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**CHANGE, OBLIVION AND DEATH: THREE STAGES IN  
LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **CHANGE, OBLIVION AND DEATH: THREE STAGES IN LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT<sup>1</sup>**

*Language shift is a common feature in the speech communities around the world and of all times. In a scenario where a language is still acknowledged as a receptacle of knowledge, the loss of a traditional language or its exchange for another one may be considered to be either a loss of traditional knowledge or, alternatively, an exchange for a 'better' knowledge. The awareness of language endangerment is therefore intrinsically linked to the awareness of culture endangerment. This paper discusses three Southeast Asian languages, 'Melayu sini' in The Netherlands, Serua in Indonesia and Nisa or Rusenu in East-Timor that illustrate incipient, advanced and terminal language endangerment, respectively. 'Melayu sini' features extensive mixing with Dutch in such a way that it becomes more and more difficult for its speakers to differentiate between both languages. In Serua, linguistic endangerment is signaled through irreversible attrition and even erosion of morphological system. Nisa or Rusenu is the prototypical moribund language, whose final speaker in fact is not even a semi-speaker but only remembers the language through a single lullaby.*

**KEYWORDS:** Language Endangerment; Language Loss, Language Oblivion, Malay in The Netherlands; Serua in Maluku; Nisa in East-Timor

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# 1. INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT?

Language endangerment is a generally acknowledged phenomenon in the present day's societies all over the world. A quick search on the Internet informs that according to Wikipedia an endangered language is "a language at risk of falling out of use". This is specified at a more linguistic website like the one of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (<http://www.sil.org/sociolx/ndg-lg-faq.html>) as: "In most general terms, it means that parents are no longer teaching the language to their children and are not using it actively in everyday matters." In Krauss's (2007:4) terms it is even clearer: "[it] may cease being spoken by children during this century."

The three definitions above enable us to interpret the terms shift and oblivion as two intermediate stages on the way to the final stage: death. In the literature, therefore, language shift and oblivion are often combined in the term language loss. In applied linguistics, language loss within one generation, labeled language attrition (Bot1998), is distinguished from language loss across generations, labeled language shift (*Ibidem*). In this paper we are mainly interested in the latter phenomenon. Table 1 displays four types of language loss as they are proposed by Bot and Weltens (1985).

Table 1: Types of language loss according to Bot and Weltens (1985)<sup>1</sup>

type	example
loss of L1 in L1 environment	dialect loss
loss of L1 in L2 environment	native language loss
loss of L2 in L1 environment	foreign language loss
loss of L2 in L2 environment	L2 loss by aging migrants

In the following paragraphs we will discuss each above mentioned stage of language endangerment by means of a different language. Only the phenomenon of second language loss among aging migrants has not been included in the present discussion, which is beyond the topic of the present paper.

Table 2 shows the nine sociolinguistic factors that Brenzinger et al. (2003) determined that contribute to language loss and eventually to language death.

<sup>1</sup> L1 = first language, L2 = second language

Table 2: Sociolinguistic factors of language loss (Brenzinger et al. 2003)

F1	Factor 1	Intergenerational language transmission
F2	Factor 2	Absolute number of speakers
F3	Factor 3	Proportion of speakers within the total population
F4	Factor 4	Trends in existing domains
F5	Factor 5	Response to new domains and media
F6	Factor 6	Materials for language education and literacy
F7	Factor 7	Government language policies
F8	Factor 8	Community members' attitudes towards their own language
F9	Factor 9	Amount and quality of documentation

Sasse (1992:9-10) provides three criteria with which language death can be diagnosed. A purely linguistic criterion is the “substantial-linguistic set of phenomena, e.g. changes in phonology, morphology and lexicon...”. Speech behavior is a sociolinguistic criterion that concerns “the regular use of variables in a given speech community, which are bound by social parameters.” The External Setting contains “the entire range of extra linguistic factors leading to language death, for example cultural, sociological, ethnohistorical etc. processes.”

This paper focuses on the linguistic features of language endangerment. Therefore, this paper will discuss language change and erosion rather than language shift and attrition beside language death by means of three exemplary languages from Southeast Asia: Malay in The Netherlands, Serua in East Indonesia and Nisa or Rusenu in Timor-Leste.

