

Psychocultural forces in language change:  
Perspectives from the Pacific

Laura Arnold  
ANU Linguistics Seminar

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# Overview

1. Defining terms
2. The literature
  - Language change
  - Language variation
  - Anthropological linguistics
3. Lexical change
4. Change in use
5. Structural change
  - Phonological change
  - Morphosyntactic change
6. Conclusions

Defining terms

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The literature

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Lexicon

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## *Defining terms*

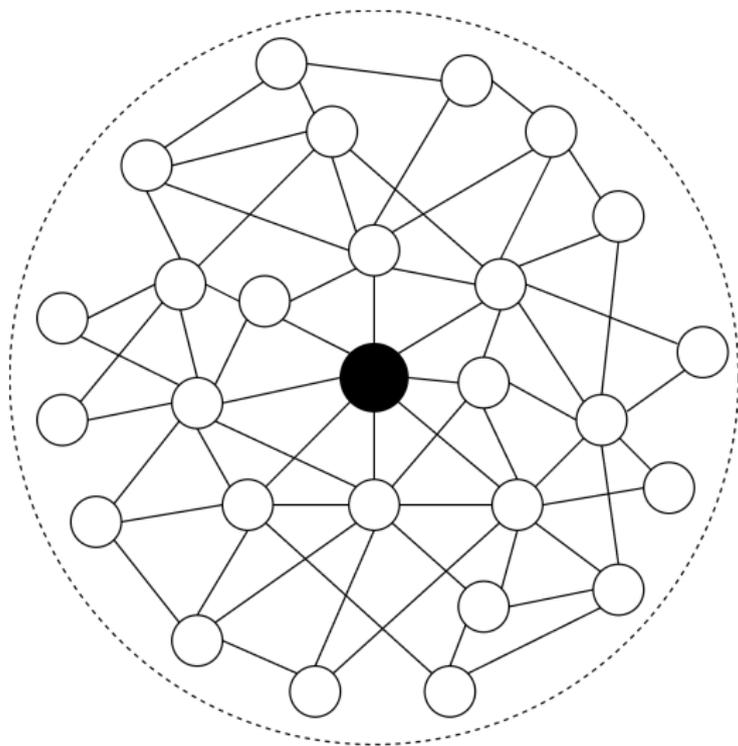
# Defining terms: 'The Pacific'



## Defining terms: ‘Language change’

- ▶ Change in both structure and use
- ▶ All linguistic subdomains
- ▶ Change as actuation, change as propagation
- ▶ Contact-induced change, non-contact-induced change

## Defining terms: 'Psychocultural'



## Defining terms: 'Psychocultural'



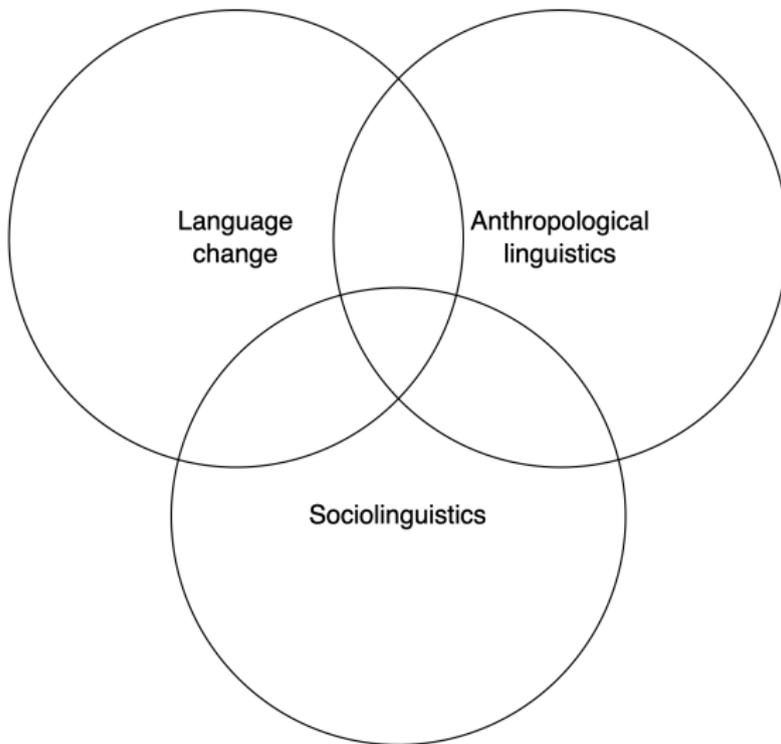
## Defining terms: ‘Psychocultural’

