence for a closer link between that variety and those spoken to the east and south. Map 2 summarizes these groupings.



Map 2 – Distribution of features distinguishing dialects and varieties

On the basis of the data examined here, I would suggest that the Collins' 1983 account is preferable to his 1982 account. That is, it is more accurate to describe the varieties spoken at Hitu and at Tulehu as separate languages than as dialects of a single language. The relation between the variety at Tulehu and that at Liang is clearly dialectal, but the differences between either of those varieties and those spoken at Hitu and Mamala are more numerous and more significant, justifying describing them as a separate languages. The data presented here do not support any interpretation which would invoke a dialect chain; that is, the variety at Liang is not an intermediate point on a continuum between Hitu and Mamala and the southern villages.

6. Dialect Differentiation and Language Shift

In all the communities discussed in this paper, language shift is under way from the indigenous languages to Ambonese Malay and Bahasa Indonesia. The shift is not happening at a uniform rate and has proceeded to a greater or lesser extent in different villages. In all cases, however, this change in the linguistic ecology has consequences for the collection of language data, including the types of data used here as evidence for the assessing the relationships between the varieties used in the various villages. In the following sections, I discuss two of these consequences: the reliability of the data which can be collected, and the extent of variation within communities.

6.1 Finding Reliable Data

Our natural assumption is that, in a language shift situation, older speakers will be able to provide more reliable data. However, once language shift has proceeded beyond

a certain point, this may no longer be the case. If most interaction in a community is being carried out in the new language, then even older speakers will not be using the original language on a regular basis. They may only be carrying out a limited range of interactions in the language, and may therefore be forgetting aspects of the language.

In the research reported here, I had a fluent speaker of Sou Amana Teru with me in all interviews with speakers, and it was not uncommon for other speakers to turn to this person as a prompt or aid to memory. There is a danger that this practice might result in unreliable data, with the speaker whose memory was not good agreeing with the other speaker's prompt in order to preserve social cohesion. I am confident that such effects are not present in my data. Malukans do not value social cohesion above accurate representation of knowledge – if the poor rememberer did not agree with the prompt given, (s)he was willing to say so. However, if the prompt did not contradict the speaker's knowledge, it would be accepted and this carries the danger that the use of prompts has led to data which is more homogeneous than would have resulted if only fully fluent speakers had been interviewed[4].

Data from younger speakers is very hard to interpret in a situation where such speakers' knowledge of the language may well be incomplete. For example, I obtained word lists from two younger speakers (between 20 and 25 years of age) from Liang, as well as from one older speaker (aged over 60). The young speakers used significantly more Malay loan words than the older speaker. The older speaker gave 18 Malay words in a list of 223 items (8%). This is already the highest percentage of loan words given from all the other speakers, suggesting that language shift at Liang is more advanced than in the other villages. However, the two young speakers gave 44 and 45 Malay words from a list of 220 items (20%), suggesting that their knowledge of the language was much less complete. Whole areas of vocabulary were absent for these speakers; for example, neither of them knew any numbers beyond ten.

6.2 Intracommunity Variation

Although I have presented evidence above to support various levels of differentiation between the varieties spoken in different villages in the north east of Ambon Island, it should also be clear that these varieties are very closely related. In this context, high levels of variation within a single community could be as significant as variation between communities, which would mean that it would be almost impossible to make any reliable statement about the variation between villages. Such high levels of variation within a single community are, however, characteristic where language shift is taking place (Wolfram, 2002, Florey, 2005).

In the previous section, I introduced the three speakers from Liang from whom I collected data, one aged over 60, and two aged between 20 and 25. For the word list, which is the only data collected from all three, these speakers show a level of variation

[4] Alice Gaby (p.c.) reports that in working with speakers of endangered Australian languages, prompts often lead to improved recall of different lexical items by speakers. This has not been my experience.

as great as that shown between any of the villages. Table 9 shows the cognate percentages for the data from these three speakers.

	20+[1]	**20+[2]**
60+	64.0	68.5
20+[1]		57.9

Table 9 – Cognate percentages for wordlists of three speakers from Liang

In comparison, the lowest cognate percentages in Table 3 are just over 69%, between Liang and Mamala and Liang and Hitu. Table 10 shows the percentage of identical items in the htree wordlists from Liang.

	20+[1]	**20+[2]**
60+	54.2	61.5
20+[1]		51.1

Table 10 –Percentages of identical items for wordlists of three speakers from Liang

In this case, comparison with Table 4 is not so simple, as the effect of the shift from /l/ to [r] gives very low figures for identical items between Hitu and Mamala and all other villages. The lowest figure in Table 4 which is not affected by that factor is 65.9%, for Liang and Tengah-tengah, and again the variation within the Liang speakers is greater. Even more significantly, in both Table 9 and Table 10, the variation between the two young speakers is the greatest of all.

No data is available to assess the level of morpho-syntactic variation amongst these speakers. However, on the basis of data which I have collected at Tulehu, and on the basis of the data discussed by Florey (2005), I would expect that there would be many changes occurring in the morphological and syntactic aspects of the speech of young people at Liang. Furthermore, such changes would not be spreading through the speaker population in a uniform fashion. Therefore, I would expect morpho-syntactic data from Liang to mirror the situation seen in the word list data: a high degree of variation within the community, both between the language used by older speakers and that used by younger speakers, and between the varieties used by individual young speakers.

If this analysis is correct, it raises the question: which variety out of this range should be chosen to make comparison with other geographic locations? My discussion in the preceding sections is based, as far as the position of Liang is concerned, on data from the older speaker, but the validity of that decision could be questioned. However, if data from younger speakers was preferred, then a decision would be required as to which particular speaker or group of speakers might be taken as representative. Matching speakers on the basis of age would not necessarily guarantee comparable data, as the extent and speed of language shift varies from one community to another.

It is possible to identify groups with different levels and types of language knowledge (Florey, 2006), and such information could be used to create a comparative sample from different locations, stratified for level of linguistic vitality. The results of such a study would give important information about how dialects and varieties diverge and converge in a language shift situation. Such a study is beyond the scope of this paper, and remains the goal of future research.

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