

Au Dialect Survey Report

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1. Introduction

The people who speak the Au language live in the Lumi District of the West Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea. They live in the Au East and Au West census division and are administered by Yenkok, the Sub-district headquarters. The language area is bounded by the Yelbu River to the West, the Kikar River to the North, the Sepik swamps to the South, and the Anguganak Mountain Bluff to the East. The terrain is characterized by abrupt rises upon which the people build their hamlets.

The geographical features are typical of the West Sepik Province. The land is heavily forested and the people historically clustered themselves on the tops of the many ridges that dot the foothills of the Torricelli Mountains. The average rainfall varies from 3,000mm to over 7,000mm each year. Sago is the basic staple and grows abundantly in the forests. The primary forests are located South of the major villages of the language, and this is where all the game animals abound.

According to the most recent figures given out by the national census, there are some 4,200 Au speakers living in 19 villages, with some 600 of these absent, living in towns or in various squatter settlements in the East and West Sepik Provinces.

1.1 Migration and Dialects

According to local tradition (oral), several clans migrated into the area during pre-contact periods ranging as far back as nine (9) generations ago. The clans of Yaap, Maru/siauken and the Bulwa/Mnauwe clans trace their origin from Magleri and Abrau villages, located just North of the Sepik River. The stories purport to a great catastrophe in the form of a flood. The survivors, afraid of a re-occurrence, travelled North and settled in the area now known as Bulwa. Subsequent quarrelling led to a further division of this group. Part of these people migrated North again, some going to the Lumi area (settling in Seina, Telote and

Tabali villages of the Olo language) and the others went to Ya Sein+k, Anguganak, and Yemm villages in the Au language area.

Other clans migrated from the North (where the Y+l language is located) coming South to live. One story describes three brothers who migrated because they massacred a group of children after they had cruelly abused their blind father. They fled to the villages of Wes+n, Ya Wita and Tumentonik in the Au language.

The language spoken at Bulwa is Karawa and at Abrau is Awun. Hagleri village is part of the Amal language. To the North of the Au, Y+l and Elkei are spoken. One would suppose there would be a great deal of overlap in lexical items with past migration patterns. There are, however, little traces of large lexical incorporation into the Au language. According to Laycocks survey (Laycock 1967: pp48-49) there is very little percentage of shared vocabulary among these languages all belonging to the Torricelli Phylum. They do however share more general features which distinguish these languages from other Sepik languages. These include gender systems, lack of morphological tense indication in verbs, and by irregular morphological plurals. Phonologically, they are characterized by three positions of articulation, lack of distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants. The phones (l) and (n) frequently are a single phoneme.

2. Conducting the Survey

This dialect survey was conducted under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics between September and December 1980. The standard SIL word list was used in conducting the survey, and each village was asked to complete all the items. This was done to avoid using words known to be different in the compilation of a shortened list. The SIL list was taken from the Swadesh word list along with words used by S.A.Wurm in his survey in the INC highlands, and other words taken from various lists.

The people mentioned to us that other dialects spoken the word "what" differently than they did, so this was used as a tentative criterion for distinguishing between the

various groups. In living among the speakers for twelve (12) years, a list of word differences was compiled, and this also became another criterion by which we were able to verify our conclusions.

Testing for mutual intelligibility was done only in two dialects, the Western and The Central Dialect. There seemed to be no point in re-testing those whose villages were in the Eastern Dialect (which is a different dialect than Tumentonik) as most of the children attend the Anguganak and Yemmu primary school and can converse with the children of the Central Dialect quite fluently. Texts were taken from the Central Dialect (Tumentonik) and played at the Western Dialect, and stories recorded there were tested at Tumentonik. We found that among the adults who had travelled widely in the language area, the stories were easily understood. But among adults who did not do much travelling, and among children, the stories were somewhat difficult for them to understand. This was caused by the variant lexical items used to express the same semantic concept. Yet few of these variant items appear on the standard SIL word lists.

In using the SIL standard word list, it quickly became apparent that there would only be two major dialects based on lexiostatistical counting procedures- the Eastern and Western Dialects. The people themselves, however, recognize three major groupings, and have territorial boundaries delineated along these features. People of the same dialect groupings tend to band together for war and do not inter-marry heavily. They co-operate in group social functions (garden planting, singsings, etc.) which tends to maintain the dialect status quo.