## **2. LANGUAGE CHANGE: MALAY IN THE NETHERLANDS (“MALAY HERE”: *MELAYU SINI*)**

The origin of the existence of Malay in The Netherlands is to be found in 1950 when the republic of East-Indonesia acceded into the Republic of Indonesia and the Dutch government wanted to disband its colonial army. However, since the Dutch Court of Justice disallowed any involuntary demobilization on foreign (= Indonesian) territory, 12,500 Moluccan soldiers who had not yet resigned or refused to go over to the Indonesian army were transported together with their families in 1951 by the Dutch government to The Netherlands.

76% of them originate from what is now called the regency of Central Maluku, 21% originates from the regencies of Southeast and West Southeast Maluku, whereas the remaining 3% comes originally from the new regency of Southwest Maluku. The Malukans from Southeast and West Southeast Maluku generally call themselves as ‘Tenggara Moluccans’, which term refers to political divisions of the province of Maluku before 1998.

When they arrived in The Netherlands they were initially lodged in temporary hostels according to their religion. Special hostels were assigned to Roman-Catholics (for example Geleen) and Moslems (Balk in the province of Friesland). In the early 1960s the Dutch government relocated the Moluccan families to permanent quarters in order to accelerate their incorporation in Dutch society. Moslems moved South to Ridderkerk (South-Holland) and Waalwijk (North-Brabant), whereas the Roman-Catholic Tenggara Moluccans moved to Echt (Limburg) and Nistelrode (North-Brabant).

Whereas the soldiers and their families originated from three different ethnolinguistic zones coinciding with the present-day regencies, the beginning of their stay was dominated by the idea of returning to Indonesia to liberate and restore a free Republic of the South Moluccas (RMS). To stress the cultural unity of the families, an RMS ideology was developed (dubbed 'Alifuru Concept' in Engelenhoven (2002)) in which the cultures of the mountain tribes on Seram Island in Central Maluku functioned as models for the prototypical inhabitant of the Moluccan motherland. Within this strategy, Malay –the language used in the barracks- was generally favored over their exclusive mother tongues as the language of a unified Moluccan identity. To distinguish it from the Malay variants in Indonesia, it is generally referred to in the Moluccan community as *Melayu sini* ("Malay here").

Table 3 displays the sociolinguistic factors of *Melayu sini* in The Netherlands, of which factors 1, 3 and 8 are decisive for its loss. *Melayu sini* is used only between first and second generations.<sup>2</sup> Its amount of active speakers is less than 1% of the total Dutch population. Although there once existed a curriculum of 'Malukan Malay' devised by the National Support for Moluccan Education in Utrecht that was used in bilingual curriculums in the Dutch schools, nothing was developed for *Melayu sini*, which the Moluccan community considered as 'cripple Malay'.

Table 3: Sociolinguistic factors of loss of *Melayu sini* in The Netherlands

F1	Language transmission only between first and second generations
F2	About 50.000 speakers
F3	Proportion of speakers is less than 1 % of the total population
F4	Confined to colloquial, non-official domains
F5	Weekly bilingual radio program <i>Suara Maluku</i> ('Moluccan Voice')
F6	No materials for language education and literacy
F7	The Dutch government only acknowledges national languages
F8	<i>Melayu sini</i> is 'cripple Malay'
F9	1 PhD Thesis, 1 MA Thesis, few papers

<sup>2</sup> The term 'first generation' is commonly used in the Moluccan community to refer to adults who came to The Netherlands in the 1950-ies. Children coming to The Netherlands and the ones born shortly after their arrival are referred to by the term 'second generation'.

*Melayu sini* is an example of both loss of a first language (for the 76% of Christians Moluccans) and of a second language (for the remaining 24%) in a third language environment, albeit that ‘change’ is a better description of what happens to *Melayu sini*.

The mixing of Malay and Dutch grammar is one of the most salient features in *Melayu sini*. This is exemplified in (1) where the underlined words are Dutch (using Dutch orthography).

