



Current Documentation Projects

Current Projects at the CELD Papua, Indonesia

Many of the 700 languages spoken in Indonesia are currently endangered. Most of them are spoken in the far eastern provinces of the archipelago, an area inhabited by only 1% of Indonesia's population, but comprising about 30% of the country's speech communities. The three projects presented are all hosted by the Center for Endangered Languages Documentation (CELD) at the University of Manokwari. They try to make a contribution to a better documentation of the languages in this linguistically and culturally highly diverse area.



Wooi

Wooi is the term for both a language and its people settling in three coastal villages at the far western tip of Yapen Island in the Geelvink Bay. The area is largely covered by untouched primary forests that feature an enormous wealth of biodiversity. The language is of Austronesian origin and belongs to the Eastern Malayo-Polynesian branch of that family. Since four generations the Wooi have increasingly been using Indonesian and approximately 1600 people still speak the language.



The Wooi bay with traditional houses built on stilts

Wooi are organized in clans, who descend either from Yapen, the Bird's head or the neighboring island Biak. They are traditionally fishermen, diversifying their subsistence economy by horticulture and trading sago. Their houses are built on stilts just off shore facing the bay. Most Wooi are Protestant and the political power is shared by two elected village heads. Inter-ethnic warfare was common in colonial times and traditional Wooi songs from that time are still orally transmitted today. Of particular ethnological interest is a specific peace-building ritual called hesokuru, practiced by the Wooi to overcome special cases of interpersonal disharmony.



Wooi traditional canoe



Kristian Walianggen showing recordings to children in the village

Iha

Iha is spoken on the West Bomberai peninsula and is dominantly used by the Fakfak and Kaimana people. The term Iha refers to an ethnic group or even to one specific clan. It is still spoken by about 5,500 people in approximately 48 villages. Iha is classified as belonging to the Trans-New Guinea family (West Bomberai Proper).



Gold to be given to the bride at an Iha wedding

Fakfak is the melting pot of a multilingual and multicultural community. The native Melanesian inhabitants of the Iha region live together with non-Papuan people and their acculturation took place over a long period of time. There are two major religions prevalent, Islam (60%) and Christianity (40%). A strong Muslim presence in Fakfak is known since the era of the Sultanates Tidore and Ternate in 1200-1400.



An Iha speaker playing drums

Yali, Yale and Eipo

Yali, Yale, and Eipo all belong to the large and still contested genetic grouping of the Trans-New Guinea family. Yali is a member of the Dani subgroup, while Yale and Eipo are Mek languages. All three languages are spoken in the rugged high mountain range running across the island of New Guinea, the highest summits reaching 5000m.

Like most peoples in the Papuan highland area, the Yali, Yale, and Eipo are sedentary horticulturists. Their gardens are laid out on the steep mountainsides, where sweet potatoes, taro, and other vegetables are cultivated. The villages and hamlets of the respective speech communities are located on the top of the mountain ridges. Nowadays almost all the mountain peoples are Christians, having been Christianized by Dutch, German, and American missionaries who are working in that area since the 1960ies.



A "Honai" - the traditional Yali housing



A Yali woman carrying home her harvesting

Core team members

Wooi: Jimi Karter Kirihi, Freya Morigerowsky
Iha: Sutriani Narfahan, Emanuel Tuturop
Yali: Kristian Walianggen, Sonja Riesberg
Yale/Eipo: Volker Heeschen

CONTACT ADDRESS

Yusuf Sawaki
 Center for Endangered Languages Documentation
 Universitas Negeri Papua
 PO Box 206 Manokwari
 Indonesia 98314

ysawaki@fulbrightmail.org
www.celd-papua.net

