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Kemak Dialects in Timor Leste

By

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INTRODUCTION



Introduction

- ❑ Central-Eastern Malayo-Polynesian
- ❑ Speakers in East Timor (2015 census): around 69,000.
- ❑ Speakers in West Timor, Indonesia (Joshua project, 2021): around 12,000, many migrated from East Timor.
- ❑ Alternative names: Ema
- ❑ Mainly spoken in Bobonaro and Ermera municipalities.



Research questions

- **What are the varieties of Kemak?**
- **How can they be grouped?**
- **How mutually intelligible are they?**
- **What are the similarities and differences between the varieties?**
- **In what contexts is Kemak used?**
- **What linguistic varieties are used for inter-variety communication by Kemak speakers?**
- **What do Kemak speakers consider to be the most attractive variety, and which variety would they prefer to see used in Kemak literature?**

WORDLIST ANALYSIS

Methodology: wordlist analysis

- Provisionally identified 10 Kemak varieties from my own experience, naming them after the major town in each area. Added an additional variety in response to feedback.
- 11 groups: one per location, 3-5 speakers per group. All native speakers, age 25-50, 23 male & 12 female, interviewed in the capital Dili.
- Asked them to specify what they think the varieties of Kemak are.
- Collected a 206-word Basic Austronesian wordlist.
 - Asked them to orally translate each item from Tetun into their own variety of Kemak.
 - The researcher transcribed the words in standard script (not phonetic script).
 - The speakers read the list and checked the spelling.
 - Recorded one reader reading the Tetun and the Kemak for each item.
- Analysed using Gabmap.

Varieties according to Kemak speakers

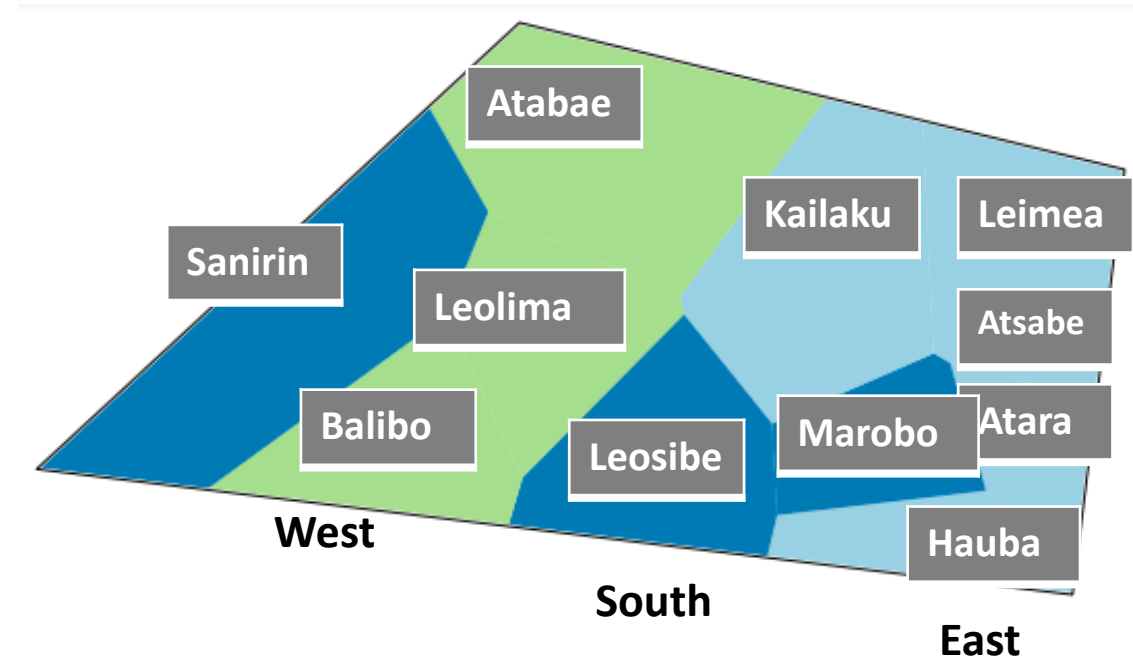
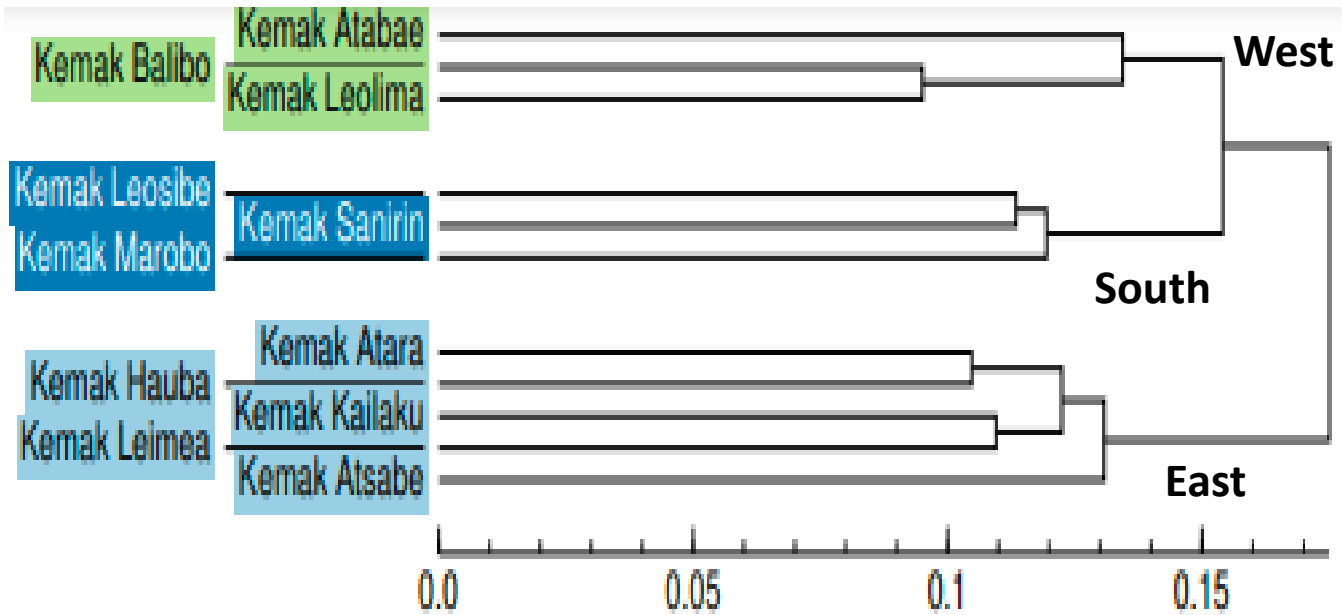
16 speakers identified varieties of Kemak
11 varieties got at least 10 mentions:

