

THE DIALECTS OF THE RORO LANGUAGE OF PAPUA :
A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a preliminary attempt to describe the dialects of the Roro language, and to make some brief notes on the changes in the language.

The Roro language is spoken by about 7000 people¹ in the Kairuku area of the Bereina sub-district, Papua, some 60 miles north-west of Port Moresby.

Roro-speaking villages (called 'Maiva' by the Motuans) in the main are spread along the coast, only five villages and a number of small hamlets being inland from Yule Island (see Map 1).

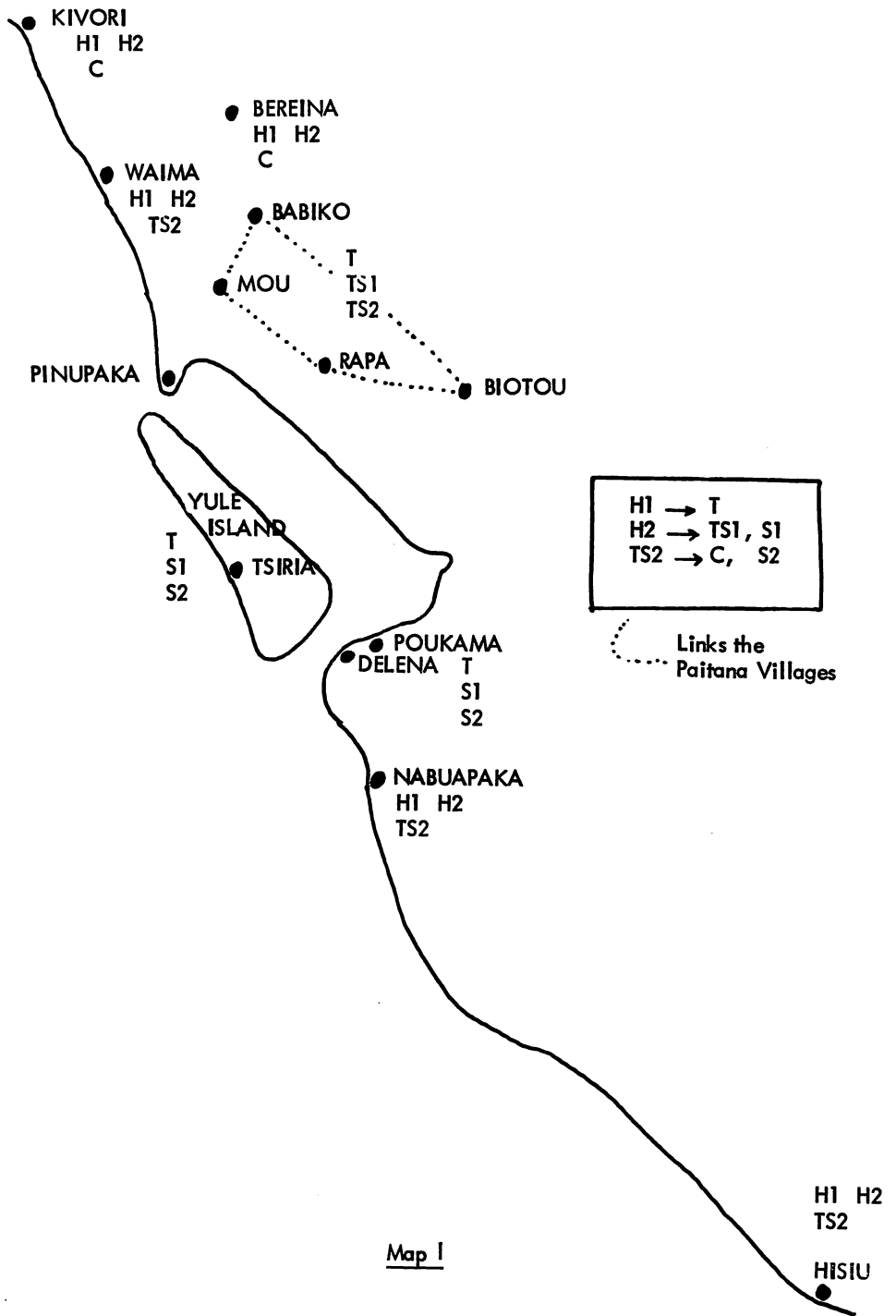
An Austronesian language, Roro is bounded to the NW by Elema (Toaripi), an NAN language, and on the NE and SE by its close AN relatives: Mekeo, Kuni, Nara, Gabadi, and Motu. Pawley's (nd) preliminary survey of these AN languages (including Sinauaro and Hula to the SE of Port Moresby) shows them to be very closely related as a single family - the Central Papuan, which both Dyen (1965) and Pawley (1969) tentatively classify as belonging to the Eastern Oceanic sub-group of AN.

