

Margaret Florey

Linguistics Program, Monash University

Capacity building and community language activism in Central Maluku

The languages of Maluku are the most endangered in Indonesia, and this is also one of the highest regions of language endangerment in the Austronesian world. A research team based at Monash University has been documenting four endangered and previously undescribed languages under the rubric of the project *Endangered Moluccan Languages: Eastern Indonesia and the Dutch diaspora*. The EML project embeds capacity building within all aspects of documentation activities. The training philosophy aims to empower speakers of Moluccan languages and their descendants to undertake language documentation and implement language revitalization or maintenance at the grassroots level.

This paper presents strategies which have been developed by the project team as pathways to community language activism. An intensive residential training program brings community members together with regional professionals from a range of disciplines, and builds a resource pool from which expertise can be drawn for undertaking activities involving both Indigenous languages and Indigenous knowledge. Skills gained in workshops are then reinforced in the community. All age groups and key institutions (such as the schools) are involved in language activities such as the development of literacy materials. Community language workers gain further training through working in apprenticeship with linguists and elders in their communities. In some locations, this pathway has already led to community members initiating and undertaking their own documentation and language maintenance activities. These are important developments from the perspectives of language revitalization, sustainable knowledge, and capacity building in endangered language communities.

About the speaker

Dr. Margaret Florey is a Senior Lecturer in the Linguistics Program at Monash University. She has substantial experience in the field of language endangerment through her research, teaching and capacity building with indigenous communities. Margaret's research interests include the minority languages of the Austronesian and Australian language families, language endangerment, language documentation, ethnography, ethnobiology, and anthropological linguistics. Her PhD in Linguistics from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (1990) was an examination of language shift in the Alune language of eastern Indonesia. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in eastern Indonesia and in Western Australia. Margaret is currently coordinating a collaborative research project which is documenting four endangered Moluccan languages, both in the Indonesian homeland and in the Dutch diaspora. This work is supported by major grants from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (SOAS, UK) and the Australian Research Council.

In addition to language documentation, Margaret has been actively involved in teaching both theoretical and applied aspects of language endangerment and revitalisation. She devised and convenes the postgraduate Studies in Language Endangerment programs at Monash University. She has also developed and implemented methodologies for training community language workers and Indigenous linguists in language documentation and language maintenance strategies in Indonesia, the Netherlands and Australia. Margaret is a co-founder of the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity, serves on the Advisory Panel for Terralingua, and chairs the steering committee for the International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics. She has also contributed as an international expert at the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Section Experts' Meetings on the Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage.