

## Endangered languages listing: TENIS [tns]

Number of speakers: 30 (2000 estimate); population of language area: 66 (2000 census), plus unknown number of Tench Islanders living in Kavieng.

Tenis (or Tench) is spoken on Tench Island, located about 130 km north of New Ireland and about 100 km east of Mussau. Together with Mussau-Emira, it is one of two members of the St Matthias subgroup of languages of the Oceanic group within the larger Austronesian family. There is very little data on Tennis, but it appears to be quite closely related to Mussau-Emira. Ross notes that the St Matthias languages are quite important, because they appear to be conservative within the Oceanic group (Ross 2002; Beaumont 1976).

The status of the language is unknown; however there are indications it is endangered. Lithgow and Claasen gave a total of 49 speakers of the language in 1968 (cited by Beaumont 1972). The Tench people are said to have made a conscious decision to marry outside their language group, since it was so small, and so all marriages these days are mixed. Additionally, children from Tench Island attend schools on Mussau and Emira islands, and so are acquainted with the Mussau-Emira language. Many of the Tench Island people live in Kavieng, typically in the Mussau-Emira settlements in the town.

There are still native speakers of Tennis (as of September 2006), but all speakers living in Kavieng except for a very old man claimed to have a poor grasp of the language. Any research on the language could involve speakers living in Kavieng, but would also require fieldwork on Tench Island. Research contacts can be supplied by SIL.

(Much of the foregoing is from John Brownie, personal communication).

### **Language Resources**

None for Tennis.

### **References:**

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