2.

2.1 Collection of Data

Most of the data was collected among Roro speakers resident in Port Moresby during a series of interviews lasting from as little as 30 minutes to as long as three hours, between March and June 1971. All informants have been personally known to me for several years.

In collecting data, I tried to use at least one informant from each of the major villages (Hisiu, Nabuapaka, Delena, Tsiria, Pinupaka, Waima, Kivari, Bereina, Mou, Rapa, Biotou, Babiko), and to check the information against at least one other informant from the same village. Informant's ages ranged from about 15 to about 25, so their information reflects the language as it is spoken by today's youth, not by the older generation.



Map I

My collection of data is deficient in that I did not cover Pinupaka, nor did I obtain confirmation of the Waima dialect; however, tentative evidence suggests that Pinupaka lies within the Tsiria/Delena dialect, while Waima falls within the Nabupaka/Hisiu dialect. (See section 4, below).

2.2 It must be remembered that most of my informants have been in Port Moresby for some time, returning to their villages for only short periods. In addition, most have been educated, at least to primary level, by one or other of the Catholic or United Church (L.M.S.) Missions, both of which have produced their own written versions of the language.

In view of this, the "purity" of my informant's dialects is likely to have been affected by education, by prolonged contact with speakers from other villages, and by Motu, which most also speak to some extent. As a single example, Roro has a bilabial obstruent: most of the Delenas in Moresby articulate this phoneme as a labio-dental fricative, while the Delenas in the village articulate it more clearly as a bi-labial stop.

Thus it must be realised that anything presented here is very preliminary only, takes little account of the older generation, and should be ideally followed up by a detailed field survey.

2.3 Choice of lexical items: Initially the "100-word" list was completed with several informants, then from this list, and in part from my own acquaintance with the language, I selected a list of 50-plus items containing the major phonemes which are subject to change from community to community.

Copies of both lists are attached at the end of this paper.

3.1 Attitudes

The Roro speakers themselves recognise the differences in the language, and tend to describe them in such a manner as "in Kivari, Waima and Hisiu we say 'moihana' (look at him), but other villages say 'moitana'".

Every community as a whole, of course, believes its communalect to be correct, and everyone else to be speaking a corrupted form. I have often heard people say to other villagers "Eh! Stop spoiling the language!" However there are individuals in every community who will make comments such as "we should speak like the Waimas, but somehow we changed the language," or who otherwise recognise that the language is changing.

It is interesting that many informants comment on the Kivari dialect, saying that Kivaris "pull out" the words, and give examples such as moihantika'look at him' and

mobe.na'u 'give it to me' - putting a heavy falling stress on the second syllable. However the Kivori interviewed spoke no more differently than any other village, and when taxed with the problem, shrugged it away saying that one or two people spoke in this manner, but most spoke 'normally'. One informant said he knew of only two families who "pulled out" the words.

It may be in fact, that the special accent belongs to a recently immigrated clan, or else that the Kivori, on coming to town, prefer to modify their accent to avoid embarrassment with other Roro speakers. This can only be satisfactorily checked by fieldwork in Kivori itself.

