A Sociolinguistic Survey of Amara

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Abstract

This survey was undertaken to assess the vitality of the Amara [aie] language, which is found on the north coast of West New Britain Province (WNB), Papua New Guinea. Amara is spoken in three villages that are each surrounded by villages of neighbouring languages. In order to assess vitality, the team used observation, participatory methods, and conducted interviews guided by the SIL-PNG sociolinguistic questionnaires. The survey team found the language vital in one village and endangered in the other two. It appears that the people, including those in the village of higher vitality, are steadily shifting to Bariai [bch] and Maleu-Kilenge [mgl], two neighbouring languages.
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1 Introduction

From the fourteenth of July to the sixteenth of July 2011, Bonnie MacKenzie, John and Katie Carter, and Brian and Hannah Paris completed a sociolinguistic survey of the Amara language area in order to research language vitality. The SIL survey team would like to acknowledge and thank the communities of Siamatai, Niuniuiiai, and Natamou for taking time to explain their language and culture to us. They generously shared their homes and food while we stayed with them. We would also like to acknowledge the help of local church leaders and school staff in the Amara language area.

Originally the survey team intended to visit West New Britain Province to assess the vitality of the Anem [anz] language, located directly east of Amara. In gathering previous research for Anem, the team found reports from the 1980s stating that Amara speakers were quickly shifting to the Bariai language. In order to determine whether the Amara language still had an active population, the team expanded the Anem survey to include Amara. In Siamatai, the team found all generations actively using Amara, though there were early signs of shift to Bariai. In Niuniuiiai, married men are the only Amara speakers left; the children use and identify more readily with the Bariai language. In daily language use, the people of Natamou have fully shifted to Maleu-Kilenge. There are still some speakers of Amara in Natamou, but many are now only sentimentally attached to the language. For the most part, each village will be examined separately throughout this report since each is at a different stage of language shift and not all of them are shifting to the same neighbouring vernacular.

1.1 Language location

The Amara language is spoken on the northwest coast of WNB in Papua New Guinea. There are three Amara villages: Siamatai, Niuniuiiai, and Natamou. Natamou is located ten kilometres east of the nearest government station, Cape Gloucester; Siamatai is located 40 kilometres east of the government station; and Niuniuiiai is located between Natamou and Siamatai. The Amara language area is about 150 kilometres west of Kimbe, the closest population centre. The only road in the area runs east and west of the Cape Gloucester airstrip for about ten kilometres in each direction.

Identification of the precise geographical boundaries between languages or dialects was not one of the team’s goals, nor should any maps resulting from this survey be considered an indication of land ownership.
Between these Amara villages, there are other villages where Bariai is the primary language. Map 2 shows Siamatai, Niuniuiai, Natamou, and villages from other language groups that are nearby: the Anem village of Malasongo to the east; the Bariai villages of Bambak, Akonga, Kokopo, and Gurrissi; and the Maleu-Kilenge villages of Ausmate and Garenge to the west. Gloucester Station is also found in the Maleu-Kilenge language area. There are only trails and water routes connecting the villages in this area; the primary mode of transportation is boat travel (see section 4.1.2). Map 2 also shows a large section of the Amara language area inland that has no villages. Land in this area is passed from father to son as an inheritance (see section 4.3.5).
1.2 Previous research

The Amara language and culture is most fully described by William Thurston (1996). Before his work was published in 1996, the Amara language was briefly addressed by Ann Chowning (1978, 1986) and Malcolm Ross (1988). Thurston himself also mentions the Amara language in some of his earlier work on the neighbouring Anem language (1976, 1982, and 1987). However, his 1996 article providing a short phonology, grammar sketch, and ethnography with a lexicon of over 500 entries, is the most complete work done on Amara. This article was based on field research conducted in the Amara language area in 1981, 1982, and 1988. Due to Thurston’s work, Amara is well documented linguistically.

Thurston reported that contact with the Bariai language encouraged Amara speakers to shift to Bariai. Historically, Amara speakers lived on the island of New Britain before speakers of Bariai, Lusi [khl], and Kove [kvc] came to New Britain from the Siassi Islands1 (Thurston 1996:197). The Amara lived inland with no tradition of maritime activity. The Australian administration resettled both the Anem people and the Amara people on the coast in the 1940s, where the administration felt they would be able to “exploit the abundant food resources of the ocean and gain access to the copra market” (Thurston 1982:7–8). The Anem were given a stretch of empty shoreline, while the Amara people were forced to scatter their villages among the already well-established Bariai villages (see Map 2). The new Amara villages were instantly required to rely on Bariai-speaking people for school, church, and access to trade goods.

Thurston visited the Amara people for the last time in 1988. During that trip he reported that there were still teenagers speaking Amara, but he called them “semi-speakers” (1996:201). He meant that the Amara they spoke was a highly reduced version of the Amara language. Thurston did not believe

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1The Siassi Islands are a group of islands to the west of New Britain; the largest is Umboi Island.
the language would die out quickly because it was still useful as an ethnic marker, distinguishing Amara teenagers from Bariai. However, with every Amara speaker being bilingual in Bariai, it seemed only a matter of time to Thurston before Amara became a dead language (1996:198).

1.3 Language name and classification

The names of people groups and the names of their vernaculars are largely synonymous in West New Britain Province. Thus, the Amara people speak Amara; this was maintained by the people in every village we visited. According to the Ethnologue, there are two alternate names for the Amara language, Longa and Bibling. Though the Amara people recognize those names, they reported that they prefer their language to be called Amara. The language's ISO code is [aie] (Lewis 2009).

Amara is an Austronesian language in the Western Oceanic family and Vitiaz group. Figure 1 gives the layout of the Vitiaz group, but only shows the languages on New Britain. Figure 2 shows the relationship between Amara and Bariai.

Figure 1: Vitiaz group.

Languages are italicised.
The numbers inside parentheses indicate how many languages are in the group.
Green indicates languages in West New Britain.
1.4 Population

Table 1 gives three population figures for each of the three Amara-speaking villages: the figure based on the 2000 National Population Census; projected figures based on the 3.6 percent annual growth rate given for West New Britain Province by the 2000 National Population Census (National Statistical Office 2002b:31); and the reported population figures as determined by group consensus in each village.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siamatai</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niuniuai</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natamou</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>~50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>398</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The reported population figures for each village are centred on different parameters. The people in Siamatai reported a figure based on the number of voters in 2005 while the figures in Niuniuai and Natamou are both estimates of each individual in the village, including women and children.

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2See Figure 1 for a full description of the Vitiaz group.

3“All growth rates should be used with caution due to changes in how censuses have been conducted since 1980” (National Statistical Office 2002b:9).
People from the neighbouring Anem language area consistently identified Siamatai as an Amara-speaking village while only some also mentioned Niuniuiai and Natamou. After visiting all three villages, it became apparent to the survey team that the only Amara village with a vital population of Amara speakers is Siamatai. There is a high level of bilingualism in all three villages, although the dominant language of bilingualism varies based on location and proximity to the neighbouring languages (see section 4.2.9). Natamou has a considerably smaller population than was projected by the census in 2000 which may be contributing to the language shift occurring in that community to Maleu-Kilenge. Overall, the small population of the Amara language area and the high rate of immigration (see section 4.1.1) are working against language maintenance and contributing to the shift that has all but completely occurred in two of the three Amara villages: Niuniuiai and Natamou.

1.5 Goals

The goal of this survey was to assess the vitality of the Amara language.

2 Methodology

2.1 Tools

In order to assess the current vitality of Amara, the survey team recorded language use observations, conducted sociolinguistic interviews, and used one participatory methods tool.

