

Lesser-known languages as a window to the past:
Historical linguistics and human prehistory in
west New Guinea

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Lesser-known languages as a window to the past: Historical linguistics and human prehistory in west New Guinea

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3. Areas of great similarity: Contact
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Background

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Genealogical relationships

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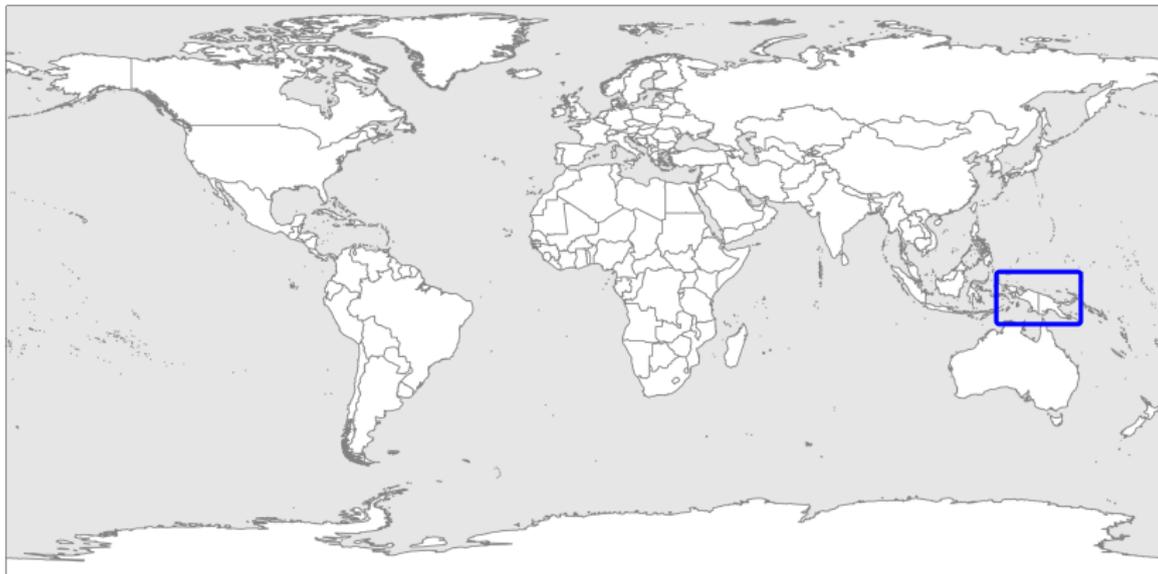
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Genealogical relationships



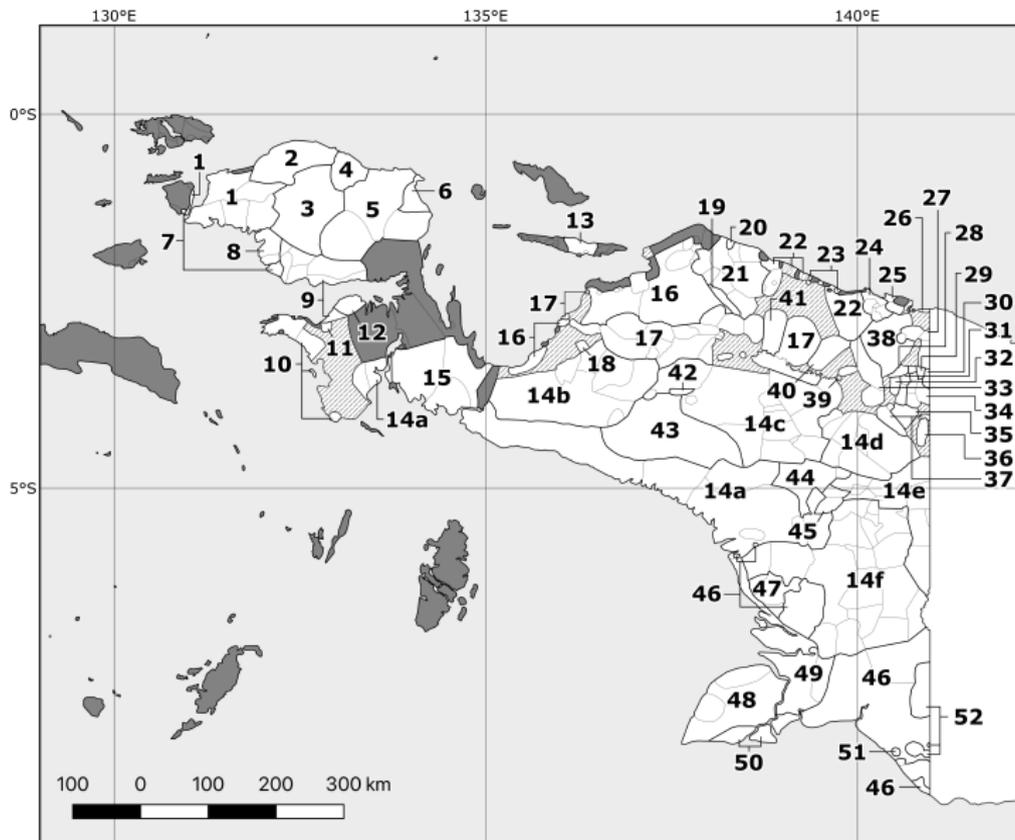
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Raja Ampat



Summary



Documentation levels in WNG

	Africa	Australia	Eurasia	North America	Papua+AN	South America
grammar	780 [20]	94 [28]	537 [40]	264 [25]	415 [1]	260 [25]
grammar sketch	483 [35]	30 [22]	135 [18]	67 [32]	428 [10]	82 [28]
phonology or sim.	120 [5]	15 [2]	109 [2]	44 [9]	157 [2]	31 [17]
wordlist or less	603 [77]	45 [53]	684 [112]	105 [39]	978 [40]	30 [125]
Total	1986 [137]	184 [105]	1465 [172]	480 [105]	1978 [53]	403 [195]
Average desc.	2.68	2.69	2.31	2.91	2.12	2.88
grammar (%)	37.68	42.21	35.25	49.40	20.48	47.66
living undoc (%)	28.40	15.57	41.78	17.95	48.15	5.02

Documentation levels in WNG

- ▶ 53.5% Papuan + Austronesian languages in WNG represented by a wordlist or less (Arnold In press)
- ▶ 13/27 least documented families in the world spoken in WNG (Hammarström 2010)

Some questions for today:

1. What forces shaped the present-day linguistic landscape of WNG?
2. What can the languages of WNG tell us about human prehistory in the region?
3. How do the languages of WNG inform theories and models of language change?
4. How can linguists collaborate with colleagues in sister disciplines?

