

A language centre for Kupang: how can we make it work most effectively and what should it do?

John Bowden
Linguistic Department
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
john.bowden@anu.edu.au

The author of this paper has just been successful in obtaining a grant from the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Programme to document the Helong language and to help set up and equip a language centre for Kupang and Nusa Tenggara Timur. Helong has been chosen as the focus of language documentation because (a) although the language is fairly vibrant on Semau island, it is much more endangered on the Timor mainland where the need for documentation of the Bolok and Funai dialects is critical, and (b) its accessibility to Kupang city makes it an ideal training ground for people resident in Kupang who might be able to work on documentation of other languages from NTT.

Although the project will be primarily focussed on developing a rich archive of the Helong language and providing a rich documentation of the language, the funds will also enable the purchase of basic equipment for a language centre, including computers as well as audio and video recording equipment. It will also fund the production of bilingual educational materials in Helong and enable training to be provided to local people who with a desire to document other languages in the NTT region. Furthermore, it will give these people the opportunity to work on other language projects by using the equipment that has been provided to the centre.

In this paper, I will outline the aims of the Helong documentation project in some detail, and suggest ways in which a language centre in Kupang might be developed. I would hope that the discussion following the author's presentation might help develop the project in such a way that it can best serve the interests of the people of Nusa Tenggara Timur and the preservation, development and documentation of their languages.