2.1.1 Language use observations

Each member of the survey team collected language use observations throughout the trip. If possible, the team recorded what language was being used, by whom, and to whom. We paid particular attention to what language children were using with other children and what language parents were using with their children. These combined observations helped the team get an accurate picture of language use, especially when viewed in conjunction with the data collected through the language use group interview.

2.1.2 Sociolinguistic interviews

The sociolinguistic interviews were conducted using the standard SIL-PNG survey questionnaires designed to investigate language use, language attitudes, contact patterns, and maintenance of cultural traditions. The survey team also interviewed church and school leaders using the standard SIL-PNG church and education questionnaires in order to further assess language attitudes and the current level of institutional support for the local language.

2.1.3 Participatory methods

The survey team is in the process of developing and practicing new research methods that are thought to be more culturally appropriate in Papua New Guinea, hence eliciting more accurate data than the current interview procedures. Participatory methodology (PM) is a relatively new research science that is being used in community development circles and becoming more popular within the language assessment community. The intent is for the researcher to facilitate a community discussion rather than direct a group interview.

On this survey, we decided to use one PM tool: the community connection tool developed by the SIL-PNG survey team. Our purpose in using this PM tool was to supplement the traditional methods of research we were using to gather data and to test the effectiveness of PM in a Papua New Guinean context.

The community connection tool was developed by members of the SIL-PNG survey team in an attempt to create an informal environment that would provoke more involvement from the respondents when eliciting information about social connections. The team brought markers and
planned to collect rocks and banana leaves in each village where the tool was used. The five members of the survey team had different roles in administering the tool. One surveyor became the point person while the other surveyors mingled with the respondents making language use observations and passing out materials as needed. The point person first asked the people to write the name of their village on a banana leaf. It was placed on the ground with a rock to hold it in place. The point person and facilitator then encouraged the people to name all the villages that they had a connection with and to list how they were connected to that village (i.e. marriage, trade, church). Someone from the community wrote the name of each village mentioned on a banana leaf and placed it on the ground with a string attaching it to the home village. Participants placed banana leaves indicating what type of connection was found between the home village and that particular village along each string. Once all villages and social connections had been identified, the facilitators asked the people to rank each village in order of importance. This was followed by one community member summarising the picture now laid out on the ground.

2.2 Sampling

The survey team consisted of John and Katie Carter, Bonnie MacKenzie, and Brian and Hannah Paris. All members of the team collected language use observations throughout the survey. John Carter researched culture, church, and education; Katie Carter researched language use, church, and education; Bonnie MacKenzie (team leader) oversaw the interviews; Brian Paris researched culture and contact patterns; and Hannah Paris researched language use and contact patterns.

We visited each village reportedly within the Amara language area: Siamatai, Niuniuiai, and Natamou. The initial plan was to only visit Siamatai in order to make a quick assessment of language vitality. Based on previous research, we had expected to find the language at a very threatened state and, as such, came prepared to record word lists and stories for language documentation. However, we found the language being used by all generations in Siamatai which instigated us to visit the other two villages in order to gain a more complete picture of the situation. We spent one night each in Siamatai and Niuniuiai; since we were not able to contact people in Natamou beforehand, we went early in the morning to meet people before they went to their gardens and left after a few hours of data collection. In each village we observed as many interactions as possible. The team chose interviewees based on availability of people and the qualifications necessary for respondents of the questionnaires.

2.3 Critique

2.3.1 Language use observations

It was challenging to take accurate language use observations because the people in this area are highly multilingual. This made it difficult to ascertain whether they were using Amara or another vernacular. When it was possible, we would ask what language was being used in order to paint a faithful picture, but it was difficult to do this all the time.

2.3.2 Sociolinguistic interviews

The majority of the team members on this survey were inexperienced, so great forethought was put into creating a research system that would offset the inexpenience. There were enough researchers and enough time on this survey to create pairs focused on certain questionnaires. In this way, we avoided putting an inexperienced surveyor into the role of interviewer and recorder. Instead, one surveyor asked the questions and interacted with the people while another surveyor recorded answers. Not only did this free up the interviewer to focus on the people, on the questions, and on maintaining a firm understanding of where the conversation was going, but also it allowed the recorder to focus more widely. Instead of only briefly documenting the immediate answers to the questions, the recorder could observe peripheral conversations and make more detailed notes. We would highly recommend this style of interviewing if there are enough team members and enough time.
2.3.3 Participatory methods

During this survey trip, the team tested two PM tools in the neighbouring language of Anem. In two Anem villages, the PM tools failed to engage the respondents any more than the group interviews. However, when the team utilised the connection tool in Siamatai, there was a high level of involvement and interest. It is questionable whether or not the tool provided any information beyond what was already gathered during the contact interviews, or that it was perceived as being more culturally appropriate than interviews.

3 Language and dialect boundaries

Some Amara speakers are slowly switching to the Bariai language, while others are shifting to Maleu-Kilenge. As such, it is difficult to define precise language boundaries. There are now three villages that are still considered to be Amara-speaking. However, in Niuniuai and Natamou, more Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge, respectively, are spoken; essentially, these two Amara villages are slowly turning into Bariai-speaking and Maleu-Kilenge-speaking villages. Amara language use may last for one or two more generations in Niuniuai before speakers shift completely to Bariai, but unless something drastic happens, it will not be long before Amara is no longer spoken in Niuniuai. In Natamou, the people have already made significant steps toward a complete shift to Maleu-Kilenge. Siamatai is the only village where Amara is used by its residents in most domains of daily life. Amara is still vital in this village, and it may soon be the only village where it is spoken.

According to Thurston, there were two dialects of Amara historically: Amara proper and Autie. Amara proper was spoken in all the Amara villages, while Autie was spoken by a patriclan in Siamatai (1996:197). The clan still exists in Siamatai, alongside the Amara clan, but the people reported that the Autie dialect is dead and that now everyone speaks Amara proper.

It is probable that the Amara spoken in Niuniuai and that spoken in Natamou are different and diverging, as the people of those villages shift to different languages. The team did not, however, collect wordlists in these villages because Thurston had already thoroughly documented the language linguistically. We also believed that the differences we might find through this methodology would not help us to distinguish between dialects of Amara, but would only illustrate how the people are transitioning from speaking Amara to speaking either Bariai or Maleu-Kilenge.

4 Language vitality

Lynn Landweer (2006:213–214) has identified three themes that impact ethnolinguistic vitality: opportunity for contact with other language groups, actual language use, and language attitudes. The data presented in the following three sections, which address these three themes, were collected with the goal of assessing language vitality.

4.1 Opportunity for contact with other languages

Using the community connection tool, we gathered data in Siamatai about the contact patterns of people in that community. The results are reported in Table 4.1. The numbers seen next to some of the village names indicate how the people ranked their connections in order of importance.

The other two Amara villages, Niuniuai and Natamou, were listed among the 12 total villages the participants in Siamatai named. The connection with Niuniuai was marked as the most important while Natamou was not recognized in the top six. Of the 14 different kinds of connections the people identified, only market, marriage, kastam, and visiting family represent needs that can be met by

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4The Tok Pisin word kastam means shared cultural festivities. In looking at connections, the respondents in Siamatai reported that the villages they share kastam with are the villages where Siamatai community members
Amara-speaking villages. All other categories of connections, notably worship, school, health, and business, represent needs that can only be met in non-Amara speaking villages. The opportunity and need for the people of Siamatai to interact regularly with speakers of Bariai, Anem, Maleu-Kilenge, Uneapa [bbn], and Tok Pisin is significant. Map 3 shows the villages that Siamatai participants reported having various connections with.

