

Dialect Survey

Nahu Language Madang Province

Ethnologue Code: NCA

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(Data collected by Paul Minter between June 1992 and April 1998)

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Location

The language under discussion in this paper is spoken by at least 5400 people (1981 census figure) spread over the northern and southern slopes of the Finisterre Mountains in Madang Province. The people who live along the Nahu (Gusap) river on the southern side call the language "Nahu." Those who live along the Kipuro (Yanganon) and Kasang (Mot) rivers on the northern side call the language "Do." For the purposes of this paper the name "Nahu" will be used throughout.

The language area extends along both sides of the Nahu valley from where the Nahu River enters the Ramu valley northward toward the headwaters and then across the mountains and down toward the coast. There are no villages above 2200 meters elevation on the southern side, leaving basically uninhabited forest from there across the main ridge line (which reaches 3750 meters) down to the first village on the northern side at about 1000 meters. From that elevation the area extends along both sides of the Yanganon and Mot rivers down the mountains to approximately 350 meters above sea level.

The area is bounded on the west by the Rawa (southern)/ Karo (northern) language, on the north by Ngaing, on the east by Nankina (northern) and Ufi (southern) and on the south by Wasembo. Within this contiguous area there are three geographic sub-areas: Nahu 1 at the headwaters of the Nahu river, Nahu 2 closer to the Ramu valley, and the Rai Coast. There are significant communities of Nahu speakers in Lae, Pt. Moresby, Ramu Sugar and Madang but there are no available population figures.

In general the people will identify three groupings of speakers which cohere with the above-mentioned geographic areas. The population is roughly divided across the mountains (there are no current census figures to work with) and roughly divided on the southern side between Nahu 1 and 2.

On the southern side the closest urban center is found at Ramu Sugar and is accessible from the Nahu 2 area by foot trails leading to the Madang-Lae highway, a trip taking from 2 to 6 hours. The Nahu 1 area is more remote, being accessible only by foot trail and light aircraft. A trip by foot takes from 1 to 2 days and before the advent of air travel people would often walk out, buy supplies and/or visit relatives in the towns, then walk back up. The physical toll, particularly on the women who carried the bulk of the cargo, was high.

With an airstrip in the Nahu 1 area it is now possible to get to the Ramu Valley (at the Gusap airstrip) in about 15 minutes. From there PMVs are accessible to go to Ramu/Madang/Lae/the highlands. While much more convenient, limited space and high cost keep traffic to a minimum. People, sometimes whole families, will still walk out if the plane's schedule does not fit theirs, or in order to buy supplies to be brought up on the plane when it does come.

On the northern side an unused vehicle road leads down from the lowest village along the ridge line between the two rivers to meet a currently used road which terminates at the edge of the language area. This is a fairly easy walk which takes about 3 hours. From the terminus many people will continue to walk another 2 hours to Biliau to meet a ship, or perhaps get a car to go to Saidor, the closest urban center.

Methodology

The data for this paper was gathered during several walking surveys of the various areas. Standard SIL wordlists were taken in 20 villages, approximately 80% of all the villages in the language group. The respondents were not necessarily a representative selection of the population, a preponderance being men in their 20's - 40's. But some were from groups of people across a wide age spectrum including women. There were no women who individually supplied a word list. The villages were those located along the central north-south axis of the area, with only some along the periphery.

This is an admittedly limited sampling of data, but it is generally representative of the language group as a whole. Where the population is homogenous, that is, all the members of a village derive from that village, vernacular use is uniform across age and sex boundaries. Where there has been intermarriage with other villages there has been some admixture of dialect usage, with the women from other villages retaining to some extent their own distinctive language characteristics. However, because of the universalist nature of the dialect situation (see below), this does not materially affect understanding on the part of anyone.

At the periphery of the area there seems to be a heightened awareness of the neighboring languages, but not borrowings per se. People in those border villages are more likely to be bilingual.

Degree and Nature of Linguistic Differences within the Language Community

There is a certain range of lexical variation among the various villages which seem to indicate speaker preference more than lexicon. 95% of the variable words are included in the whole lexical corpus available in all the areas. However, each village tends to use different selections of the possibilities. These offer no easy divisions of the language area, since the subsets which are dominant do not follow clear lines. However, the villages on the Rai Coast tend to use a lexicon roughly 86% similar to those on the Nahu side. Those words which are dissimilar have no necessary phonological connection to each other. Some categories of words, such as those having to do with the sea, have been lost to those living on the inland side of the mountains.

