

Endangered languages listing: GWEDA [grw]

Number of speakers: 26; total population of language area: 308 (2001).

Gweda (Garuwahi) is only spoken in the village of Garuwahi, which is situated on the north coast of the East Cape peninsula, Milne Bay province, Papua New Guinea. Gweda belongs to the Taupota branch of the Oceanic languages, part of the Austronesian family (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002).¹ The language has SOV structure with postpositions.

A 2001 SIL survey (Alemán 2001) found that Gweda was highly endangered and losing ground. Of 308 villagers, only twenty-six spoke the language. Most language use in Garuwahi village was in the neighbouring languages Taupota and Tawala. Villagers said that they valued their language and hoped it would be spoken in twenty years' time, but this was not matched by observed behaviour. On this basis, Gweda must be classified as highly endangered (refer comments by Grimes 2002).

However, it is still possible that Gweda will be revitalised. One positive indicator was that usage was not confined to the elderly at the time of survey. Ten speakers (38%) were under forty, and two speakers were under twenty. Catherine Easton (personal communication, 2006) reports that a recent program to revitalise the language in the elementary school appears to be having a positive effect. Schoolchildren have reportedly been learning the language, and teaching it to their parents. Whether this will have a long-term effect remains to be seen.

Language Resources

Wordlists compiled in 1973,1997 (comparative wordlists for Gweda, Taupota and Wedau, 190 entries) and 2001 (Gweda and Taupota only): held in SIL technical library, Ukarumpa, PNG.

References:

Alemán, Laura M. 2001. Sociolinguistic survey of the Taupota [TPA] and Gweda [GRW] languages, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. Unpublished manuscript. Ukarumpa: SIL.

Ethnologue (15th edition). 2005. Ed. Raymond G. Gordon. Dallas: SIL International.
<http://www.ethnologue.com/>

Grimes, Barbara F. 2002. Global language viability: causes, symptoms and cures for endangered languages. <http://www.sil.org/sociolx/ndg-lg-grimes.html>

Lynch, John, Malcolm Ross and Terry Crowley. 2002. *The Oceanic languages*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

¹ Gweda [grw] should not be confused with Umanakaina [gdn], which is also known as Gweda or Gwedena. Umanakaina is also located in Milne Bay province, but is a Dagan language belonging to the Trans New Guinea phylum.