

# Dictionary Making and the Creation of Standards Where None Previously Existed

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Lexicographers typically see dictionaries as impartial records of usage, but the typical dictionary user probably tends to see the dictionary as an arbiter of usage or some sort of canonical authority on a language. Although lexicographers may not particularly wish to become arbiters, the way in which the people who read their products use the dictionaries they consult inevitably forces the role of arbiter onto lexicographers whether they want the role or not.

'Standardization' of languages is a notion that is typically applied to national languages (or major regional languages at least) rather than to small minority vernaculars. However, the very act of producing a dictionary inevitably creates a standard of sorts, no matter whether the language involved is a major one or a small endangered vernacular. The lexicographer, then, is obliged to take the role of standardizer seriously. Lexicographers cannot work in an apolitical vacuum without taking the interests of different stakeholders into account.

I have recently been involved in a collaborative project to produce a multilingual glossary of Waima'a, a small Austronesian language spoken in East Timor. This paper addresses some of the issues that have been raised by different stakeholders during the Waima'a glossary project and canvasses some of the strategies that we have used to defuse potential conflicts.