3.2 Writing in 1910, Seligman divided the Roro language into two dialects - Roro and Waima. He wrote that Roro was spoken in Tsiria, Pinupaka, Poukama, and Delena, and in the Paitana villages of Mou, Rapa, Babiko and Biotou, while Waima was spoken in Waima, Kivori and Bereina. Seligman did not mention Nabupaka or Hisiu, but he did note that Bereina formerly had a dialect which differed from that of Waima (Seligman 1910: 195/196).

I have no consensus from informants on general dialect groupings or boundaries beyond the basic moihana/moitana (Waima/Roro) differences. While agreeing that the Paitana villages form a unit, informants differ over inclusion of Tsiria, Delena, Pinupaka, and Poukama within the Paitana dialect. Similarly, some informants link Hisiu and Nabupaka, but claim that Bereina, Kivori and Waima are all different.

4. Phonemes

4.1 All dialects possess the following phonemes:²

consonants	p	t	k	'
	b			h
	m	n		
		r		
vowels:	i			u
	e		o	
		a		

4.2 As detailed in paragraphs 4.5 to 4.7 below, some communities also possess additional units /s/, /ts/ and/or /ʒ/. Without a full phonemic analysis, I am not able to state whether these are additional phonemes, or allophones, for example, /t/.

4.3 Glottal stop can appear as a phoneme in most positions, including initial position:

/ae/ to suckle (of a baby on the breast)

/'ae/ leg

/hina'u/ my mother

/hinau/ to tell tales on someone, sneak

4.4 /p/ in contrast with /b/

/poho/ anus

/po'o/ stupid

/bo'okia/ many

4.5 The next three paragraphs should be read in conjunction with the selected list of words and Map 2.

Where /h/ is preceded by /i/ and followed by /a/ or /e/ , it remains /h/ in those villages marked H1, but changes to /t/ in those villages marked T.

aihau ----> aitau three

nihe ----> nite teeth

pihara ----> pitara stone

4.6 Where /h/ is followed by /i/ it remains /h/ in those villages marked H2, but changes to /s/ or /ts/ in those villages marked S1 or TS1 respectively.