- ▶ Immaterial culture, e.g. norms, customs, values, ideas, beliefs
- ▶ Interaction with the individual: Ideologies, attitudes, identity, worldviews

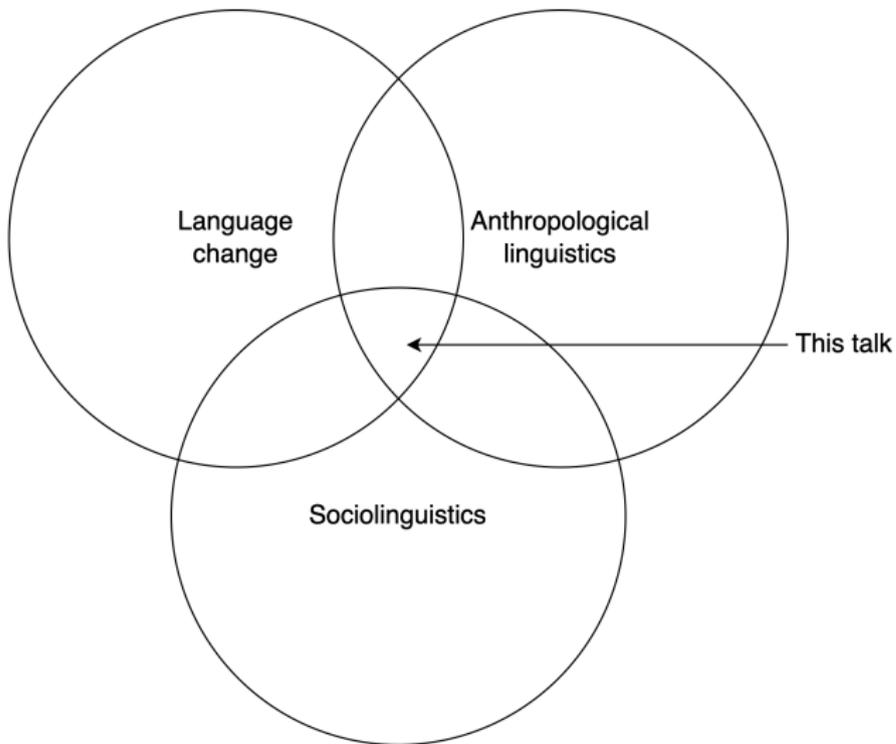
“[P]sychocultural analysis refers essentially to a method for the study of the emotional aspects of cultural behaviour”

Lagacé (1966: 165)

# Overview



# Overview



Defining terms

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**The literature**

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# *The literature*

## The literature: Language change

- ▶ General historical linguistics: Very little on psychocultural factors

e.g. Bybee (2015), Bynon (1977), Campbell (2020), Campbell & Mixco (2007), Crowley & Bowerman (2010), Hock (2021), Joseph & Janda (2003), Lass (1997), Romaine (1982), Trask (2015)

## The literature: Language change

► Language contact:

“The linguist who makes theories about language influence but neglects to account for the socio-cultural setting of the language contact leaves his study suspended, as it were, in mid-air.”

Weinreich (2010 [1953]: 4)

## The literature: Language change

► Language contact:

**“...we will have little to say about the general predictive value of more specific social factors, especially attitudes, because these are as varied as the contact situations in which they are embedded.”**

Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 46)

## The literature: Language change

► Language contact:

“The notion [‘cultural pressure’] is of course vague; making it more precise—i.e., giving relative weights to various kinds of social factors in an effort to predict structural borrowing—**is a task that falls into the domain of the sociolinguist rather than the historical linguist**, and is therefore beyond the scope of this book.”

Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 77)

## The literature: Language variation

- ▶ Applied linguistics:
  - ▶ Focus on standardisation, policy, planning, changing competencies  
e.g. Preston (2013), Tabouret-Keller (1998), Kristiansen (2011)

## The literature: Language variation

### ► Variationist sociolinguistics:

“How is social meaning [of linguistic variables] acquired? How does this acquisition progress, and what repercussions do answers to these questions have for theories of language change and language learning?”  
Drummond & Schlee (2016: 62)

## The literature: Language variation

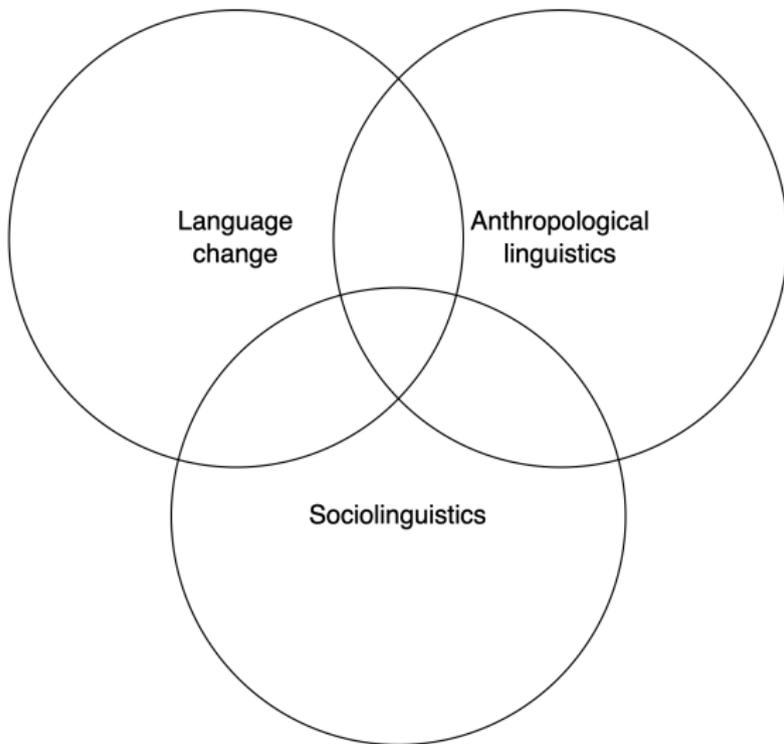
### ► Variationist sociolinguistics:

- Adli & Guy (2022): - “Language change exists in all languages and societies, but are the social processes that drive them universal? Who leads change and how are innovations evaluated in different cultures?” (p10)
- Indo-European lgs the focus of > 85% recent sociolinguistic papers

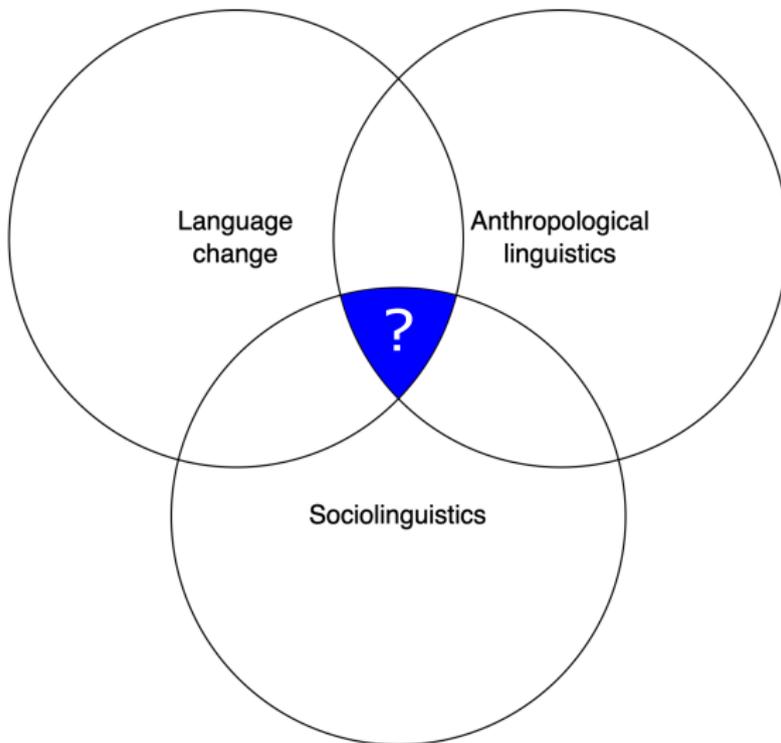
## The literature: Anthropological linguistics

