Wider Communication

International languages such as English are used in many different countries. Trade languages, like Tok Pisin, allow multiple language groups to communicate. Regional languages, such as Kuanua, are used for communication in specific regions.

Quiz – PNG Languages

Can you put these examples into the correct language levels? Answers are at the bottom of the page. Note that language situations are complex, and discerning the exact position of a language can be challenging.

(1) This coastal language is small, with only two villages. Its people use a language of wider communication for economic activities involving outsiders and use dinghies to travel to town. They are very proud of their language and identity and use their vernacular at home, in the garden, and in other significant domains.

(2) These people read the Bible in Tok Pisin but wanted vernacular literature. Though they use multiple languages in daily life, they continue to use their vernacular in significant domains, like with their children in the home. They have found that access to Scriptures in their vernacular helped them understand the Bible more clearly. Vernacular literature has benefited the community in other ways.

(3) This language is large, with many villages – most near a road. There are a lot of people in the language group, however many who live near roads use Tok Pisin most of the time, their vernacular seldom, and children learn Tok Pisin first. In more remote areas, both Tok Pisin and the vernacular are used. The people do maintain strong markers of identity around their traditional clans and dialects.

Used in Education

The language is spoken by all generations and literacy in the language is being transmitted through a system of public education.

Written by Some

The language is spoken by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community.

All Generations

The language is spoken by all generations and is being learned by children as a first language. People might learn other languages as well, such as Tok Pisin, but they still use their vernacular language to serve needs important to them.

Some Children

The language is spoken by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are teaching it to their children. Some children use other languages to serve functions that were previously reserved for the vernacular language.

Only Adults

The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it among themselves but none are teaching it to their children.

Used for Unity

Once the only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation, language death becomes likely. Eventually, parts of the language might be used as a reminder of heritage identity, and used in activities such as ceremonies, or it might be lost forever.

Forgotten

Languages are like mountains. On a mountain, there are steep places and flat places. If you are on a flat place, you can sit down and rest. You can build your house. If you are on a steep place, you can't stop for very long. You have to go up or down to get to a resting place.

Languages are the same way. The flat parts of the mountain represent stable language situations. For example, when a language is at the 'used in education' level and has vernacular materials and supportive policies, it is able to remain at that level. A language can also be sustainable at the 'all generations' level when all generations speak it. If a language is between flat parts, it is likely to slide down the mountain to the next stable language situation.

Communities may choose to use different languages for different parts of their life – a school language, a vernacular language at home, a different language for worship, etc. Multilingualism can be sustainable. If communities choose to use other languages for all significant functions, or if younger generations only use other languages, the vernacular will be remembered by fewer and fewer people.

The strength of a language and how long it will continue to be used depends on the choices of the community. A language is also affected by factors which may be beyond the language community's influence – language policies, economic opportunities, language use norms in church, etc.

This mountain shows the different levels at which languages can exist. Use the descriptions to the right to help you assess where your language currently fits on this scale. For more information about language levels, visit https://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status. If you are interested in having a conversation with someone about your own language, contact SIL-PNG at do-admin_png@sil.org.

Where does your language fit?

It's My Language!

Persevering

Because it sits in the 'ring of fire', PNG experiences its share of disasters. In 1998, a tsunami devastated Aitape. As a result of this disaster, a single language translation program was transformed into the Aitape West Multi-Language Translation Project. In 2018, a massive earthquake in Hela Province decimated gardens, eliminating the primary food source for many villages. SIL planes were able to assist with bringing in relief supplies, and later Trauma Healing workshops were held in the area to help people process their grief and fear. This past year, COVID-19 has brought many challenges, but we have been encouraged to see the commitment of our staff and the communities with whom they work. Many have found new ways to continue working on translation even when work cannot be accomplished in person. Bible translation is a difficult task, requiring collaboration and determination. Let us continue to work together as we value *laikim* (care for one another), *wanbel* (agreement/unity), and *wok wantaim* (working together).

delivering supplies for the Marawaka health clinic

a health worker at Owena signing for the delivery

The Honourable Jimmy Uguro, MP
Minister for Education
Parliament Haus
Waigani, NCD

Dear Minister Uguro,

It is with great pleasure that I submit this 2020 SIL-PNG Annual Report. 2020 brought many challenges, COVID-19 among them. This virus has had a significant impact in PNG, other nations, and on the global economy. Through this and other challenges, SIL-PNG remains committed to serving the people and nation of Papua New Guinea.