Table 4.1: Connections Siamatai has with other villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Language Spoken</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Worship</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Kastam</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Visit Ukarumpa</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Shopping</th>
<th>Visit Family</th>
<th>Supplies</th>
<th>Forestry Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Niuniuiai(^a)</td>
<td>Amara</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Malasongo</td>
<td>Anem</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Gurrissi</td>
<td>Bariai</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Bomai Parish</td>
<td>Bariai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Gloucester</td>
<td>Maleu-Kilenge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Kimbe (town)</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Natamou\(^a\)  | Amara          | x       | x       |          |        |        |        |         |                |       |          |          |              |          |                 |
| Alaido          | Bariai         | x       |         | x        |        |        |        |         |                |       |          |          |              |          |                 |
| Bali            | Uneapa         |        |         |          |        |        |        |         |                |       |          |          |              |          |                 |
| Bambak          | Bariai         |        |         |          | x      |        | x      |         |                |       |          |          |              |          |                 |
| Aniemate\(^b\)  | Maleu-Kilenge  | x       |         |          |        |        |        |         |                |       |          |          |              |          |                 |
| Gilnit\(^b\)    | Maleu-Kilenge  | x       |         |          |        |        |        |         |                |       |          |          |              |          |                 |

\(^a\)The team asked respondents which villages speak like them and they indicated these two.  
\(^b\)These two villages are probably the Maleu-Kilenge villages of Anepmete and Gilinit. During the language use interview, the people reported that there used to be an Amara speaking population in Anepmete. It is likely that there used to be an Amara-speaking population in Gilinit. Now only a few elders still know Amara in both villages.

will go to participate in cultural festivities and that people from those villages will come to Siamatai for the same reason.
4.1.1 Immigration and emigration

According to Landweer (1991), immigration is less likely to negatively impact language vitality when immigrants are proficient in the local language of their new home and make up a low percentage of the population. The survey team asked detailed questions about immigration and emigration to determine whether there is a strong population base that speaks Amara.

Respondents in the three Amara villages reported population estimates based on varying parameters. In Siamatai, the people gave the number of voters in 2005 while in Niuniuiai and Natamou, the people gave an estimate of each individual in the village, including women and children. For a total population count, the team combined the projected population for Siamatai (139) with the reported population for Niuniuiai (42) and Natamou (50), due to the confidence with which interviewees gave the population estimate in Niuniuiai and the large discrepancy between the projected population and the reported population in Natamou. Based on these numbers, the estimate for the population in the Amara language area is 231. Of the total population in the Amara language area, 16.5 percent are immigrants while 15.5 percent of the total Amara population are emigrants.

There is a vast difference in language vitality between Siamatai, Niuniuiai, and Natamou. Based on the total population size for each individual village, 16.5 percent of the people in Siamatai, 21.4 percent of the people in Niuniuiai, and 12 percent of the people in Natamou are immigrants. In calculating the figures for emigrants, the team took the total population size of each individual village and excluded the immigrants. In Siamatai, the total population is 139. Of those, 23 are reportedly immigrants and 14.7 percent are emigrants. Based on the same system, 24.2 percent of the

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5The scale used in the Priority Allocation Assessment Device indicates that language vitality is least likely to be affected if immigration is below 10% (Landweer 1991).
Amara population in Niuniuiai are emigrants and 11.4 percent of the Amara population in Natamou are emigrants.

Of the 38 total immigrants into the Amara language area, 25 reportedly learned Amara well, indicating that people, including outsiders, are finding it beneficial to learn and use the language. Nevertheless, the percentage of immigrants into the Amara language area is high at 16.5 percent and is undoubtedly having a negative effect on Amara language vitality. The Amara population is being saturated with speakers of neighbouring languages, mostly Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge, which is made more significant when analysed in conjunction with the geographic location of Amara villages relative to Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge villages (see section 1.1). All three Amara villages are located closer to either Bariai or Maleu-Kilenge villages than they are to each other.

Evidence of the language vitality difference between the Amara villages is apparent in the behaviour patterns of immigrants. In Siamatai, there are 21 female immigrants; 19 of them have reportedly learned Amara well. By contrast, in Niuniuiai where language vitality is low, only one of the nine female immigrants reportedly learned Amara well, and, more importantly, no marriage exists that is not cross-linguistic. In Niuniuiai and Natamou, the people reported that, though some children of immigrants learn Amara well, many can only understand it but not speak it, whereas every single child of an immigrant in Siamatai actively speaks Amara.

Most immigrants came to the Amara language area for the purpose of marriage. The people reported that though spouses are from many neighbouring language areas, the vast majority are from Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge. In Siamatai, as stated previously, the children of cross-linguistic marriages learn and use Amara. In Niuniuiai and Natamou, where Amara language use is in decline, only a few children of cross-linguistic marriages are taught Amara.

The trends of emigration are less detrimental to language vitality than the trends of immigration, though emigration is still working against vitality in this area. In Siamatai and Niuniuiai, the emigrants often return to their home villages and consistently use Amara when they come back. On the other hand, in Natamou where language vitality is very low, the emigrants that come home only speak Maleu-Kilenge, never Amara. In Niuniuiai, some of the emigrants have not gone far; four of the eight emigrants from that community moved to the Bariai village of Kokopo, which is less than a kilometre from Niuniuiai.

Through trends in the language use patterns of immigrants and emigrants, Siamatai is demonstrating a positive attitude toward language maintenance that is resulting in practical language use; those same trends in Niuniuiai are exhibiting more language shift to Bariai than language maintenance of Amara. Though the Amara people in Natamou are not being as overwhelmed by the number of immigrants and emigrants coming into or leaving their village as Siamatai and Natamou, the language choices made by those immigrants and emigrants is indicative of a complete shift to Maleu-Kilenge.

### 4.1.2 Transportation

Landweer (2006:174–177) has pointed out that the language vitality of communities with easy access to a population centre, where they are likely to mix with speakers of other languages regularly, is at greater risk than the vitality of communities with less access to large population centres. The people in the Amara language area do not have easy access to the closest population centre, Kimbe; however, they do have easy access to larger villages of neighbouring language areas. It is this contact, not contact with Kimbe, which is having a detrimental effect on language vitality.

**Water travel**

There are no roads in the Amara language area, we did not see the trails, and air travel is very rare. Traveling by water is the most common type of transportation in the Amara language area and is
how the survey team travelled between villages. The people use both dinghies⁶ with motors and a
traditional boat called a mon, with which they often also use motors.
The people reported that the places they most often go by water are Kimbe and Gloucester station.
Along with these, Siamatai also listed Siassi, Bali, and Anepmate; Niuniuiai included West Arove, on
the south coast of WNB, and Karaiai, in the Anem language area; and Natamou included Anepmate,
Siamatai, and Niuniuiai. Each location, except Siamatai and Niuniuiai, are outside the language area
and Natamou was the only village to report commonly using water routes to go to other Amara
villages. While the team was staying in Niuniuiai, we saw and talked with a group of people from
Natamou who was briefly stopping in before heading to Kimbe. It’s possible that they travel to
Niuniuiai and Siamatai because they plan on reaching Kimbe and not because they plan on staying in
those villages for an extended period of time.
The boats in this area are used like public motor vehicles (PMVs); each individual pays a passenger
rate. Boats came frequently to Niuniuiai while the survey team was visiting, but were less frequent in
Siamatai and Natamou (though we did not stay in Natamou very long). There are two men in
Siamatai that own boat PMVs, giving the people access to water transport in Amara. The availability
of these Amara boat PMVs lessens the reliance of the Siamatai people on outsiders for transport.
The Amara villages seem to be somewhat isolated from one another. The people reported traveling to
and interacting with villages outside of the language area more often than interacting with each
other.