An area of great diversity: Genealogical relationships

The comparative method—key principles

- ▶ Similarities between languages may be due to:
 - ▶ ~~Chance~~
 - ▶ ~~Universal tendencies~~
 - ▶ Inheritance
 - ▶ Contact

The comparative method—key principles

- ▶ Certain systematic similarities are unlikely to be due to contact:
 - ▶ Cognate paradigms
e.g. French *je, tu, nous, vous* :: Italian *io, tu, noi, voi* :: Catalan *jo, tu, nosaltres, vosaltres*
 - ▶ Shared phonological and morphological idiosyncracies
e.g. English *good, better, best* :: German *gut, besser, best*

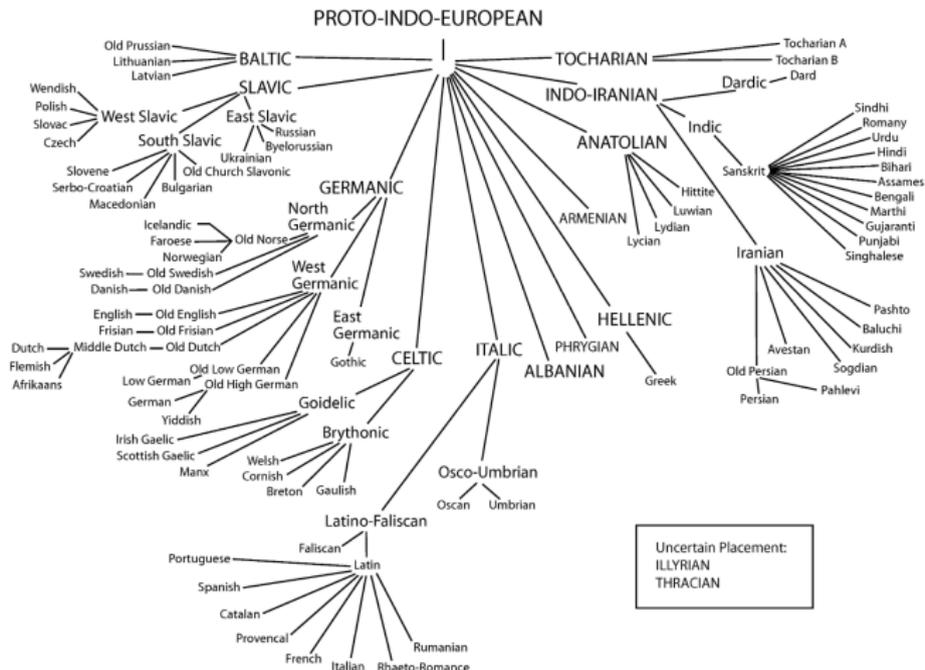
The comparative method—key principles

- ▶ Certain systematic similarities are unlikely to be due to contact:
 - ▶ Regular sound correspondences in basic vocabulary

	Italian /k-/	Portuguese /k-/	French /ʃ-/
‘goat’	/kapra/	/kabra/	/ʃɛvrə/
‘main, chief’	/kapo/	/kabo/ ‘extremity’	/ʃɛf/
‘dear’	/karə/	/karu/	/ʃɛr/

For more, see Campbell (2020), Crowley & Bowerman (2010), Trask (2015)

The comparative method—key principles



Papuan languages



Taufik et al. (2022); see also Allen & O'Connell (2020) and Gaffney (2021)

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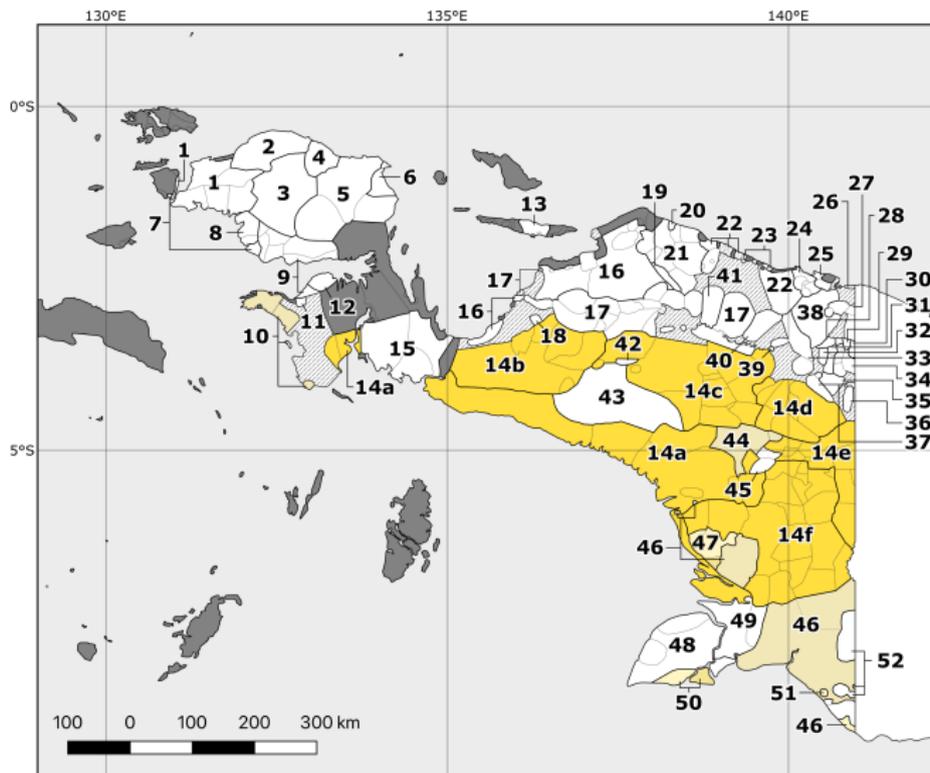
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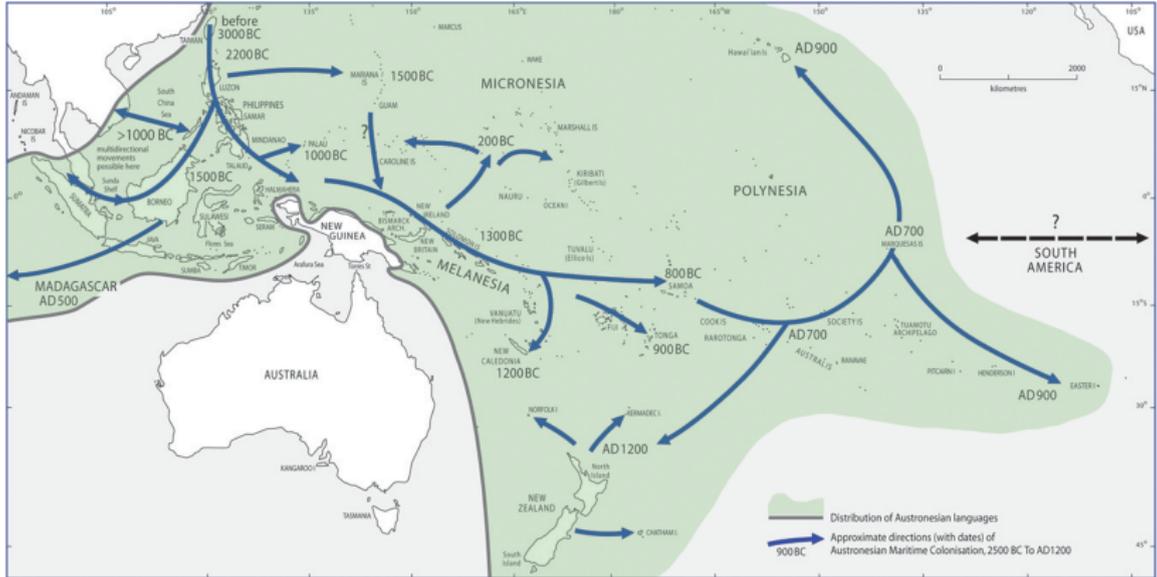
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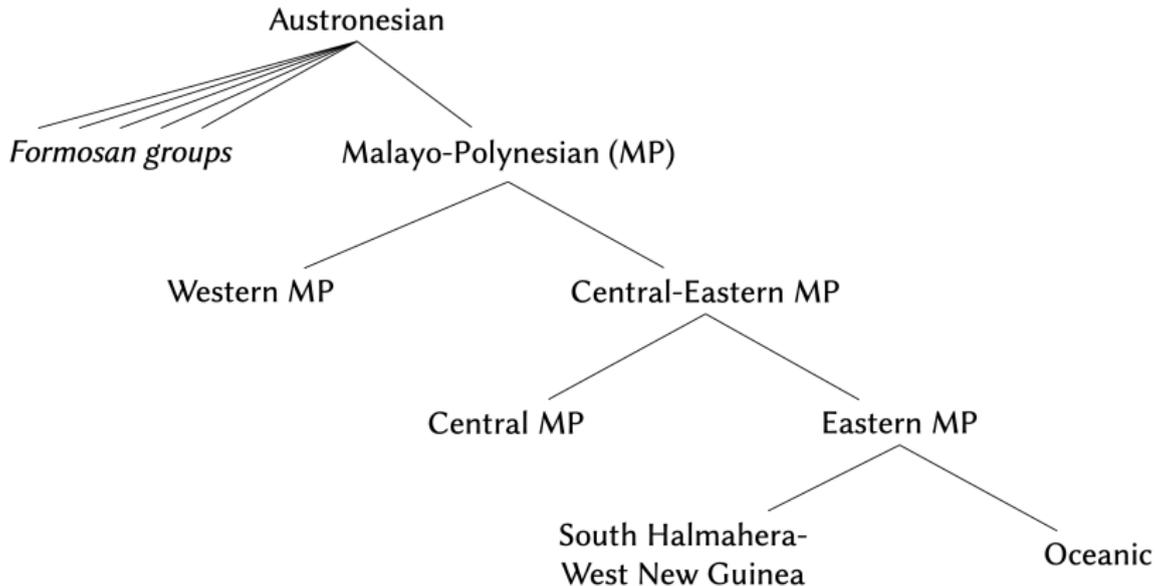
Papuan languages



The Austronesian family

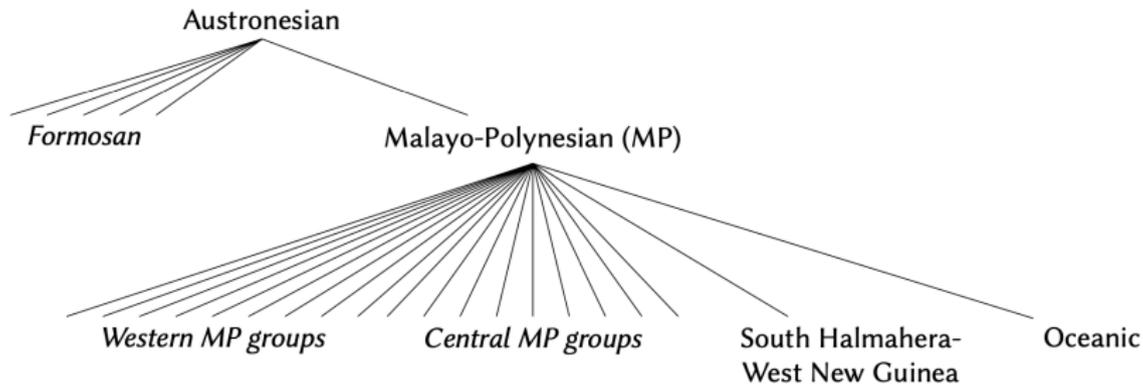


The Austronesian family



After Blust (2009)

The Austronesian family



After Donohue & Grimes (2008), Ross et al. (2023), and Smith (2017)

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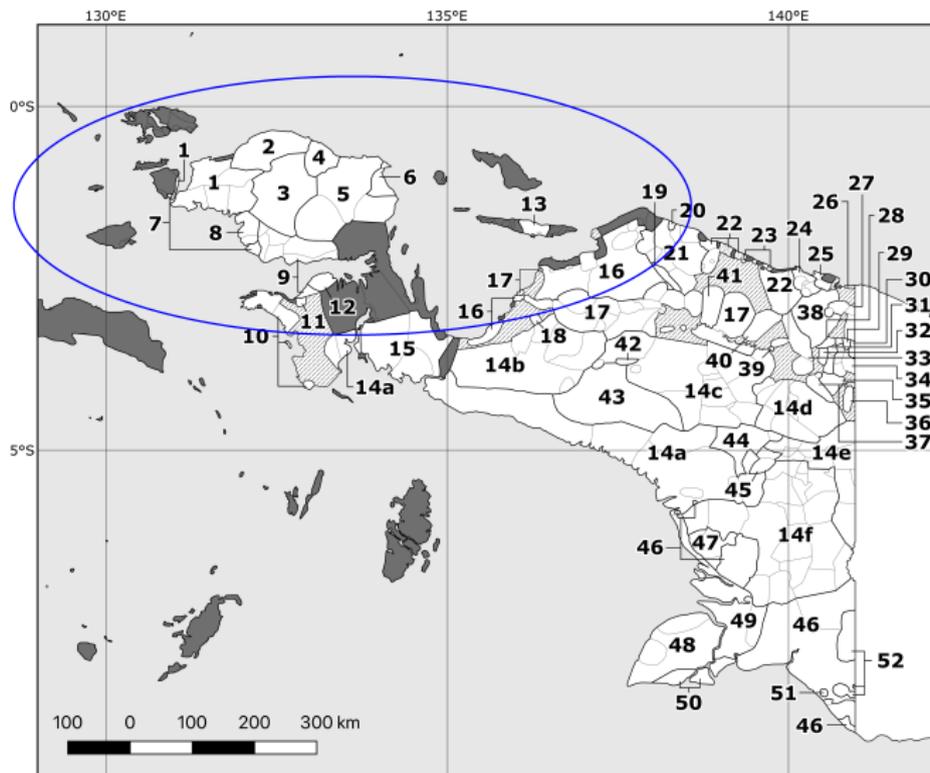
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The Austronesian family



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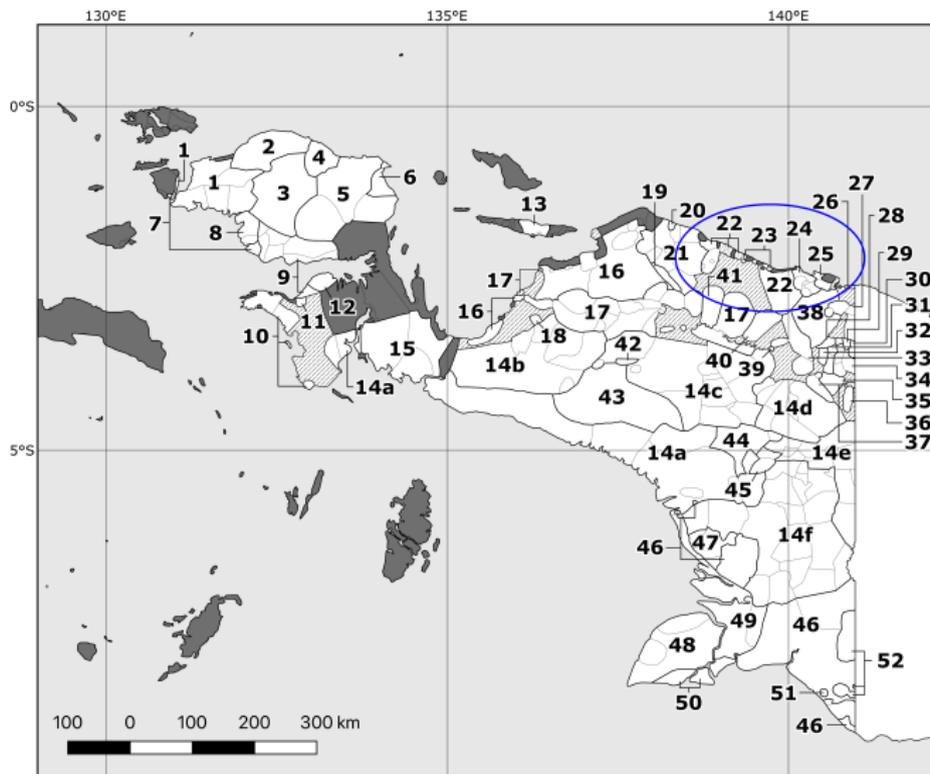
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The Austronesian family



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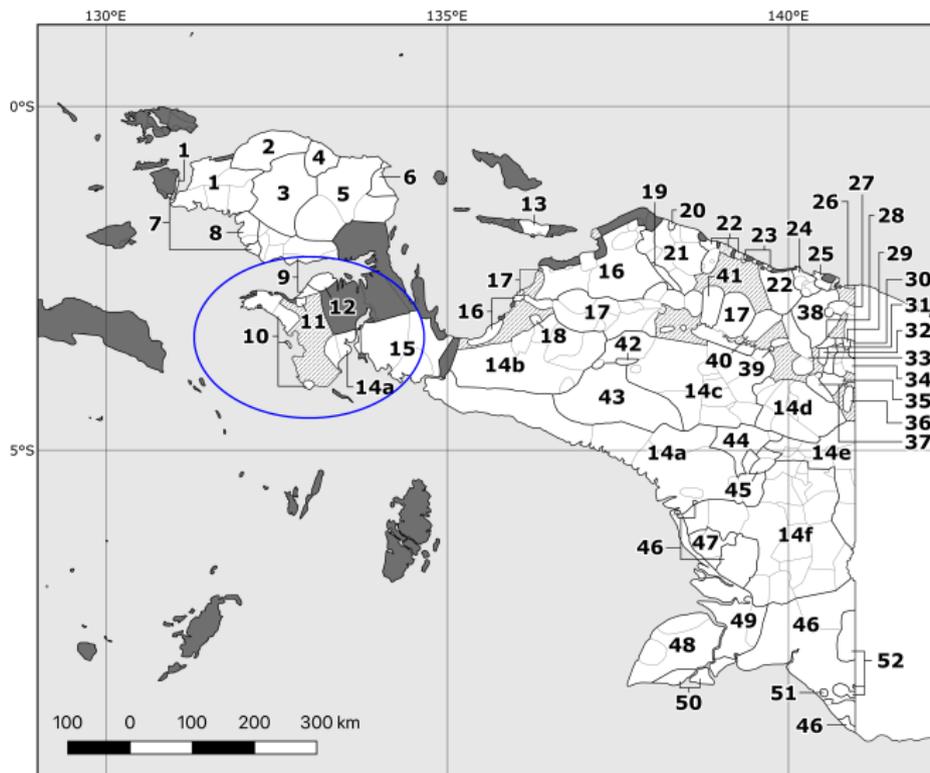
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The Austronesian family



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Areas of great similarity: Contact

Contact in Melanesia

“The close grammatical similarities between many adjacent languages in Melanesia often means that learning another language is largely a matter of learning new lexicon only—that is, the two languages involved are very close to being the same language with a different set of labels.”