The regular phonological differences are slight. There is a tendency among villages on the Rai Coast as well as the village of Sewe on the Nahu side to pronounce the word for 'one' with a /k^h/ rather than /k/.

There are no observed differences in grammatical or morphological structures.

The anecdotal boundaries, both of the language group as a whole and of the dialect groupings (such as they are) seem to be an accurate indication of the true situation. People from any of the geographic areas have no difficulty understanding those of any other area. Those words which are different in usage are generally known to be a part of the whole lexicon.

Degree and Nature of Social Differences within the Language Community

The members of the Nahu language group, while divided among various clans, do not compete in the usual sense along those lines. The family groups are basically free to join or not join with other family groups in marriage or common work. What competition there is comes from inter-village rivalries, although these are fairly mild. One village may decide not to join in with a group project or other activity. There may be hard feelings because of real or perceived injustices at the hands of another village. There has been one case of a family erecting a sign along a main trail which defined their ground and forbade any other families to leave the trail and go into that area.

No one village or geographical area has more apparent prestige than another. Each village tends to hold itself in slightly higher esteem than any other place. Each village considers that the way they speak is superior to that of any other village, because they speak the true language; everyone else has changed it a bit. So one village may say /uyare/ as opposed to /iyare/ and feel that theirs is the correct way. This however only applies to a small number of words in any given village. Children will learn the entire lexicon, that is, all the names for any given item, but tend to speak the subset of the village they grow up in. Because of a period of heavy earthquake activity in 1993, there has been a bit of reshuffling of populations. Those adults and young people who have ended up in other villages tend to retain their particular idiosyncratic lexicon. Those children born to the new settlers will tend to use the dialect of the new village.

People who travel between the geographic sections will seemingly speak with their own distinctive dialect/lexical subset. People who have spent time outside the language area in town, are more likely to use Tok Pisin in their interactions with other villagers when they return. Even if they speak the vernacular there is more interspersion of Tok Pisin in their speech. Christmas is a time of travel inwards to the home area for many town dwellers. Often the children who have been born outside the area will come back not knowing much or any vernacular. If they return for any great length of time they will generally learn to speak Nahu fairly quickly. There is little intermarriage outside the language group, except for those who are more-or-less permanently resettled outside the area.

A speaker is readily identifiable as a resident of a particular village, at least amongst the four main villages in the Nahu 1 area. And speakers from either the Rai Coast or Nahu 2 are identifiable as such. This is apparently as much phonological as lexical, but it is hard to pin down just what the differences are. It might be related to style of delivery. This could create some problems with eventual acceptance of published materials. The work currently being done is generally accepted by those in the Nahu 1 area. Since the translator did initial language learning in Moro village, the Moro style is understood to be the general style of translated material. Some efforts have been made to accommodate any expressed reservations of lexical choice by any of the other villages in the same area. What will need to be done to

satisfy those in other areas remains to be seen. For the present the Nahu 1 area will be the focus and possible adaptations for other areas left till the future.

Effect of Lingua Franca, Church Language and Neighboring Languages

The Nahu 1 language area, since it is more remote and less accessible than the other areas, is linguistically fairly homogeneous, with little intermarriage outside the language area. The Nahu 2 and Rai Coast areas have more intermarriage with neighboring groups. In the Nahu 1 area nearly everyone is a fluent vernacular speaker. Nahu is the dominant language in all domains except in some aspects of worship in church (e.g. reading of the liturgy in Tok Pisin) or in interactions with outsiders. This pattern is true of the other two areas as well.

In church there are at least two and sometimes three languages used. Amongst the older population there will be songs and/or liturgy conducted in Kâte, a language of the Finschhafen area which was introduced by the first evangelists. Many who were then young children attended village schools where they learned to read Kâte and became familiar with the song book and the liturgy. In the last fifteen years these village schools have died out and the population under the age of 25 in general is ignorant of Kâte.

