From areal linguistics to (pre-)historical sociolinguistics: Identifying contact events in northwest New Guinea

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Philological Society ECR Panel, University of Edinburgh

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Contact linguistics
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Contact in unwritten languages
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Identifying and diagnosing contact events in northwest New Guinea

1. Best practice in identifying contact

2. Case study: Split Inalienable Coding in northwest New Guinea

3. Investigating contact in unwritten languages

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Contact-induced change

"Contact is a source of linguistic change if it is less likely that a particular change would have happened outside a specific contact situation."

Thomason (2010: 32)

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Written records and contact linguistics

- ► Historical corpus studies
  - ► e.g. Scots-English (Gotthard 2022)

- ► Geographic extent
  - ► e.g. Tocharian-Old Chinese (Boltz 1999: 87)

- ► Descriptions of contact
  - ► e.g. Greek and Roman accounts of Migration Period

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Establishing contact-induced change

► Thomason (2001)

1. Identify a recipient langage (B)
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Split Inalienable Coding (SIC)

A language has **Split Inalienable Coding** if there are three
or more distinct adnominal possessive coding strategies...

▶ at least two of which are used to code inalienable
possession

▶ where the choice of inalienable coding is conditioned by
semantic factors.

Arnold (forthcoming)

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Split Inalienable Coding (SIC)

(1) **Hatam** (Hatam-Mansim; Reesink 1999)

    a. *Alienable:*
       a-de   singau
       2sg-poss knife
       'your knife'

    b. *Inalienable 1:*
       a-ndab
       2sg-hand
       'your hand'

    c. *Inalienable 2:*
       at-nem
       2sg-wife
       'your wife'

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Split Inalienable Coding (SIC)

Table: Hatam inalienable paradigms (Reesink 1999)

	Inalienable 1	**Inalienable 2**
	Body parts	*Kin terms*
1SG	di-	diT-
2SG	a-	aT-
3SG	ni-	niT-
1PL.EXCL	ni-	niT-
1PL.INCL	i-	iT-
2PL	ji-	jiT-
3PL	i-	iT-

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Split Inalienable Coding (SIC)

(2) **Salawati** (Austronesian; own fieldnotes)

   a. *Alienable:*
      at-ni-m   wá
      1PL.I-POSS-1PL canoe
      'our (incl) canoe'

   b. *Inalienable 1:*
      (at-ni-m)   tá-m
      1PL.I-POSS-1PL eye-1PL
      'our (incl) eye'

   c. *Inalienable 2:*
      at-ni-m   təbú-m
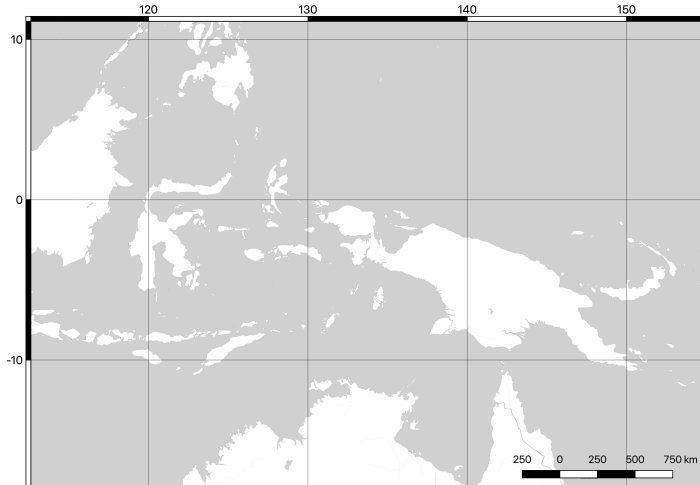   1PL.I-POSS-1PL grandchild-1PL
      'our (incl) grandchild'