- ▶ Anthropological linguistics:
  - ▶ Foley (1997): Chapters on ‘Culture and language change’
  - ▶ Enfield et al. (2014): Chapters on ‘Process and formation’
  - ▶ Little in e.g. Duranti (1997), Bonvillain (2016)

# Summary



# Summary



Defining terms

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**Lexicon**

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# *Lexical change*

# Lexical change

## ▶ Lexical inventory

### ▶ Widespread taboo (Simons 1982)

e.g. In-law taboo: Koromu (TNG > Madang, Priestley 2020), Musom (AN > Oceanic, Holzkecht 1987)

e.g. Names of the dead: Ma Manda (TNG > Finisterre-Huon, Pennington 2016)

### ▶ Group differentiation

e.g. Selepet (TNG > Finisterre-Huon, Kenneth A. McElhanon pers. comm. reported in Kulick 1992), Marquesan (AN > Oceanic, Cablitz 2006)

# Lexical change

## ▶ Lexical inventory

### ▶ Widespread loans

e.g. Northwest New Guinea (Gasser 2019), Sepik (Aikhenvald 2008),  
east New Guinea Highlands (Salisbury 1962), Huon Gulf (Sankoff 1976)

# Lexical change

## ▶ Lexical inventory

### ▶ Widespread loans

e.g. Northwest New Guinea (Gasser 2019), Sepik (Aikhenvald 2008), east New Guinea Highlands (Salisbury 1962), Huon Gulf (Sankoff 1976)

#### Implications:

- ▶ Signal of genealogical relatedness rapidly lost
- ▶ Similarities in basic vocabulary not necessarily indicative of relatedness

# Lexical change

## ▶ Lexical semantics

### ▶ Highly differentiated in culturally relevant semantic fields

e.g. Western Dani (TNG > Dani, Barclay 2008), Inanwatan (Inanwatan, de Vries 1998), Barai (Koiarian, Olson 1979)

### ▶ Similar patterns of lexico-semantic associations

e.g. BONES ARE STRENGTH across Melanesia (Schapper 2021)

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#### Implications:

- ▶ Cross-linguistically ‘standard’ word lists may not be most appropriate for teasing out genealogical relatedness

Defining terms

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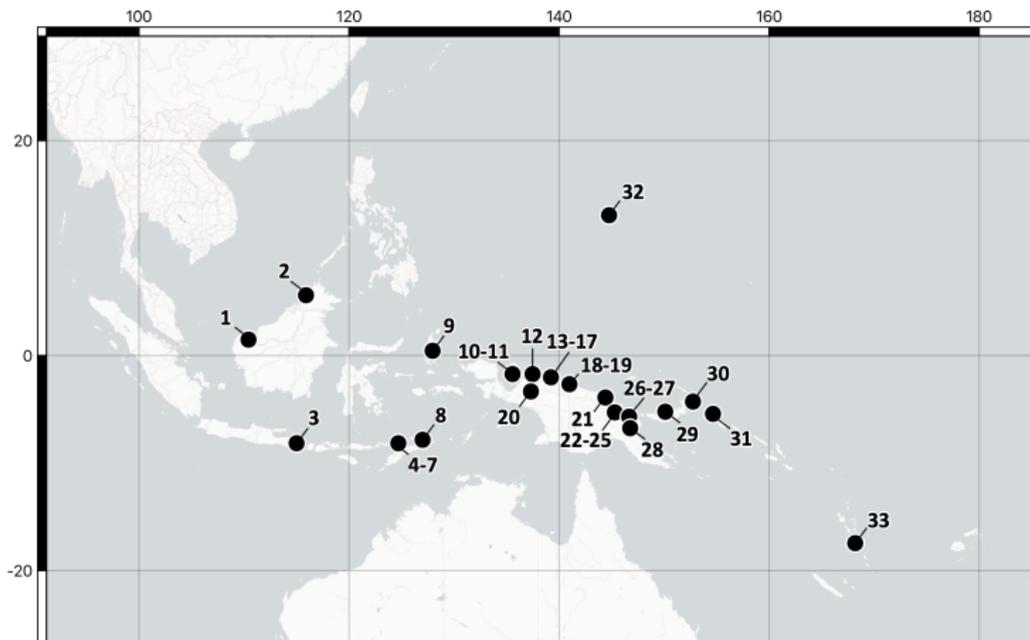
*Change in use*