- (1) Wijk yang baru, laatst dorp bikin, bouwen akan  
 quarters REL new last.NOM village make build.inf it  
als het laatst dari Breda.  
 as the last of Breda  
 “The quarters are new, it is the last village, they made, built it as the last one of Breda.” (Voigt 1994)

The sentence above shows that in *Melayu sini* the matrix language (after Myers-Scotton 2002) is Malay in which there are ‘islands’ (in boxes in the example) that use Dutch grammar. Sometimes both grammars are used as is shown in the boxed noun phrase in (2) where the Dutch word *poezen* ‘mollies’ is marked for plurality and at the same time displays Malay diversity reduplication.

- (2) Poezen-poez-en altijd tukang pencuri ikan.  
 RED-molly-PL always HAB steal fish  
 “Cats always steal fish.” (Tahitu 1989:59)

The use of *akan* as a pronoun in (1) and the use of *tukang* ‘craftsman’ and *pencuri* ‘thief’ respectively as an habitual marker and a verb meaning ‘to steal’ identify *Melayu sini* as a variant of Ambonese Malay. However, the semantic reinterpretation of Malay grammatical instruments like reduplication makes it deviate from the regular Malay pattern. Its aberration also becomes clear in the total absence of otherwise typical Malay verbal art as *pantun*, which is explained by the general incompetence of *Melayu sini* speakers in Indonesian or Malay.

### 3. LANGUAGE EROSION: SERUA (MALUKU, INDONESIA)

Serua used to be spoken in four villages on Serua Island and three villages on the South side of adjacent Nila Island in the Southwest of the Central Maluku regency that borders on the Southwest Maluku regency in Indonesia. Taber (1993) suggest that Serua and its sister languages Nila and Teun are close relatives of the Luangic-Kisaric languages in the latter regency because of the abundant occurrence of metathesis in their morphologies which is the most salient feature of Austronesian languages in Southwest Maluku. Collins (1982), however, points at the deviating sound change of PAN \*z > s, which in Proto Luangic-Kisaric was \*z > t.

The present condition of Serua is closely linked to the history of thirty years of transmigration that the population of the islands of Teun, Nila and Serua had to endure and to the Civil War that devastated Maluku in 2000. Table 4 displays when and how many families were migrated to the East coast of the Elpaputih Bay in Central Seram, which would eventually become the sub district of Teun, Nila, Serua or TNS.

Table 4: Transmigration of the Teun, Nila and Serua Islands

transmigration	households	location
1964	60	Letwaru (Masohi)
1976	50	Ruatan Valley (Makariki)
1977	50	Ruatan Valley (Makariki)
1979	1175	Waipia
1982	150	Waipia
1983	remaining individuals	Waisiru (Waipia)

Initially the village plan of the TNS district reflected the original geography on the islands. The Serua-speaking quarters were all located at the South bank of the Pia River, with the exception of Waru that is on the North bank, while the river itself runs through Amet. In the original situation the indigenous languages could be maintained thanks to the straits being natural barriers between the islands, which enabled the southernmost island of Teun to become a 'linguistic haven' for the Teun language and the Wetan dialect spoken in the villages of Isu and Layeni. In the TNS district on Seram island, however, the Teun-speaking villages became quarters were completely surrounded by Serua-speaking quarters, whereas the Wetan-speaking quarters besides being surrounded by Serua-speaking quarters were separated from each other by the Teun-speaking Yefila quarters. Consequently, both the Teun and Wetan languages were the first to disappear. Due to their strong similarity, Nila and Serua managed to maintain longer, albeit with strong mutual lexical and grammatical influence.

Table 5 shows the sociolinguistic factors of the loss of Serua in the TNS district today. Serua shares the factors 1, 3 and 4 with *Melayu sini*, but differs from the latter through the strong commitment to language survival (factor 8) of especially mothers.

Table 5: sociolinguistic factors of loss of Serua in the TNS district.

F1	Language transmission only between first and second generations
F2	About 2000 speakers
F3	Proportion of speakers is about 20 % of the sub district's <sup>3</sup> population
F4	Confined to traditional ritual domain
F5	radio and television in Indonesian and Ambonese Malay
F6	No materials for language education and literacy
F7	Regional language allowed but not supported
F8	Strong commitment to language survival
F9	few papers

Serua is an example of first language loss in a second language environment in a context of oblivion. This means that there are no speakers available who can remember the original grammar structures. Since Serua is considered to be a Southwest Malukan language, its structures need to be compared with Southwest Malukan typological features of which we chose the alien-inalienable distinction in possessive marking on NPs and subject agreement.