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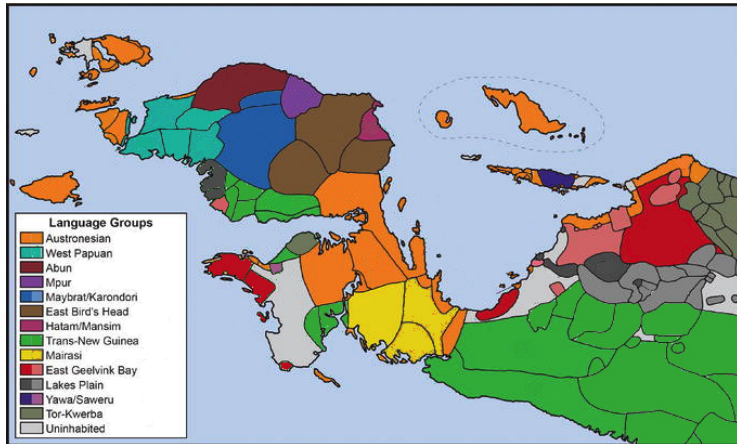SIC in NWNG
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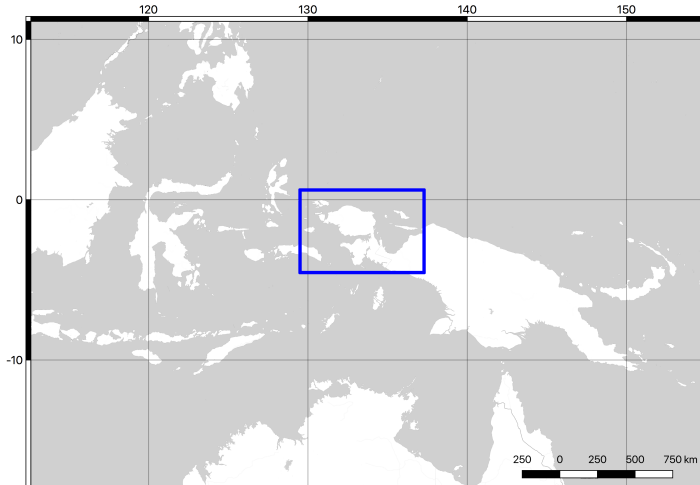
Northwest New Guinea

Adapted from Gasser (2019)

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Distribution of SIC in Northwest New Guinea

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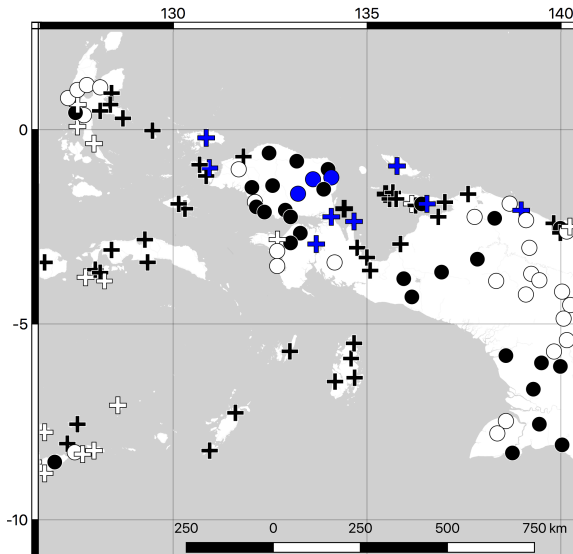
Inheritance: East Bird's Head

Proto-East Bird's Head

Sougb   Proto-Meax

Meyah   Moskona

Arnold (under revision)

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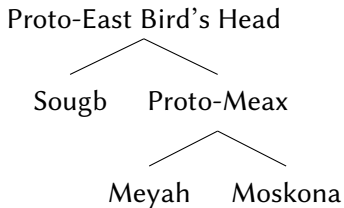
Inheritance: Austronesian

- South Halmahera-West New Guinea > West Yapen

    - Ambai: 3sg body parts *-n*, kin terms *-na*
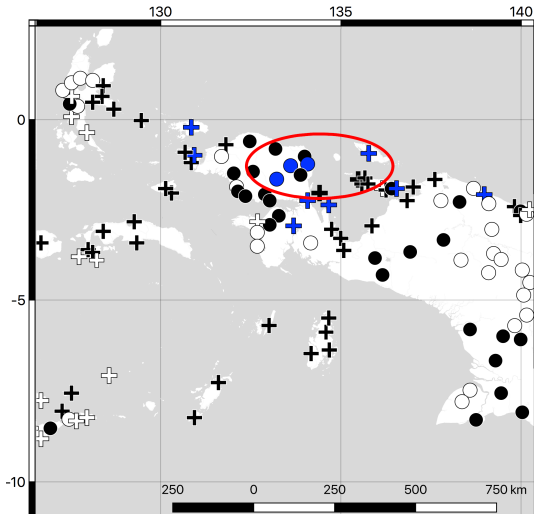
    - Wamesa: 3sg body parts *=pa*, kin terms *-ni*