## Change in use

- ▶ Late Vernacular Production (Saad, Arnold & Peddie forthc.):
  - ▶ Active users of only the lingua franca in childhood
  - ▶ Begin actively producing the vernacular in late adolescence/early adulthood

# Change in use

## ► Late Vernacular Production (Saad, Arnold & Peddie forthc.):



## Change in use

- ▶ Late Vernacular Production (Saad, Arnold & Peddie forthc.):
  - ▶ Psychocultural factors:
    1. Lingua franca as the language of opportunity
    2. Vernacular as the language of in-group identity
    3. Ideological link between language use and lifestage
  - ▶ Implications for theories and models of language change not yet clear

## Change in use

- ▶ Other examples:

- ▶ Ideology and language shift

- e.g. Kulick (1992), Mühlhäusler (1996), Steinhauer (1992)

- ▶ Which social groups are locally salient/relevant?

- e.g. gender in Belep (AN > Oceanic, McCracken 2012) and Yéli Dnye (isolate, Levinson 2022); village in Nmbo (Yam, Kashima 2020); church groups in Kwaraqae (AN > Oceanic, Macdonald 2010)

## Change in use

### Implications:

- ▶ Sociolinguistic models based on observations in the West may not be cross-culturally applicable
- ▶ Relationship between variation and local culture is deep and intangible

Defining terms

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# *Structural change*

# Phonological change

- ▶ Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)

## Phonological change

- ▶ Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)
  - ▶ Salawati and Batta (AN > SHWNG):
    - ▶ ~75% lexical similarity
    - ▶ Minor segmental and morphological differentiation
    - ▶ Salient differences in the tone systems

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Salawati		Batta	
High	::	High	< *High, -stress
High	::	Rise	< *High, +stress, *i *u
High	::	Low	< *High, +stress, *e *a *o
Rise	::	High	

## Phonological change

- ▶ Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)
  - ▶ Selfasina Dimara, a late Batta bilingual
  - ▶ 1954: Born in Solol village, raised speaking Tepin Salawati
  - ▶ 2000: Moved to Yenenas, a Batta-speaking village
  - ▶ 2019: Recorded her variety of Salawati

# Phonological change

- ▶ Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)

Speaker SD	Salawati	Batta	
	High	:: High	< *High, -stress
	High	:: Rise	< *High, +stress, *i *u
	High	:: Low	< *High, +stress, *e *a *o
	Rise	:: High	

## Phonological change

- Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)

Speaker SD	Salawati		Batta	
[High]	High	::	High	< *High, -stress
[High]	High	::	Rise	< *High, +stress, *i *u
	High	::	Low	< *High, +stress, *e *a *o
[Rise]	Rise	::	High	

## Phonological change

- Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)

Speaker SD	Salawati		Batta	
[High]	High	::	High	< *High, -stress
[High]	High	::	Rise	< *High, +stress, *i *u
[Mid]	High	::	Low	< *High, +stress, *e *a *o
[Rise]	Rise	::	High	

## Phonological change

- ▶ Contact-induced change in a Salawati idiolect (Arnold 2024)
  - ▶ Dynamic marriage, settlement, and mobility patterns (Gaffney et al. 2024)
  - ▶ High levels of linguistic accommodation, toleration, and acceptance (also reported in e.g. Wuvulu, AN > Oceanic, Hafford 2014)