Those who are about 50 years old or younger will generally know Tok Pisin, although there are many women in this age group who do not. Tok Pisin is used for all interactions with outsiders, whether during trips to town, or should an outsider enter the area. Tok Pisin has become the dominant language of worship. Until the last few years all sermons and prayers were conducted in Tok Pisin. In some Lutheran churches there was liturgy in Kâte at times, and some singing in Kâte. In the other churches it was all in Tok Pisin. Among the congregations of newer denominations in the area all aspects were in Tok Pisin.

Among all groups this has begun to change with more and more parts being conducted in the vernacular. Only the liturgy has had no inroads made by the local language.

There are people in all areas who are conversant to some extent with the surrounding languages, although probably no one would describe themselves as fluent. On the southern slopes some older people can understand spoken Rawa. On the northern slopes some older ones can understand Ngaing or Karo. But there is always a strong distinction held by Nahu speakers between themselves and any other language. There is a pride of culture which keeps the vernacular strong in all the geographic areas and therefore the knowledge of these other languages do no seem to affect their idiolects.

Tok Pisin is seen as a necessary tool for anyone to have. Those who have found work elsewhere have had to learn it and have taught it to their children. But it seems that the vernacular is still the predominant language for the domains of family life, local work, play, arguments, etc. At one time the teachers in the Nahu 1 community school chided the parents of new students, telling them they had to do a better job of teaching their kids Tok Pisin in order to make the transition into school easier. Those in the community schools are learning English, but as there is very little outlet for its use in the area it is seldom heard. Kâte has almost died out, certainly amongst the younger population. These last two languages hold some prestige value, but only when there is an occasion to actually use it in speech. Then the one who knows a bit of that language will step forward and make use of it. Otherwise, there is not much advantage gained by knowing it.

As a largely endogamous group the only real use for Tok Pisin is for the liturgy and Bible used in church, for contact by radio or personally with government, or for interactions with other people in town or on the job. Those villages more on the periphery will more likely find a need for Tok Pisin. Those in the center may go for long stretches of time without the necessity of speaking anything but Nahu. The middle-aged men and young boys and girls are more likely to know it than older men and women or middle-aged women.

Where there are villages on the periphery of the group they will more likely have occasion to interact with surrounding languages. These might happen to some extent in those languages, but more likely in Tok Pisin, since the knowledge of that other language is mostly limited to understanding it, not speaking it. There are at least two villages which are seen as villages of mixed language. One village is on the southwestern edge of the area and one on the northwestern edge. They both have a sizable population which has intermarried with Rawa/Karo speakers (two dialects of the same language which is divided by the spine of the mountains). In the northern village reportedly the children of these marriages tend to mix

quite a bit of the other language into their speech. In both the dialect situation is seen as being unique to those two villages.

The inclusion of loan words and spellings is one of some debate. Many words have come into the ecclesiastic jargon from Kâte, words which have no ready equivalent in Nahu. Thus they occupy a place all their own. These include the name for God, names for certain days, and formerly unknown artifacts from the Bible. Over time they have become so ingrained that only a few remember where they came from. This has happened to some extent with Tok Pisin as well, particularly for unknown items which are basically transliterated in the Tok Pisin Buk Baibel.

In the last few years there have been some expressed desires to try to use only Nahu terms for many of these items. Many terms which came in with Kâte have ready equivalents which are still in use but not well-known anymore. These have been accommodated in translated materials. Other terms, especially ecclesiastical terms, are harder to reproduce but there seems to be a desire to do so on the part of particularly the older people. The younger people are more at ease with borrowed terms from Tok Pisin, especially if the only vernacular equivalent would be an involved phrase. In some cases, such as anything nautical or having to do with sea creatures, those on the inland side cannot remember the vernacular term and quite readily use the Tok Pisin, if they know it.

Most names are adapted phonologically to Nahu and their appropriate spelling is accepted. Other names are pronounced according to Tok Pisin phonology and their reproduction in Nahu is confusing. There is no apparent preference for either method. Each name has to be taken on its own merits.

