

A description of some linguistic and sociolinguistic features of Papuan Malay

Abstract

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Although Indonesian became the official national language of the Republic of Indonesia with independence in 1945, the use of various forms of Malay throughout the area of modern-day Indonesia existed long before the language achieved official status. Similarly, some form of Malay was introduced into Papua centuries before Papua became an official region of Indonesia. Nowadays, a form (or forms) of Malay has been reported to exist throughout Papua that purportedly differs lexically, phonologically, and grammatically relative to the “standard” Indonesian that functions as the national language. Because of limited data upon which to verify such assertions and with a desire to contribute to the documentation of Malay(s) spoken in Papua, a project was initiated to document language use and attitudes toward Papuan Malay(s) and to describe some of its key linguistic features.

This paper details an on-going survey undertaken by SIL staff in the Papua region. A synchronic picture will be presented of selected lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic and discourse features observed in Papuan Malay, derived from analysis of recorded natural texts elicited from native speakers. In addition, a description of language use patterns as well as attitudes towards Papuan Malay(s) will be presented based on data collected from a combination of sociolinguistic questionnaires, interviews, and observation. Primary attention will be given to the presentation of information collected from the northeast coastal region.

Although the emphasis of this paper is to present a synchronic picture of some key linguistic features of Papuan Malay(s), historical background research will also be used to facilitate presentation of a diachronic picture of the development of Papuan Malay in the region.