

Culture change, language change: Missionaries and moribund varieties of Kilivila

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In my talk I emphasize that with respect to levels of endangerment Kilivila, the Austronesian language of the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea, can still be classified as a viable but relatively small language: it is "spoken in [a community] that [is relatively] isolated [and] with a strong internal organization, and aware of the way [its] language is a marker of identity" (Crystal 2000:20). However, I also point out that two of its varieties, the 'biga megwa' – the 'language of magic' and the 'biga baloma' – the 'language of the spirits of the dead' are highly endangered and actually moribund these days. I first present examples of text genres that constitute these two indigenous varieties of Kilivila and then explain how and why they have to be classified as being doomed to die. The presentation ends with an assessment of this development and its impact on the language and culture of the Trobriand Islanders.