Therefore, it became apparent to further divide the Eastern Dialect it was necessary to draw upon lexical items outside of the word list. This was done through a compilation of stories which were taken in different villages. The stories were identical in the two dialects in question, and when the results were compiled, it accorded with what the people felt to be accurate-the fact that there were indeed three major dialects, not two. The differences were added to the few lexical items

that differed, and a more realistic picture was seen as to how divergent the dialects were.

Another criterion used to establish dialects was the ability of the speakers to read fluently from the Central Dialect. When the differences were too great for easy reading, another dialect was posited. Some sub-dialect groupings showed up on the basis of similarities between neighboring villages, and these findings were recorded for this paper as well.

There is quite a lot of verbal communication across dialect boundaries, and the speakers generally understand one another. The speakers will use their own dialect when speaking to others, and the person responding will speak in his own dialect as well. Occasionally there will be misunderstanding and in such cases, the speaker may naturally revert to "tok Pisin" to clarify what he had previously said.

In the process of conducting the survey, it was noticed that there many shifts in the language. The younger men are now tending to use "Tok Pisin" freely in total substitution of the language. This will occur for large stretches of speech. Upon completion of the breath segment, they will again revert to Au, and will do so until other technical terms re-occur, at which point the process will be repeated. "Tok Pisin" has made some dramatic changes in the way Au is spoken and even though this is true, the grammatical features seem to remain stable. The major shift is in the replacement of lexical items. This tends to level dialect distinctions among the younger speakers of the language. The older speakers, however, tend to be more conservative and do not incorporate so much Tok Pisin into their speech.

3. Dialects of Au

On the basis of this survey, and on previous knowledge acquired from residence in Tuzentoni village, three (3) dialects are posited. The dialects were determined on the basis of differences in (1) vocabulary, (2) grammatical affixation, (3) numerals, (4) interrogatives, and (5) some vowel sequences which occurred in the vocabulary. The three dialects, their population and location are listed below.

3.1 Eastern Dialect

This dialect is spoken by 2,200 people living in ten (10) villages located both East and West of the Opan River. These villages are: (East) Brugap, Yenkok, Yenkok W+nak (Anguganak), Winaluk; (West) W+l+k+m, Piem, Yemm, Wititai, Witweis, Wes+n.

3.2 Central Dialect

This dialect is spoken by 1,600 people living in six (6) villages located in the Au West Census division. These villages are: Tumenton+k, Puank, (Witwaunek, Ya Sein+k, Witmenkep, Withan, and Mesi hamlets), Muwain, Pink+n, Lak+n wit, N+p+k.

3.3 Western Dialect

This dialect is spoken by 400 people living in three (3) villages located at the extreme Western end of the Au language. They are all bounded by the Merere (or Yelbu) River, which divides the Elkei language from Au. These three villages are: H+maun (or War+n), Yutepi, Weteili.

4. Findings

4.1 Phonology

Au phonemes are as follows:

p, t, k, m, n, h /ə/, s, r, w, y, : a, e / /, ɛ, i, u, o

The same phonemes appear to be in use over the whole language area, but there are a couple of variations.

1. All the Eastern Dialect speakers use /a/ or /aa/ in the same place where the Central Dialect speakers use /a?a/. It has been noted that many of the Western Dialect speakers also use /a?a/ in the same lexical items. A summary of this distinction along with a discussion will follow point 3.
2. The Eastern Dialect speakers tend to use the /l/ word medially and finally, whereas the Central Dialect speakers tend to use the /n/ more frequently in the same environment.

3. Consonant Clusters

The Western Dialect does not allow for the following sequences:

/nm/. /nk/. /mk/. /sp/

Examples are:

<u>Eastern Dialect</u>		<u>Central Dialect</u>		<u>Western Dialect</u>	
<u>yanm</u>	"sun"	<u>wapni</u>	"sun"	<u>yan+m</u>	"sun"
<u>yaank</u>	"forest"	<u>yaank</u>	"forest"	<u>yan+k</u>	"forest"
<u>n+mk</u>	"louse"	<u>n+mk</u>	"louse"	<u>n+m+k</u>	"louse"

The sequence /sp/ may not occur in the same syllable or across syllable boundaries.

his+p+nak "side of the hand" his+p+nak "five" hisip+nak "five"

In looking over the data, it became evident that there were some restrictions which merited some investigation. In the Western Dialect there is a distinct preference for only CV or CVC syllable patterns. This is illustrated by the above vowel apenthesis where contiguous consonant clusters are broken up. This also appears in the word ha?ak "firewood", which in the Eastern Dialect is spelled haak (or hak). But in this case it is two vowels which are juxtaposed which are separated by an inserted consonant. The central Dialect has no such restrictions and shows no preference for CV or CVC patterning, yet they too use the word ha?ak for "firewood". I would posit this to show that the dialects using this word are in the middle of a sound change. It is almost complete in the Eastern Dialect which has had more contact with other languages, but not complete in the other two dialects. Tok Pisin has also undergone a similar alteration in the Au area. The word dispela is now being pronounced disela by most of the people, which shows a preference again for the CV pattern, but also adding the restriction that the sequence /sp/ across syllable boundaries should not occur. (I've noticed that this particular restriction is becoming common all over the country where Tok Pisin is spoken.)

