

DEDICATION

Papua New Guinea has emerged as a nation with the realisation that more languages are spoken within its borders than in any other nation in the world.

We Papua New Guineans have always been aware of the enormous multiplicity and diversity of languages in our country, and in the three volumes that make up this work we see the first comprehensive and scientific study of this special feature of our culture. I, the Prime Minister, welcome this work by so many authors long associated with language study in Papua New Guinea.



M. Somare
Port Moresby
25th November, 1975

SPECIAL DEDICATION TO THE FIRST VOLUME

I remember that a few years ago I read in the newspaper that an old woman - the last speaker of a particular language group of Papua New Guinea - had died.

I felt sad. A whole language had died with that woman. A part of Papua New Guinea had died with her.

Language in itself does not seem to me to be important. But because language is communication between people, its every facet and intonation carries irreplaceable importance in society.

Because language is constantly changing, and is constantly modified by the new forces around us, it is important to record its various forms, because its construction and words give us an insight to the men and women who have used it in the past.

There has been much talk in Papua New Guinea about 'The Melanesian Way' - a phrase coined to describe a cultural way of life, that it is impossible to define in the restrictive English language, from another culture.

Those who have sought to define this 'Melanesian Way' have made the absolute, basic mistake of trying to translate it using the terms and concepts of modern learning. There has been no need to define the 'Melanesian Way' in the past, nor is there any need now. It simply is.

It is the same with language. We can translate the individual words of each language, and perhaps make ourselves understood by stringing these words together into sentences. But understanding language is not simply a matter of translation, just as the playing of music is not simply a matter of precise imitation.

If the woman who died a few years ago had taught, before her death, the vocabulary and grammatical construction of her language to a scholar, the real language would still have died with her. The scholar would have been left with the linguistic equivalent of a photograph of her language.

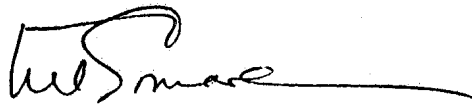
However, all this is not to detract from the importance of the three volumes of language and language use, in and around Papua New Guinea, of which this is the first.

These 'images' of communication in this part of the world will provide both our own people and others with an insight into the culture of Papua New Guinea, the basis upon which the citizens of our country will build the future.

Gain kosi, kimbeka babako arem tokdan toga

(Dialect of Mr Somare's people in Murik Lakes, Sepik)

*Tie your canoe well, so that the tide does
not take it away.*



M. Somare

Port Moresby

December, 1975