hiabu → siabu → tsiabu smoke

mahi → masi → matsi animal

aihi → aisi → aitsi crayfish

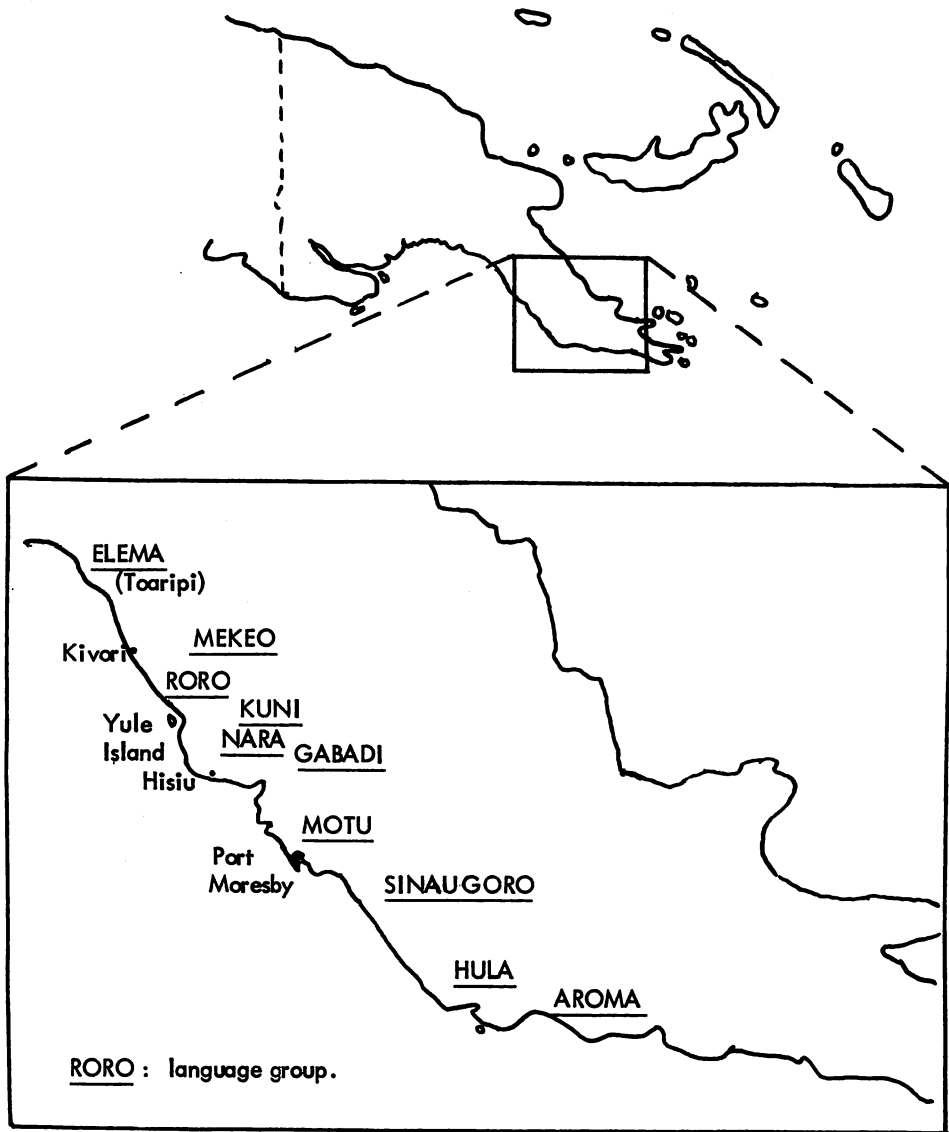
4.7 Where /ts/ is followed by /i/ or /u/ it remains /ts/ in those villages marked TS2, but changes to /s/ or /č/ in those villages marked S2 or C.

tsitsi → sisi → čiči meat

matsiu → masiu → mačiu tree

tsubu → subu → čubu grass

itsu → isu → iču nose, house



Map 2

Selected list indicating sound correspondences:

	<u>three</u>	<u>teeth</u>	<u>stone</u>	<u>smoke</u>	<u>animal</u>	<u>crayfish</u>
Hisiu:	aihau	nihe	pihara	hiabu	mahi	aihi
Nabua:	aihau	nihe	pihara	hiabu	mahi	aihi
Delena:	aitau	nite	pitara	siabu	masi	aisi
Tsiria:	aitau	nite	pitara	siabu	masi	aisi
Paitana:	aitau	nite	pitara	tsiabu	matsi	aitsi
Bereina:	aihau	nihe	pitara	hiabu	mahi	aihi
Kivori:	aihau	nihe	pitara	hiabu	mahi	aihi

<u>when</u>	<u>river</u>	<u>younger brother</u>	<u>meat</u>	<u>tr ee</u>	<u>grass</u>
aita	ate	hatsi	tsitsi	matsiu	tsubu
aita	ate	hatsi	tsitsi	matsiu	tsubu
aita	ate	hasi	sis	masiu	subu
aita	ate	hasi	sis	masiu	subu
aita	ate	hatsi	tsitsi	matsiu	tsubu
aita	ate	hači	čiči	matsiu	čubu
aita	ate	hači	čiči	mačiu	čubu

<u>cough</u>	<u>nose</u>	<u>near</u>	<u>look at him</u>	<u>he came in</u>
totsi	itsu	herena	moihana	etoto
totsi	itsu	herena	moihana	etoto
tosi	isu	herena	moitana	etoto
tosi	isu	herena	moitana	etoto
totsi	itsu	herena	moitana	etoto
toči	iču	herena	moihana	etoto
toči	iču	herena	moihana	etoto