4.2 Orthography

The orthography as it stands appears to adequately cover the three dialects of Au.

To definitely establish this fact, a literacy class was conducted in War+n, the central village in the Western Dialect. Several teachers from the Central Dialect took turns teaching at War+n, and over a period of eight (8) months they taught books one and two of the primer series (there are three books total). They encountered little or no difficulty in teaching all the symbols to these speakers, all of whom were under thirty (30) years of age. The /aʔa/ referred to above which occurs in the Central and Western Dialects was tested among the Eastern Dialect speakers. They were taught that this sound occurred in their dialect with a slight length, but no glottal stop. They adjusted to this written word /aa/ quite easily and found it to be no problem. Other than this minor change, there were no differences in the orthography for all three dialects.

The consonant cluster restrictions which occur only in the Western Dialect posed little problem for the teachers as they taught these students. The students readily recognized and mastered these differences because these restrictions occur in words which are common to all three dialects. I do not know whether this would be true with the older speakers of the language.

4.3 Lexical variations:

Notable variations in the three dialects appeared on the survey word list taken for this paper. They are listed below in the standard orthography for ease of presentation.

<u>English</u>	<u>Eastern</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Western</u>
eye	naan	nanawár	nanawár
skin	yánk	yánk	yánk
sun	yanm	wepni	yaním
foot	hát	hát	hátu
hand	his	his	hisi
read	ya	yayiwe	yanák
yam	kámatán	kámatán	kámatán

<u>English</u>	<u>Eastern</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Western</u>
snake	yemik	zanpen	zanpen
fish	sauk	saauk	newek
sago	niu	niu	nare
rope	waai	waai	waiyu
tobacco	saukei	saukei	tenkan
seed	yehes/nakim	yehes/nakim	nu werpek
mountain	nip	niniu	neip/ napi
frog	nenhap	petko	nenep
many	yapruwe	yapirwe	napune
what	meneman	mekam	menam
who	keimán	keimán	keimáni
bamboo	yáp	yáp	hápu
ashes	si wán	si wana	si hennip
we (1 du)	hawár	hawár	hawát
tooth	yehes	yehes	yekis
when	ewai monuni	ewaai meruri	nepneiyan
yes	owe	o	o
two	wikes	wik	wiket
four	wikes wikes	tekyuait	tekyaaait
five	nápu kewen	hispának	hisipának
ten	his newáren	hiswiyen	hisipának (2)

4.4 Grammatical Items

The only variation which occurs among the three dialects is manifested in the bound pronoun forms, both the objective and benefactive. These are as follows:

1. Benefactive

3rd sing M	-orak/-urek	-ewek/-iwek	-orok/-orok/irek
3rd sing F	-orep	-ewo/-iwo	-orep
3rd pl	-or	-ár	-or

2. Objective

3rd sing M	-ik	-ek	-ik
3rd sing F	-ip	-ip/-ie	-ip
3rd pl	-ir/-or	ir/-or	-ir/-or

4.5 Verb Stems

There are many verb stems which differ among the various dialects. These changes are minor, and involve a basic substitution of vowels. Examples of these are as follows:

<u>English</u>	<u>Eastern</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Western</u>
follow (a path)	ises	itot	ise
believe/follow	eises	ises	ises
listen	eintau	entau	entau
make	arik	ārāk	ereiyak
go	ene	eno	eno
get	erim	eiyaṁ	eiyaṁ
cut	ereidr	erēkir	enekit
think	han keises	han kitot	han kises
chip sago	eses	eses	aku
eat (fut)	ehām	ehām	ava
sleep	āwāai	āwāai	ati

A number of the verb stems also involve the substitution of consonants which often occur at the same point of articulation, as seen in the first example above.

