Abstract
In the Pacific Islands, many small languages are undocumented and disappearing. On the island of Santa Cruz in the Solomon Islands, the Nagu language is endangered. In 1976, 311 people spoke Nagu, but at the time of the last census in 1999, there were only 206 speakers, a 34% decrease in less than 15 years (DeBrujin and Beimers 1999:50). The decrease is not a result of death, but of people choosing to use a different language instead of Nagu. What are the causes of language shift on this small island? In this paper, I give an overview of the Nagu language situation and the causes I found for language shift during my research in summer 2008.

Setting
The Solomon Islands are a chain of over 1000 islands with over 65 spoken languages situated in the Pacific Ocean just northeast of Australia. My research focuses on the Nagu-speaking village of Baemawz on Santa Cruz in the eastern part of the Temotu Province. Nagu is part of the Reefs-Santa Cruz language family that includes two other languages on Santa Cruz, Natggu and Naliro, and Aiwoo in the nearby Reefs Islands.

In summer 2008, I spent six weeks in a Nagu-speaking village called Baemawz studying the Nagu language and people. I lived with three young women and became a part of the village community. The village is a close-knit community of families who share resources, help each other with daily tasks and “stori” (talk) together.

Research Questions
✓ Is Nagu an endangered language as previously listed by DeBrujin and Beimers in the 1999 census?
✓ Who in the village speaks Nagu and in what contexts?
✓ What other languages are affecting the Nagu language situation?
✓ What is the primary language of the children?
✓ Do people in the village perceive that Nagu is endangered?

Research Methods
Participant Observation: For six weeks, I lived in the village of Baemawz on Santa Cruz. During this time, I was a participant observer in the daily life of the people. I attended church services and other community gatherings. The majority of my observational data come from the times where I sat in the village with the people, listened to them “stori,” and watched them interact. Interviews: I conducted in Solomon Islands Pijin around 26 formal semi-structured interviews with 11 men and 15 women. These 26 interviewees represent close to every household in Baemawz.

The interviews included 20 main questions with many sub-questions that were adapted to each person. In my interviews, I asked questions about personal and family language use as well as perceptions of the language stability of Nagu. I also conducted over 15 informal interviews, which supported the data gathered in the formal interviews.

The Endangerment and Shift of the Nagu Language in the Solomon Islands
Rachel D. Emerine, M.A. Candidate
Department of Anthropology California State University, Long Beach

Preliminary Findings
Language Shift: Intermarriage and the Use of Solomon Islands Pijin
Nagu language shift is caused primarily by intermarriage and increased use of Pijin. In the past when people from two different languages married they learned each other’s languages in order to communicate. Today, when couples from two different languages marry, instead of teaching their children one or both home languages, they teach their children Pijin. This shift began in the last two generations because the introduction and use of Pijin in schools. English is taught in the schools, but Pijin is used to communicate among the students and with the teacher. I asked my internees when they learned Pijin, and almost everyone said they learned Pijin in school.

Perception of Language Shift
Almost everyone agreed Pijin was spoken more now than in the past. Some parents believed that even though they talked to their children in Pijin, the kids would “pick up” Nagu “all about” or from their friends. I asked these same parents what language their kids spoke with their friends and they said Pijin, but they still believed that somehow their children would pick up Nagu and speak it as adults.

Conclusion
✓ The majority of the adults and young adults in Baemawz still speak the Nagu language, but there is a shift occurring where children are choosing to speak Pijin over Nagu.
✓ The growth of Pijin began with the introduction of schools that taught in Pijin and is reinforced when parents choose to speak Pijin in mixed marriages instead of learning their spouse’s language.
✓ Nagu is also considered the most difficult language on the island, which may lower its value in the eyes of the speakers.
✓ Some parents are trying to be proactive and teach their kids Nagu, but many believe the kids will just “pick up” the language.

When asked why more people from other parts of the island did not learn Nagu, the response was that it was the hardest language on the island. Multiple people from Baemawz and from other parts of the island told me that Nagu is the “languis blong devol” (language of the devil), because it is so hard.

Total Language Competency for Male and Female Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Language Competency</th>
<th>Hean, speak Pijin</th>
<th>Hean, can’t speak Pijin</th>
<th>Don’t understand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 of 9 (66.7%)</td>
<td>3 of 9 (33.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10 of 15 (66.7%)</td>
<td>5 of 15 (33.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language Ideology: “The Language of the ‘Devil!’”
Nagu-speakers live in a multilingual setting. Pijin is used in the schools and for general communication. English is read in the churches for prayers and daily readings. Throughout the island, the three other languages (Natggu, Naliro and Aiwoo) are spoken regularly. Nagu speakers are unique because they can understand the other languages on the island, while speakers of Natggu, the largest language on the island, cannot understand Nagu. Most speakers Naliro and Aiwoo cannot speak Nagu, but they often understand it better than Nagu-speakers because Naliro and Aiwoo speakers interact and intermarry more with Nagu speakers. In my interviews, I asked people how much they understood the other languages on the island.

I used a classification system based on the preliminary answers I received. The classifications were “olow” (understand and speaking a language fully), “hearing” (understanding) a language, but only speaking a few phrases, “hearing” but not speaking at all, and “not hearing” or speaking.

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Contact: rachel.emerine@gmail.com