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  - ▶ cf. Sui (Tai-Kadai, China; Stanford 2008)—mobile females highly resistant to acquiring new tone realisations; strong cultural prohibitions against accommodation

## Phonological change

### ► Other examples:

#### ► Bilabial trills /<sup>m</sup>B/, /P/ in Vanuatu (AN > Oceanic):

- In-group identity formation and attachment

Rangelov et al. (2023)

#### ► Metathesis in Meto varieties (AN > Timor-Babar):

- In-group identity formation and attachment
- Reflects the wider societal and cosmological importance of complementary pairs

Culhane (2018), Edwards (2020)

# Morphosyntactic change

- ▶ Split Inalienable Coding (Arnold 2023)

## Morphosyntactic change

### ► Split Inalienable Coding (Arnold 2023)

#### (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’

# Morphosyntactic change

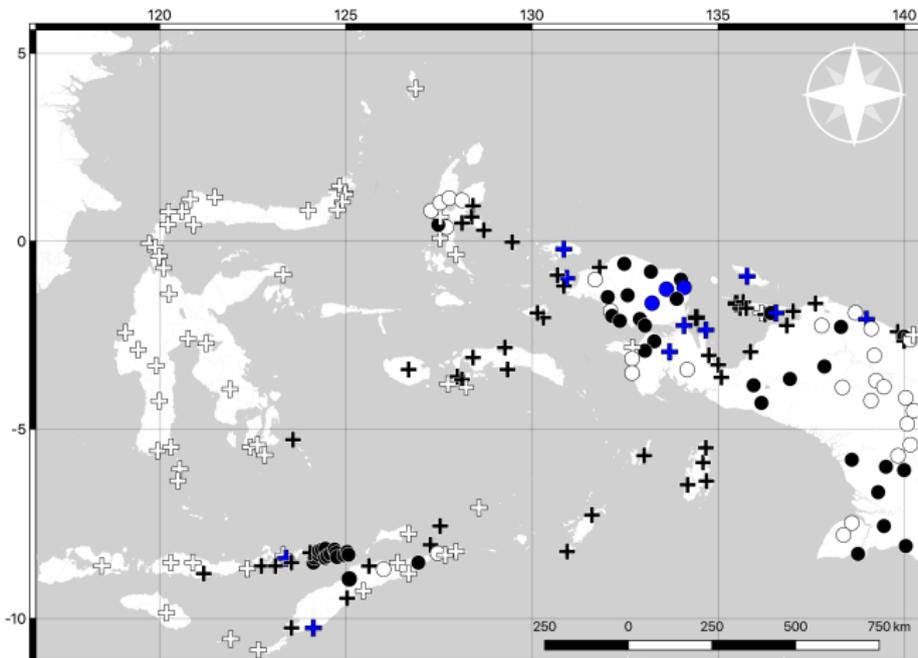
## ► Split Inalienable Coding (Arnold 2023)

Table: Hatam inalienable paradigms (Reesink 1999)

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

# Morphosyntactic change

## ► Split Inalienable Coding (Arnold 2023)



## Morphosyntactic change

- ▶ Split Inalienable Coding (Arnold 2023)
  - ▶ Structural: Kin terms a distinct lexical subclass in Austronesian (e.g. Blust 1979)
  - ▶ Social: Austronesian/Papuan contact in NW New Guinea
  - ▶ Psychocultural: Kin ties as the primary unit of social organisation

e.g. Ma Manda (TNG > Finisterre-Huon, Pennington 2016), Nahavaq (AN > Oceanic, Dimock 2009), Lewo (AN > Oceanic, Early 1994), Lamaholot (AN > Bima-Lembata, Michels 2017), Biak (AN > SHWNG, Rutherford 1998), Belep (AN > Oceanic, McCracken 2012)

cf. 'Kintax' in Australian languages (Hale 1966, Evans 2003)

# Morphosyntactic change

- ▶ Other examples:

- ▶ Categories of spatial deixis

- e.g. Levinson (2022), Holton (2017), Pappas & Holton (2022), Palmer et al. (2017)

- ▶ Classificatory verbs

- e.g. Ku Waru (TNG > Chimbu-Wahgi, Rumsey 2002), Kilmeri (Border, Gerstner-Link 2018)

## Morphosyntactic change

- ▶ Other examples:
  - ▶ ‘Linguistic perspective’ in Northwest New Guinea

“[W]hat is actually borrowed is not the morphosyntactic construction per se, but rather a particular orientation towards the expression of one or another aspect of reality, an orientation which, in turn, gives rise to the construction in question.”