Language Use by Age and Sex

	Nahu S/U	Tok Pisin S/U	Kâte S/U	English S/U	Rawa S/U	Ngaing S/U	Karo S/U
Males							
<15	100 / 100	80 / 90	0 / 0	5 / 30	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
15-25	100 / 100	100 / 100	0 / 0	5 / 40	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
25-45	100 / 100	100 / 100	30 / 30	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
>45	100 / 100	50 / 80	70 / 70	0 / 0	10 / 30	10 / 30	10 / 30
Females							
<15	100 / 100	80 / 90	0 / 0	5 / 30	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
15-25	100 / 100	100 / 100	0 / 0	5 / 40	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
25-45	100 / 100	80 / 80	30 / 30	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
>45	100 / 100	50 / 80	70 / 70	0 / 0	10 / 30	10 / 30	10 / 30

Key: S/U - Speak/Understand all expressed as percentages

Language Work Already Done

The only linguistic work to date has been done by SIL workers. Colin and Dee Murphy worked in the Nahu 1 area from 1985 to 1992. They produced an Anthropology Background Study and Organized Phonology Data paper, both in 1990. They also produced an alphabet book and one vernacular story booklet, *The Hands and Legs Story*.

Paul and Jennie Minter have been working in the same area since 1992. They have produced a Grammar Essentials paper; several small booklets containing stories from a writer's workshop held by the Murphys in 1990, all without titles and in very small quantities; a book entitled **Murí Tero**, the book of Genesis in Nahu, published in 1998; 16 months of Sunday readings following the Lutheran Lectionary, distributed in small quantities to each of the Lutheran churches in the Nahu 1 area; a set of Big Books which are being used in a newly begun vernacular school held in the village of Sewe.

The people have been very responsive to the vernacular materials. Approximately 100 copies of Genesis were sold at its dedication in March 1998. Those who hear the Sunday readings are quietly excited to have it read in church each Sunday. The practice of reading their own language is still new and those who can confidently handle written Nahu are few. But they are making the effort to use it nevertheless.

Sunday readings are continuing to be produced by the Minters and a team of translators. These readings are forming the rough draft basis for the complete New Testament as well as an anticipated collection of Old Testament selections for the lectionary.

Churches and Missions

The group has historically been Lutheran - the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea. This has changed in the last fifteen years or so as small denominations have been established. Currently there are Baptist, Church of Christ, and Evangelical Brotherhood congregations. These have not been founded by outsiders, but by Nahu people who have gone out to town, developed a relationship with another denomination, and brought it back. All three other denominations are locally administered and supported. Their relative numbers have not changed dramatically over the years.

There has been conflict between the traditional Lutheran structure and the new groups which has periodically flared up and then died down. At present there is a general atmosphere of cooperation, at least in the Nahu 1 area. Of the three newer groups, the Church of Christ is the largest on the southern slopes and has the most influence on the church as a whole. On the northern slopes it is the Baptists who have the influence, if any, with the main group.

Each of these groups is receptive to the use of the vernacular in church, particularly the smaller denominations. The Lutheran church on the southern side at the moment has a Rawa speaker as pastor, but he is endeavoring to learn Nahu and is willing to have the Nahu text read. On the northern slopes the pastor is a vernacular speaker and is also willing to use the vernacular.

The current team of translators includes people from the Lutheran, Baptist and Church of Christ groups. There are people from the Lutheran and Church of Christ groups who make up a steering committee. The new school which was just begun includes teachers from both the Lutheran and Evangelical Brotherhood Churches. These all demonstrate a real willingness on the part of all the denominations to work together to develop vernacular materials.

Conclusion

The Nahu language seems to be a fairly homogeneous group, with only lexical differences between villages. There would not seem to be any necessary orthographic differences. The only phonological alternation can be easily accommodated with a single grapheme. There are no apparent prestigious areas, every village seeing themselves as the center of the language. It has been decided elsewhere, because of physical limitations on the translation team, that the primary work will proceed in the Nahu 1 area. As materials are produced they will be sent to the other two areas as well for their inspection and use. If they are happy with the results then enough New Testaments will be produced for everyone. If, however, there is opposition to accepting the Nahu 1 selection of lexicon, then after the New Testament is completed in the Nahu 1 area, avenues will be pursued to generate area specific translations.