Air travel
The closest commercial airstrip is found in Hoskins, about 45 kilometres west of Kimbe. To the west
of the Amara language area is the Gloucester airstrip that was closed during the time of the survey,
and to the southeast there is an open airstrip in the Mouk-Aria [mwh] language area. The team did
not ask about air travel because the people do not have easy access to any of these airstrips. It is
likely that a few people from the Amara language area have flown, but it is not enough to have any
effect on language vitality.

Trails
During the survey, the team did not hike on the trails for any extended period of time. The people in
Siamatai reported that the existing trails are in good shape and the respondents in Niuniuiai stated
that some of their trails have bridges in need of repairs, but that nothing has been done because they
are easy to get around. The trails in Siamatai connect the people to Kokomo and Maleu, while the
trails in Niuniuiai connect the people to Gloucester, Maleu, Gurrissi, Malasongo, Akonga, and
Kokopo. All of these villages are outside of the language area. No information was collected on trails
in Natamou.
The manner in which trails and their connectivity to outside areas were reported shows that the
population movement within the Amara language area is primarily between each individual Amara
village and villages outside of the language area, and not with each other. This enables intense
contact with speakers of neighbouring vernaculars and is an indicator of low language vitality.

4.1.3 Economics
According to Landweer (2006:209), language communities that do not need to use a second language
to meet their perceived economic needs typically have higher language vitality than those that are
dependent on an economic base outside the language area. In order to acquire money, the Amara
people are required to either go to markets outside of the language area or sell each other
manufactured goods they have acquired outside of the language area. In order to fulfil their
monetary needs, they are relying on systems that exist outside of their control and outside of their
language, which is having a detrimental effect on language vitality.

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⁶In PNG “dinghy” refers to a small open boat. They are often fiberglass and have an outboard motor.
Siamatai has the strongest language vitality of the three villages and that is reflected in its economy; it is more self-sufficient economically than Niuniuiiai or Natamou. Men from Siamatai often go to Kimbe to sell and buy at the market and to pick-up their royalties from the gold mining company. As stated in section 4.1.2, the people do not have to rely on outsiders for transportation because they can hire the boat PMVs from their village. There are no trade stores in Siamatai so they are required to go outside of the language area for any goods they would want from a trade store. Within the village, people sell the manufactured goods they have acquired during a trip to town. The people reported the existence of a gold mining company from whom they, as stated previously, receive royalties. No one from Siamatai works for the mining company and the villagers seem neutral about their interactions with the company.

Niuniuiiai is drastically different from Siamatai due to the close proximity it shares with Kokopo, a large Bariai village. Men go to Kimbe less often than men from Siamatai; however, the Niuniuiiai community has a stronger social link to the Bariai people in Kokopo where there is a regular market. They can sell garden produce, fish, and mats in Kokopo while solidifying relationships with Bariai people on a deeper level than the non-Amara people with whom those from Siamatai interact during trips to Kimbe. Men from Niuniuiiai use only Tok Pisin when they go to Kimbe, even when they are interacting with each other.

The team did not gather information on economics from Natamou; however, we were able to observe some of the villagers' economic behaviour before arriving in their village. We saw a van filled with people from Natamou on the way to Kimbe while we were in Niuniuiiai. They stopped in briefly to acquire more fuel from Kokopo. They were on their way to sell at the market and buy various goods not accessible in Natamou, which indicates that they also rely on systems outside of the language area to fulfil economic needs.

4.1.4 Summary of contact with other languages

Each individual Amara village is physically closer to villages of neighbouring languages than to one another. This proximity to neighbouring languages has slowly developed a dependency among residents of Amara villages on other language groups for trade stores, schools, and social relationships. Siamatai is close to Anem and Bariai villages; Niuniuiiai is directly next to a large Bariai village; and Natamou is geographically separated from both Siamatai and Niuniuiiai by several Bariai villages. Due to this dependency that is demonstrated in immigration and emigration patterns, transportation practices, and the economic base, people of Niuniuiiai are identifying more with the Bariai village of Kokopo and the people of Natamou are identifying more with Maleu-Kilenge to the west. This is creating an ethnolinguistic identity shift in both of those places. As they interact more heavily with people from Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge, they are shifting to those languages and identifying more closely with the people socially and culturally. Siamatai is the largest Amara village and is maintaining the Amara language and identity despite high contact with outside languages.

4.2 Language use

4.2.1 Children’s reported language use

Language use of children is critical to understanding the vitality of a language community as a whole. The Amara language community varies in vitality from village to village, as can be seen in children’s reported language use. Children in Siamatai are taught Amara early and encouraged to use it frequently. Adults in Niuniuiiai and Natamou do not treat language use among children with the same intentionality as the adults in Siamatai. Children do not learn Amara early and are not placed in environments where Amara language use would be practically beneficial to them, with a result of very low or no language use.

Siamatai respondents reported that children learn Amara first and later learn Tok Pisin in school. The children can also speak Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge, but neither language is learned ahead of or alongside Amara. By the time children go to school, they speak Amara as well as the adults. The children of Siamatai reportedly use only Amara in their interactions with family and friends. The
only caveat to this was children of cross-linguistic marriages. In those situations, the children sometimes speak the mother’s vernacular with parents and grandparents. Despite their grasp of the language, the children occasionally mix Amara with Bariai, which is discouraged by the adults.

The people in Niuniuiui expressed a strong desire for children to use Amara, but their behaviour is doing little to encourage the use of Amara among children. The first language that children in Niuniuiui learn is Bariai. People in Niuniuiui do not start teaching Amara until their children become 18 or 19 years old. Due to this, all interactions between children and their parents, grandparents, and friends occur in Bariai. Respondents seemed frustrated that they are often required to correct the speech of young men and women as these individuals mix Bariai and Amara constantly. When the team asked what language, or languages, adults in Niuniuiuii want their children to know, the people only mentioned Amara. Given their current behaviour, this was a bit confusing. However, their reasoning was that the children already know Bariai and have yet to learn Amara, so that was the only immediate language learning concern. One older lady confidently stated that when their grandchildren grow up, they will use Bariai. Some in the group disagreed with her, but it seemed the disagreement was more indicative of the fact that they did not want to see that happen, not that they disagreed about the reality of it happening. Ultimately, they all agreed that if the situation continues as is, then when their grandchildren grow up they will be using Bariai.

Children in Natamou do not learn to speak Amara. The first language they learn is Maleu-Kilenge and later they learn to understand, but not speak, Amara. In all interactions with family and friends, the children reportedly use Maleu-Kilenge. Respondents did not hesitate to say that when their children and grandchildren grow up, they will all speak Maleu-Kilenge and there was no regret about that.

4.2.2 Children’s observed language use

The impression of the team, based on data gathered through the observation of children’s language use, is that Amara children more consistently use Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge than Amara. Even in Siamatai, where Amara vitality is higher, signs of shift can be seen in children’s observed language use; a boy with an Amara mother and an Amara father was observed using Baria in a larger group.