In reflecting back on 2020, the word perseverance comes to mind. Perseverance includes the idea of maintaining a purpose in spite of great difficulty, acting with determination and resolve. The nation of Papua New Guinea met its challenges and persevered in 2020.

This report features a few of SIL-PNG's responses to some of the challenges faced in PNG. It also explores decisions around language and development, speaking about how SIL-PNG comes alongside communities persevering through their challenges.

SIL-PNG is pleased to be a partner with the government of Papua New Guinea through a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Department of Education. Research, translation, and materials production have enabled language development in hundreds of PNG's 839 language communities. Building capacity by training Papua New Guineans remains at the forefront of our work. All of our efforts are made possible through partnerships with the government and churches of this beautiful nation.

The challenges of 2020 tested the perseverance of SIL-PNG. I am pleased to report that we continue to stand together with Papua New Guinea. Through the support and partnership of your Ministry, SIL-PNG looks forward to continuing the work begun in 1956, persevering in the pursuit of our vision: God's Word, in every language, in every life.

Sincerely,

David Barton, Director, SIL-PNG

Papua New Guinea has almost 840 different languages. Each language is distinct, representing in its words and ideas the history and culture of the people who speak it.

A grandmother's voice quavered with concentration, eyes clouded by age and memory, as she told a story in a language only she and two other people could remember. It was a solemn moment. We recorded her story and later had it transcribed, documenting it for future generations. Soon there will be no one to tell those stories, in that language, ever again. Many years earlier, younger generations had begun speaking a neighbouring vernacular and Tok Pisin, using their own language less. This is called language shift. Most were not conscious that anything was being lost.

Languages belong to the people who speak them, and those people have to decide whether to maintain them, intentionally develop them, or allow language shift to occur. Each language is uniquely beautiful, but sometimes communities don't realize the gift they have until it is at risk. SIL seeks to come alongside communities and help them achieve their language goals.

A young man's rapid-fire questions betrayed his excitement to be talking to researchers interested in his language. Having learned about language development and decline in university, he was eager to find ways to strengthen his vernacular. It belonged uniquely to his language community and played a significant role in their identity.

In the above story, the researchers from SIL emphasised that language development is difficult. Maintaining a language often requires investment from the whole community, and sometimes even needs an external agency's assistance. SIL recommended that the community start with an all-important step they could do on their own: ensuring that their vernacular was used by all generations for significant functions (such as conversations in the household or working together in the garden). It is ok if multiple languages are used by a community – each language has value – but for a vernacular to be maintained, all generations need to speak it regularly.

The opposite side of this poster has an illustration representing the different levels of language development and decline. Where does your language fit? What plan does your community have for the future of its language?

SIL offers different services based on a community's goals for their language and on the strength of the language. Some of these services include translation, literacy training and audio recording. We desire that all Papua New Guineans have the Scriptures in languages and media that speak to them clearly.

recording vernacular stories

working with language communities

Contact Us

DO-Admin_png@sil.org

www.silpng.org
www.facebook.com/silpng

(m) 7217-0330 x4431
(l) 537-3544 x4431

Bible Dedications

Gizrra NT Dedication in Western Province • Dec 2020

Ura NT Dedication in East New Britain • Sept 2020

Publications

Aramba Dictionary [stk]; Pauw, Michel (www.webonary.org/aramba)
Abau Dictionary [aau]; Lock, Arjen (www.webonary.org/abau/)
Bola Grammar Sketch [bnp]; van den Berg, René and Brent Wiebe, Data Papers on PNG languages volume 63
Considering the Etymology of the Word "Pidgin"; Franklin, Karl J. (www.langlxmelanesia.com/llm-vol-38-2020)
Developing SE Research: Building on the Methodology of SURAM; Carter, Jed (www.diu.edu/documents/theses/carter_john-thesis.pdf)
Language, Culture and the Image of God: how God revealed himself to me in Papua New Guinea; Crosland, Matthew E (www.pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/86555)
Lele Language Survey Report [lle]
Maisin: A Grammatical Description of an Oceanic Language in Papua New Guinea [mbq]; Frampton, Joanna Margaret (www.pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/86283)
Mato Dictionary [met]; Stober, Scot (www.webonary.org/mato/)
Preliminary Data Reports on Aiklep [mwg], Ainbai [aic], Ak [akq]
Scripture Use Research and Ministry; van den Berg, René (www.pnglanguages.sil.org/resources/archives/83267)
Suggestions for Malol Orthography; van den Berg, René and Lydia