The Kisaric and Wetar languages distinguish between alienable and inalienable nouns respectively by means of possessive pronouns preceding the noun, or by pronominal suffixes directly on the noun. This is displayed by the possessive paradigms of 'house' and 'hand' in Roma. The Serua counterparts, however, use pronominal proclitics for both types of nouns. If it were not for the obsolete inflections for 'my mother' and 'your mother', respectively *ina-ku* (mother-1sg) and *ina-mu* (mother-2sg), one could surmise that Serua would not distinguish between alienable and inalienable possession.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Less than 1 % of the district's population.

<sup>4</sup> The regular inflection of these two nouns is *sa'=ina* (1sg=mother) and *m=ina* (2sg=mother).



Table 6: Alienable and inalienable possession in Roma (Laidig 1993:343) and Serua

alienable noun: 'house'		inalienable noun: 'hand'		
Roma: <i>rahan</i>	Serua: <i>kresna</i>	Roma: <i>lima-</i>	Serua: <i>lima</i>	
<i>aniku rahan</i>	<i>sa=ruma</i>	<i>lim-ku</i>	<i>sa=lima</i>	1sg
<i>nimu rahan</i>	<i>m=ruma</i>	<i>lim-mu</i>	<i>m=lima</i>	2sg
<i>nina rahan</i>	<i>n=ruma</i>	<i>lim-na</i>	<i>n=lima</i>	3sg
<i>tita rahan</i>	<i>tit=ruma</i>	<i>lima-hti</i>	<i>tit=lima</i>	1plinc
<i>anami rahan</i>	<i>sam=ruma</i>	<i>lima-hmi</i>	<i>sam=lima</i>	1plex
<i>nimi rahan</i>	<i>mir=ruma</i>	<i>lima-hmi</i>	<i>mir=lima</i>	2pl
<i>rira rahan</i>	<i>rir=ruma</i>	<i>lima-hra.</i>	<i>rir=lima</i>	3pl

Interestingly, Serua informants did know the lexical item for 'house', *kresna*, but could only provide the full possessive paradigm with the Ambonese Malay loan *ruma*. Furthermore, if we compare subject agreement in Serua with the one in Leti, for example, it becomes obvious that the possessive markers are also used on verbs whereas in Leti there are two types of pronominal prefixes that depend on the verb class. The only remnant of the original Serua subject agreement is the prefixation of the third person singular to verbs with an initial vowel to which the possessive marker is then added. Also did the Serua informants not manage to provide the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural exclusive conjugation of the verb 'to sleep'.

Table 7: Subject agreement in Leti (Engelenhoven 2004) and Serua

'work'		'sleep'		
Leti: <i>-kari</i>	Serua: <i>karei</i>	Leti: <i>-mdudu</i>	Serua: <i>-ena</i>	
<i>a k-ü~ari</i>	<i>sa=karei</i>	<i>a u-mdudu</i>	<i>sa=n-ena</i>	1sg
<i>m-kü~ari</i>	<i>m=karei</i>	<i>mu-mdudu</i>	<i>m=n-ena</i>	2sg
<i>n-kari</i>	<i>n=karei</i>	<i>na-mdudu</i>	<i>n=n-ena</i>	3sg
<i>t-kari</i>	<i>tit=karei</i>	<i>ta-mdudu</i>	<i>tit=n-ena</i>	1plinc
<i>a m-kari</i>	<i>sam=karei</i>	<i>ma-mdudu</i>	?	1plex
<i>m-k-ï~ari</i>	<i>mir=karei</i>	<i>mi-mdudu</i>	<i>mir=n-ena</i>	2pl
<i>r-kari</i>	<i>rir=karei</i>	<i>ra-mdudu</i>	<i>rir=n-ena</i>	3pl

Serua therefore is characterized by pervasive morphological restructuring in which the alienable-inalienable distinction in possession and the original subject agreement markers were lost while alienable pronominal proclitics are used as subject agreement markers. Its endangerment is furthermore indicated by the incapacity of speakers to inflect full paradigms and the replacement of indigenous terminology by Indonesian or local Malay words.