If a vernacular speech event was observed, then the team member tried to ask those nearby what language was being used. In Siamatai, over half of the observations were of children using Amara without mixing Tok Pisin or another vernacular. Although the team observed children using Amara with high frequency, there were still some cases of children using Bariai or Tok Pisin that could be interpreted as early signs of language shift. In both Niuniuiiui and Natamou, no one on the survey team observed children using Amara. Instead, children in Niuniuiui were observed using Bariai, Tok Pisin, and mixing Bariai and Tok Pisin, while children in Natamou were observed only using Maleu-Kilenge.

The behaviour patterns of Amara children are an indicator of low language vitality in Niuniuiui and Natamou. The children in Niuniuiui are no longer finding their social needs filled through the Amara language and so are not learning or using it (see section 4.3.1). Children in Natamou are simply not learning it as a result of their parents no longer finding it beneficial. Siamatai, despite having the highest vitality of the three villages, is also showing early signs of shift through the language choices of the children. Though we did observe cases of children in Siamatai using Bariai, Siamatai children also demonstrated an ease with Amara that comes with daily use; they were able to take part in the elicitation of a word list\(^7\) and were often observed using Amara amongst themselves.

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\(^7\)The team took the word list for practice and to make language use observations; it was not for the purpose of lexicostatistical analysis. Therefore, word lists were not a part of our methodology, but rather an activity done spontaneously to gain some insight into language use.
4.2.3 Adults’ reported language use

The people of Siamatai reported more Amara language use than either Niuniuiai or Natamou. In Niuniuiai, the people reported still using Amara, but mixing it heavily with Bariai. Natamou respondents reported using Maleu-Kilenge instead of Amara in all situations. All three of these are consistent with the rest of the data gathered; it reflects the stronger vitality of Amara in Siamatai, the shifting state of Amara in Niuniuiai, and the completed shift to Maleu-Kilenge in Natamou.

The people in Siamatai are highly multilingual (see section 4.2.9). The team asked specifically what language men and women choose to use when interacting with various family members. The men of Siamatai reported that they only use Amara in these close relationships, even after the team pressed about the use of Tok Pisin. Women reported that they use Amara with all family members, but that sometimes the young women and married women\(^8\) use Tok Pisin with their parents and siblings. No one reported using a neighbouring vernacular or Tok Pisin in a familial relationship where they wouldn’t also use Amara. Aside from praying in the home (see section 4.2.6), there are no subdomains of the home that are solely reserved for Tok Pisin or a neighbouring vernacular. At one point, the women reported using Amara when they scold and teach their children. The team asked if, at times, they use Tok Pisin in these circumstances. The immediate reaction from various respondents in the group was that it does occur sometimes. However, the elder answering our questions immediately rejected their assessment and stated that women never use Tok Pisin when interacting with their children.

Amara is spoken by everyone except married women and children in Niuniuiai; children can understand Amara, but not speak it. The majority of the adult population in Niuniuiai reported using Bariai, not Amara. Respondents told the team that only older men consistently use Amara with their families. Bariai dominates the interactions of young men and married men with their families; the only area where younger men and married men reported using Amara was when they scold or teach their children. The young and married women, on the other hand, only use Bariai. Older women in this community continue to use Amara, but all marriages are cross-linguistic, dominated by Bariai spouses (see section 4.1.1).

The adults in Natamou use Maleu-Kilenge. An elderly population does not exist, so there are no older generations left to continue speaking Amara. Young and married men sometimes mix Amara with Maleu-Kilenge, but rarely. Women reported that they only use Maleu-Kilenge. Based on this reported data, there is a vital language in Natamou, but it is not Amara; it is Maleu-Kilenge.

4.2.4 Adults’ observed language use

The team was not able to get many language use observations in Niuniuiai or Natamou. When we first arrived in Niuniuiai there were very few people in the village. While we waited, we tried to take as many language use observations as possible. However, it was impossible for us to distinguish between the vernaculars and there was rarely someone nearby to identify the languages for us. For example, one surveyor noted that a vernacular was being used early in the morning underneath the house the team was staying in, but there was no way to identify exactly what the language was. Since language shift is occurring in Niuniuiai between Amara and Bariai, it is imperative to note which observations are definitively Amara, which are a neighbouring language, and which are a mix of the two. A strong indicator that Tok Pisin is not endangering Amara is that a vast majority of the interlocutions involving Tok Pisin the team observed also included a vernacular (see section 4.2.10). Unless the people were talking directly to us or about us, Tok Pisin was never the sole medium, but always mixed with a vernacular.

In Siamatai and Natamou, the team was able to make a few definitive observations about what vernacular was being used. During the language use interview in Siamatai, respondents discussed their answers in Amara. The group that gathered before the sociolinguistic interviews started also

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\(^8\)The term “married women” refers to married women that are still bearing children. It does not include elderly women that are married.
took time to discuss the work of the survey team in Amara. On two different occasions, a married man and a young woman in Siamatai were heard using Bariai, but it is not clear whether they were from Siamatai or from a village in the Bariai language area. The people in Natamou reported that while they were discussing their answers during the sociolinguistic interviews, they were using Maleu-Kilenge, not Amara.

4.2.5 Summary of reported and observed language use

It was difficult to make language use observations in the Amara language area because the people used neighbouring vernaculars that were impossible for members of the team to identify separately from Amara. We tried to ask what languages were included when a vernacular was being used, but this was not always possible. The observations that we were able to record supported both children's and adult’s reported language use.

In Siamatai, the people reported that children learn and use Amara well before they become school aged and that adults use it in most situations that do not involve outsiders. The team observed children using Amara numerous times in natural situations; they used it while playing with each other, playing with dogs, and speaking to adults. Even during a more unnatural situation when a surveyor pointed to random objects and asked what the Amara word for it was, they were able to quickly respond; they also helped with ease during an informal word list elicitation. The adults in Siamatai were observed using Amara and Bariai, though Amara dominated. Tok Pisin was rarely heard; it was even rarer to hear it as the only medium of a conversation.

The reported language use data and observed language use data were also complementary in Niuniuiai and Natamou. Respondents in Natamou stated that they do not teach their children Amara and that only some adults know it. This was true in the few language use observations we were able to take; we only observed the people using Maleu-Kilenge and Tok Pisin. In Niuniuiai, the people reported that they thought want to teach their children Amara, in reality, they do not actually teach their children Amara; the team did not observe any children using Amara.

Essentially, the Amara people demonstrated that they have a realistic picture of language use and how it is affecting the vitality of Amara. It does not seem that this is new information or that this knowledge will change language use behaviour in the future in order to better maintain their language.

4.2.6 Domains of language use

The domains of language use will be described separately for each village, as each is in a different phase of language maintenance and shift. This is apparent in how the people assign languages to various domains.

Amara dominates the domains of language use in Siamatai. The people reported that arguing, joking, and planning cultural events centred on weddings and funerals are only conducted in Amara. When they play sports, go to market, go to town, trade with neighbours, or are in any situation that requires them to interact with outsiders, they choose to use either Tok Pisin or the language of the people in the group; the language chosen is dependent on the background of the people present. When Siamatai residents visit the aid post in Akonga, a Bariai village, they typically use Tok Pisin. Church is conducted in Tok Pisin, a language use pattern that carries over into prayer at home.