Vernacular Publications

Misima Scripture Calendar [mpx]; Callister, Bill and Sandra
Nobonob Scripture Book – Jonah [gaw]; Irish, Jan
Nukna Trilingual Picture Dictionary [klt]; Taylor, Matt and Christy
Seimat Scripture Book - The Christmas Story [ssg]; Wilson, Theresa and Beata Wozna
Urim Scripture Calendar [uri]; Akerson, Paula and Pirkko Luoma

Orthographies

Kwomtari Orthography Established [kwo]; Honsberger, Murray and Carol
Meramera Orthography Approved [mxm]; Hwang, Joong Kee and Sungh Hye
OPD submitted for Mevembet [keh]; Liew, Litz
OPD submitted for Nama [nmx]; Park, Jeong-Seok and Sun-Young
OPD submitted for Saliba [sbe]; Oetzel, Rainer and Sabine
OPD submitted for Yamap [ymp]; Paoli, Sonya
Saliba Orthography Established [sbe]; Oetzel, Rainer and Sabine

Trainings & Workshops

Storytelling Workshop – January, 33 participants
Basic Exegesis – 5-25 February, 7 participants
Paratext 2 – 26 February - 10 March, 3 participants
Basic Computing – 11-24 March, 9 participants
Healing the Wounds of Trauma Workshop – March, 16 participants
Linguistics Workshop – 22-26 June
Hands On Linguistics Seminar 1-4 – June-September
Culture Meets Scripture Workshop – August, 64 participants
Culture Meets Scripture Workshop – September, 37 participants
Healing the Wounds of Trauma Workshop – November, 47 participants
Healing the Wounds of Trauma Workshop – December, 74 participants

Vernacular Audio Recordings

Scripture Portions: Abau [aau], Abu [ado], Adzera [adz], Agarabi [agd], Akukem [spm], Angal Enen [aoe], Angor [agg], Anjam [boj], Arop-Lokep [apr], Arop-Sissano [aps], Asaro'o [mtv], Awa [awb], Bamu [bcf], Bargam [mlp], Bariai [bch], Baruga [bjz], Barupu [wra], Baruya [byr], Bau [bbd], Bimin [bhl], Bo-Ung [mux], Bola [bnp], Bugawac [buk], Buhutu [bxh], Burum-Mindik [bmu], Bwanabwana [tte], Dedua [ded], Doromu-Koki [kqc], Enga [enq], Gadsup [gaj], Gapapaiwa [pwg], Goiniri [onrg], Gumawana [gvs], Gwahatike [dah], Halia [hla], Huli [hui], Ipili [ipi], Iyo [nca], Kala [kcl], Kaluli [bco], Kamano-Kafe [kbq], Kamasau [kms], Kamula [xla], Kandawo [gam], Kanite [kmu], Kapin [tbx], Kasua [khs], Kol [kol], Kombio-Wampukuamp [xbiw], Kombio-Yanimoi [xbiy], Kuman [kue], Kuni-Boazi [kvg], Kuot [kto], Lote [uvl], Madak [mmx], Madi [grg], Maia [sks], Malol [mbk], Mamusi [kdf], Mandara [tbf], Mangseng [mbh], Mato [met], Mauwake [mhl], Mbula [mna], Mekeo [mek], Menya [mcr], Misima-Panaeati [mpx], Muna [mnb], Mussau-Emira [emi], Mutu-Oov [tuco], Mutu-Tuam [tuct], Nai [bio], Nali [nss], Namia [nnm], Notsi [ncf], Nukna [klt], Numanggang [nop], Odoodee [kcc], Onobasulu [onn], Patpatar [gfk], Pele-Ata [ata], Pinai-Hagahai [pnn], Pau [wrap], Pouye [bye], Ramoaaina [rai], Rawa [rwo], Romei-Barera [onrr], Saisai [nmw], Sam [snx], Seimat [ssg], Siane [snp], Sissano [sso], Sulka [sua], Sumo [wras], Sursurunga [sgz], Tairora [tbg], Umbu-Ungu [ubu], Urat [urt], Urim-Kalpm [urik], Usarufa [usa], Vitu [wiv], Waboda [kmx], Waskia [wsk], Wiru [wiu], Wolwale [onrw], Yopno [yut]

Stories: Arop-Lokep [apr], Kombio [xbi], Kombio-Wampukuamp [xbiw], Kombio-Yanimoi [xbiy]

Other: Baruga [bjz], Onobasulu [onn], Rawa [rwo], Vitu [wiv]
Recording and dubbing of 81 vernacular videos.
Recording of songs in 50 different languages.

Vernacular Work