Gil (2024: 165)

# Structural change

## Implications:

- ▶ Psychocultural factors may
  - ▶ Interact strongly with acquisition and the development of new phonological categories
  - ▶ Lead to the emergence and persistence of cross-linguistically unusual categories
  - ▶ Organise language structure to reflect perspective and lifeworld of speakers

Defining terms  
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# *Conclusions*

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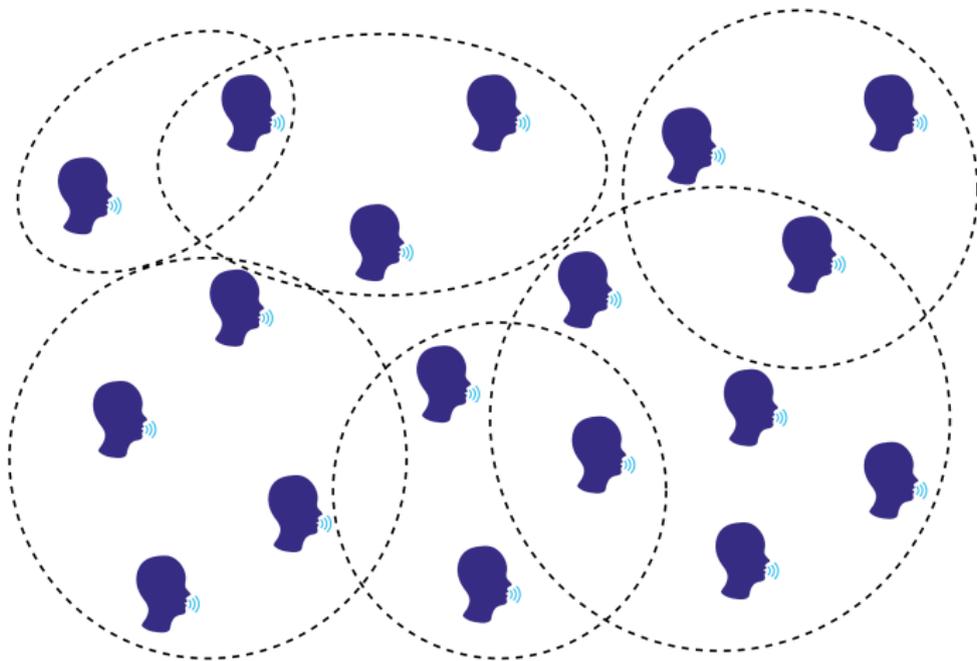
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# Modelling psychocultural factors in change in use

