

## **Measuring mutual intelligibility between language varieties of northern Pentecost Island, Vanuatu.**

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We established mutual intelligibility between speakers of four related language varieties spoken in the northern half of the island of Pentecost in Vanuatu (Raga, Suru Kavian, Suru Rabwanga and Suru Mwerani). This is a traditional oral, rural society, which made it necessary to develop new methods for testing intelligibility that do not depend on the subjects being literate and computer-savvy. The Raga language is a separate language spoken in the northernmost part of Pentecost and it is only intelligible to a limited degree to speakers of the other three varieties. The other three varieties are considered dialects of the same language, Apma (Gray 2012). However, intelligibility between the three dialects is asymmetric. Although Suru Kavian speakers claim to understand Suru Rabwanga and Suru Mwerani without difficulty, speakers of the latter two varieties maintain that they have significant problems understanding Suru Kavian (Schneider & Gray 2015). These claims are supported by our results.

To explain our intelligibility results we correlated them with quantitative measures of linguistic and non-linguistic factors that may play a role in mutual intelligibility. For example, exposure is likely to be an important factor and may explain the asymmetric intelligibility between Suru Kavian and the other Apma dialects. We quantified exposure by calculating the percentage of non-cognates that each participant understood when listening to the test varieties. Also geographical distance to the place where the test language is spoken might give an indication of the amount of exposure a test person is likely to have had. To quantify linguistic factors, we used methods for measuring phonetic and lexical distance that have recently been successful in explaining the results of a project carried out to test and explain the level of mutual intelligibility between closely related European languages (Gooskens & Van Heuven submitted).