

Lirasniara, the sung language of Southwest Maluku (East-Indonesia)

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a highly endangered sung style in Maluku Barat Daya along the lines of Sasse's (1992) theory of language death and focusses on structural consequences, the speech behaviour, and the external setting of this oral tradition. It is concluded that if it really has existed and not only in local folklore, *Lirasniara* must have been a jargon that was replaced by Malay. Only because it already occurred in sung texts during the latter's introduction prevented its total disappearance from the region thus far. The fear remains that in the process of the modernization of Indonesia, it may undoubtedly disappear after all in the near future.

KEYWORDS

Singing, argot, jargon, Southwest Maluku, trade language.

1 INTRODUCTION

Southwest Maluku (East-Indonesia) is a small region that is both linguistically and culturally complex. The Austronesian isolects spoken in this area have been identified as members of a single Southwest Malukan Group (Taber 1993). The isolects of Kisar, Roma, and the dialect chain extending from Leti up to Tepa on West-Babar are considered descendants of a single proto-language, called Proto Luangic-Kisaric (henceforth PLK, Van Engelenhoven 1995). Based on Taber's (1993) lexicostatistical findings, the Wulur language on East-Damar may well be another descendant of PLK.¹ The languages of

¹ Both East-Damarese (= Wulur) and the Kisar-Roma Subgroup have a shared lexicon

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