Laycock (1982: 34-5)

Contact in Melanesia

“Austronesian influence is so strong that it is valid to question whether Warembori is really a Papuan language heavily influenced by Austronesian contact, or whether it is an Austronesian language that has taken on several... areal characteristics of the Lower Mamberamo region”

Donohue (1999: 2)

Modelling language contact

General vocab Basic vocab Structural convergence



Intensity of contact

Thomason (2001, 2010)

Modelling language contact

- ▶ Preadolescent bilinguals → Complexification
- ▶ Adult bilinguals → Simplification
- ▶ Rapid language shift → Radical simplification

Kerswill (1996) and Ross (2013)

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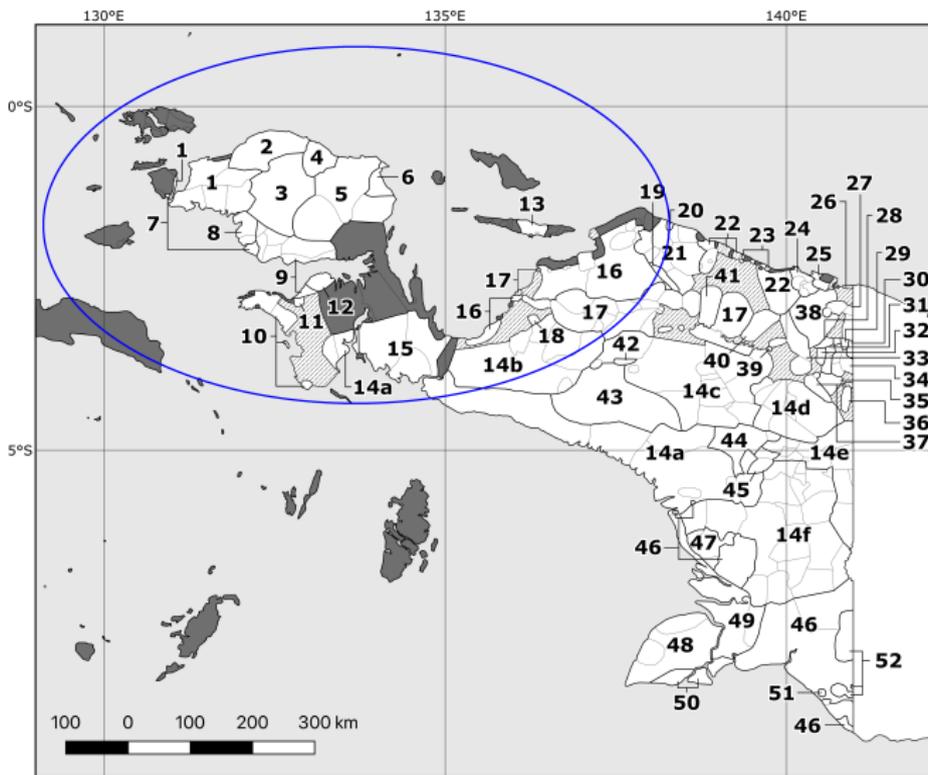
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Contact in northwest New Guinea



Contact in northwest New Guinea

- ▶ Basic flora and fauna vocabulary (Gasser 2019)
- ▶ Ancient Austronesian vocabulary in the Bird's Head Papuan languages (Reesink 1998)
- ▶ 'Do/give' colexification (Gil 2017)
- ▶ Split inalienable coding (Arnold 2023)
- ▶ Tone in Raja Ampat, Cenderawasih Bay (Arnold 2018, forthcoming; Kamholz 2017)

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Diving deeper: Linguistic flux in Raja Ampat