In 2000, however, all three languages in the district came in a state of acute language death through the massive influx of fugitives from several parts of Seram Island and from the Banda Islands. As such, the population of TNS district increased with 50%. Whereas Serua was already pushed back into the domain of the household, it now was even removed from there, since each household in the TNS district volunteered to accommodate up to four fugitives with whom communication was only possible in Indonesian and Ambonese Malay.

#### 4. LANGUAGE DEATH: NISA OR RUSENU

According to Andrew McWilliam (personal communication November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007) Nisa, or Rusenu as it also referred to, was still spoken just east of the harbor of Com in the district of Lautem in the republic of East-Timor during the Second World War, but fell into disuse afterwards.

In January 2007 the author of this paper was informed of an extinct language called Rusenu that used to be spoken on the top of Ilikerekere mountain in Tutuala sub district. However, no evidence of former inhabitation was found there. After his return in the capital Lospalos, he was told that in fact Rusenu was rather a location further west on the Nari plains and that the final speaker of the language he was looking for, Ms Maria Ascensão Parreira, was living in Lospalos.

Ms Parreira is now in her nineties. Due to her physical condition, her speech has become very hard to understand, because of which her son who is in his seventies functions as an interpreter.

Table 8 provides the details of the sociolinguistic factors determining the loss of Nisa/Rusenu. It shares with Serua and *Melayu sini* the factors 1, 3 and 4. Exclusively with Serua it shares factor 8, the commitment to language survival. It was only because of the author's work on Makuva that Ms Parreira saw a chance to safeguard her language if she would make herself known to him. Unfortunately, her language already entered the stage of irreversible death. Indeed, the case of Nisa/Rusenu is a clear example of loss of a first language in a first language environment.

Table 8: sociolinguistic factors of loss of Nisa/Rusenu in Lautem district.

F1	No language transmission
F2	1 “Speaker”
F3	Less than 1% of the total amount of 30.000 Fataluku speakers
F4	Not used in any domain
F5	radio in Tetun and Portuguese, no television
F6	No materials for language education and literacy
F7	Regional language allowed but not supported
F8	Strong commitment to language survival
F9	None

In fact, Ms. Parreira cannot be categorized as a speaker and not even as a semi-speaker, because she remembers the language only through one lullaby of five lines that has been reproduced in (3). Since this lullaby was taught to her when she was still a toddler, she cannot remember its meaning anymore.

- (3)<sup>5</sup>
- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>E moko pora nata e nata;</i>     |
| 2 | <i>Kata koto vora nata e nata;</i>  |
| 3 | <i>Hai navare, isatel nate apa;</i> |
| 4 | <i>Kere-kere te va kelaru apa;</i>  |
| 5 | <i>E loro ta loro liru marana.</i>  |

According to Ms. Parreira, who does not have a name for her language of birth, her native clan Latuloho ratu clan and the Uruha’a ratu clan used this language in their original villages. McWilliam informs that in Com Nisa is considered to be the original language of the Fara Kati ratu clan.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that Nisa/Rusenu is the original language of Latuloho ratu clan is an important clue. Gomes (1972:35) mentions a local myth in which the clans Latuloho ratu and Nocaratu ratu entered Lautem from the West by foot. Local folklore has it that Fataluku is the original language of Latuloho ratu and that after a final combat between this clan and Cailoru ratu from Tutuala sub district the language of the first mentioned was imposed as ‘the correct language’ (*Fata luku*) for all clans in the Fuiloro and Lautem sub districts. This may suggest that Nisa and Rusenu are different names for Fataluku. A similar instance is reported by McWilliam (2007:360, footnote 16) who rightly points out that the Portuguese used to refer to Fataluku with

<sup>5</sup> For a phonetic transcription and sound file refer to <http://noorderlicht.vpro.nl/artikelen/36635727/>, accessible through the Fataluku Language Project’s website at <http://www.fataluku.com> (see under interviews). The last word in line 5 is wrongly transcribed there as *enna*.

