

Language probably extinct: ABAGA [abg]

Number of speakers: 5 (1994).

Abaga was spoken in a small group of villages east of Goroka in Eastern Highlands province, Papua New Guinea. It was found to share 25 – 30% basic vocabulary cognates with Kamano, a language of the Kainantu-Goroka branch of the Trans New Guinea phylum. Nevertheless features of the verb morphology and other basic vocabulary led to it being classified as typologically one of the Finisterre-Huon languages. Abaga seems to have originally been a Finisterre language whose speakers migrated south into the Kamano language area and became subject to Kamano influence (McElhanon 1975: 543).

Abaga is now probably extinct. When described in 1975, the language was said to be spoken “by about 150 or so people.” However, the speakers lived in Kamano villages. McElhanon commented, “Only about half a dozen very old men are monolingual, all others are bilingual Abaga and Kamano speakers, and Abaga appears to be rapidly receding before Kamano.” The total number of speakers was given as five in 1994 (*Ethnologue* 2005, original source unknown). Current SIL personnel with experience of the region doubt that there are any speakers alive now (Dunc Pfantz and Rich Mattocks, personal communications, Feb 2007).

Language Resources

Wordlists taken 1961 and 1967 (190 items), held in SIL Technical Library, Ukarumpa, PNG.

References:

Ethnologue (15th edition). 2005. Ed. Raymond G. Gordon. Dallas: SIL International.

<http://www.ethnologue.com/>

McElhanon, Kenneth A. 1975. North Eastern Trans-New Guinea phylum languages. In Stephen A. Wurm, ed. *Papuan languages and the New Guinea linguistic scene*. Vol 1 (Pacific Linguistics C-38). 527-567. Canberra: Australian National University.