

Hawu and Dhao in Eastern Indonesia: Revisiting Their Relationship

Charles E. Grimes

SIL International

Hawu (Savu, Sawu, Sabu) and Dhao (Ndao) are spoken on three small islands in the Sabu Sea to the west of Timor Island in eastern Indonesia. Earlier observers have seen obvious similarities in their phonologies and lexicon, and some have confidently asserted that "Ndao" was clearly a dialect of "Sawu".

Walker (1982), on the other hand, after looking briefly at aspects of the phonology, lexicon, phrase structure and syntax, cautiously came to be "of the opinion" that "Ndao is a separate language".

This paper revisits the issue with new data and new analyses, picking up on several features not yet described by others. It approaches the question by comparing entire subsystems of the two languages. In addition to looking at the complex phonologies and the lexicon, it explores a number of grammatical subsystems, including syntax and some very interesting typological features. It also examines more closely the issue of intelligibility.

While the topic is worthy of a monograph, an attempt is made here in this conference-length paper to choose examples that clearly illustrate the points being made.