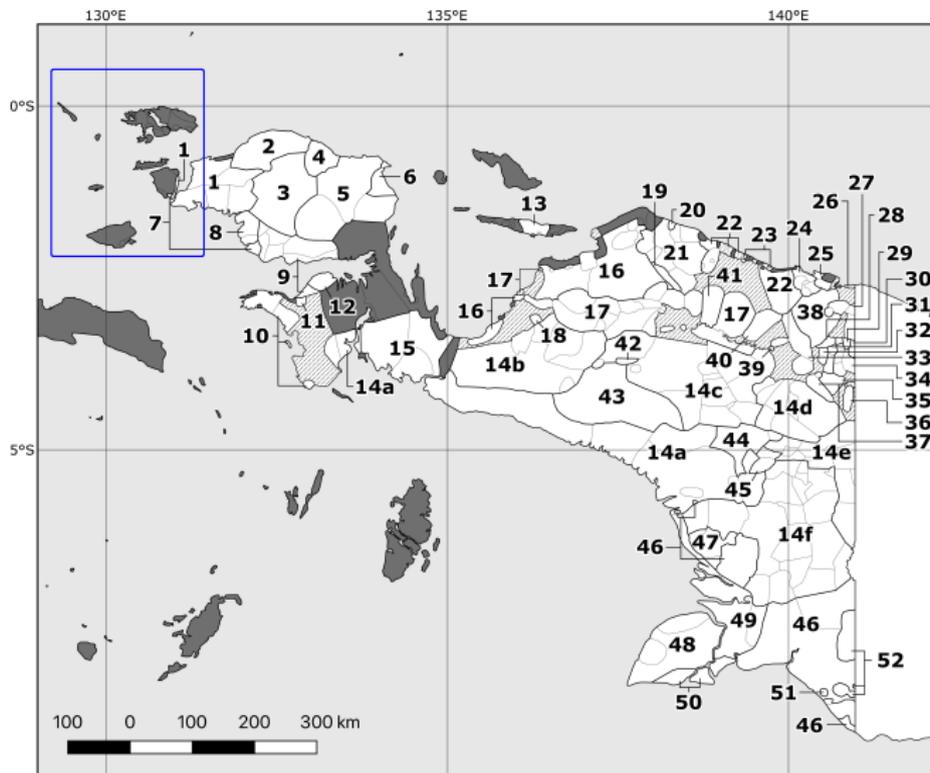
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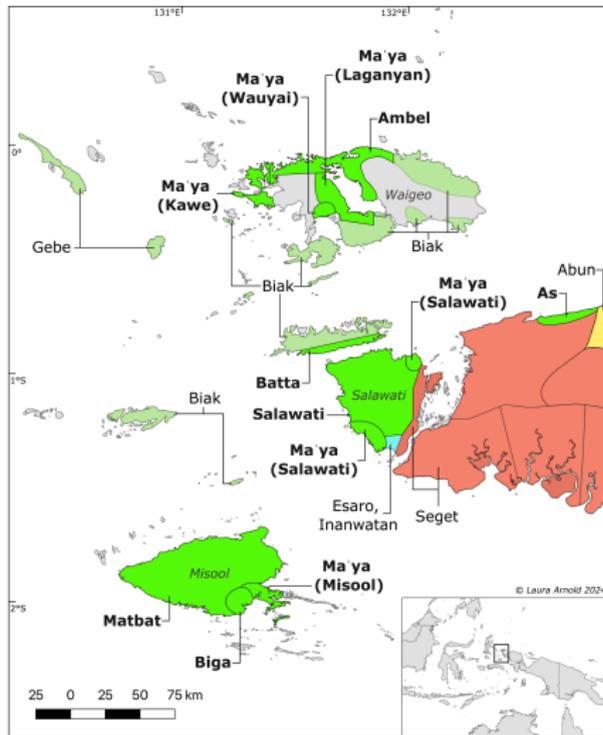
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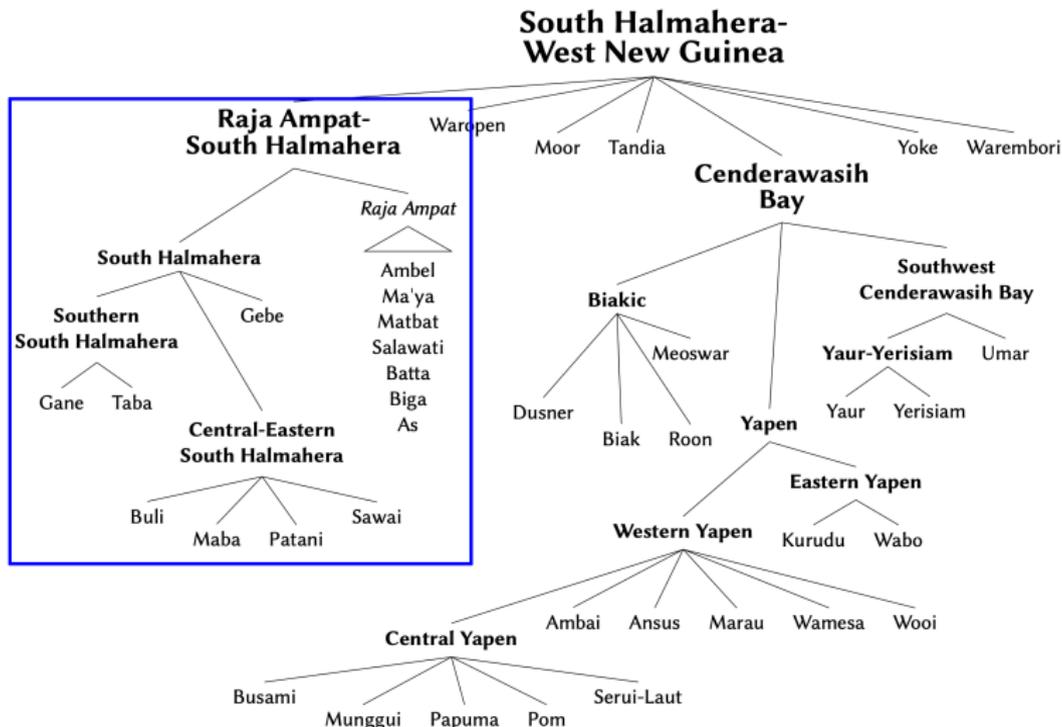
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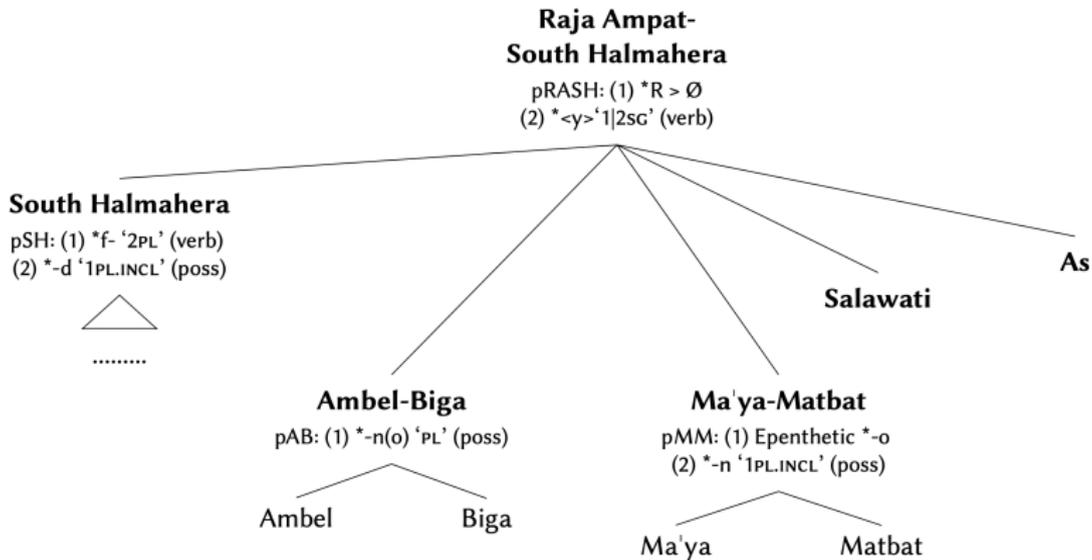
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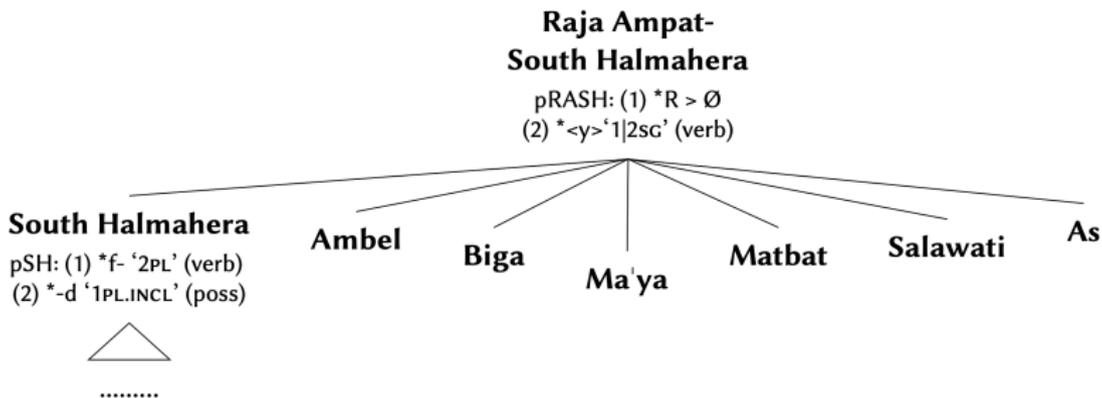
Summary