	<u>he ran out</u>	<u>take it away</u>
Hisiu:	ebeaoahi	moa'ikatsuana
Nabua:	ebeaoahi	moa'ikatsuana
Delena:	ebeaoasi	moa'ikasuana
Tsiria:	ebeaoasi	moa'ikasuana
Paitana:	ebeaoasi	moa'ikatsuana
Bereina:	ebeaoahi	moa'ikačũana
Kivori:	ebeaoahi	moa'ikačũana

Notes: In the foregoing examples -
 for Nabuapaka, read also Waima (tentatively)
 for Paitana, read also Mou, Rapa, Babiko, Biotou
 for Delena, read also Poukama

The position of Punupaka is in doubt; however, I suspect
 it falls within the same group as Tsiria and Delena.

5. Lexical differences (see selected list).

5.1 Most villages are aware of each other's idiosyncracies in certain lexical items. For example, everyone knows the words tamena and kiki maru for 'salt' (or akuaku 'salty'); however, certain villages use tamena, saying that kiki maru is the old word; some villages reverse the situation, and both words are used in Tsiria.

5.2 'cloud' - a Bereina man assured me that the correct word was 'aohau', but most people, including himself, normally said 'auho'.

5.3 'to count' - the most usual word appears to be mobahuna 'you count it' but tsuabi is also known and used.

5.4 'right' (correct) - ebero or enamo. Several Tsiria youths in Moresby were unable to give me the correct Roro word, giving me instead an English borrowing erait. (Tsiria has been under Catholic Mission influence for almost 100 years).

Lexical Differences : selected list

Note : An item enclosed in square brackets is claimed to be the old word, and used mainly by the old people.

	<u>cloud</u>	<u>salt</u>	<u>to count</u>
Hisiu:	'auho	tamena	-tsuabi [-bahu-]
Nabua:	'auho	tamena	-bahu-; -tsuabi
Delena:	'aohau	tamena	-bahu-
Tsiria:	'aohau	tamena; kiki maru	-bahu-
Paitana:	to'u	kiki maru [tamena]	-bahu-
Bereina:	'aohau	kiki maru [tamena]	-bahu-
Kivori:	'auhao	tamena [kiki maru]	-čuabi [-bahu-]

	<u>right</u>	<u>yellow</u>	<u>quarrel</u>
	-bero	'a'aeabu	-baibata; -baiara
	-bero	'a'aeabu	-baibata
	-bero	'au'aeabu	-roku
	-era it(bero)	'au'aeabu	-roku
	-namo	'au'aeabu	-roku [-baibata]
	-bero	'a'aeabu	-baibata
	-bero	a'aeabu	-baiara; -baibata

	<u>beads</u>	<u>platform</u>
paipai		itara (-roof) i'aua (+roof)
emo'aru		tsibu'a
emo'aru		itara
'ou'ou		?
'ou'ou		ababa
emo'aru		itara; čibu'a [i'aua]
paipai		itara (-roof) i'aua (+roof)

6. Changing Language

6.1 A great many informants and friends have commented on how much the language is changing, and while I was not able to collect word lists from old people on this occasion, I was able to note certain changes which are taking place between the generations. Certain lexical items have already been noted. Other changes were heard as follows:

6.2 Both in Bereina and Tsiria I heard some of the older people using /č/ rather than the younger peoples' /h/ or /s/ :

Bereina: pičara ---> pihara 'stone'

Tsiria: činabu ---> sinabu 'hundred'

In Tsiria again I hard an elderly person say abanouao ? instead of the more usual abanoao ? 'you are going?' (note the extra /u/); and again in Tsiria I noticed a few young people dropping the glottal stop in hina'u 'my mother' - so that it becomes hinau, even though the latter means 'to tell tales' (sneak). However, to be used as a verb the appropriate prefix and suffix must be added.

At this stage I do not know to what extent the differences might be due to personal idiosyncracies.

6.3 Apart from erait, (discussed above 5.4), other obvious English borrowings are marere 'letter' or 'school', which presumably comes from 'mail' (neighbouring Mekeo use malele), and rari 'motor vehicle' from 'larry' (Mekeo: loli).

