

## **Linguistics Research Seminar Series 2008**

**Monday, March 31 at 11.00 am**

**Linguistics seminar Room - W5C221**

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### **An impartial observer or an impassioned advocate? Researching language policy in East Timor.**

In this presentation I draw on my experiences of researching language policy and planning in East Timor. An interweaving theme is the challenge of maintaining an objective stance in a situation where language politics are fraught with contradictions and conflicting interests. The East Timorese language ecology is the product of the experiences of Portuguese colonialism and Indonesian occupation. The National Constitution of 2002 declared Portuguese (the former colonial language) and Tetun (the indigenous lingua franca) to be co-official. English (the language of the UN and the aid industry) and Indonesian (the language of *integrasi* or integration with Indonesia) were declared working languages “for as long as is deemed necessary.” The vernacular languages were declared national languages, “to be protected and promoted by the State”. With regards to language policy, East Timor is obliged to find a path through the wider political ideologies represented by Portuguese, Indonesian and English. How East Timor strikes a balance between these ideologies will have important consequences for its indigenous languages. Against the background of my research findings from semi-structured interviews and focus groups, I pose the question of how the researcher also must strike a balance between the role of an impartial observer of the politics of language reform and an impassioned advocate of linguistic and cultural diversity.