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Verbal subject-marking in Raja Ampat

	Class I	Class II V-initial	/t/, /d/, /h/, /b/-initial	Class III /l/, /m/, /w/-initial	/s/-initial	Class IV C-initial
	-gón 'promise'	-un 'know'	-tum 'follow'	-mát 'die'	-sun 'enter'	-mdól 'fall'
1SG	ya-gón	y-un	t<y>um	m<y>át	Ø-sun	ya-mdól
2SG	nya-gón	ny-un	N-t<y>um	N-m<y>át	N-sun	nya-mdól
3SG.AN	na-gón	n-un	N-tum	N-mát	N-sun	na-mdól
3SG.INAN	aN=na-gón	aN=n-un	aN=tum	aN=mát	aN=sun	aN=mdól
1DU.I	tuta-gón	tut-un	tut-tum	tut-mát	tu-sun	tuta-mdól
1DU.E	uma-gón	um-un	um-tum	um-mát	um-sun	uma-mdól
2DU	muma-gón	mum-un	mum-tum	mum-mát	mum-sun	muma-mdól
3DU	ula-gón	ul-un	u-tum	u-mát	u-sun	ula-mdól
1PC.I	(a)túta-gón	(a)tút-un	(a)tút-tum	(a)tút-mat	tú-sun	(a)túta-mdól
1PC.E	atúma-gón	atúm-ul	atúm-tum	atúm-mat	atúm-sun	atúma-mdól
2PC	matúma-gón	matúm-un	matúm-tum	matúm-mát	matúm-sun	matúma-mdól
3PC	atúla-gón	atúl-un	atú-tum	atú-mat	atú-sun	atúla-mdól
1PL.I	ta-gón	t-un	Ø-tum	t-mát	Ø-sun	ta-mdól
1PL.E	áma-gón	ám-un	ám-tum	ám-mat	ám-sun	áma-mdól
2PL	ma-gón	m-un	mim-tum	mim-mát	mim-sun	ma-mdól
3PL.AN	la-gón	l-un	la-tum	la-mát	la-sun	la-mdól
3NSG.INAN	sina-gón	sin-un	si-tum	si-mát	si-sun	si-mdól

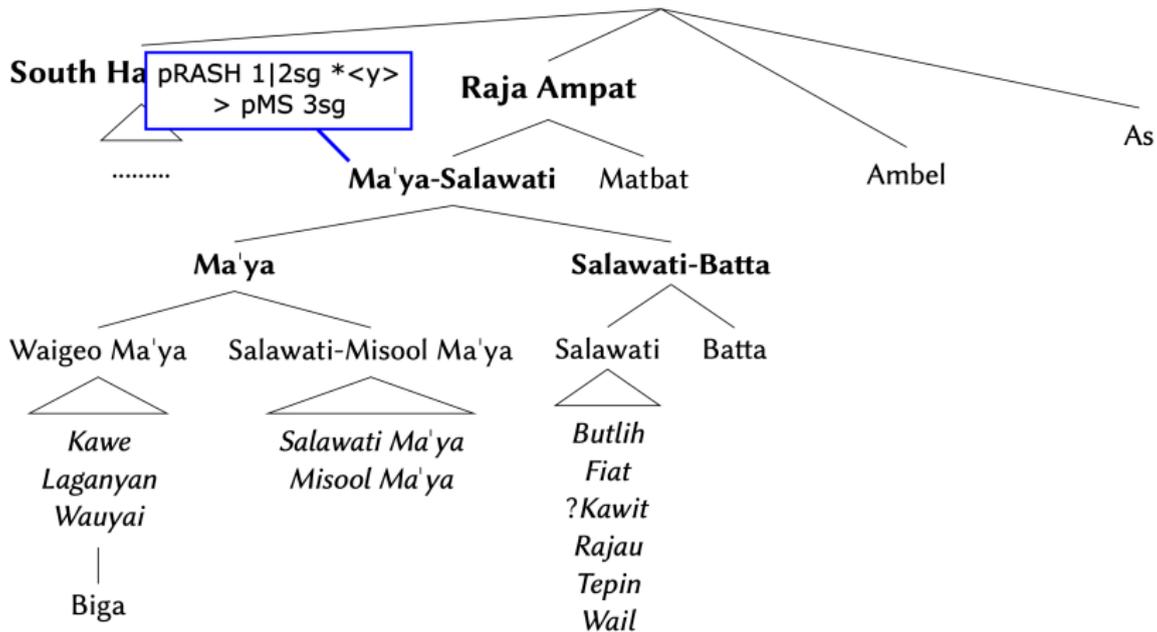
Verbal subject-marking in Raja Ampat

	1sg		2sg		3sg	
	V	C	V	C	V	C
Ambel	y-	<y>	ny-	n-<y>	n-	N-
As	<y>	i-<y>	m-<y>	m-<y>	n-	n-
Matbat						
Magey	k-	k-	m-	m-	n-	n-
Ma'ya						
Waigeo	y-	<y>	my-	m-<y>	ny-	n-<y>
Salawati	y-	<y>	my-	m-<y>	ny-	n-<y>
Biga	y-	ya-	m-	ma-	n-	na-
Salawati						
Fiawat	y-	yə-<y>	m-	?	n-	?
Butlih	?	?	?	?	?	?
Tepin	?	?	?	?	?	?
Batta	?	?	?	?	?	?