Appendix

Sample Data (not necessarily indicative of the language usage as a whole)

	Nahu 2 Butemu village	Nahu 1 Moro village	Rai Coast Matoko village
(my) hair	'hu.ne	'hu.ne	'hu.ne
(my) head	k ^h ɛm.'ba.ne	k ^h ɛm.'ba.ne	k ^h ɛm.'ba.ne
(my) mouth	maŋ.'go.ne	maŋ.'go.ne	maŋ.'go.ne
(my) nose	u.'mu.ne	u.'mu.ne	u.'mu.ne
(my) eye	to.'ŋɛ.ne	to.'ŋɛ.ne	to.'ŋɛ.ne
(my) neck	pu.'ŋɛ.ne	pu.'ŋɛ.ne	pu.'ŋɛ.ne
(my) belly	qa.'u.ne	qa.'hu.ne	qa.'u.ne
(my) skin	ko.'wɛ.ne	ko.'wɛ.ne	ko.'wɛ.ne
(my) knee	po.'tō.ŋɛ	po.'tō.ŋɛ	po.'to.ne
man	u.ni	u.ni	u.ni
woman	'pa.re	'pa.re	'pa.re
bird	nū	nū	nū
dog	'i.sa	o.'pi.ŋo	ã
road	'o.re	k ^h e	k ^h e
stone	'mi.pu	'mi.pu	'won.do
big	pa.'rã.mi	pa.'rã.mi	pa.'rã.mi
small	to.'mō. ⁿ ta	to.'mō. ⁿ ta	to.'mō. ⁿ ta
fire	'ke.wã	'ke.wã	te
smoke	'wo.ro.'tu.tu	,pu.ka.'tu.tu	,pu.ka.'tu.tu
ashes	nom.'bo	nom.'bo	nom.'bo
(my) ear	ku.sum.'bo.ne	ku.sum.'bo.ne	ku.sum.'bo.ne
(my) tongue	mi.'pi.ne	mi.'pi.ne	mi.'pi.ne
(my) tooth	mɛ.'to.ne	mɛ.'to.ne	mɛ.'to.ne
breast	'su.su	'su.su	'su.su
(my) hand	kan.'dɛ.ne	kan.'dɛ.ne	kan.'dɛ.ne
(my) foot	'k ^h ɛ.ne	'k ^h ɛ.ne	'k ^h ɛ.ne
sun	o.'ki.so	'ko.sa	u.'si
moon	'kom.bo	'kom.bo	'kom.bo
star	'tu.tu	'tu.tu	'tu.tu
cloud	ko.'po.rē	ko.'po.rē	ko.'po.rē
water	'so.no	'so.no	'so.no
tree	'ke.wã	'ke.wã	te
he comes	ma.'hɛ.te	ma.'hɛ.te	ma.'hɛ.te
one	ka.'na.ta	ka.'na.ta	k ^w a.'na.na
two	ɪ.'ri.sa	ɪ.'ri.sa	ɪ.'ri.sa
father	'a.wa	'a.wa	'a.wa
mother	nã	nã	nã
pig	po	po	po

house	'pa.se	ya	ya
wind	ma.'tũ	ma.'tũ	ma.'tũ
new	'ke.ta	'ke.ta	kun.'di.yõ
many	'wa.ta	'wa.ta	pa.'rã
five	kan.'dɛ.ka	kan.'dɛ.ka	kan.'dɛ.kʷa

Addendum

1. The whole corpus of data would tend to bear out my “rough” estimates of 90% lexical similarity. The statement on page 2 which was referred to as saying there is 95% lexical similarity in fact refers to the composition of the lexical corpus, not similarity of structure. I state that “95% of the *variable words* [i.e. those words which name the same referent in the various areas] are included in the whole lexical corpus available in all the areas.” The percentages which were obtained from the sample data I supplied at random are certainly in the 90% range (84% and 88%), however I have adjusted the statement in the body of the report to read 86%.

2. Concerning the labialized voiceless velar stop, it does occur in one village on the Nahu 1 side. But it really is only in the morpheme /ka/ or /kwa/ ‘one’. The other example was the word /kandeka/ or /kandekwa/ ‘five’ which is a static suffixed form composed of /kande/ ‘hand’ and /ka/ or /kwa/ ‘one’. There is no other extant evidence for labialization. The answer to question 3.e. is found on page 2, “The anecdotal boundaries, both of the language group as a whole and of the dialect groupings (such as they are) seem to be an accurate indication of the true situation.”

3. The decision of the previous team to allocate in Nahu 1 is not completely known to me. There had never been a survey on the Rai Coast side until I was there in 1992. The particular reason for initially locating in the village of Moro was as much because of accessibility to other villages as anything else. We simply moved into the existing house in Moro without too much contemplation of where would be the “best” location in terms of dialects.

I hope this answers the questions about the paper.