

The Sawos region remains the last unknown pocket of the otherwise quite well documented Ndu Language Family. LAYCOCK's "The Ndu Language Family" covered almost all the languages of the family in survey form with special emphasis on Wosera Abelam. Members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics have done language studies of Boiken, Gaikwundi, Maprik Abelam (Abulas), Manambu, and Iatmul. Typescript materials exist for all these languages as well as three publications by STAALSEN on Iatmul (1966, 1969, 1972).

1. Survey Overview

The present survey was conducted in 1972¹. Almost all of the villages of the Sawos region were visited. In cases where villages were bypassed, persons from those villages were contacted in other villages and data were elicited.

The data elicited were of three kinds: lexical items from the SWADESH list, grammatical paradigms, and subjective reactions to linguistic similarities between villages, mutual intelligibility, and multi-lingualism.

I feel that the lexical material alone will not give a true picture of the closeness of relationship between 'isoglots'. (I use the term 'isoglot' following APPELL (1968) who said, "I coin here the term 'isoglot' to refer to the speech of a group of people who consider their language or dialect to be significantly different from neighboring communities and thus have an indigenous term by which to identify it".) One of the features of the Ndu Family is a greater degree of similarity between open class items than between closed class items or grammatical typology. A lexical count by itself would lead one to expect a higher degree of mutual intelligibility than is actually the case. The percentages of cognates are of value only for comparison, so that we can see that isoglot A is more like B than it is like C. Some key words did emerge from the lists which correlated with other differentiated phenomena and constituted isoglosses between the various isoglots.

a) History

The Sawos region is a zone of transition between several large Ndu languages. All the linguistic groups in the region are small and much influenced by neighboring Ndu languages. Most adult males in the Sawos region have good speaking knowledge of basic Iatmul. Another evidence of pressure from neighboring languages was discovered at the village of Nagotimbi where the people are presently making a conscious shift of language. They formerly spoke the same language as the people of Pangeimbit, but have now decided to adopt the language spoken at Aurimbit village.

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