

The shark, the crocodile and the man-ship: Who is shaping language ideologies in a multilingual insular province?

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Born in a period in which the terms *sovereign state* and *nation* are often used interchangeably and having adopted the required symbols of statehood, such as flag, coat-of-arms (supported by the two beasts mentioned in the title), national anthem etc., the Solomon Islands still lack a national language. The seventy or so indigenous languages are limited to regional use, while English is the language of administration and Melanesian Pidgin is used as a *lingua franca*.

One of the main islands in the archipelago, Santa Isabel is both a province in its own right and a diocese of the Church of Melanesia. There are currently six indigenous languages spoken there, of which Cheke Holo, Bughotu, and Zabana are quite vigorous, while Gao, Blanga, and possibly Kokota are seriously threatened.

This talk focuses on how language ideologies in Isabel are being shaped by the local claimants of authority, the provincial government and the church, and by the interventions of missionaries and researchers from overseas (*mane vaka*, lit. 'men-ship'), and how they interact with recent language maintenance initiatives. The status of dominant language has been shared over the years by Bughotu and Cheke Holo, due to their cultural and respectively socio-political prestige and they have received most of the anthropologists' or missionaries' attention, while only a couple of field linguists have shown interest in Kokota, Zabana, or Blanga. Indeed, it is more practical to translate the New Testament, for instance, in Cheke Holo, a language understood by almost everybody on the island, than in the obscure Blanga, which nobody uses as a second language.

The less vigorous communities, however, seem to have more positive attitudes towards their own language, as reflected in their traditional stories and public discourses, in consultants' statements and self-initiatives. The current situation in Blanga is presented as a case study.