- South Halmahera-West New Guinea > Raja Ampat-South Halmahera

    - Ambel: 3sg body parts unmarked, kin terms *i-*

    - Salawati: body parts – possessive particle optional, kin terms – possessive particle obligatory
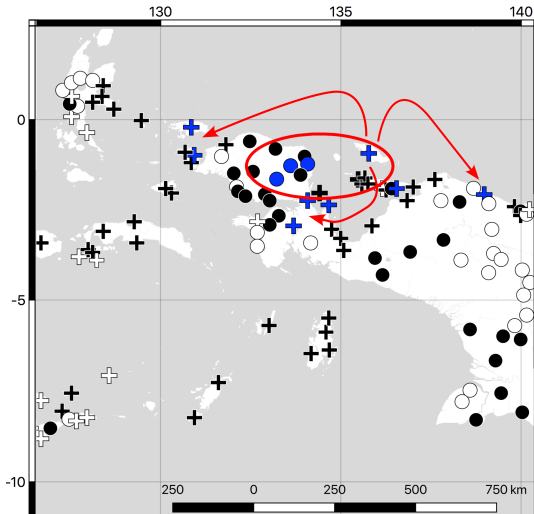
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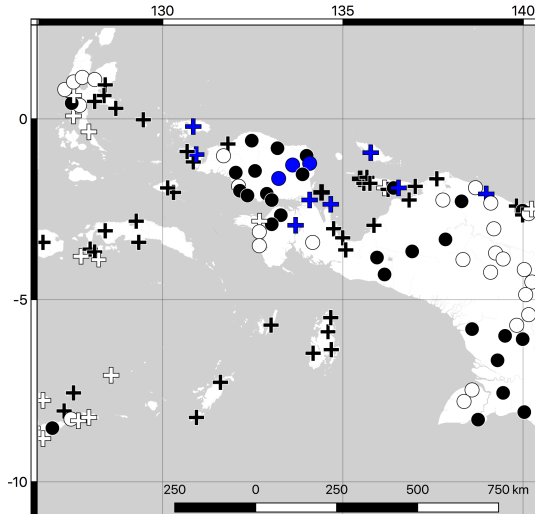
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Stage 1: EBH-Hatam-Biak

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Stage 2: Biak onwards

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Socio-cultural indicators of contact

- East Bird's Head-Hatam-Biak (Stage 1):

  - EBH-Hatam: Shared homeland, migration patterns, high levels of intermarriage

  - Hatam-Biak: Intermarriage since at least 18th century; mythological clan links

- Biak onwards (Stage 2):

  - Biak high prestige explorers and settlers

  - Ambel, Wamesa, Ambai, etc: Intermarriage; shared ritual artefacts, mythological elements, messianic movements; musicological similiarities

  - Sobei: Some intermarriage

  - Irarutu, Salawati: ??

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Other linguistic correlates of contact

- East Bird's Head-Hatam-Biak (Stage 1):

  - EBH-Hatam-Biak: Adverbial calques (Reesink 2002b)

  - Hatam-Biak: Potential lexical and morphological borrowings (Reesink 2002a)

- Biak onwards (Stage 2):

  - Shallow lexical loans

  - Ambel, Wamesa: Shallow gramamtical loans

  - Irarutu, Sobei, Salawati: ??

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Towards localised models of language contact

- ► Grammatical convergence, little lexical borrowing

    - ► Vaupés basin (Aikhenvald 2002; Epps 2009)

    - ► Vanuatu (François 2012)

    - ► Northwest Australia (Rumsey 2018)

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Towards localised models of language contact

- ▶ Contact elsewhere in Melanesia:

  - ▶ Donohue and Crowther (2005): Phonological convergence in north New Guinea despite recent and casual contact

  - ▶ Evans (2019): Less grammatical convergence than expected in contact-heavy south New Guinea

- ▶ Moving forward:

  - ▶ Increased documentation of the dynamics of language use in small-scale societies

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Thanks for listening!