Verbal subject-marking in Raja Ampat

	1sg		2sg		3sg	
	V	C	V	C	V	C
Ambel	y-	<y>	ny-	n-<y>	n-	N-
As	<y>	i-<y>	m-<y>	m-<y>	n-	n-
Matbat						
Magey	k-	k-	m-	m-	n-	n-
Ma'ya						
Waigeo	y-	<y>	my-	m-<y>	ny-	n-<y>
Salawati	y-	<y>	my-	m-<y>	ny-	n-<y>
Biga	y-	<y>	m-	m-<y>	ny-	<y>
Salawati						
Fiawat	y-	yə-<y>	m-	?	n-	?
Butlih	y-	yə-<y>	my-	mə-<y>	ny-	<y>
Tepin	y-	yə-<y>	my-	mə-<y>	ny-	<y>
Batta	y-	yə-<y>	mny-	mə-<y>	ny-	<y>

Raja Ampat- South Halmahera



Segmental correspondences

	Ambel	Ma'ya	Biga	Salawati	Batta	Matbat
*p	p	p	p	p	p	p
*b-	b-	b-/p-	b-	b-	b-	b-
*t	t	t	t	t	t	t
*d-	d	d	d	d	d	?
*k-	k-	k-	k-	k-/∅	q-	k-
*s-	s-	s-	s-	s-	s-	s-
*m	m	m	m	m	m	m
*n	n	n	n	n	n	n
*l	l	l	l	l	l	l
*r-	r-	r-	r-	r-	r-	?
*w	w	w	w	w	w	w

Segmental correspondences

	Ambel	Ma'ya	Biga	Salawati	Batta	Matbat
*-k	-k	-k	-k	-ʔ	∅	-k
*g-	g-	g-	g-	dy-	g-	g-
*-g	-n	-g	-g	-ʔ	-g	-ŋ
*f-	h-	f-	f-	f-	f-	f-
*-f	∅	-f	-f	-h	-f	-f
*-s	∅	-s	-s	-h	-h	∅
*y-	y-	y-	∅	∅	∅	?

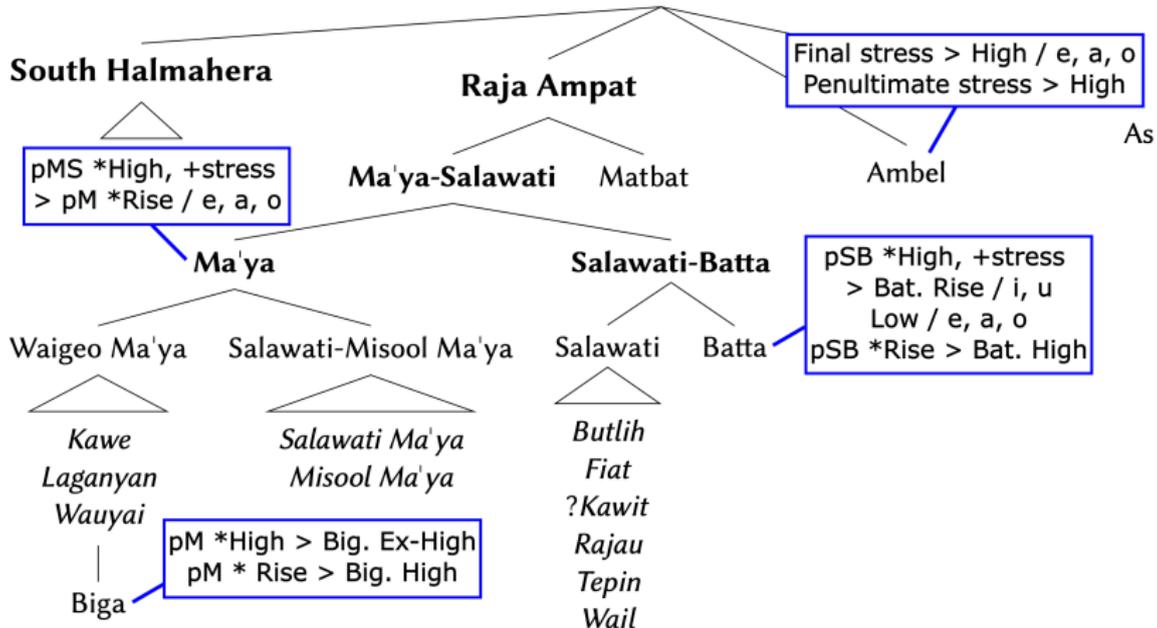
Tone in Raja Ampat

	No. of tones	Tonal inventory	Lexical stress?
Ambel	1	High	✗
Matbat	6	Extra-High, High, Rise, Low, Rise-Fall, Fall	✗
Ma'ya	2	High, Rise	✓
Biga	2	High, Extra-High	✓
Salawati	2	High, Rise	✗
Batta	3	High, Rise, Low	✗

Tonal correspondences

	Ma'ya	Biga	Salawati	Batta
*Toneless	Toneless	Toneless	Toneless	Toneless
*Rise	Rise	High	Rise	High
*High, +stress	High, +stress / i, u Rise, +stress / e, a, o	Ex-High, +stress / i, u High, +stress / e, a, o	High	Rise / i, u Low / e, a, o
*High, -stress	High, -stress	Ex-High, -stress	High	High

Raja Ampat-South Halmahera



Mechanisms for tonogenesis

- ▶ At least two independent tonogenetic events in Raja Ampat
- ▶ Language-internal mechanisms
 - ▶ Stress placement and vowel height > tone
 - ▶ Includes a previously unattested tone split (Ambel High tone / *e *a *o; Arnold 2020)
- ▶ Language-external mechanisms:
 - ▶ Contact with a pre-existing Papuan substrate?
 - ▶ Similarities with systems in East Bird's Head (Papuan) languages (Schapper & Syufi 2023)
 - ▶ If correct, implies extensive bilingualism (Blevins 2017)

Summary and looking forward

Historical linguistics and human prehistory in WNG

- ▶ Historically: small, mobile language communities
- ▶ Intergroup relationships variable; ample evidence for small-scale, egalitarian multilingualism (see also François 2012, Schapper 2020)

Lesser-known languages as a window to the past

- ▶ Recent push in documentation and description has improved our understanding of synchronic diversity (Seifart et al. 2018)
 - ▶ Less focus so far on diachronic diversity
- ▶ Historical linguistics is only as good as synchronic documentation
 - ▶ ‘Garbage in, garbage out’ (Matisoff 1990)

Lesser-known languages as a window to the past

- ▶ Moving forward:
 - ▶ Detailed documentation and description still needed for more than 50% of lgs in WNG
 - ▶ Shift from ‘top-down’ to ‘bottom-up’ historical work
 - ▶ How does language variation and use interact with change? (e.g. Moro 2019, Kashima 2020)
 - ▶ Increased collaboration between linguists, archaeologists, geneticists, anthropologists, historians, and communities

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Background
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Genealogical relationships
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Contact
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Raja Ampat
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Summary
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