

Squibs, Notes and Discussion

Some Further Comments on Kaki Ae

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Clifton (1994) has recently published information on Kaki Ae, a small language in the Gulf Province. Although the language fits the standard criteria of an endangered language, Clifton feels that it has not only survived but is also currently viable, due somewhat to its own linguistic isolation. That is, its smallness has precluded it from becoming a viable lingua franca and, coupled with this, there has been no lingua franca prestigious enough to replace it. However, more recently English has shown signs of having that kind of prestige.

This note is meant to add some linguistic information to Clifton's report. It is based on materials collected by Brown and given to me when we collaborated (with others) in a survey of the Gulf area (Franklin 1973). I will mainly confine my observations to Clifton's claim (1994:10) that 'because of [borrowing] I feel the claim [by Brown] that Kaki Ae [Raepa Tati] is related to the Eleman languages at the stock level is questionable.'

But first of all, a brief aside on the name of the language and its population figures. Brown called the language 'Raepa Tati' (meaning 'Hill Tati') and reported that this was the name given to the people by the Eastern Elema. Clifton uses the name by which the people call themselves – Kaki (from Tati) Ae, or 'Hill Language'.¹ The name Tati, Brown reported, was related to a group by the same name, but much further to the east and once a part of the Kovio (Brown 1973:284). Apparently the Tati-Kovio people were once spread over a much larger area and were Austronesian descendants. According to Brown (1988:140)

¹ Raepa means 'hill' or 'mountain' and, with modifiers, can refer to a large rock, a ridge, a hillside, a mountain, or a steep hill (Brown 1968:241). The cupola behind Kerema is the area Strong (1911) referred to in his note on the 'Tate'. Vocabularies as early as 1892 and 1894 for Toaripi, Orokol, Bairara, Keura and Kerema are recorded in the Annual Reports for British New Guinea. As to its overall classification, Wurm (1982:122) considers Raepa Tati (RT throughout this paper) to be a family-level isolate in the Eleman subphylum-level stock along with the Eleman family and Purari (Koriki, Namau), also a family-level isolate.

The Raepa Tati have a tradition that their ancestors come from Nara, to the east of Yule island. Their language which must be classed as Eleman, shows no structural affinity with Nara, an Austronesian language. There are, however, a few odd resemblances of vocabulary that suggest a factual basis for the tradition, but the migrants must have been few in number and so were absorbed by the group of Elema already settled at Cape Cupola.

Brown gives a further bit of evidence to support the eastern contacts of the Raepa Tati, namely the method of tattooing that the women followed. This tradition was not Eleman and was copied from people eastwards from Cape Possession, such as the Roro, Nara and Motu peoples (Brown 1988:141). However, although the names of Raepa Tati (or Kaki Ae) and Tati are similar, there seems to be no linguistic affinity between the two groups.

The population of RT, when Brown (1973) reported on it, involved only three villages: Lou, Lovere, and Uriri, totaling 266 around 1970. Clifton says there were 310 in 1993, with three additional villages, which are 'relatively recent splits from Uriri.' So the new villages have appeared in the last 25 years.

The geographical distribution of the Eleman languages or dialects that Brown compares RT with are widespread: Kaipi is to the east of RT, but closest, followed by Toaripi, which is generally west of the Lakekamu River, and Sepoe, which is nearest to Kovio-Tati and Roro, AN languages in the Central Province bordering the Gulf Province. Orokolo is the westernmost Eleman language, bordering Purari (Namau, Koriki) in the Purari delta.

The RT data collected by Brown consisted of 400 RT words which were compared with the various Eleman languages. He found 75 RT words (or about 19%) with affinities with one or another of the Eleman languages or dialects. Those linguistic groups of Elema(n) that Brown specifically mentioned were (T)oaripi, (O)rokolo, (S)epoe, and (K)aiipi. Some of the words had a wider distribution than Eleman, extending to Purari. Brown's data demonstrates that RT is most influenced by K, and least by O and S.

I now present my observations on Brown's data, noting the regular sound correspondences which occur between RT and the Eleman group.

1. *k:-t-*,² as in RT *keno* and T *tero* 'narrow', RT *kekene* and T *tetere* 'sandy soil', RT *kivi a'ani* and T *tivi loi* 'work', RT *kapora nai* and T *tapora loi* 'hunt',³ RT *kai'ia* and S *taita* (*taisa* in T) 'paddle'

² *k:t* is also a regular correspondence between O and T. Brown (1986:xv) refers to it as his Sound Change Rule 1: 'Cognate words with an initial /t/ in T or with a /t/ preceded only by a vowel, are replaced by /k/ in O.' Some examples are O *uki*: T *uti* 'bone', O *kaita*: T *taisa* 'paddle'.

2. *-n:-r-*, as in RT *keno* and T *tero* (see above), RT *honou* and T *horou* 'rope', RT *finu* and T *firu* 'island, piece', RT *hawani* and T *kauari* 'sweet potato'
3. *-n:-l-*, as in RT *mena* and O *kela* 'hill', RT *nonora* and K *lolara* 'valley', RT *enena* and T *elele* 'veins, sinews'
4. *ø:h-lk-*, as in RT *arisu* and K *harisu* 'ghost', RT *aropure* and T *haropuru* 'brains', RT *aru* and T *karu* 'person, man', RT *mauri ha* and T *makuri* 'be alive', RT *loi lohio aru 'u* and T *lohio karu* 'headman'
5. *h:-s-/ ø-*,⁴ as in RT *himiri* and K *siviri* 'many', RT *suruha* and T *surusuru* 'wet', RT *here* and T *ere* 'belly'; note also RT *mehau* and O *mehau* and K *misou* 'heavy', RT *sarufa aru 'u* and T *sarufa karu* 'servant'

Other correspondences are unique, but show the instability of certain sounds, such as /s/, which is frequently lost in RT:

6. RT *sioro* and T *sisoro* 'year', RT *lare ove* and T *sare ove* 'sun shadow'
7. *-i:-e* and *-e:-a*, as in RT *mapori* and O *mapore* 'yam', RT *kararape* and T *kararapa* 'side of chest'

To sum up, the most sound changes are between RT and T, for example the loss of a corresponding *h-*, *k-* or *-s-* in RT. The RT alveolar *-n-* changes to *-r-* or *-l-*, the former with T in every case and the latter with T in one case, but also with O and K.

In conclusion, the data seems to support the contention of Brown that RT and the Eleman languages are distantly related. The claim by Brown (1968:xvii) that the Eleman languages and Purari (Namu) have an 'unmistakable affinity' is another matter.⁵

References

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³ Both RT and T use an auxiliary verb with 'work' and 'hunt'. While T uses the same auxiliary (*loi*) with both, however, RT uses different auxiliaries with the two. T *loi* may be cognate with RT *nai*.

⁴ The correspondence *h:s* also occurs between O and S, e.g. *haita: saita* 'dish', *hare: sare* 'sun'.

⁵ Brown examined 1000 words common in the two language groups and found 40 which he considered related. This is of course a very small percentage and may well reflect loans, given the degree of trade between the two areas. My own quick efforts comparing Brown's Eleman and Toaripi materials with those of Kairi and Kolia (1977) on Purari were not productive.

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