

THE DIVERSE ROLES OF GLOTTAL IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA LANGUAGES

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One definition of glottal stop given by Pei (1966,107) is "a voiceless, fortis, impulsive, unaspirated, simple pressure stop". As a result of definitions such as this, glottal has generally been analysed as a stop consonant in Papua New Guinea despite its diverse roles in various languages.

In this paper, part of Pei's definition is shown to be inadequate for the Gimi language in which there are contrastive glottal stop consonants - fortis versus lenis. While glottal fills the role of a stop consonant in Gimi and some languages of Papua New Guinea, it fills other roles in other languages. It may function as part of a complex consonant phoneme in a few languages while for many it functions as an integral part of the syllable nucleus - i.e. vowel with glottal release, or syllabic nasal with glottal release, not as a stop consonant as has been suggested by many linguists. In other languages glottal occurs only between geminate vowels as a complex syllable nucleus of V?V.

Thus it can be seen that it is unwise for linguists to begin analysis by considering glottal automatically as a stop consonant. Where it should be analysed as a part of a complex nucleus, it has been analysed as occurring as the only stop segment in the consonant coda (nasals being the only other coda segments). In other cases it has, in fact, been analysed as the only "consonant" in the coda. These distributional limitations have led to the present analysis.

Reference

Pei, Mario (1966): Glossary of Linguistic Terminology, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.