- 2 Eastern speakers had limited knowledge of the West
- Disagreement over whether Atsabe, Atara, Leimea are 3 varieties or 2.
- 5 recognized 2 subvarieties of Hauba
- 2 recognized 2 subvarieties of Marobo



Clustering analysis by Gabmap

Weighted average clustering method, 3 clusters



Geographic and historical correlation

- Loes River separates East and South from West.
- East and West were traditionally separate kingdoms.
- South is geographically split: Sanirin people are said to have migrated from Marobo.

Distinctive features of Eastern varieties

- Eastern varieties (esp. Atsabe and Kailaku) often have an additional final vowel which is identical to the final vowel in disyllabic Southern and Western words.

English	East	South	West
hand	<i>limara</i> (Atsabe, Kailaku) <i>limar</i> (Leimeia, Hauba)	<i>limar</i> (all)	<i>limar</i> (all)
green	<i>mosoko</i> (all)	<i>mosok</i> (2) <i>moskon</i> (Marobo)	<i>mosok</i> (all)
six	<i>neeme</i> (all)	<i>neem</i> (all)	<i>haneem</i> (2) <i>haneen</i> (Balibo)

- Where Eastern varieties end in a vowel, South and West often have an additional final /n/.

English	East	South	West
cold	<i>suma</i> (all)	<i>suman</i> (all)	<i>suman</i> (2) <i>sumang</i> (Leolima) <i>gabaran</i> (2)
sick	<i>baraga</i> (3) <i>mgara</i> (Hauba)	<i>mgaran</i> (2) <i>gbaran</i> (Sanirin)	<i>gabarang</i> (Leolima)
night	<i>dodaga</i> (all)	<i>dodogan</i> (Marobo) <i>dodgan</i> (Sanirin) <i>dodag</i> (Leosibe)	<i>dodag</i> (2) <i>lelebo</i> (Atabae)

Distinctive features of Western varieties

- Where East (except Atsabe) and South have /c/, Western varieties tend to have /t/.

English	East	South	West
stone	<i>acu</i> (3) <i>atu</i> (Atsabe)	<i>acu</i> (all)	<i>hatu</i> (all)
white	<i>buci</i> (3) <i>buti</i> (Atsabe)	<i>buci</i> (all)	<i>buti</i> (all)
grass	<i>su'ucu</i> (2) <i>su'uc</i> (Hauba)	<i>su'ut</i> (2) <i>su'uts</i> (Marobo)	<i>su'ut</i> (all)

- Some numerals in Western varieties have an initial /ha/, which varieties from the East and South don't have.

English	East, South	West
two	<i>rua</i> (all)	<i>harua</i> (all)
three	<i>telu</i> (all)	<i>telu</i> (2) <i>hatelu</i> (Balibo)
five	<i>lima</i> (all)	<i>halima</i> (2) <i>hilima</i> (Atabae)

Other types of variation, with no relation to clustering

- Some varieties sometimes have an epenthetic vowel where others have an initial consonant cluster. This vowel is identical to the first vowel.