In Niuniuiai, the domains are less contained. There are no domains that are reserved for Amara only. Each event that happens in the home or village, including the organisation of cultural events, is mixed between Amara and Bariai. Market is conducted in Bariai and Tok Pisin and the people only use Tok Pisin in church. Surprisingly, when they are praying at home they sometimes use Bariai instead of Tok Pisin. This may be a result of the fervour surrounding the near completion of the Bariai New Testament. If this is the case, it demonstrates connectivity to major events that happen in the Bariai language area. The people visit an aid post in the Bariai language area and report using both Tok Pisin and Maleu-Kilenge when they interact with outsiders there; the aid post orderly is from the Maleu-Kilenge language area.
In Natamou, all home and village domains are conducted in Maleu-Kilenge. Whenever Natamou community members interact with people outside of their community, they use Tok Pisin. Essentially, as respondents discussed the various languages at their disposal and what they choose to use, with whom, and where, Amara never came up because they rarely choose to use it. One exception is when they are traveling to Kimbe and stop at Niuniuiai or Siamatai; in this situation, they use Amara if they can. Overall, the domains of language use are yet another indicator that Natamou community members have completely shifted to Maleu-Kilenge.

### 4.2.7 Language use in schools

Early education in much of PNG is divided into the elementary school, which includes a year of prep and grades one and two; and primary school, which includes grades three through eight. The concept behind elementary schools is that children should start learning close to home in their first language, when possible, before bridging to English.

Children in Siamatai attend the Siamatai elementary school. It was founded by the headmaster of the Gurrissi Primary School in 2008. The head teacher of the elementary school is from Siamatai. He completed grade ten and worked as a mechanic for a company in Lae. His first language is Amara, as is true of the two teachers who began teaching alongside him in 2010; they are also from Siamatai. Children in Niuniuiai attend Puari elementary school in Kokopo, a Bariai village. This elementary school was established in 1996. In the Natamou community, children attend the Kaogo elementary school, which is located in the Maleu-Kilenge language area. The Natamou community sees Maleu-Kilenge as their vernacular, so they do not intend to build an elementary school in Natamou dedicated to the use of Amara.

The respondents in Siamatai reported that Amara and Tok Pisin are used in the classroom at the Siamatai elementary school, though the head teacher reported he prefers to teach in Tok Pisin because he feels he can explain things more clearly. There are teacher's guides available to the staff that were originally provided in English and then translated to Bariai. However, the teachers of Siamatai translated them into Amara for use in Siamatai. Adults in Niuniuiai reported that since Kokopo is a Bariai village, Bariai and Tok Pisin are used in the classroom. The children in Natamou attend an elementary school in the Maleu-Kilenge language area and so use Maleu-Kilenge and Tok Pisin in the classroom.

Students from Siamatai and Niuniuiai moving on to primary school attend Gurrissi Primary School, which is in the Bariai language area. Students from Natamou that move on to the primary school level go to Gloucester Primary School.

The only school inside the Amara language area is the Siamatai elementary school. This lack of access to schools in the language area pushes the Amara people to meet the educational needs of their children by sending them outside the language area where they are exposed more intensely to neighbouring vernaculars.

### 4.2.8 Language use in churches

Institutional support is a key factor in ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles et al. 1977 and Fasold 1987:221). In Papua New Guinea, the church is often the primary institution functioning at the local level. In the Amara language area, the Catholic Church is the only denomination and is an influential institution within the village.

In Siamatai, the church leader reported that a mixture of Tok Pisin, Amara, and several neighbouring languages are used in the church setting. The liturgy and prayers are conducted in Tok Pisin, Amara, and Bariai; hymns are sung in Tok Pisin, Amara, Bariai, and Maleu-Kilenge; announcements are given in both Tok Pisin and Amara; scripture readings are only in Tok Pisin; and sermons are often preached entirely in Tok Pisin, but sometimes the leader mixes in Amara. Niuniuiai does not have a church because the people are so close to Kokopo. They attend the church in Kokopo where the dominant vernacular being mixed with Tok Pisin is Bariai.

The church in Siamatai, Christ the King, is only made up of people from Siamatai; therefore, the entire congregation is Amara-speaking. Occasionally visitors from other language groups come to
the church, but this is not a weekly occurrence. The church had a catechist for 12 years, but in 2010, he was reassigned. Now a local man is the main leader of the church. His father was Amara, his mother Bariai, and he speaks both languages. He has been working as a leader in the church for 13 years.

Both the church in Siamatai and the church near Niuniuiai reported that they sometimes use Amara songs during services. However, the team found that language groups in this area are multilingual and tend to use many different WNB languages to sing songs during church services; therefore, we conclude that this does not seem to be a strong indicator of language vitality for any one language.

We did not gather language use in church in Natamou.

4.2.9 Bilingualism with other vernaculars

As stated earlier, there is a high level of multilingualism in Siamatai. Interviewees reported knowing, to some degree, Bariai, Maleu-Kilenge, Lusi, Kove, Mouk, Aria, Anem, and Tok Pisin; of these languages, males and females of each age group are actively bilingual in Bariai, Maleu-Kilenge, and Tok Pisin. The rest of the listed languages have a mix of active and passive bilingualism among the Amara-speaking population of Siamatai. Only old men and married women are actively bilingual in Lusi; married men, old men, married women, and old women are actively bilingual in Kove while young men are just passively bilingual in it; only old men are actively bilingual in Mouk and Aria; and in Anem the young men, married women, old men, and old women are actively bilingual.

The Niuniuiai community reported knowing Bariai, Maleu-Kilenge, Lusi, English, and Tok Pisin. Of those, the people reported that all ages, both male and female, can speak Bariai and Tok Pisin. The people reported that all adults are actively bilingual in Lusi. They also reported passive bilingualism of English in young men, married men, young women, and married women. The reports they gave about Maleu-Kilenge were confusing. They reported that young men, old men, young women, married women, and old women are all actively bilingual in it. However, married men were reported to only have the ability to compose traditional songs in Maleu-Kilenge, and not do anything else in that language. As the interviewees discussed this, the team began to question the extent of active bilingualism among the rest of the population; it is possible that they do not use Maleu-Kilenge in any other domain aside from traditional ceremony and song.

In looking at bilingualism, Natamou must be described differently from Siamatai and Niuniuiai. Though speakers are shifting away from Amara in Niuniuiai and there are early signs of shift in Siamatai, respondents in both still identify Amara as their first language. In Natamou, the people still identify Amara as their language, but it is no longer the dominant language of the village. The primary language in Natamou is Maleu-Kilenge. Due to this, they viewed the questions of bilingualism as being about languages they know other than their first language, Maleu-Kilenge. In light of that, they reported that old men, married men, married women, and young women are actively bilingual in Bariai while young men are just passively bilingual. Much more telling is the fact that interviewees reported young men, married men, young women, and married women as being passively bilingual in Amara. Only old men are actively bilingual in Amara.

In Niuniuiai, the active bilingualism in Bariai is due to the small population size of the village, proximity to the Bariai village of Kokopo, and intermarriage. Since the population is so small, villagers have intermarried with the community located nearest to them, Kokopo. This situation has slowly developed until none of the married women in Niuniuiai are Amara women. All of them are from Bariai villages. Being so close to Kokopo and having heavily intermarried with Bariai people increased the practicality of knowing and using Bariai in Niuniuiai.

Natamou is located far from the other Amara villages and directly on the Maleu-Kilenge language boundary; over time the people have developed more dependency on Maleu-Kilenge villages to meet their needs.

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9The Ethnologue refers to Mouk and Aria as Mouk-Aria [mwh]. Since the people in Siamatai distinguish between them, we will also distinguish between them when reporting what respondents in Siamatai said about bilingualism.
basic needs rather than looking to the other Amara villages. Through intense contact (see section 4.1) language use has shifted from Amara to Maleu-Kilenge. Due to this, instead of assessing in what languages the people of Natamou are bilingual with Amara, Amara was considered one of the languages most people are only passively bilingual in with Maleu-Kilenge.