5 Differences Between the Dialects

5.1 Cognate Percentages Between the Dialects

A comparison of the equivalent forms of 200 words in each dialect gave the cognate percentages shown in the chart. The Western Dialect showed the lowest cognate percentage because the dialect contained the most divergent forms of the three dialects of Au. The results are shown below:

Cognate Percentages

	Eastern	Central	Western
Eastern	X	95	85
Central	95	X	87
Western	85	87	X
Average % Cognate	90%	91%	86%

A cursory glance at the above statistics will readily show that the Eastern and the central Dialects are more closely related to one another than either of them is to the Western Dialect. There are, however, many lexical items which do overlap. Some words which are not common in the Central Dialect occur commonly between the Eastern and Western Dialects. Words which are not common in the Eastern Dialect commonly occur between the Central and Western Dialects. I can readily understand the occurrence of the latter as they are geographically juxtaposed. But the common occurrence of many words in the Eastern and Western dialects is not as easily explained. This feature is not only present between dialects, but it also occurs within the dialects themselves. Yenkok village in the Eastern Dialect would be expected to have lexical items identical to Anguganak village in the same dialect. It has, however, numerous lexical items identical to Tumentonak in the Central Dialect which are not common to Anguganak village.

Perhaps it may be explained on the basis of the cultural features of the language group. Initially there was a lot of migration from one place to another as mentioned above and this could account for much of the overlap. There are also a lot of game animals toward the primary forest and swampland. This could have been a strong incentive for exchanging shell rings obtained on the coast for pigs and other wild animals hunted in the Western Dialect area. Thus to facilitate the great amount of trading, it would have been mutually beneficial to exchange sons and daughters to maintain the reciprocal relationships necessary to their well being. I am tentatively concluding, therefore, that migration patterns and intermarriage are the only viable solutions to explain this phenomena.

5.2 Cognate Percentages between Villages of the Same Dialect

A. Eastern Dialect:

	Anguganak	Yenkok	Brugap	Wálákám	Piem	Yemmu	Wititai	Witweis
Anguganak	X	98	99	96	97	97	97	96
Yenkok	98	X	98	96	96	97	97	97
Brugap	99	98	X	97	98	96	97	97
Wálákám	96	95	97	X	97	95	96	97
Piem	97	97	98	97	X	96	96	98
Yemmu	97	97	96	95	96	X	99	99
Wititai	97	97	97	96	96	99	X	99
Witweis	97	96	97	97	98	99	99	X

B. Central Dialect:

	Tumentonák	Puank	Nuwain	Pánkán	Lakán Wit	Nápák
Tumentonák	X	99	98	97	98	97
Puank	99	X	98	97	98	97
Nuwain	98	98	X	98	98	98
Pánkán	97	97	98	X	99	98
Lakán Wit	98	98	98	99	X	98
Nápák	97	98	98	98	99	X

C. Western Dialect:

	Warín	Yutapi	Weteili
Warín	X	98	97
Yutapi	99	X	98
Weteili	97	98	X

5.3 Conclusions About the Villages Within the Same Dialects

As can be seen from the above cognate count in percentages, the villages within their own dialects tend to differ very little from one another. Across those

boundaries, the changes become more marked. The Eastern Dialect which is more widely separated geographically has the most divergence- with up to 5% difference. The other dialects are smaller and are closer together, and as a result the variation is less. The people recognize distinctions among themselves (within their own dialects) and can easily recognize the village a person comes from by their speech. It takes only a few seconds for them to recognize variant speech patterns for each village has its own distinct vocabulary resulting in its own Shibboleth identification system.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Dialects

On the basis of the phonological, lexical and grammatical information obtained from the word lists, the mutual intelligibility tests, and the peoples own feeling that there are differences between villages, we have concluded that there are three (3) distinct dialects of Au- Eastern, Central and Western. This conclusion is also mentioned as a possibility by Salisbury (1963 unpublished notes). Wilskim village which has been placed in the Eastern Dialect is a tentative placement. It was done so because of the feeling of the people who said it was more like the Anguganak speech. But lexically, it is closer to Tumentonik village. If it were placed in the Central Dialect, the figures would be slightly higher in cognate percentages (96/95%).

APPENDIX B POPULATION FIGURES AND VILLAGES

A listing of all the villages in each dialect with their approximate population is listed below:

Eastern Dialect

Anguganak
Brugap
Piem
Witital
Winaluk
Witweis
Wesán
Wílikám
Yemmm
Yenkok

10 Villages

Total
Central Dialect

Puank
Lakán Wit
Nápák
Nuwain
pinkán
Tumentonák

6 Villages

Total
Western Dialect

Námaun/ warán
Weteili
Yutapi

3 Villages

Total

Total Population: _____

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