English	Kemak Kailaku	Kemak Leosibe
laugh	<i>ginila</i> (3 East)	<i>gnila</i> (all South, all West, 1 East)
heavy	<i>mededa</i> (2 East) <i>madedan</i> (1 South)	<i>mdeda</i> (2 East) <i>mdedan</i> (2 South, 2 West) <i>mreran</i> (1 West)
fall	<i>manahu</i> (2 East, 2 West)	<i>mnahu</i> (3 East, 3 South, 1 West)

- A lot of variation seems to have no pattern.

English		
lie down	<i>boe</i> (3 East)	<i>bue</i> (2 East, all South, all West)
water	<i>bia</i> (all East, 2 South, 2 West)	<i>bea</i> (1 South, 1 West)

Totally distinct vocabulary

❑ 58 items (28%) have at least one variety with a totally unrelated term.

English	Kemak varieties					
worm	<i>koer</i> (Atsabe, Sanirin) <i>kuere</i> (Atara)	<i>kuita'u</i> (Leimea) <i>koita'o</i> (Kailaku) <i>kuicau</i> (Hauba) <i>kuica'u</i> (Atabae)	<i>ular</i> (Leosibe) <i>ulal</i> (Marobo)	<i>lakit</i> (Leolima, Balibo)		
say	<i>dale</i> (Leimea, Leisibe, Atsabe)	<i>toek</i> (Marobo)	<i>boi</i> (Atsabe, Balibo)	<i>habu</i> (Kailalku)	<i>to'u</i> (Atabae)	<i>bobe</i> (Leolima, Hauba, Sanirin)
lake	<i>bia lihu</i> (Atara, Atsabe) <i>bea lehung</i> (Marobo) <i>bea lihung</i> (Leolima) <i>bea lihun</i> (Sanirin)	<i>lebu</i> (Leimea)	<i>roko</i> (Hauba)	<i>ramas</i> (Leosibe)	<i>debu</i> (Balibo)	

❑ Possibly some Tetun loans, but it's hard to know as Kemak and Tetun are related.

❑ No Portuguese loans in the Basic Austronesian wordlist.

Comparison with clustering by native speakers

K Kailaku		X							
K Leimea				X	X	X			
K Atsabe				X		X			
K Atara						X		X	
K Hauba			X					X	
K Marobo		X	X						
K Sanirin		X	X	X	X	X		X	
K Leosibe		X	X	X		X			
K Leolima		X	X		X	X			
K Balibo		X	X			X			

- All recognized West, but some add Kailaku, Leimea or Sanirin
- 5 saw Kailaku and Leosibe as a single cluster, but Gabmap puts Kailaku as East and Leosibe as South. Several factors may make them seem more mutually intelligible than expected:
 - Relatively low number of very different words: 18. (This compares with Leimeia-Kailaku which have 19 very different words, while Gabmap places these 2 as very similar.)
 - Some East/South phonological differences are easily adjusted to:
 - eye: *matara* (Kailaku), *matar* (Leosibe)
 - small: *bi'i* (Kailaku), *bi'in* (Leosibe)

PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF SPEAKERS

In what contexts is Kemak used?

Kemak:

- Family
- Informal community get-togethers
- Market, local shops
- Ritual ceremonies, funerals.

Tetun Dili:

- With people from other parts of Timor
- In school, church, government, formal meetings

Perceived intelligibility

- Asked 17 people how well they understood speakers from each of the other varieties.
- All agreed they could understand Kemak speakers from all varieties to some extent.
- Some speakers can understand other varieties well because they have often been exposed to them, e.g. with relatives there, or because they are travelling market sellers.
- In general people understand speakers from their own cluster more than speakers from other clusters, but there are exceptions.

Language used for inter-variety communication

- Kemak speakers use Kemak with most other Kemak speakers.
 - Each uses their own variety (65%).
 - One speaks the other's variety (24%).
- Alternatively both speak Tetun (10%).
 - 7 out of 17 said they speak Tetun with speakers of some other varieties. All but one case was across a cluster boundary.

Preferred dialect to listen to and for literature

	Atsabe	Hauba	Kailaku	Leosibe	Marobo	Balibo
Preferred variety to listen to	3	2	1	0	8	2
Preferred variety for literature	6	5	2	1	1	0

- ❑ For listening to:
 - Marobo (South) was strongly preferred.
 - All reasons were based on pronunciation.
- ❑ For literature:
 - Atsabe and Hauba (East) preferred.
 - 9 gave reasons of easy understanding.

Conclusion

Kemak has 3 subgroups:

- Vocabulary (Gabmap)
- Mutual intelligibility high within subgroups
- Speakers usually use Kemak within their own subgroup

West versus East + South:

- *ha-* on some numerals, /t/ versus /c/
- Kemak speakers recognize West as distinct
- Loes River separates them

East versus West + South:

- Where West and South have a final vowel, East often has an extra coda.
- Where West and South have a final /n/, East often lacks it.

East versus West: traditionally separate kingdoms

South versus East + West: no additional evidence.

References

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