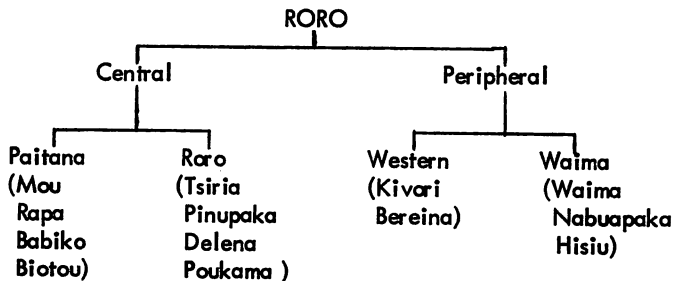
A fourth borrowing is erauni 'round' given to me by Tsiria youths.

6.4 Certain new expressions have appeared in recent years to cope with liquor; my Hisiu informant gave me the expression inu teao or teao keteinu implying 'they've gone to drink (liquor)' whereas previously the object was specified: e.g. teao bei keteinu 'they've gone to drink water,' or teao bei tana keteinu 'they've gone to drink coconuts'.

6.5 Shooting with a shotgun requires the expression -ipitsi-, whereas shooting with a spear was -komo-, and with an arrow was -reua-.

7. Conclusions:

The data presented here confirms Seligman's (1910) statement that Roro possesses two dialects, which we may for convenience label Central (Seligman's 'Roro') and Peripheral (Seligman's 'Waima'). However it is clear that we can make further sub-divisions as follows:



On the basis of the hints outlined in paragraph 6.2., it may be that the sub-division of Central into Paitana and Roro is a post-contact phenomenon. Confirmation needs lengthy follow-up with both elderly and young people in each community; the collection of detailed phonemic and lexical data, and its comparison with early information collected by Missionaries.

Notes

1. PNG Village Directory 1966, Department of the Administrator.
2. Some writers maintain a distinction between /u/ and /w/ (e.g., Bluhme 1972:873). For example, in stressing the difference between kaua 'rat' and kaua 'buy/sell', the latter has come to be written kawa.

I suspect the difference lies in the relationship of /u/ to its neighbouring vowel phoneme; i.e. in kaua 'rat' /u/ forms a diphthong with the preceding vowel, while in kaua 'buy/sell' it forms a diphthong with the following vowel: [kau.a] 'rat', [ka.ua] 'buy/sell'.

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- | | | |
|-------------------|------|---|
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APPENDIX

1. 100-WORD LIST

I	tree	drink	cloud
thou	seed (fruit)	eat	smoke
he/she	leaf	bite	fire
we (inc)	root	see	ashes
we (exc)	skin	hear	burn
you	flesh	know	path
they	blood	sleep	mountain
this	bone	die	red
who	egg	kill	green
what	tail	swim	yellow
all	hair	fly (to)	white
many	head	walk	black
one	ear	come	night
two	eye	sit	hot
three	nose	stand	cold
four	mouth	give	new
five	tooth	say	good
big	tongue	sun	bad
long	foot	moon	dry
small	knee	star	name
man	hand	water	yam
woman	belly	rain	coconut
fish	neck	stone	banana
bird	breasts	sand	
dog	heart	earth	
louse	liver	sea	

2. DIALECT LIST

three	younger brother	salt - sea
six	meat/flesh	packet
teeth	stick/tree	to count
see	grass	right (correct)
stone	breast	straight
year	cough	louse
smoke	rain	mountain
warm	wipe	hill
he ran out	float	yellow
to breath out	right (hand)	warm (it's getting warm)
to suck	nose	wet
animal	spit	old
star	sit	round
hundred	stand	'girl-friend'
crayfish	give it to me	look at him
new	woman	quarrel
near	milk (human)	angry
how	reef	platform
tear	'take it away'	beads
he came in	some	hunt
when	to flow	
river	cloud	