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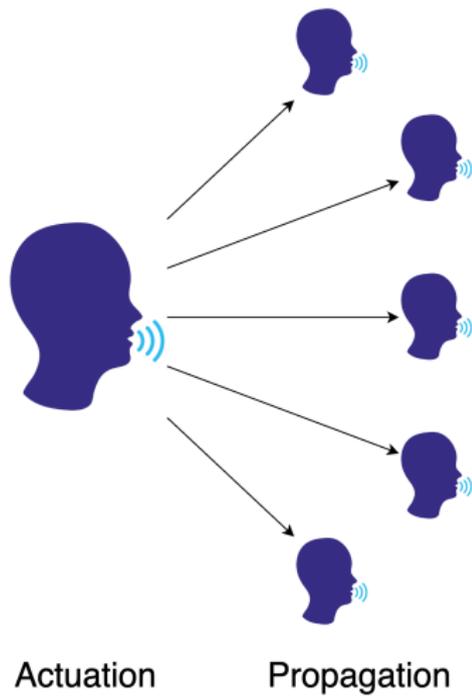
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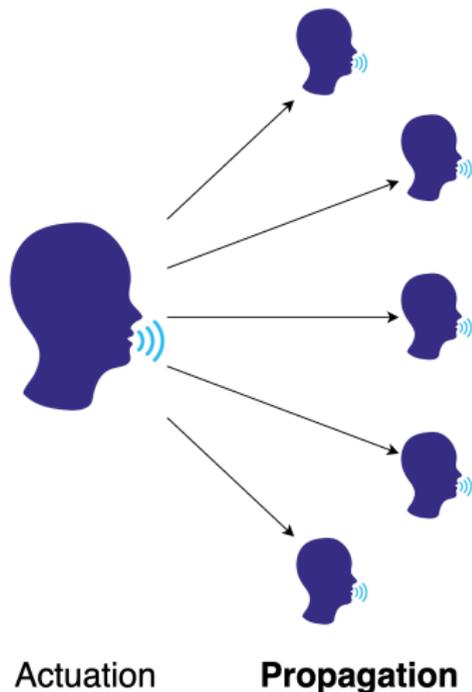
# Modelling psychocultural factors in structural change

# Modelling psychocultural factors in structural change



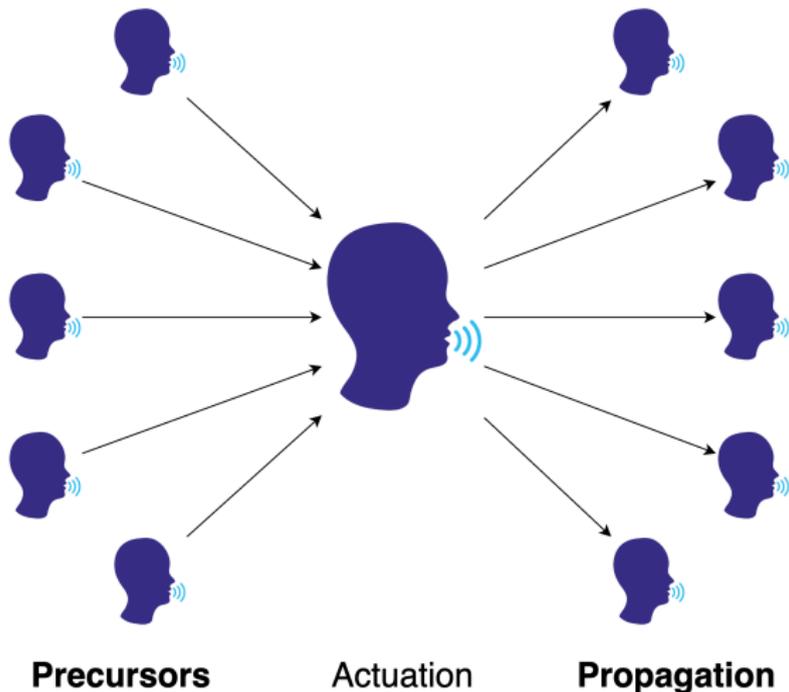
e.g. Hall-Lew et al. (2021), Yu (2023)

# Modelling psychocultural factors in structural change



e.g. Hall-Lew et al. (2021), Yu (2023)

# Modelling psychocultural factors in structural change



## Conclusions and outlook

- ▶ Descriptive orientation:
  - ▶ Some sources include a wealth of cultural observations
  - ▶ Others little to nothing

## Conclusions and outlook

- ▶ Further research needed on the relationship between culture, language variation, and language change
  - ▶ The Pacific as a ‘sociolinguistic laboratory’ (Wurm 1979)
  - ▶ How do psychocultural factors interact with articulatory, cognitive, social mechanisms (e.g. regularity of sound change, ‘naturalness’, analogy)?

## Conclusions and outlook

- ▶ Both quantitative and qualitative approaches needed
  - ▶ To inform theoretical understanding—what is the possibility space of language variation and change?
  - ▶ To inform historical understanding—what events happened where, when?

Thanks for listening!

What are your thoughts?



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