<sup>6</sup> Since, however, this clan is also acknowledged as the first or original clan of Lautem District, we surmise that any language acknowledged as being a remnant of pre-Fataluku times is automatically considered to be their property. As such, they are also acknowledged as the ‘owner’ of the ‘hidden’ Makuva language in Tutuala (Engelenhoven 2009a, In Press a).

the Makasai exonym *Dagada*.<sup>7</sup> The latter's alternative name is *Sokolori*, which refers to Northwest dialect of Fataluku that is spoken near the border of the Baucau district.

In the communication mentioned above, McWilliam provides a list of ten words that supports this hypothesis for Nisa even more. These are displayed in Table 9 with their Fataluku and Oirata equivalents. The latter is a closely related language spoken on the offshore island of Kisar in Southwest Maluku (Indonesia).

Table 9: McWilliam's ten Nisa words compared to Fataluku and Oirata

	Nisa	Fataluku	Oirata
father	(e) <i>pale</i>	<i>palu</i>	<i>ha</i>
mother	(e) <i>nale</i>	<i>nalu</i>	<i>na</i>
younger sibling	(ni) <i>no'o</i>	<i>noko</i>	<i>no'o</i>
older sibling	(ni) <i>kaka</i>	<i>kaka</i>	<i>ka</i>
small brothers	<i>no'o-no'oru</i>	<i>nokoru</i>	<i>no'o-no'o</i>
small knife	<i>voilulu</i>		
big knife	<i>nipa lo'or</i>	<i>hikari</i>	<i>ululu</i>
(small) baby	<i>mocon sala</i>	<i>hikari lafai</i>	<i>iha lo'or</i>
to make peace	<i>ni nororo</i>	<i>moco</i> (child)	<i>modo</i> (child)
to eat	(e) <i>mace</i>	<i>nita rau-rau</i> (reciprocally well) <i>mace</i>	<i>ne ro-ro</i> (speak well) <i>mede</i>

Although the wordlist is too short to conclude anything decisively, there seems to be an obvious lexical relation between the three languages. McWilliam's reference of the first ten cardinal numerals in Nisa fully coincides with the secret numerals in Fataluku that Gomes (1972:176, footnote 1) mentions. They are listed in Table 10 with their counterparts in Fataluku, Makalero, Makasai and Oirata. In the second row are added the numerals given by a member of the Uruha'a tau clan who was present during the interview with Ms. Parreira in 2007.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Meaning 'talk' (< Proto Makasai-Makalero-Fataluku-Oirata \**daga-daga*), compare Fataluku *ta'ata'a* 'speech'.

<sup>8</sup> Although the name of this person is known to the author it has not been given here since he wanted to remain anonymous.

Table 10: Cardinal numerals in 6 non-Austronesian of the Timor region

	Nisa	Uruha'a	Fataluku	Makalero	Makasai	Oirata
1	<i>Ukai</i>	<i>Kaiu</i>	<i>Ukani</i>	<i>U, Uunu</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>Auni</i>
2	<i>Kai-Rua</i>	<i>Coo</i>	<i>Ece</i>	<i>Loloi</i>	<i>Lola'e</i>	<i>Eye</i>
3	<i>Rua-Fitu</i>	<i>Etu</i>	<i>Utu'e</i>	<i>Lolitu</i>	<i>Lolitu</i>	<i>Utu</i>
4	<i>Naka-Fitu</i>	<i>Efa</i>	<i>Fate</i>	<i>Faata</i>	<i>Loloha</i>	<i>Pata</i>
5	<i>Oro-Naka</i>	<i>Eli</i>	<i>Lime</i>	<i>Lima</i>	<i>Lima</i>	<i>Lime</i>
6	<i>Tau-Naka</i>	<i>Ene</i>	<i>Neme</i>	<i>Dou(hu)</i>	<i>Daho</i>	<i>Neeme</i>
7	<i>Nunu-Muli</i>	<i>Tufi</i>	<i>Fitu</i>	<i>Fitu</i>	<i>Pitu</i>	<i>Pitu</i>
8	<i>Vata-Muli</i>	<i>Faka</i>	<i>Kafa</i>	<i>Afo</i>	<i>Apo</i>	<i>Kapa</i>
9	<i>Sere-Kai</i>	<i>Vasi</i>	<i>Siva</i>	<i>Siwa</i>	<i>Siwa</i>	<i>Siwa</i>
10	<i>Kua</i>	<i>Neta</i>	<i>Ta'ane</i>	<i>Ruru, Ruu</i>	<i>Ruru</i>	<i>Ta'an</i>

