

ISW Colloquium – Fall Semester 2024

11.11.2024 | 16:00-17:00 | UniTobler F 003

Adam J.R. Tallman (Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena): The sociolinguistic ecology of Idi-Agob multilingualism

Pahoturi river languages are linguistic family spoken in western province in the southfly area of Papua New Guinea. The literature reports that there are four or five Pahoturi river languages (Idi, Taeme, Agob, Ende, Em), perhaps forming a dialect continuum (Evans et al. 2019; Lindsey et al. 2023). Pahoturi communities display a high degree of multilingualism and multidialectalism. However, the multilingual competencies of speakers in the region have not been systematically studied. It has been claimed that widespread multilingualism is driven by a combination of linguistic exogamy and a tendency towards multilingual egalitarianism, the latter often described as an ideology where no language has greater social status than another. However, there are few high-resolution studies of social attitudes towards different speech varieties in the region, nor detailed studies of how kin networks correlate with multilingualism.

This talk provides a comparison of three Pahoturi river varieties in the communities of Sibidiri (Sibidiri Idi), Kaikmowang (Dhmiri Idi) and Buji (Agob) and contextualizes the findings in relation to the multilingual ecology of the region (kin networks, multilingualism, intermarriage and other contact activities). I consider the findings in relation to Evans' (2019) claim that languages in the Morehead district display 'divergence through contact' whereby languages in heavy contact diverge due to conscious cultivation of linguistic difference by the speakers (consider related concepts of 'neighbour opposition', 'esoterogeny'). At face value comparison between the three varieties does not support Evans' claim as linguistic difference/convergence seems to straightforwardly reflect geographic proximity. A closer look reveals a more complex situation as there is proportionally more intermarriage between Sibidiri and Buji, and Idi-Agob multilingualism is at least as prevalent in Sibidiri as it is in Dhmiri. I argue that understanding the relationship between contact and linguistic diversity requires a more high-resolution ethnographic knowledge of the sociocultural conduits of linguistic contact and explicit documentation of multilingual competencies combined with documentation of kin relations and linguistic autobiographies. I also discuss the challenges and advantages of conducting sociolinguistic language documentation (Childs et al. 2014; Di Carlo 2023; Di Carlo et al. 2021; Di Carlo & Good 2023; Good 2022) in relation to the situation in Sibidiri, Kaikmowang and Buji.

References

- Childs, T., Good, J., & Mitchell, A. (2014). Beyond the Ancestral Code: towards model for sociolinguistic language documentation. *Language Documentation & Conservation*, 8, 168-191.
- Di Carlo, P. (2023). Reappraising survey tools in the study of multilingualism. Lessons from contexts of small-scale multilingualism. *Journal of Language Contact*, 15, 376-403.
- Di Carlo, P., & Good, J. (2023). Language contact or linguistic micro-engineering? Feature pools, social semiosis, and intentional language change in the Cameroonian Grassfields. *Linguistic Typology at the Crossroads*, 3(1), 72-125.
- Di Carlo, P., Diba, R. A., & Good, J. (2021). Towards a coherent methodology for the documentation of small-scale multilingualism: Dealing with speech data. *International journal of Bilingualism*, 25(4), 860-877.
- Evans, N. (2012). Even more diverse than we had thought: The multiplicity of Trans-Fly languages. (N. Evans, & M. Klamer, Edits.) *Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 5*, 109-149.
- Evans, N. (2018). The dynamics of language diversity. En *The Dynamics of Language* (Plenary and focus lectures from the 20th international congress of linguists) (págs. 12-35). Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Evans, N. (2019). Linguistic divergence under contact. En *Histoical Linguistics 2015: Selection papers from the 22nd ICHL, Naples 27-31, July 2015* (págs. 563-592). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Good, J. (2022). Adapting methods of language documentation to multilingual settings. *Journal of Language Contact*, 15, 341-375.
- Lindsey, K. L., Schokkin, D., & Wu, N. (2023). The Pahoturi River language family, with special reference to its verbal puzzles. *Linguistic Typology*, 27(3), 667-731.