4.2.10 **Code switching**

Code switching is an aspect of language use that was very difficult for the team to observe during this survey. We were able to note a few instances of code switching between Amara and Tok Pisin and one instance of code switching between Tok Pisin and Bariai, but were not able to glean the more important information about code switching between Amara and Bariai or Amara and Maleu-Kilenge.

When we first arrived in Siamatai there was a large group of women and children gathered around the porch of the house where we were waiting. They were all rather shy, but at one point there was a break in the vernacular as a married woman talked to the girls in Tok Pisin about us. We asked what vernacular they were using and the response was Amara. Later, in Niuniuiai an adult was talking to a girl and switched between Tok Pisin and a vernacular. The surveyor asked what language was being used, and in that case it was Bariai. As soon as we entered Natamou we conducted the sociolinguistic interviews. Since most of the people we would normally try to observe were watching and taking part in the interview, we were not able to observe any instances of code switching in Natamou. Each time the team observed code switching with Tok Pisin it was always in conversations where the vernacular dominated as the medium of communication.

Often code switching would take place for a phrase or an entire sentence. The observations we gathered indicated that it was typically topic-related and not motivated by lexical borrowing. Unfortunately, in this particular language area it is less important to know the patterns of behaviour within code switching when it involves Tok Pisin. How often code switching is occurring between Amara and neighbouring vernaculars is much more important, as Amara continues to lose domains to nearby local languages.

4.2.11 **Summary of language use**

Amara language use can be envisaged as a scale from Siamatai, where language use is most intense, to Natamou, where it is non-existent. Niuniuiai lands somewhere in the middle of the continuum; the Niuniuiai community uses Amara more frequently than the Natamou community but not to the extent of the Siamatai community.

The interactions of the Amara people with neighbouring groups are steadily eroding the foundations for Amara language use. In some areas, Amara speakers are depending on outsiders for school, trade stores, and women to marry. This is being reflected in how Amara is no longer being used by children or adults in Natamou and by children in Niuniuiai; in both of those villages, Amara has lost significant ground in the domains of language use and the people are beginning to identify less with Amara. The daily language use choices made by adults in Siamatai is a major factor in why Amara is still strong there. They have made it a priority to teach their children Amara and then to consistently use it in the home and village domains. Despite these efforts for language maintenance, there are still early signs of shift in the language use of children. The overall picture of language use in the Amara language area indicates that Amara has low vitality and speakers are steadily shifting to two different neighbouring languages: Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge.

4.3 **Language attitudes**

Landweer’s third theme of ethnolinguistic vitality, language attitudes, deals with the prestige attributed to a language both by speakers of the language and by outsiders, as well as the extent to which a language community is distinguished from the language groups around it (Landweer 2006:214, 217–218). Language attitudes shape the perceptions of prestige “among other neighbouring and regional languages” and the “relative prestige of the language within the linguistic repertoire of the speech community” (Landweer 2006:206). The more positive the language
attitudes of both insiders and outsiders are, the higher the prestige they will associate with that language, and “the greater the prestige a linguistic code enjoys, the more likely it will continue to be taught, learned and spoken” (Landweer 2006:206).

4.3.1 As reported by residents

The Amara people as a whole reported positive attitudes toward their language, but the underlying reasons for these attitudes and the level of prestige they reportedly attribute to the language varied. The fact that people in Siamatai are actively using Amara and transmitting the language to their children is a result of the high internal prestige Amara has in that area. The people reported that they are motivated to develop Amara in order to support language use already taking place. In Niuniuiiai, older generations are still using Amara, but they are no longer transmitting it to children in the home or in the village. Instead, the people are beginning to recognize the benefits of using the neighbouring vernacular, Bariai, in more domains. The Niuniuiiai community expressed regret at not using Amara more than they do and are concerned that it will die, but they are simply finding fewer reasons to use it daily. Their desire for language development is buttressed by the hope that development will increase language use and by the perceived need for historic preservation of their language. The people in Natamou have a strong sentimental attachment to Amara, but they have no intentions of changing their daily behaviour in order to increase the vitality of Amara. Their desire for language development seems to be centred on a desire to create a sustainable history. Their attitude is positive, but not positive enough to make real change; they would regret seeing it disappear without any record, but they do not want to stop using Maleu-Kilenge to ensure survival.

Informal requests for aid in language development have been made by leaders in Siamatai and Natamou; they have separately approached the SIL linguist working in the Bariai language area, Steve Gallagher, with these requests. The people in Siamatai reported that they want Amara literacy materials for their children. In Niuniuiiai and Natamou the request for language development was more about the final product of a book that could be their record of the language. Especially in Natamou, the people reported that they were less concerned about the death of Amara if this book existed because it provides a place for the language to remain even when it is not being spoken.

Positive and negative attitudes toward the Amara language were also demonstrated by the adults’ reactions to children’s language use. In Siamatai, the adults reported frustration over children’s tendency to mix Amara with other languages. They stated that the only language they care for their children to know is Amara. By contrast, in Niuniuiiai and Natamou the children do not learn Amara. Respondents conveyed regret over this in Niuniuiiai, but in Natamou the people reported that they are not concerned with what languages their children know and use. This is representative of the low internal prestige given to Amara by people in Niuniuiiai and Natamou.

When the team asked whether or not respondents thought their children and grandchildren would be using Amara as adults, the people in Siamatai responded with what they hope or want to see happen. They want their children to continue using Amara for generations to come, but are not convinced it will happen in reality. These statements indicate the highly positive attitudes adults have toward their language. In Niuniuiiai, after some debate, the people reported that their children and grandchildren will speak Bariai if language use does not change to favour Amara. The discussion surrounding this topic demonstrated positive attitudes and a desire to change behaviours in order to maintain Amara, but it does not seem that they are highly motivated to make the daily changes necessary to reverse language shift. In Natamou, the people reported that their descendants will undoubtedly be speaking Maleu-Kilenge and they have no desire to change that, demonstrating very low internal prestige.

4.3.2 Language attitudes in the schools

At the Siamatai elementary school, a cultural component is taught monthly by the elders of the community in the Amara language. The teachers are amenable to this and encourage the use of Amara among their students, suggesting a positive attitude on the part of both the community and the teachers.
The team was unable to interview staff from the elementary school in Kokopo or the primary school in Gurrissi, so we have no information on their attitudes toward Amara. The fact that none of the children who attend the elementary school in Kokopo speak Amara suggests that neither the teachers nor the children give much thought to the language. The children of Niuniuiai are identifying more with Bariai culture and language; therefore, it is highly unlikely they would want to use Amara in that setting even if they could (see section 4.3.5). At Gurrissi Primary School, where children from Siamatai attend, one of the minority languages is Amara. Being surrounded by other more dominant neighbouring languages does not encourage the use of Amara and probably lowers the prestige of Amara in the eyes of the children that speak it.

4.3.3 As reported by church leaders

The current church leader in Siamatai knows both Amara and Bariai (see section 4.2.8) and has a positive attitude toward Amara. He did express some concern over whether Amara would continue to be used in the future because he believes that Bariai is starting to overwhelm Amara.

The team understood that the Bariai church, attended by people in Niuniuiai, does not have a negative attitude toward Amara so much as an indifferent attitude. There are more Bariai speakers in the congregation and the people from Niuniuiai are actively bilingual in Bariai (see section 4.2.9). Therefore, there is little reason to change language use behaviours so that more Amara is used. It is not an indicator that the Bariai speakers have negative attitudes toward Amara or even that Amara speakers are embarrassed to use their language around Bariai speakers; instead, it is simply more convenient for everyone to continue using Bariai.