Although the Uruha'a ratu member insisted that they were from 'another lost language whose name is unknown', a closer look reveals that with the exception of '1' and possibly '2' they are reversed variants of the Fataluku numerals. This is most clear in the numerals from '7' through '9' where both syllables are simply metathesized. If we take in consideration that in the Central dialect in which the interview was conducted the glottal stop is usually effaced, then the same strategy was applied to '10' that is pronounced then as *tane*. The numbers '4' through '6' also metathesized their syllables after which they deleted the onset of the new first syllable (e.g. '4' Fataluku: *fate* > *tefa* > Uruha'a *efa*; '5' Fataluku: *lime* > *meli* > Uruha'a: *eli*; '6' Fataluku: *neme* > *mene* > Uruha'a: *ene*). '3' and '2' slightly divert from this strategy. Taking into account that the glottal stop is generally thrown off in the Central dialect, the original initial syllable of '3' has disappeared after metathesis: Fataluku *utu'e* > *eutu* > Uruha'a *etu*. The form for '2' seems unexpected in that displays metathesis of *\*oco* rather than Fataluku: *ece*: *\*oco* > Uruha'a: *coo*. The aberrant Uruha'a form of '1' *kaiu* can be explained as a metathesized form of Nisa *ukai* rather than Fataluku *ukani*.

Edegar da Conceição Savio (personal communication on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010) informs that the former guerilla fighters of FRETILIN (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*: Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) in Lautem used a 'reversed language' based on Fataluku. Obviously, the numerals provided by the Uruha'a ratu informant originated from this secret code and do not really come from 'another language'.

Also the Nisa numerals that McWilliams mentions seem to be part of a secret code, which Gomes (1972:196) explains as 'the archaic language' in Fataluku. However, a suspicious element in the Nisa numerals are *kai* (< Proto-Austronesian *\*kayu* 'wood') and *rua* (< Proto-Austronesian *\*DuSa* 'two'). From the lists of numerals in Hull (2002) it becomes clear that the four Austronesian dialects of Kairui, Waimaha, Midiki and Naueti in the districts of Manatuto, Baucau and Viqueque all feature a *kai* prefix on the numerals from '2' through '9' (for example Naueti *kairua* '2'). A quick glance on table 10 shows that all non-Austronesian languages in Timor region have original words for '1' through '3' and '10', but that the others are clearly

loaned from some Austronesian language (Engelenhoven 2009b). The only exception seems to be Makasai *daho* and Makalero *douh* for '6' where Fataluku (and thus Uruha'a) and Oirata have a derivative of Proto-Austronesian *\*enem*. The composition of the list of Nisa numerals is on the whole suspect in that a clear Austronesian derivative as *fitu* (< Proto-Austronesian *\*pitu* '7') appears in constructs meaning '3' and '4', whereas '7' proper is indicated by *nunu-muli*. Both *nunu* and *vata* (in '8') are Fataluku nouns referring to 'banyan' and 'coconut tree'. Similarly, the combination of Fataluku *sere* 'beach' and *kai* in '9' suggests that the Nisa list does not contain ordinary numbers but rather some kind of secretive code. Hull (2002) mentions both decimal and quinary counting systems for Timorese languages, but the Nisa system does not seem to fit either one of them.

Unlike *Melayu sini* and Serua does Nisa/Rusenu 'survive' only in a lullaby, in fixed phrases as in Table 9 and in names that are acknowledged as 'not being Fataluku'. Typical for dead languages in insular Southeast Asia is that any information about them is mystified. The Nisa numerals in Table 10 are closely linked to sorcery, whereas the information of the Uruha'a ratu informant was fake, either on purpose or by accident. Fact is that if there still is real knowledge on Nisa/Rusenu this will never be informed to 'outsiders'. As such only McWilliam's ten words and the lullaby sung by Ms. Parreira are the only evidence that this language ever existed.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

*Melayu sini*, Serua and Nisa/Rusenu represent three stages of language endangerment in insular Southeast Asia.

