

1. Introduction

1.1 General Information

The Hewa people of Papua New Guinea speak a non-Austronesian language of the Sepik-Ramu Phylum, Sepik Hills Stock, Sanio Family (Bruce 1979). The dozen or more other languages of this stock are all situated along southern tributaries of the middle Sepik River and extend southward into the foothills of the Central Ranges.

Those very ranges, however, are a physical barrier, causing the Hewa people to be cut off from the related languages and cultures. The entire group of Hewa people lives south of the Central Ranges in an east-west band along the last 100 kilometres of the Lagaip River and its tributaries, a part of the Strickland-Fly river system. This band varies in width from 10 km. in the east to 35 km. in the centre and 20 km. in the west, with no one living more than 8 km. north of the Lagaip River. The people live at altitudes up to 1600 metres above sea level in the east, and as low as 500

* The fieldwork for this paper was done at Atini village in the lower Pori River valley. Data was first collected from July 1978 to September 1980, 14 months of which were spent within the language area. Data includes both transcribed texts and material gathered while language learning. That analysis (Vollrath 1981) is refined here following 24 additional months with the language area over the past 4 1/2 years. A wide number of male and female speakers are represented by the data analysed, mostly males. All data presented here has been checked through two Atini men, Aupapa Pata and Selayapa Oyana, both aged about 30 years.

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metres above sea level in the west. Typically, the people reside 150-300 metres above the river in their valley.

There appear to be three dialects among the 2000 Hewa speakers, largely based on lexical and grammatical changes with no known phonological changes. These dialects also lie in an east-to-west order. The eastern dialect roughly includes that area of the language which lies within Enga Province, and numbers approximately 500 speakers. The central dialect lies wholly within the Southern Highlands Province, centring in the lower Pori River valley and the immediately adjacent valleys, both east and west. This dialect has approximately 900 speakers. The western dialect has approximately 600 speakers who live in the Southern Highlands and into the West Sepik Province (known there as the Sisimin people (Cochran 1968)).

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