

Attitudes and outcomes: community-oriented consequences of language documentation in Melanesia

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This paper highlights community-oriented outcomes of two separate documentation projects in Melanesia: Bierebo – spoken on Epi, Vanuatu, and Kubokota – spoken on Ranongga, Solomons.

Various outcomes were identified over the course of documentation projects in the respective language communities but it is often difficult to attribute these developments directly or solely to language documentation. For this reason the term ‘outcomes’ is here understood as a cover term that can be subcategorised as follows:

- Direct initiatives led by the documenter;
- Indirect outcomes of documentation work (decisions made independent of, but influenced by the presence of language documenter);
- (Changes in) community attitudes towards language;
- ‘Coincidental’ community-led initiatives related to language documentation work.

The following outcomes from Kubokota and Bierebo documentation are discussed in terms of the subcategorisations proposed above:

- Formation of official language bodies: Kulu (Kubokota-Luqa) Language Institute and the Bierebo Language Committee;
- Development of a standard orthography for Bierebo and production of language materials;
- Heightened sense of language purism: cleansing the language of English and other borrowings
- Lexical innovation and borrowing:
 - influence of Luqa on Kubokota – borrowing Luqa terms for linguistic concepts; borrowing back the nominalization infix *-in-* in religious vocabulary;
 - new Bierebo language terms coined for recently introduced domestic animals (horse, cow, goat); rejection of previously used leave-taking expression for ‘goodbye/goodnight’ and adoption of a calque of a neighbouring language’s equivalent;
- Language teaching in kindergartens - convincing leaders of the value of vernacular education at kindergarten level in both communities; offering technical support and funding;
- Teaching Luqa grammar to Kubokota and Luqa-speaking adults;
- Spread of vernacular language use into new domains: Bierebo is increasingly used in church services and village meetings where Bislama previously dominated;
- Codified language policy: first written village by-law including an article relating to Bierebo language use and language maintenance.

In both situations common factors proved significant in these outcomes: positive language attitudes, effective local leadership, and several socio-linguistic conditions particular to Melanesia such as low speaker numbers, homogeneous language communities, remote and isolated locations, political autonomy, and strong sense of identity and community.