The case of *Melayu sini* concerns first and second language loss in a third language environment. Although this language is actually spoken 'in the Diaspora', outside insular Southeast Asia in, it represents endangerment as it is attested for a language like Javanese in Indonesia of which its many speakers may (about 35% of the total amount of Indonesians) suggest that it is rather in a safe condition. Whereas the small amount of speakers (less than 1% of the total amount of Dutch inhabitants) definitely influences the endangerment of *Melayu sini*, it is rather its mixed characteristics with Dutch grammar and lexicon that move away this language from an original Malay language. The fact that this language is used only in two generations and the negative perspective its speakers have on it causes that in the next generation *Melayu sini* is replaced by Dutch.

The case of Serua concerns loss of a first language in a second language environment. As in *Melayu sini* it represents a case of language change, albeit that it erodes completely instead of changing into a new structure as *Melayu sini*. Its verbal and nominal morphology is completely simplified because of which the alienable-inalienable distinction in possessive constructions is lost. Also, the speakers are no longer capable to provide full verbal paradigms and frequently replace indigenous terminology by Indonesian words. Like in *Melayu sini* it is confined to speech between the first and second generation and although its percentage of speakers seems safe on the sub district level it is still too small on the district level. An important difference with the latter language, however, is the strong commitment of its speakers to the survival of their language. Serua was used mainly in the ritual language in the TNS district before 2000 and Engelenhoven (2003) reports that the main wish of the speakers in 1996 was a dictionary that contained all lexical parallels of the ritual language. Nevertheless the structures of Serua and its close relative Nila changed and merged because of their mutual contact. Its function in the ritual language and the commitment of its speakers enables its survival through a revival project as are conducted for example by the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Program.

The case of Nisa/Rusenu concerns loss of a first language in a first language environment. This is an example of a language that recently became extinct. A special feature for the Fataluku speech community is that no distinction is made between the concepts of 'language' and 'speech'. In *Melayu sini* 'language', *bahasa* (from the Sanskrit *bhasa*, Labrousse 1985: 56) is distinguished from 'speech', *omong*. Both are referred to in Fataluku by means of a reduplication of 'speak', *luku-luku*, which term also encompasses sounds made by animals.<sup>9</sup> As such, a researcher may never know in first instance whether he is dealing with a unique language or a separate code within an existing language. The only remaining 'speaker' is not even a real speaker in that she only remembers the language through a lullaby of which she does not know the meaning. Typical for insular Southeast Asia and very salient in East Timor is the fact that linguistic memories of languages that are extinct or no longer in use are stored as sacred knowledge to be disseminated only to specifically elected people. Elsewhere (Engelenhoven In Press b) I explain that this has proven not to be a good strategy for the maintenance of oral traditions in Southwest Maluku. As a consequence of this feeble management, the last speaker does not even know anymore what the name is of her language. Its names Nisa and Rusenu are given by outsiders who may not even be concerned with the language itself. Evidence of its existence can only be provided by scientists who analyze the scanty material that remains.

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<sup>9</sup> Otherwise formulated, in Fataluku society animal sounds (especially of birds) are also considered to be languages. Svetlana Chlenova (personal communication May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010) informs that in Serua 'language' and 'talk' are referred to by *par-para* (a reduplication of 'to mean' in Leti (Jonker 1932)) and *o'omasna*, respectively, but in Nila both as *naomsa* (related to Leti *-naomsa* 'to use as a means' (Jonker Ibidem)). In Luangic-Kisaric languages a similar phenomenon exists where the word for 'language', '(human) voice' and '(animal) sound all derive from Proto-Austronesian *\*liqeR* 'throat'.

Serua and Nisa/Rusenu clearly exemplify that language – even if there is no special term in the language that refers to the concept of ‘language’- is considered by its speakers as a receptacle of traditional knowledge. The incapacity of the speakers to produce verbal art in any of the three languages confirms that endangerment of language entails endangerment of culture. Solid descriptions of endangered languages are therefore paramount and indispensable in any program that intends to call a halt to language endangerment, whether this be through purely stopping, averting or preventing endangerment, or through revitalizing languages.



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