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Central Solomon Languages

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There are four or possibly five Papuan languages in the central Solomon Islands: Bilua, spoken on the island of Vella Lavella; Touo (known more commonly in the literature as Baniata, after one of the villages where it is spoken), spoken on Rendova Island; Lavukaleve, spoken in the Russell Islands; Savosavo, spoken on Savo Island; and possibly Kazukuru, an extinct and barely documented language of New Georgia.

Relationships Among the Languages

By the time of Ray (1926, 1928), there was already an established list of non-Austronesian languages of the Solomon Islands, consisting of Bilua, Baniata (here referred to as Touo), Savo, and Laumbe (now called Lavukaleve). Waterhouse and Ray (1931) later

discovered Kazukuru, a language of New Georgia, identifying it as unlike both the Melanesian (i.e., Austronesian) and Papuan languages of the Solomon Islands. Much later, Lanyon-Orgill (1953) claimed Kazukuru and two further varieties, Guliguli and Dororo, to be Papuan languages; however, the data are so scant as to make classification uncertain.

Greenberg (1971) was the first to make an explicit claim for the genetic unity of these languages, as part of his Indo-Pacific family. This claim was shortly followed by Wurm's (1972, 1975, 1982) proposal of an East Papuan phylum, linking all the Papuan languages of the islands off the coast of New Guinea into one genetic grouping. Both claims have been firmly rejected by specialists in the region, and recent views have been much more cautious: Ross (2001) suggested, on the basis of similarities in pronouns, that Bilua, Touo (Baniata), Savosavo, and Lavukaleve formed a family, unrelated to other island and mainland Papuan languages. Terrill (2002) found limited evidence of similarities in gender morphology among these languages. In lexical comparisons using an extended Swadesh list of roughly 333 items (with obvious Austronesian loans removed), Bilua, Lavukaleve, Touo, and Savosavo share only 3–5% resemblant forms (i.e., within the realm of chance). In short, at this stage of knowledge, a genetic relationship among any or all of these languages still remains to be proven.

Typological Characteristics

A typological overview of these and other Papuan languages of island Melanesia provided by Dunn *et al.* (2002) showed that, but for a few striking exceptions, the only grammatical features shared by the central Solomon Islands Papuan languages are also held in common with surrounding Oceanic Austronesian languages. These common features include an inclusive/exclusive distinction in pronouns, dual number (actually, there are four number categories in Touo), reduplication for various purposes, nominative/accusative alignment (although Lavukaleve has ergative/absolutive alignment in certain types of subordinate clauses), and serial verb constructions (absent in Bilua).

The two most notable departures from Oceanic grammatical patterns are SOV constituent order in three of the languages (Bilua has SVO with some variation) and the presence of gender; there are three genders in Lavukaleve, four in Touo, and two in Bilua and Savosavo. Gender in Bilua is contextually determined: the masculine–feminine distinction applies only to human nouns, but for inanimate nouns there is a distinction, marked by the same morphology as marks gender in human nouns,

between 'singulative' (=masculine) and 'unspecified number' (=feminine) (Obata, 2003). Savosavo has two genders, masculine and feminine, and it is not clear whether they are contextually determined as in Bilua or permanently assigned as in Touo and Lavukaleve (Todd, 1975).

Touo has some very unusual features for the region, including a phonological distinction between breathy/creaky vs. modal vowels, as well as six vowel positions instead of the usual five for the region. Touo sources include Todd (1975), Frahm (1999), and Terrill and Dunn (2003). Lavukaleve too has many unusual features, including focus markers that show agreement in person, gender, and number of the head of the constituent on which they mark focus; and a very complex participant marking system depending on factors to do with predicate type and clause type (Terrill, 2003).

See also: Papuan Languages; Solomon Islands: Language Situation.

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Maja Ivanovna Čeremisina was born in Kiev (the Ukrainian republic) in 1924. She is a Russian scholar who, after Ubrjatov's death in Novosibirsk, took on the responsibility of continuing research on the syntax of Siberian indigenous peoples' languages. Under her guidance, 33 scholars have investigated the syntactic structures of their mother tongues (Altai, Alutor, Buryat (Buriat), Kazakh, Ket, Khakas, Khanty, Kirghiz, Nganasan, Selkup, Shor, Tuva (Tuvin), and others). Most of them have undertaken 3-year postgraduate courses at the university in Novosibirsk.

Čeremisina received her secondary and higher education in Moscow. Her first years after secondary school were during World War II. On the first day of aerial bombardment in Moscow, her parents' house was completely destroyed, and her mother was killed.

Much later, Čeremisina was educated at the University of Moscow, where she mastered literature and the Russian language and later undertook 3-year postgraduate courses at Moscow University. After graduation, she taught many subjects in Russian philology at university departments in Tomsk, Tula, Beijing (China), and Novosibirsk. Čeremisina obtained her M.A. in 1960 and her Ph.D. In 1974. Her doctoral thesis was entitled 'Complex comparative constructions in the Russian language.' Before Čeremisina's doctoral defense, Ubrjatova asked her to read the manuscript of a book devoted to the analysis of complex sentences in the Yakut language. Čeremisina read the manuscript three times, trying to comprehend Yakut, the frame of mind of its speakers, and their way of expressing themselves, and also trying to penetrate into Ubrjatova's way of thinking, which gradually opened itself up to her. Her main field of endeavor thereafter became Siberian indigenous languages.

In 1975, Čeremisina took charge of a project based on comparative and typological research into the structure of complex sentences in the languages of Siberian indigenous peoples. The starting point of the investigation was one of the postulates propounded by Ubrjatova in her monograph on Yakut syntax – that Turkic languages employ similar language means to establish links between both words and units of higher levels (phrases and sentences). Testing the postulate on other Altaic languages became the goal of Čeremisina and her disciples.

Čeremisina founded a new Department of Languages and Folklore of the Indigenous Siberian Peoples at the university in Novosibirsk.

At present, Čeremisina and her team are working at the typology of a simple sentence in Altaic languages. She has published five monographs, nine textbooks, and 183 papers.

See also: Altaic Languages; Turkic Languages; Yakut.

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