4.3.4 As inferred from behaviour

As stated in section 4.3.1, the people in the Amara language area did not report overtly negative attitudes toward their language. However, in analysing data from the individual Amara villages, the language use behaviour in some of these communities indicated otherwise.

The people in Siamatai consistently used Amara; we observed Amara language use among adults, adults to children, and children to children. As stated in section 4.2.2, some children even used Amara with a dog. This constant use of Amara supported the picture of high internal prestige the team got from reported attitudes. In Niuniuiai, the people reported that they want to maintain Amara, but their behaviour is advocating a shift to Bariai and demonstrating a low opinion of Amara’s usefulness in their daily lives and, ultimately, a low internal prestige. The behaviour of people in Natamou demonstrates Amara’s exceedingly low internal prestige, though the villagers did not report a negative attitude. Essentially, their input about how to best maintain Amara is through historic preservation; in daily life they have shifted to Maleu-Kilenge and do not regret the change.

4.3.5 Group identity

According to Fasold (1987:240), “A prevalent tendency to maintain a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, that is, the ingroup and a particular outgroup, is one sign that shift is not in progress.” Differences in language use and language attitudes have been shown among the Amara people living in Siamatai, those living in Niuniuiai, and those living in Natamou.10 This quote from Fasold illuminates the importance of yet another difference between Siamatai and Niuniuiai. In Siamatai, when the team asked what made the people different from their neighbours, the men present immediately responded with pride that their carvings are exclusive to Amara. They went on to inform us that they have unique ways of keeping their gardens and hunting. Contrast this with the community in Niuniuiai who, when asked the same question, could not think of anything that made them distinct.

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10 The survey team did not gather data on group identity from the respondents in Natamou, so this section will only address the Siamatai community and Niuniuiai community.
In his 1996 article, Thurston reports that one of the primary causes of language shift among the Amara to Bariai is caused by Amara participation in the Bariai singsing called the _aulu_ (198–202). This traditional feast includes dancing and singing. Singsings are an important part of many cultures in PNG, but are made unique through the type of dancing and the language used in the singing. This can be a very important part of a culture and losing it can be an indicator of language shift. The people of Siamatai reported that, though they do participate in the _aulu_, they also perform Amara singsings. The people of Niuniuiai, however, have not hosted an Amara _singsing_ since 1994. Language shift to Bariai in Niuniuiai is clearly evident in language use and one of the factors, as Thurston predicted in the 1980s, is the Amara participation in the Bariai _singsing_. The situation in Siamatai is completely different from Niuniuiai; part of that difference is the continuation of Amara _singsings_ in Siamatai and the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality it fosters.

The people of Siamatai still have an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality when it comes to neighbouring languages. This is no longer true in Niuniuiai. One surveyor had a long conversation with two teenage boys from Niuniuiai. Both were children of mixed marriages, whose mothers were from Kokopo, the neighbouring Bariai village. These two boys continually referred to themselves as Bariai, not Amara. They repeatedly used the Tok Pisin pronoun _mipela_ in a way that meant “we two and the Bariai people.” The boys distinguished between Amara and Bariai in just one area: land. The Amara people’s land is inland in New Britain, while the Bariai people’s land is on the coast. Since these boys’ fathers are Amara, they will inherit Amara land away from the coast, following the patriclan tradition of the area. They speak Bariai better than they speak Amara, they know Bariai traditional stories while they forget Amara stories, but they will inherit Amara land.

The maintenance or lack of maintenance of a group identity is one of the main reasons why shift is not occurring as rapidly in Siamatai, but is well underway in Niuniuiai.

### 4.3.6 Summary of language attitudes

It is impossible to say that the Amara people as a whole have a positive or negative attitude toward Amara. Although the Amara people tend to express a positive attitude toward their language, at least on the surface, the three villages display differences in the depth of that attitude depending on the functionality of Amara within their communities. In Siamatai, the people have a highly positive attitude, as evidenced by the fact that all generations continue to use it in most domains; in Niuniuiai, the decision to stop transmitting Amara to young children indicates a shift in the villagers’ attitudes and how they feel that their needs are not being met by Amara; while in Natamou the behaviour of the people in choosing to completely shift to Maleu-Kilenge reveals that Amara has a very low internal prestige.

The Amara people in each community clearly expressed that they are not ashamed of their language. They have a stated desire to be involved in language development and maintenance. However, the positive attitudes of people in Niuniuiai and Natamou seem to be focused on preserving the language for posterity rather than preserving it for daily use. They still identify with it and would regret it if people in Siamatai, the last village where vitality is still strong, allowed language shift to be complete. However, their attitudes do not extend to the point of wanting to change their own behaviours. On the other hand, the people in Siamatai have positive attitudes that are driving their motivation not only to preserve the language, but also to reverse language shift.

The cause-and-effect link between language attitudes and language vitality is clearly demonstrated in each Amara village. High internal prestige is found in Siamatai where the language is still vital. Low internal prestige and faint sentimental attachments to the language are resulting in ongoing language shift in Niuniuiai and completed language shift in Natamou.

### 4.4 Conclusions on language vitality

According to Landweer (2006:213), language vitality can be assessed by examining three themes of ethnolinguistic vitality: opportunity for contact with other languages, actual language use, and language attitudes. The team made initial conclusions on the field that the low vitality found in Niuniuiai and Natamou was a result of small population sizes that encouraged intermarriage with men and women from outside the language area. In analysing the data, it is likely that the language
shift occurring in those two villages is more directly related to their proximity to villages in neighbouring languages and their distances from fellow Amara villages. This isolation from other Amara villages and more steady contact with neighbouring languages created leaky domains. These neighbouring languages, Bariai and Maleu-Kilenge, made steady headway, until eventually Amara speakers started viewing Amara as less capable of fulfilling basic needs than Bariai or Maleu-Kilenge. As a result, Amara is only strong in Siamatai, while it languishes in Niuniuiai and is no longer considered the primary medium of communication in Natamou.

The small population sizes of Niuniuiai and Natamou encourage intermarriage and has become detrimental to language vitality in Niuniuiai. By contrast, Siamatai is the largest Amara village and, though there is a high level of contact with villages from outside the language area, it is still maintaining a separate identity from those languages. Instead of relying on outsiders for schools, traditional ceremonies, and spouses, the people of Siamatai look to their own community. This behaviour has limited the amount of reliance members of the Siamatai community have on outsiders and helps them to retain a sense of in-group and out-group, which in turn fosters language vitality. Language use in Niuniuiai and Natamou is low as a direct result of the high level of contact and dependency on outsiders. These two villages no longer have a distinct Amara identity and their attitudes are reflected in their language use behaviour.

5 Conclusions

The goal of the survey was to assess the language vitality of Amara. Previous research indicated that Amara was in a state of shift in the 1980s and that language use was expected to continue to erode for the foreseeable future. Based on this, the survey team went to the area expecting to find few Amara speakers. In reality, Amara is still a vital language in one village, Siamatai, where all generations are using Amara in most domains. There are still Amara speakers in Niuniuiai and the respondents identify heavily with Amara culture, but the people are no longer using the language regularly and are not teaching it to their children. Despite their stated attachment to Amara culture, they have assimilated into Bariai culture and lost some of their own traditions. Natamou still has Amara speakers, but as a whole the village has shifted to Maleu-Kilenge. Although the majority of residents speak Maleu-Kilenge as their first language, they still identify Natamou as being an Amara village. Even though language vitality varies throughout the Amara language area, there is still a vital population of speakers in Siamatai.
References


