Endangered languages listing: TAIAP [gpn]

Number of speakers: 80 (2000 estimate); population of language area: 203 (2000 census);

Taiap is a language spoken only in the village of Gapun near the mouth of the Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea. Laycock (1973) tentatively classified Taiap (also called Gapun) in the Sepik-Ramu phylum; however Ross (2005) established that Taiap is a language isolate, with no known relatives. The grammar, briefly described by Kulick and Stroud (1992), has several features unusual for the region; these include ergativity and gender marking on verbs.

Kulick (1992) carried out extensive fieldwork in the language in 1986-87. He found that Tok Pisin was becoming the majority language of the village, including in the home. Children under 10 (in 1987) had a poor fluency in Taiap. This shift in language use was being facilitated by adults even though they valued the vernacular and stated they wanted children to speak it. Kulick persuasively argued that the language shift was being driven by cultural values. Gapun villagers associated the vernacular with concepts including paganism, individualism, immaturity and backwardness, whereas they associated Tok Pisin with Christianity, community, modernity, adulthood and education. Kulick concluded "if the present patterns persist, it is likely that the vernacular will no longer exist as a language of everyday communication in thirty years' time."

Language resources available:

Grammar: Kulick and Stroud 1992.

References:

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Kulick, Don and Christopher Stroud. 1992. The structure of the Taiap (Gapun) language. In Tom Dutton, Malcolm Ross and Darrell Tryon, eds. *The language game: papers in memory of Donald C. Laycock* (Pacific Linguistics C-110). 203-226. Canberra: Australian National University.

Laycock, Donald C. 1973. *Sepik languages – checklist and preliminary classification* (Pacific Linguistics B-25). Canberra: Australian National University.

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Ross, Malcolm. 2005. Pronouns as a preliminary diagnostic for grouping Papuan languages. In Andrew Pawley, Robert Attenborough, Jack Golson and Robin Hide, eds. *Papuan pasts: cultural, linguistic and biological histories of Papuan-speaking peoples* (Pacific Linguistics 572). 15-66. Canberra: Australian National University.

Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiap_language