The global versus the local in East Timorese language policy and planning

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The contemporary language ecology in East Timor is the product of local versus regional and global tensions. These tensions exploded with the declaration of independence from Portugal and civil war in 1975, followed by the country’s immediate annexation by Indonesia and culminating in the devastating violence of 1999. Since the arrival of the United Nations in the country, tensions between the local and the global have increased with the entry of English into the linguistic ecology.

Global versus local tensions prevail across all sectors from the economy and agriculture to aid and reconciliation, as the country struggles to come to terms with its past, establish a national identity and hold its own in the era of globalisation. Education, Justice and the news media are three sites for discourses and counter discourses concerning language and identity in this highly multilingual society.

Can East Timor succeed in resolving these tensions, achieve the standardisation of its co-official language, Tetum, and bring about shift to Portuguese as a co-official language in the face of pressure from global and regional languages?