

### **Language contact in Timor-Leste: how did Tetun Prasa develop into its present form?**

Tetun, one of Timor-Leste's two official languages along with Portuguese, belongs to the Central Malayo-Polynesian division of Austronesian languages. It has two main varieties: Tetun Prasa and Tetun Terik. Tetun Prasa is the variety of the language now spoken as a first language in the capital and its suburbs and used as a vernacular in diglossic situations in most of the country. It has borrowed many features from Portuguese, especially on the lexical level, but also shows some Malay/Indonesian influence as well as influence of local languages (Mambae). On the other hand, Tetun Terik, a more conservative dialect of Tetun spoken in the south and around the border with Indonesia, shows much less Portuguese influence and has still preserved some inflectional morphology (e.g. subject-marking prefixes).

We can hypothesize that Tetun Prasa developed into its present form only after contact with outsiders, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who spoke restructured varieties of Portuguese – Malacca CP, Macau CP and possibly Bidau CP, a variety that emerged in the Bidau district of Dili where the families of soldiers and officials moved after the capital was transferred there from Lifau in 1769. Before the arrival of Portuguese, Bazaar Malay was the trade language in this region from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, followed by Ambonese Malay in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. To demonstrate that Tetun Prasa grew out of an earlier variety that was more similar to Tetun Terik we will provide a brief outline of what can be reconstructed of the sociolinguistic history with special focus on contact. We show that these structural and sociohistorical facts support our hypothesis of how Tetun developed into its present form, arguing that it is the result of a specific kind of language contact that has led to a specific kind of mixed language.

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